

# HENRY COUNTY NAMES TEACHER OF THE YEAR

» PAGE A3

# BOWYER 'A LITTLE BIT NERVOUS' ABOUT NEW RULES FOR RACING



» SPORTS

# MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

SUNDAY, March 17, 2019

www.martinsvillebulletin.com

Martinsville, Virginia \$2



PHOTOS BY HOLLY KOZELSKY/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN  
Keith Hodge gives Gina Roos, of Dry Fork, a tattoo of a cross and "John 3:16." Hodge and Coy King Jr., both of Henry County, opened The Body Shop tattoo parlor Wednesday in Eden, North Carolina.

# NASCAR weekends accelerate influence

No clear measure of how many dollars the races at Martinsville generate, but the effect is vast

BY PAUL COLLINS  
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The colorful crowds, the traffic and the out-of-state license plates will be obvious. There may be longer waits at a favorite restaurant. And when the haulers truck down U.S. 220 this week, a detour may be required.

Clint Bowyer and Joey Logano will line up for another start on an oval where they both won important races last year, and some driver's fate for the season or his career could be rewritten at The Paperclip this weekend.

Those are the obvious and tangible impacts of when NASCAR visits its oldest stop for the truck and car races that will attract 10s of thousands to Martinsville International Speedway on Saturday and Sunday.

That's a big deal for any town, but these races are a really big deal for the smallest city on the circuit. If you are one Henry County's

roughly 50,000 residents, on a racing Sunday you might feel like a million bucks.

That's because in addition to making your chest swell with

pride, these races stuff a lot of dollars into the economy for the region and the state.

Just how much is not so obvious.

The last time anyone tried to calculate that impact was a decade ago, when a study by the Washington Economics Group said ongoing operations at the Martinsville Speedway generated about \$170 million annually for the state.

The study broke down that figure to \$68 million in labor income each year and \$104 million in "value-added impacts."

"Value-added is the portion of business revenues that is available to pay compensation to workers, capital income and indirect business taxes," the report said. "Value added is also the principal source of income to households and a key measure of Martinsville Speedway's contributions to the Virginia economy."

The report said a little more than a third of that value was added by \$39 million in what it called "knowledge-based services sector" and 23 percent from \$23 million generated by the state's "visitor industry."

None of that includes retail or wholesale sales, transportation or government, although it said the speedway generated \$30.8 million in tax revenue for the nation (\$17.7 million) and state (\$13.2 million).

But all of that was calculated in 2009. Allyson Rothrock, president of the local nonprofit The Harvest Foundation, offered figures about more recent impact.

"According to Virginia Locality Economic Impact data provided by the Virginia Tourism Corp., our local economic impact from tourism rose in every category from 2013 to 2017," Rothrock said in an email. "In 2017, Martinsville-Henry County had more than \$70 million in direct spending from travelers, including lodging, transportation, entertainment, and recreation. This represents a nearly 3 percent increase from 2016."

See **RACES**, Page A8

# Writing their future in ink

Two men from Henry County who didn't know each other but lived similar lives hope a joint venture as tattoo artists will create beautiful opportunities.

BY HOLLY KOZELSKY  
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If you are reading this story in ink, there's some symmetry to that. Because it's about ink. It's about two men devoted to ink and etching it artfully into skin, to creating not only words and symbols and faces but, through each tattoo, re-drawing the course of a troubled life.

Keith T. Hodge of Stoney Mountain and Coy "C.J." King Jr. of Carver didn't know each other, although they came from some of the same rolling hills and found their way to similar prison cells for long chunks of time. But now their futures are linked indelibly by their lifelong passion for tattoos, a passion that took them from art forms to artists.

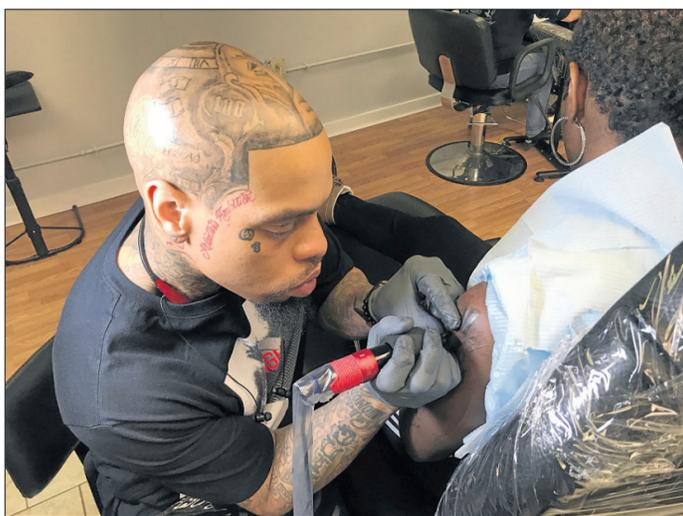
Hodge and King both "picked this trade up in prison for the sole purpose of not having to ask Mama to send \$20 every two weeks," Hodge said. "It was a way to survive in there financially — illegal, but a way to survive."

Hodge has been out of prison for 3 1/2 years and King for 2. Each has a full-time job and has been doing tattoos on the side since they last were freed, working out of homes and hotels.

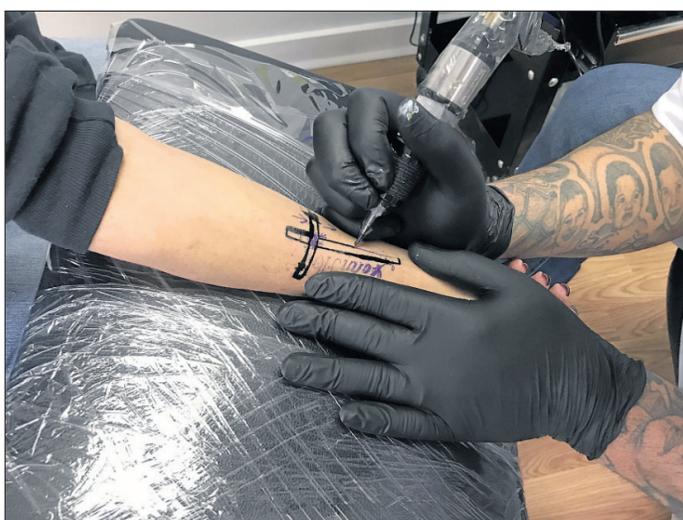
They saw each other's artistry on social media. They liked what they saw and said so. And a few months ago, a mutual acquaintance suggested they get together and open a shop. A building was coming up for rent just across the state line in Eden, N.C.

Hodge and King talked about that idea. They talked about their tattoos. They decided this was their chance to create a business that's part of their dedication to living well through family and work.

Although tattoos were common across the board when King, 33, was incarcerated, they were rare when Hodge, 45, first went to jail, in 1994



ABOVE: Coy King Jr., of Carver, had set various goals for himself to accomplish once he got out of prison, including to open a tattoo shop within two years — which he did two weeks before its deadline. BELOW: Keith Hodge colors Gina Roos' tattoo.



at Greenville (Va.) Correctional Facility.

"Back then, 'black dudes didn't get tattoos, just bikers,'" Hodge said. "Then Tupac [Shakur] got famous

and got a tattoo on his stomach, and black people started getting them" — and the rest was history.

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## WEATHER

Today will be sunny to partly cloudy. Tonight will be partly cloudy.

56 HIGH | 34 LOW

For detailed weather information, see Page A2



See a list of events coming up in the area. Page A2



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# Tattoo

From Page A1

And it's their story.

## 'The gift of gab'

Hodge's last stint in prison was eight years for credit card fraud, credit card theft, forgery, grand larceny and multiple parole violations, he said. During that time he developed another interest: writing.

In fact, he penned five novels that were published by Delphine Publications while he was behind bars, including "The Left Lane" and "The Left Lane 2" and "Exit Strategy." He wrote pages by hand and mailed them to his mother, Arnetta Philpott Hairston, who typed them and helped with the interactions with the publisher.

It was the start of his becoming somewhat of a social media phenomenon. Hairston had created a Facebook account for him while he was in prison, in part to help promote his books. Hodge only had been familiar with MySpace when she told him about Facebook, so she explained it to him, he said.

When she offered to post his comments, "I said something over the phone to her that was a little brash, and she said, 'No, baby, you can't say that,'" he said. "Every time I wanted to post something, it was filtered."

But once he was released from prison and got on Facebook himself, he saw it was "full of double personalities," people boasting, exaggerating and downright lying," he said. He decided to be "the exact opposite of that, [to] be so honest and real it's going to make people mad."

However, it seemed to have done the opposite. Hodge has about 5,000 "friends" and another 700 followers on that social media platform. He regularly posts funny anecdotes and wry commentaries on life that get plentiful responses.

"He's got a way with words, the gift of gab," said his wife, Aimee Cabrera Hodge.

## A 2-year deadline

King said throughout his school years — Rich Acres Elementary, Drewry Mason Middle School and Magna Vista and an alternative high school — only art and "technical stuff" held his attention.

"I got on the streets when I was young, most of the time something stupid," he said.

He got his first tattoo at 14 and was locked up the first time at 17. He served a sentence for involuntary manslaughter at Powhatan and Pulaski Correctional Centers.

While there an inmate nicknamed "Legs" (because he didn't have any) taught King how to draw letters and some pictures with the "penitentiary gun," he said.

"I fell in love with it," King said. "Believe it or not I hate drawing, but I love how the needle hits the skin, how it can sit in a certain layer of skin, how it can dispense with certain colors, certain shades. How you can put something on your body permanently, even though it may change. It's still there for life ... For me, that's just kind of something extra creative, because what else could you do for life besides plastic surgery?" King said.

Once he was released from prison in 2007, he started an internship at the Martinsville tattoo parlor Generation X, where he learned a great deal about professional tattoo work, he said.

But he found himself back in prison — 10½ years at a variety of facilities, includ-



At The Body Shop in Eden, North Carolina, Coy "C.J." King Jr., of Carver, gives Shan'tea Manns, of Bassett, her first tattoo.

HOLLY KOZELSKY/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

ing in West Virginia, Louisiana and Virginia — for drugs and firearms charges.

During that stint he earned degrees in culinary arts and motorcycle repair, but he said his heart was in the artistry of tattoos.

Again he was released, on March 22, 2017, and he started doing tattoos from his mother's house in Carver with equipment he had purchased. But he wasn't licensed. Getting licensed to do tattoos in Virginia is a long process that involves an apprenticeship and red-tape hassles, Hodge said.

Four and a half months into having clients, often strangers, at his mother's house, King decided it was better to take his craft elsewhere. He started doing tattoos in hotel rooms, which practically removed the profit from the business, and in clients' houses.

Although he wasn't licensed to do tattoos, people saw pictures he posted of his work on social media and kept coming to him for the service.

However, he was getting closer and closer to a deadline he had set for himself while he was locked up: to open his own tattoo parlor within two years of his release.

The opening of The Body Shop in Eden came just in time, with barely two weeks to spare. It's in an old storefront on The Boulevard, a historic district in Eden, in what most recently had been the site of a hair salon.

## Jailhouse tattoos

Doing tattoos in prison was a good way to learn the art, Hodge said. There were plenty of guys on whom to practice, although the stakes were high. You didn't want to anger an inmate by making a mistake on his tattoo.

To make a tattoo machine in prison is an art of its own, to hear Hodge describe it. It starts by taking the electric motor out of hair trimmers. Then you melt a toothbrush into an elbow, and attach the motor to the top of the toothbrush with tape and cellophane wrap.

Then you have to fabricate a wheel on top of the motor to rotate. Then take a spring out of a retractable ink pen, stretch it straight while it's heated and break off the tip to use as the needle which puts ink into the skin.

Making the ink starts with making a candle by filling a cut-down soda can with hair grease and sticking into it a wick made of tightly wound toilet paper. When the candle is lit, it creates black smoke; the soot in the smoke is collected on a magazine page. The powdery soot is scraped off the page into a little distilled

water with a couple of drops of distilled alcohol. After Hodge learned the art from other inmates, he practiced on himself and other inmates. He covered his abdomen and arms with images, including portraits of his family. He had others work on his head and back.

## 'It's almost impossible'

"Most of the time when somebody gets out of prison, the deck is stacked against you," Hodge said.

A just-released ex-convict more than likely faces fines and restitution costs, Hodge said.

He is in a Catch-22: He can't get to work because he has lost his driver's license, yet he cannot get a driver's license without paying a good portion of those costs first.

"It's almost impossible to pay that unless you've got family [to help], but most of the time they're disappointed in you" and not wanting to help pay, Hodge said.

People can't imagine how hard it is to try to rebuild a life owing a lot of money, which prevents you from getting a driver's license, they said.

"If you don't have a car, it's almost impossible to get a job," King said.

"Most of the people you know who could give you a ride got two guns in the car," Hodge said. Felons aren't allowed to be around guns.

Hodge had to pay outstanding fines at the rate of \$435 a month for a year "just to keep a driver's license," he said.

King came out owing \$10,000. "Looking at it from the beginning, it seems like something you can't get past," he said.

He has reduced that now to \$4,000. It's precarious, because, "if you miss a month, you have to pay all fines in full to get your license back."

There's also a stigma to being a convicted felon that affects the way other people treat you, they said.

"I'm not what I appear to be," King said. "The majority look at me and, 'Ah, I don't know if I want to talk with him.' I'm a good person. I try to stay out of the way, [and] work hard, kind of a normal person that's just dedicated."

King said it took a year to find employment, and now that he's working at Radial, a warehouse for several retailers, in Ridgeway, he said he appreciates the job.

Although it took time to get on his feet, "I knew exactly what I wanted to do" and kept at it, King said.

If you don't have something to aim for once you're out of prison, "it's going to be real hard to succeed," he said. "You've got to have a

goal, or you're not going to make it too long."

King next is looking forward to being a father. He and his fiancé, Catherine Morrison, are expecting a baby girl in June.

## 'There's nobody like him'

Hodge has been working at Merricks Collision and Restoration in Eden for three and a half years, he said, starting there two weeks after he was released.

After prison, an ex-con may be on probation for one to 10 years, Hodge said. Because he "came home through a supportive family," he had a lenient probation, he said: He had only one appointment a month, and he had permission to cross the state line, because of his job.

Hodge said he kept his nose to the grindstone: "I just got up every day and stayed up until I made some money and went home." He stayed so busy that he "didn't have time for friends, and that's what kept me out of trouble. I feel like if it's not going to take me forward, I'm not going to do it."

For the most part it's difficult for most ex-cons to get past "felon" on a job application, both Hodge and King said.

"You're better off trying to create your own opportunities," Hodge said. His ex-convict buddies who have become truck drivers or opened car washes or clothing stores are the ones who have been able to get ahead.

He met his wife, Aimee, a little more than a year ago by reworking an old tattoo on her leg. The couple married in September.

"There's nobody like him," she said. "He just goes so hard in everything he does." She points out various accomplishments in the three years since he has been out of prison, including remodeling the house in Stoney Mountain where his grandmother, the late Orena Hairston, lived, and the grandmother who is memorialized in a tattoo on his head.

"The Roanoke Police Department asked him to mentor youth. That right there says something about him," said Kevin Stafford of Dry Fork, who has worked with Hodge in auto-body work.

"He's multitalented. He's calm. He comes in happy. You never see him mad," not even if he were to bang a finger with a hammer, Stafford said.

## Opening up shop

Both men, who said they had loved art and done a great deal of drawing since early childhood, "do a lot of photo realism," Hodge said. "Not a lot of artists can do it."

Sometimes clients email him images he can use to make a stencil, Hodge said. When it comes to portraits, he just draws the image on the skin with a disposable ballpoint pen to use as a guide for the tattooing.

Although he is confident in (and famous for) his portraits, he is not so good with script, Hodge said, so he does letters from printed guides.

Opening the shop was fairly straightforward, Hodge said. They moved into the building the day after a hair salon closed and the stylists moved out and had inspections for the

building permit and by the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services' environmental health division. Inspectors made sure the men's equipment was up-to-date, that the needles and ink were fresh and that they had the proper chemicals for cleaning and sanitation and knew how to use them. The licensing laws in North Carolina are more lenient.

## You can't stop at just one

Gina Roos of Dry Fork and Shan'tea Manns of Bassett were two of The Body Shop's first customers. Hodge gave Roos a cross and "John 3:16" on a lower arm, and King gave Manns a clock-and-roses design on her upper arm.

It was Roos' eighth tattoo, she said, adding that she has found it's true what they say: "Once you get your first one," you're hooked.

It was Manns' first. Getting a tattoo usually doesn't hurt, Roos said, but just feels like "being stung by bees over and over."

However, getting tattoos on the ribs, elbows, head and feet hurts, Roos and Hodge said.

Hodge offered some practical advice about his beloved art form.

First, think twice before getting a boyfriend's or girlfriend's name tattooed. He has done plenty on name cover-ups.

Second, don't get tattoos with small script, because it will blur slightly over the years because of the aging of the skin.

## That future

The shop is open after the men's day jobs are finished, usually by 5 or 6 p.m. weekdays and all weekend. They only do tattoos by appointment but are thinking of taking on a third artist to handle walk-ins, Hodge said.

Hodge is getting to know the neighbors in Eden, he said, and just learned that the pastor of the church across the street is related to him in some way.

Although opening a tattoo parlor was a serious goal for King, Hodge said he was just doing tattoos for the enjoyment of the art. He sees himself primarily as a "car guy," he said.

"We still look at each other like, 'Man, what in the world is this?'" Hodge said. "It was hard to get ... and now we've got to worry about the task of making it grow."

As far as what the rest of their after-prison future holds, it's simple, Hodge said.

"Me and C.J. got the same mindset," he said. "I want to make my marriage last. He wants to raise that little girl he's got on the way."

**Martinsville City Public Schools**

*Preschool Applications Available Now!*

**Registration**  
for 2019-2020 Classes

Clearview Early Childhood Center  
800 Ainsley Street  
Martinsville, VA 24112  
276.403.5800



**All children who will be 3 or 4 on or before September 30, 2019 and are residents of the City of Martinsville should apply!**

**Bring the following information to apply:**

- Child's birth certificate (original)**
- 2 Proofs of residence (ex. utility bill and Lease Agreement)**
- Current physical examination (completed after 8/7/18)**
- Up to date Immunization record**
- Proof of Income (2018 Taxes or W2)**

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**If you don't have all of the information, you can still apply; however, all documentation must be submitted before your child's application will be reviewed.**

Staff will be available during regular school hours to answer questions and to assist with the application.

**QUESTIONS? CALL 403-5800**



helping children develop and fulfill their potential

# Patrick County's young team 'lost a little bit of focus' in loss

» SPORTS



# DAY CENTER STARTS RAISING FUNDS FOR A NEW VEHICLE

» INSIDE

# MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

THE VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY FOR 130 YEARS

Sunday, September 8, 2019 • MARTINSVILLEBULLETIN.COM • Martinsville, Virginia \$2

# Tourism leaders have new selling points

VisitMartinsville has a lot to tout: a grant, a tourism-related facility and a new manager

By Steven Doyle  
steven.doyle@martinsvillebulletin.com

The people who try to talk people into visiting Martinsville-Henry County – and to generate revenue from those visitors to help the community – have been talking about a lot lately themselves.

That would be the Martinsville

Henry County Economic Development Corporation's Tourism Division. And just having to say that name in conversation can be a mouthful. So they use VisitMartinsville for short.

But Assistant Director of Tourism Beth Stinnett and her crew have been busy in the past few weeks, with new money, a new drawing card, a new key manager and, coming, new ideas to

meet their mission.

The new money comes from the state, courtesy of Gov. Ralph Northam, who announced VisitMartinsville had received a \$37,000 grant to market tourism.

The state calls this the Virginia Tourism Corporation Marketing Leverage Grant Fund. There were 44 grants for \$965,000, with the goal of the investments being to let everyone know about the best parts of the commonwealth.

SEE TOURISM | A5

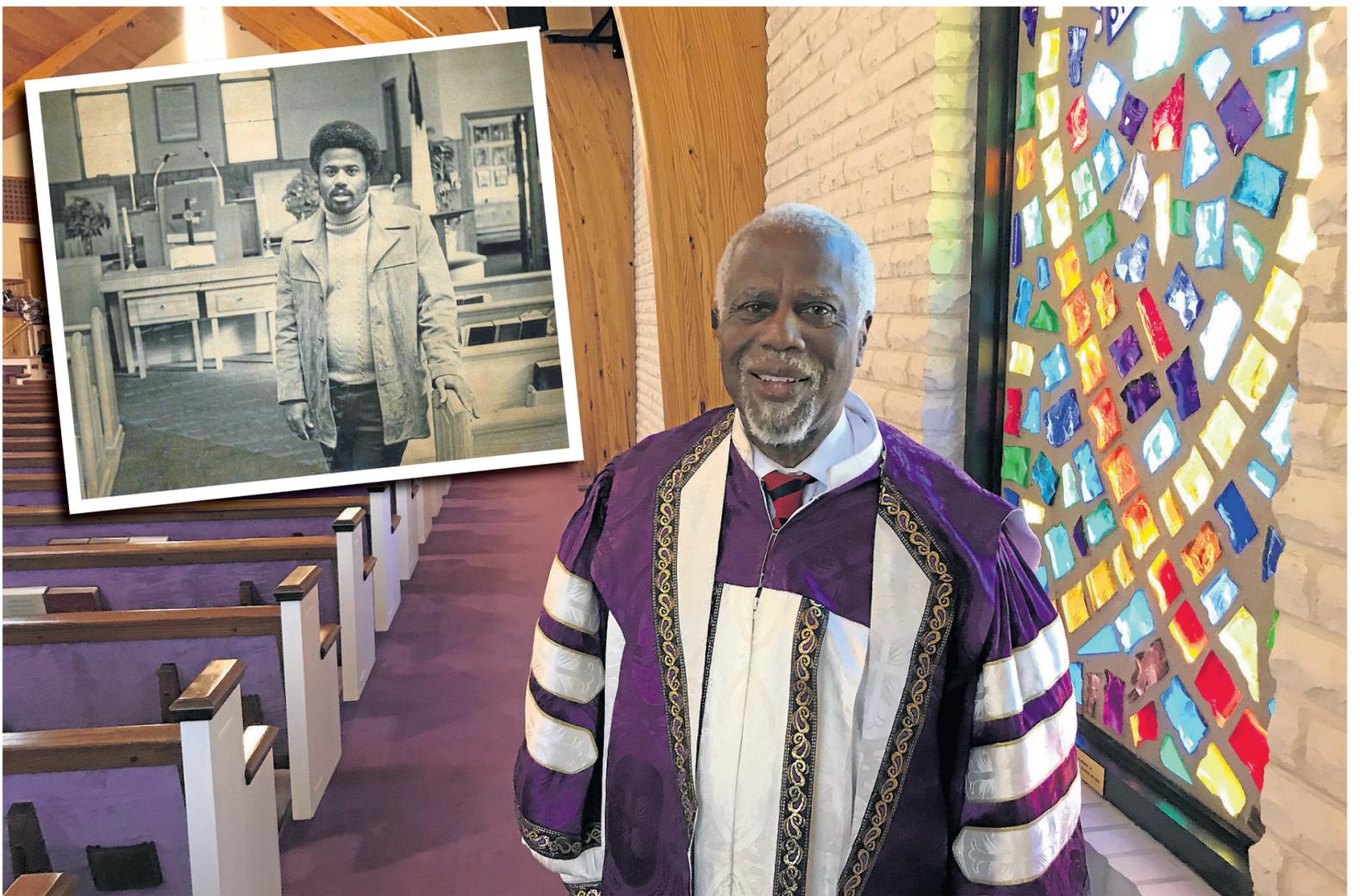


Jesse Cahill is developing the Lily Pad RV Park & Campground near the Smith River in Bassett, which tourism officials expect to be a big draw.

VISITMARTINSVILLE

# 'You need to shake the apple tree that other people might be able to get the apples'

Thurman Echols, a man of 'guidance and inspiration,' has shaken a lot of apples around Danville and Martinsville. Now he is stepping away from his pulpit, but he's not stepping away from the path he has walked.



The Rev. Thurman Echols, who has been the pastor of Moral Hill Missionary Baptist Church since 1976 and also heavily involved in the life of the community, has announced that he will retire at the end of this year. INSIDE: In this 1979 Bulletin file photo, Echols is in the old sanctuary of Moral Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Axton.

By Holly Kozelsky  
holly.kozelsky@martinsvillebulletin.com

With some of the goals he long has fought for having been achieved, and others still needing advocacy, the Rev. Thurman Echols, longtime pastor and community leader, is retiring.

Echols, 72, grew up amid the fire of the civil rights movement in Danville, then

spent the majority of his adult life as pastor of Moral Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Axton, with a ministry reaching far beyond the church's walls.

"The pastor needs to be involved with the affairs and in the lives of the people he or she pastors," Echols said. "You can make a difference."

His vast involvement in the community has led to being recognized several times for this efforts, including the Jack

Dalton Community Service Award in 2007. The Henry County Board of Supervisors wrote in nominating him for that award: "Rev. Echols gives guidance, inspiration and moral and tangible support, always listening to others in the process."

It is important to be a voice for others in the community, Echols has said. "Someone needs to speak up in their behalf," Echols said. "You need to shake

the apple tree that other people might be able to get the apples."

Echols "has been an example of what it means to synergize faith-based obligation with social responsibility," said Charles Whitfield, president of the Virginia Baptist State Convention and pastor First Baptist Church East Martinsville.

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## WEATHER

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 Tonight will be humid and partly cloudy.  
 For detailed weather information, see Page A2

86 HIGH 63 LOW



Experts say an insanity defense is difficult to use.  
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# Echols

From Page A1

## A strong foundation

Echols grew up during the days of segregation in Danville, which he called “the hotspot of the civil rights movement.” In fact, he said, “It is said Danville would have been the focal point” of the civil rights movement but got upstaged by what was happening in Birmingham, Ala.

As a child, “one of the things I have been very blessed and fortunate for” was living five minutes away from the William F. Grastly branch library, which was for black people. Not only did Echols patronize the library often, but as a teenager he worked there as a page.

Another treasure he recalls was being part of Calvary Baptist Church, where members represented “any profession in the black community,” including lawyers, doctors, nurses, teachers and bankers.

Those professions had not been within the reach of his parents, although they would raise their children to pursue them. His father worked at Dan River Mills, and his mother, who had grown up in a sharecropping family, worked in a tobacco factory, then as a maid in the school system. Echols said he remembers her crying in regret for not having been able to get an education.

What she did have, however, was “integrity and discipline. She just had what it took to be a good role model and mother,” Echols said.

Under her guidance, all five of her children finished high school and most finished college. All of her grandchildren have finished college, some with advanced degrees.

“Sometimes there are two factors that shape the lives of an individual:” family and environment, Echols said, adding that he was fortunate in both regards.

## Civil rights movement

Echols became involved in student government, as the vice president and then president of the student body of John M. Langston High School.

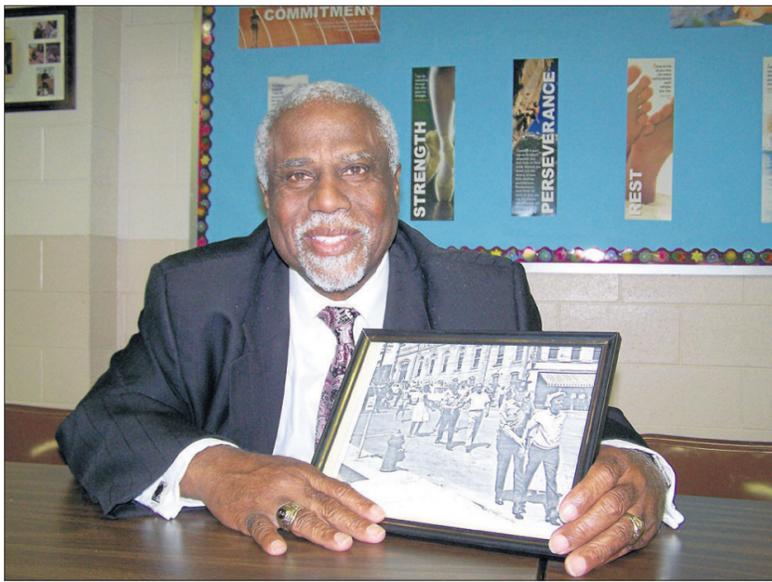
The serious politics, though, came outside school, facing the difficulties and limitations of life under segregation. The teenaged Echols took part in various community efforts to abolish that separation of the races and the laws and practices which prevented black people from having the rights white people could take for granted.

He was a key part of what has gone down in history books as Bloody Monday — June 10, 1963, his first day of being 16 years old.

It was the day after the March from Selma to Montgomery in Alabama, undertaken by 5 million people for voting rights. Violent reaction to the peaceful march led to the murder of James Reeb, a minister from Boston, and various beatings.

The next day, 75 to 100 teenagers in Danville marched through the city to spread a message of support of “trying to integrate public facilities and accommodations ... and meaningful jobs for blacks” as well as integrating stores, Echols said. They carried a casket with a message: “Burying segregation.”

The police’s plan, Echols said, was to arrest the student leaders — which included Echols — in hopes the rest of the group would



Thurman Echols holds a photo of himself when he was arrested in 1963.

PHOTO BY SUSAN ELZEY



Area influencers in the Virginia Baptist State Convention have been the Rev. Charles Whitfield of First Baptist East Martinsville (left) and the Rev. Thurman Echols. Whitfield said Echols “has been an example of what it means to synergize faith-based obligation with social responsibility.”

BULLETIN FILE PHOTO

dissipate, but instead, in reaction to the arrests, even more people came out to protest.

But while that was happening both of Echols’ parents were arrested while at work for contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Supposedly, “they did not have me under subjection,” Echols said.

That summer became known as the “Summer of Discontent,” which stretched into fall with tragedies including the murder of four black girls in a bombing at 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham that September and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in November.

Integration in Danville schools started in 1964. A few black students went to George Washington High School, but Echols didn’t, he said, because he didn’t want to leave his friends.

Echols was involved in the civil rights movement in many other ways, he said, and he has heard the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. speak.

In January the state dedicated a historical marker in Danville for Bloody Monday. It was Echols who had written the proposal for it.

## As a minister

Echols studied at Virginia Union University, from which he was graduated in 1969 with a degree in sociology. Then he was drafted into the military.

He served as a medic in locations including Fort Knox in Kentucky, Fort Sam Houston in Texas and Fort Jackson in South Carolina.

While he was in the military, he joked, his wife, then Diana Tyler, cast a web to catch him. The two had been in school together in Richmond, and while he was in the military — before they were married — she got a teaching job in his hometown to keep up with him more easily.

The couple had two children, Cicely Washington, a teacher in Hampton, and Phillip Granville Echols, a teacher in Apex, N.C., and each has a child. Diana Echols died in 2008.

After the military, he worked as a community-schools coordinator in Danville until he felt the call to go into the ministry, he said. He started at Duke Divinity School in 1974, and in 1976 he became the pastor of Moral Hill. He finished his religious education at Shaw Divinity School in the 1980s.

In later years Echols would be granted honorary doctoral degrees in divinity and humane letters from several schools, with the one most precious to him being from Virginia Union.

At Moral Hill, Echols has overseen a construction project that more than tripled the square footage of the church building, helped the church pay off its debts in 10 years and

Obama, he said. “It was the biggest crowd that I’d ever seen in my life” — and that included comparison to the Million Man March, which he also had attended.

His church gave money to help establish the Axton Life-Saving Crew, which began operation in 1993, and he was a president of its board and the board’s only lifetime member.

He has served on the Henry County School Board for eight years; was appointed by then-Gov. Mark Warner to the Child Abuse and Neglect Board of the Commonwealth of Virginia; has been the president of the local NAACP, was on the board of Piedmont Arts, including as board president; was president and chair of the capital campaign for United Way; was with the MHC Voters League; and, from an appointment by the Henry County board of supervisors, served on the board of Pittsylvania Community Action for 25 years, including some as its chair.

His affiliations also have included Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, March of Dimes Walk America Campaign, Martinsville-Henry County Ministerial Association, Smith River Missionary Baptist Association, Baptist Sunday School and BTU Congress of Virginia, Home Missions Board, National Baptist Convention USA Inc. and National Home Missions Board.

Also, he has been involved with West Piedmont Planning District Commission and Economic Development Policy Advisory Committee; the National Wildlife Foundation; Habitat for Humanity; Masons; and Smithsonian Association.

He was one of the first people to initiate Martin Luther King Day observances in the area.

He has been a member of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc., which named him its Citizen of

the Year in 1998, and the MHC Men’s Roundtable has honored him with the Distinguished Service Award. He has been given the keys to the cities of Roanoke, Danville and Virginia Beach.

Others who are active in the community, such as Whitfield, have credited Echols with getting them started.

After Whitfield had been appointed to a local board, he learned it had been Echols who had recommended him. “This had opened literally dozens of other opportunities because of his confidence in my leadership,” Whitfield said.

## A long farewell

When Echols announced in his church that he would be retiring, “I don’t know if they believed me or not,” he said.

He will continue in his post through the last day of December.

Events to honor and say farewell to him will include a retirement gala on Dec. 21 at New College Institute and on Dec. 29 a service led by his brother, the Rev. Danny O. Echols of Rising Valley Baptist Church in Gloucester.

Even though he’s retiring, “I can’t stop now. I want to still be involved in some areas of the community,” Echols said.

What they will be, though, he is not revealing yet.

He does, however, talk about personal interests, which include traveling, visiting people, including in rest homes, and photography.

Meanwhile, he has recommended that his church not make any hasty moves toward finding his replacement — and he’s definitely not going to get involved with making any recommendations, he said. That’s entirely up to the congregation.

Holly Kozelsky is a writer for the Martinsville Bulletin; contact her at 276-638-8801 ext. 243.

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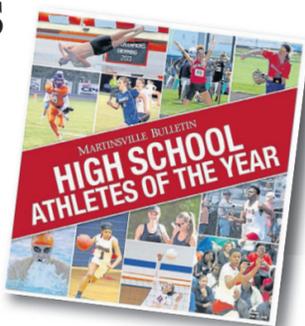
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» INSIDE

# MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

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## Churches fighting for their salvation



HOLLY KOZELSKY/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Ruby Stultz (from left), the Rev. Gene Anderson, Bob Weatherall and Avenell Jordan look over church records. Once a thriving church, St. Paul's Episcopal was down to four active members in December, but now it's on the rebound.

ONE IS REBOUNDED, ONE IS CLOSING, AND TWO HAVE FOUND MERGER AS THE AISLE TO SUCCESS.

By Holly Kozelsky • holly.kozelsky@martinsvillebulletin.com

Avenell Jordan cried when the congregation talked about possibly closing St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

That was in the winter, when just four people were keeping it together, but now they are up to 14 – and improvements are being made on their building.

“We were in a shaky situ-

ation with our backs to the wall,” fellow St. Paul member Bob Weatherall said. “We came storming back.”

The way St. Paul's handled the society-wide decline in church membership is just one of different approaches being carried out in the area.

Villa Heights Baptist Church

had closed by the spring after 58 years, and the 125-year-old Bassett Memorial United Methodist Church is closing this month.

Meanwhile, Stanleytown Amazing Grace Baptist Church is in its 10th year of being two churches merged into one and on a path of continued growth.

## A revival at St. Paul's

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, on Fayette Street in Martinsville, got its start in 1940, when the dentist Dr. L.A. Vickers presented a petition to the area Episcopal diocese to organize an Episcopal Church for black people in Martinsville.

Services started in the home of Mary E. McDanielson on East Church Street, where Patrick Henry Mall is now, from 1941-48, according to a church history written by Jean Wilson. In 1948 the basement of the present church building was completed, and the congregation met there until the sanctuary was opened in 1955.

For decades it was a strong church with heavy professional membership and community outreach. When the factories closed, the younger generations moved out of town for work, and as original members passed away, church membership dwindled. “Not unusual” for this area, Bob Weatherall said.



HOLLY KOZELSKY/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Ruby Stultz (left), who has been part of St. Paul's Episcopal Church on Fayette Street for 65 years, and Avenell Jordan, who joined a few years ago, have remained strong in the church even when it got down to just four active members. Now about 14 people go every Sunday, a baptism was held there recently and a wedding is planned for October.

SEE REVIVAL | A9

## New CEO named for Sovah in Martinsville

Dale Alward of LifePoint Health Care moving from Galax is just one change

By Amie Knowles  
Special to the Bulletin

Some key changes are coming to Sovah-Martinsville, and they start at the very top.

The hospital system has named Dale F. Alward as its new chief executive officer, replacing Michael Ehrat, who last month moved to pursue an out-of-state opportunity.

Stepping into the position ahead of his to-be-determined start date,



Alward

Alward, the CEO of Twin County Regional Healthcare in Galax, came to Martinsville a couple of times last week to meet with administrators and staff. Sovah-Martinsville and Twin County are both

*“I look forward to collaborating with the hospital's staff, physicians, board and partners to enhance the care and services we provide and examine how we can improve the health of the region”*

– Dale F. Alward, incoming CEO of Sovah-Martinsville

owned by LifePoint Health, a national system.

According to Elizabeth Harris, marketing director at Sovah, Alward made a great first impression.

“He spent a good portion of Tuesday and Wednesday meeting with our hospital leaders,” Harris said. “So when he officially starts, he's not starting from square one.”

The meetings confirmed rumors hospital staff had heard about Alward's dedication to health care.

“We're very excited. It's a nice opportunity we have here because Dale is coming from another LifePoint hospital. In our system, the buzz gets around,” Harris said. “He comes so highly recommended from a local and corporate level.”

Said Jamie Carter, Eastern Division president of LifePoint: “Dale is a seasoned leader with a strong passion and commitment to high quality, patient-centered care. We are thrilled to welcome Dale to Martinsville to explore new ways that Sovah Health-Martinsville – and the entire Sovah Health network – can enhance the ways they work together to achieve our mission of making communities healthier.”

It could be a few weeks – or longer – until Alward makes the move from Galax. “He's so good that they won't relocate him until they find a replacement,” Harris said.

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91 HIGH | 60 LOW

### WEATHER

Today will have a thunderstorm in spots. Tonight will be clear and humid. For detailed weather information, see Page A2



Company says the issues at Lofts are 'a top priority' Page A3



6 56525 10681 1



Stanleytown Amazing Grace Baptist Church formed with the 20 remaining members of the once-strong Stanleytown Baptist Church merged with the growing Amazing Grace. About a decade after the merger, the church's membership keeps growing.

## Merging helps 2 churches thrive

When Greg Hodges was a boy, Stanleytown Baptist Church on Fairystone Park Highway was a thriving church, he said. At its height, the church, founded in 1927 as Sunday school classes, had 400 members.

Hodges, the vice president of academic and student success services at Patrick Henry Community College, in 2001 started Amazing Grace Baptist Church in Collinsville (in the neighborhood behind the old Dutch Boy drive-in restaurant), with 55 members, he said.

That church building was big enough for 200 people, but in less than 10 years the membership outgrew even that. There wasn't room to add on, so members had to look for a new building.

Meanwhile, around the same time, Stanleytown Baptist Church, once the biggest independent Baptist church in the area, had gone down to about 20 people who had been three years without a pastor. "They were really, really

struggling," Hodges said. "They were facing some difficult decisions" and approached him about the possibility of merging.

Hodges invited the Stanleytown congregation to worship with Amazing Grace for three months of Sunday evening and Wednesday services, to see how they felt about it.

The two churches' doctrines were the same, he said, but they had slightly different worship styles: Stanleytown was more solemn, while Amazing Grace was more participatory, such as saying "amen" more during the service and singing the same hymns in a livelier manner.

However, overall it was a good fit, so after the three months the results of a vote they took was to merge. Amazing Grace moved into Stanleytown's building, and it leased its former building to The Church on the Hill, which now is 10 years into a 15-year rent-to-own arrangement.

The hardest thing was merging the two 501c3 organizations' paperwork

to satisfy IRS requirements, which took about 6 months, Hodges said.

The two churches combined their name to Stanleytown Amazing Grace Baptist Church.

Being together "has been incredible," he said. The church has "experienced significant growth since then. We couldn't be more pleased with the way things have gone. It's much, much better than we had originally anticipated."

There are many reasons the church is thriving, he said. Much of it is because of "programming for all ages to keep them engaged with the church, all the way from nursery to our 'Senior Saints' program," he wrote by text.

It has Sunday school, Awana, teen programming, children's church, junior church, summer teen conferences, youth camps and more ministries that are "designed to engage the children and teens in church," he wrote. Church leaders make sure to set aside "significant funds" for those programs at the

creation of each annual budget.

They group classes "to address the issues and challenges that each age group faces" to follow Biblical teaching.

Additionally, although Hodges said he fully supports the standard model followed by churches of that size to have full-time ministry staff, Stanleytown Amazing Grace mostly has part-time staff who also have other jobs, he wrote. "This model allows for money that is often times directed to salary to be directed to other areas of engagement."

Of the staff of 15, the only two full-timers work in the church's child-care center.

After about a decade of the two churches together as one, they rarely think back to the times they were separate entities, Hodges said.

"The only time it comes up is when someone asks why the name is so long," he said.

Holly Kozelsky is a writer for the Martinsville Bulletin; contact her at 276-638-8801 ext. 243.

## Churches vote to close doors

Bassett Memorial United Methodist Church is closing this month.

The pastor and Danville District United Methodist Church district superintendent did not respond to recent requests for interviews. A district staff member said no one from the district would be available to talk until this week. However, some details about the church's situation has been shared on social media and in its newsletter.

Its final monthly community meal was May 23, when the church "shared the news of our discontinuance," the Rev. Timonty Joseph Barth shared on the church's Facebook page.

The church newsletter sent out on May 30 stated that items and memorabilia in the church were available to the congregation. An inventory was in the church office, and people were to sign their names beside things they would like to have.

On a May 16 post, Barth wrote a Facebook post about the process of "discontinuing as a local congregation of the United Methodist Church in June."

For the two prior months, he wrote, the members "entered into a time of discernment," which included conversation and prayer. The congregation consulted the district superintendent and "talked about financial concerns, energy, and the possibility of another church utilizing our building."

The district superintendent, the Rev. D. Janine Howard, held a church conference at which 15 people voted to discontinue, and 12 voted to stay open.

"The reality is this: Every person voted they [sic] way that they did out of their

love for the church. As a whole the majority felt it would be better to discontinue. It is our hope that another church will have the possibility of buying our building and continuing the legacy of missions, evangelism and love that has defined Bassett Memorial UMC over the last 125 years," he wrote.

In Martinsville, Villa Heights Baptist Church's final pastor was Keith Spangenberg. The March/April edition of "The Caller," Henry County Baptist Association's newsletter, has a message titled "The Legacy of Villa Heights Baptist Church" signed by "Former Trustees & Pastor."

It states, "We reached the point that many of our sister churches may be familiar with: we weren't the church we used to be in size, ministries, and capabilities; we're an aging congregation that was having to cut back services because we didn't drive at night, cook like we used to, and becoming less physically able to get out into the community; each year the budget had to be reduced; the future looked bleaker."

The members "did not want the building to become a funeral home or 'used car lot,'" it states.

The message said that the church agreed to let Agape Bible Christian Fellowship use its property and to let Amanacer of Collinsville, a church with services in Spanish, to use the fellowship hall. Remaining assets were divided among Agape, Amanacer, Grace Network, the Gideons, Pregnancy Care Center, Good News Jail Ministry and the Home Home's residents, according to a survey and vote, it added.

Holly Kozelsky is a writer for the Martinsville Bulletin; contact her at 276-638-8801 ext. 243.

## Revival

From Page A1

St. Paul's still kept up its yearly picnic for the neighborhood, attended by about 100 people; monthly movie nights; and a free clothes closet open from 10 a.m. to noon the first and fourth Saturdays of the month. During election season some members help people register to vote.

Membership was at 13 or 14 for the past several years, but because of deaths it had fallen to four in December — one of the remaining five wasn't going much in the winter.

Ruby Stultz, a 69-year-old retired registered nurse and physician assistant, started attending when she was 4, and Wilson, the coordinator for Patrick Henry Community College's Alliance for Excellence, also is a long-time member.

Avenell Jordan and her adult son Tom Salyer and Weatherall have joined more recently.

They say the church means a lot to them because of its welcoming nature and respect for all people.

"We're not one of those churches that says you can't come here because" of this or that, Weatherall said.

"I grew up in this church and always loved this church," Stultz said. "Everybody was really nice and encouraging to me when I was pursuing my career" and also supported her son on his path. "There was a closeness here. I just could not turn my back on that."

"That's what really helped me in staying. These people care about everybody," Jordan said.

Throughout the lean times, their pastor, Gene Anderson,

"never got discouraged, and a lot of times he's not getting a paycheck," Weatherall said.

Anderson, who has been the supply pastor for 12 years, said he has a house in Roanoke and an apartment in Martinsville. Service is held at 11 a.m. Sundays, and he comes the first and third Sunday while members who are lay ministers take turns on the other Sundays.

The diocese pays Anderson for one Sunday a month, and he donates most of that back to the church, Jordan said.

The church's expenses are low because the members do all the work, including cleaning and maintenance, that they can.

"The biggest bill is utilities. We stretch our money," Jordan said.

Weatherall said the first time he attended, he stayed afterward for the vestry meeting. The church's balance was \$990. Even with that low balance, the church made plans to get clothes for victims of an apartment-complex fire.

"That's one of the things that attracted me to the church," he said.

At a December meeting, the four present talked about closing the church because there were so few people. However, they still had enough money to keep going for a while, so they decided to keep it open until it just wasn't possible.

"We were in the early stages" of closing, Weatherall said. "Ruby just flat-out said, 'I'm going to get new members. We're not going to close this church down.'"

At the end of January, Stultz attended an inspiring revival in Roanoke with Presiding Bishop and Primate Michael Curry (who received worldwide attention when he delivered the sermon at the wedding of Meghan Markle and Prince Harry) and Bishop



Even when it was down to a congregation of just four, St. Paul's Episcopal Church still kept its free clothes closet open twice a month. Now the church is up to 14 member and its future is looking bright.

Neff Powell of the Episcopal Diocese of Southwestern Virginia.

She talked to them about St. Paul's situation "and they gave me a lot of encouragement. I came back to Martinsville and got busy," Stultz said.

"Something just hit me. I made a few phone calls and invited some people out," she said. Some of them were former neighbors she had befriended. "We cannot say no to you in no way," she said they told her.

"Ruby, she's a closer," Weatherall said.

Now 14 people — black, white and Hispanic — are regularly attending St. Paul's. There has been a baptism. A wedding will be held there in October, and a teenager is talking about being confirmed there.

The diocese is helping the church with the costs of installing

an air conditioning system and building a ramp.

"It's not a huge amount" in terms of the diocese, which "is not a wealthy" organization, but it's helpful to the church, said the Rev. Canon Melissa Hays-Smith of the diocese.

"We don't want to close churches. It's not our goal," Hays-Smith said. "Churches often close because people stop thinking about the ministry they are called to do. The keep doing the same thing over and over" and don't look at how to keep current with what people's needs are.

"Being relevant does not mean giving up the powerful message" of Jesus, Hays-Smith said. "Church doesn't have to remain the same as the past 100 years. We think of the mid-20th century" type of church as the model, but throughout history ways of

worship have changed.

The bishop is assigning diocese staff to help the people of St. Paul's "being in the process to be open to what God's calling them to do," she said.

The key to that is "prayer, study and not snap decisions," Hays-Smith said. "When in transition, people are anxious. Our bishop is very supportive of people being in that place, wondering, 'What is God calling us to do at this moment?'"

St. Paul's recent turn around gives her "a sigh of relief," Jordan said, "and I personally thank God every day."

"It's a good feeling to know," Stultz said. "It was very sad to me thinking this. I just did not want this place to close."

Holly Kozelsky is a writer for the Martinsville Bulletin; contact her at 276-638-8801 ext. 243.