



'Kmart courthouse' seen as liability for some local lawyers **A4, B1**

Mendota Trail announces grand opening **B2**

Board of Supervisors applies for grant to install 911-ready addresses in Mendota **A3**

Washington County News

Wednesday, August 14, 2019 ♦ Washington County News ♦ www.swvatoday.com ♦ Vol. 74, No. 32 ♦ \$1.00

COMMUNITY



The return of Mud Run will raise funds for Habitat for Humanity
» **B1**

EDUCATION



Emory & Henry Marching Band readies for new season
» **B2**

SPORTS



Spotlight on two Washington County high school athletes
» **B3**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

At a Glance.....A2
Crime & Courts.....A3
Opinion.....A4
Homefront.....B1
Sports.....B3
Faith & Worship.....B4
Classifieds.....B5-B6



Glade Spring's Samaritan House closing

Thrift store ministry will shutter after 2 years

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

GLADE SPRING, Va. — A non-profit organization in the Glade Spring town square is closing its doors at the end of the month after attempts to locate an affordable, more spacious building proved fruitless.

For the past two years, Samaritan House Thrift Shop accepted donations of gently-used clothing and household goods from the community and resold them at a low price.

The money raised has partially funded Samaritan House Ministries Inc., a 501(c)(3) corporation with a mission of providing housing, transportation and program support to formerly incarcerated women in the area.

The board of directors for Samaritan House Ministries recently decided to close the store after two years.

"We closed for several reasons," said Ann Ledgerwood, who was

See **SAMARITAN**, Page A6



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Ginger Addison (left) and Susan Copeland display purses that were donated to the Samaritan House Thrift Store in Glade Spring in 2017. The storefront will close at the end of August due to high expenses for the ministry.

EMORY & HENRY



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

John W. Wells, the new president of Emory & Henry College, talks about his love for a college his family has attended and served for generations. Here, he stands next to a portrait of the college's 12th president, James Noah Hillman. Wells is Emory & Henry's 22nd president.

Legacy of learning

New Emory & Henry president wants to get involved in community

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

EMORY, Va. — Throughout his professional career, John W. Wells has lived in Nashville, Northeast Tennessee and western North Carolina.

But now the new president of Emory & Henry College has settled down in Emory, and he feels right at home.

"There's something about the timelessness of the mountains that reminds us of the enduring value of place. We live in a somewhat rootless world today, but there's something that folks born in the Appalachian region have that is so important," said Wells, who was promoted to the office of president in July after serving the college as provost and dean of faculty since 2017.

Wells transitioned into the leadership position following the retirement of President Jake B. Schrum, who served the college for six years.



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Emory & Henry President John W. Wells wants to emphasize career services, community involvement and social readiness for students.

Historic portraits that hang in a hallway outside Wells' office reinforce his love for the region and the college.

"This is Dr. [James Noah] Hillman, the 12th president of the

See **WELLS**, Page A6

John Battle basketball coach Jon Odum dies at age of 39



WCN FILE PHOTO

John Battle Basketball head coach Jon Odum talks to his team during a timeout against Holston High School.

BY TIM HAYES
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Jon Odum — who was a star basketball player at John Battle High School and spent the last three seasons as the head coach of the Trojans — died on Saturday at the age of 39.

Odum succumbed to brain cancer, which he had courageously battled since being diagnosed in the fall of 2016 with an aggressive form known as glioblastoma multiforme.

Folks throughout Southwest Virginia offered their sympathies on social media Saturday, as Odum was a popular guy among those in the Battle community and opponents of the Trojans.

"You know, life sometimes just isn't fair," said Gate City coach Scott Vermillion. "You get curveballs like Coach Odum got, but I've never seen anybody handle it as well as he did. He stayed positive and never complained. Every time I talked to him, he was always upbeat and positive. He would never talk about himself; he would talk about his team. What a great person. He was a family man and a great coach."

Odum compiled a 44-

See **ODUM**, Page A6

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Wells

From Page A1

college,” he said, pointing to a portrait that hangs among other past presidents in Wiley Hall.

“My grandmother was a dorm mother for Hillman Hall during the 1960s. It was the only place she worked outside the home.”

Wells’ father graduated from Emory & Henry College in 1959 before attending Candler School of Theology and later becoming a Methodist minister.

“My father had a profound love for Emory & Henry College and carried with him the liberal arts traditions that he learned here. Our dinner table was often a place of genuine conversations. Books and ideas and thinking about the world — he got all of that here,” Wells said.

“I feel like I already knew about Emory & Henry before I even got here.

“Emory & Henry has always been looked at as a leader among Appalachian colleges. It’s a place that has generated a lot of ingenuity and creativity. I’ve always respected the place, even apart from the sentimental attachments of family.

“It’s a real honor to be here.”

Big plans

Wells is using his invaluable experience to lead the college into the next chapter of its life.

The president has big plans for the small liberal arts college and the roles it plays in the community and beyond.

“We want to make certain the institution continues to be regarded as one of the great educational opportunities — not just in Southwest Virginia but in the entire South. We have a long history of being a trendsetter. We want to continue that process,” he said.

His strategic plan includes uncovering ways the college can play a role in the economic revitalization of the area.

“I’m not sure people realize how many simultaneous blows to the economy this region has sustained,” he said. “It’s been a difficult time of change — the diminishing coal industry, the decline of the tobacco industry and small manufacturing that’s gone away,” Wells said.

“I think the college has a tremendous potential to turn the page — economically and culturally. The culture of the region has something to teach the rest of the country.”

Health care

The partnerships that formed the Emory & Henry School of Health Sciences in Marion demonstrate a sense of community that

is the heart of the college’s mission.

“The facility in Marion is a model for what higher education and our towns and municipalities can do together. We want to continue that,” said Wells.

Due to an aging demographic in Southwest Virginia and an ever-demanding need for nurses in the area, Emory & Henry College has established its first-ever program to fast-track registered nurses into earning Bachelor of Science in Nursing degrees. Students are enrolling in classes which begin this fall.

The School of Health Sciences also offers undergraduate and graduate programs in a variety of health care disciplines, including occupational therapy, physician assistants and physical therapy.

“As we continue to double down on our health sciences, we know we’re helping to make the medical profession in this area even better,” said Wells.

The president recognizes that mental health care is another need in the region.

“We’re looking at developing a master’s degree in counseling. Our goal is to have a fully functioning program in counseling by 2020.”

Career services

Wells plans to offer students more opportunities to shadow in various professional roles.

“Students will have a tremendous amount of their education outside of the classroom.

“We continue to celebrate our tradition as a liberal arts institution, but employers want graduates who can communicate and think analytically,” said Wells.

“We’re doubling down on our career services and internships and helping our students make a path from the classroom to the world of work. It’s important students can make a living, but the liberal arts emphasis helps them make a life.”

According to the president, his goal is to make certain that students who graduate from Emory & Henry are fully developed intellectually, socially and spiritually in order to become decision and change makers in their communities.

“Education isn’t just about pouring knowledge into the mind. It’s about changing who we are as people so that we have a love of community, a love of service and a lifelong love for learning.

“That’s the education I want to see at Emory & Henry.”

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.

Odum

From Page A1

29 record in his three seasons as head coach in the rugged Mountain 7 District, and his team qualified for the Region 2D tournament twice. He did that while battling his illness with dignity and grace.

“He was such an inspiration to his players because he never gave up,” said Caleb Goins, a 2018 John Battle graduate. “There were many days when we could tell he wasn’t feeling well, but he never let that get in the way because he cared too much to let it affect us.”

The Trojans had a winning record in each of Odum’s three seasons at the helm. He was the school’s golf coach as well.

“The biggest thing Coach Odum taught me was to accept challenges and to do the hard things that others might not want to do,” said John Battle senior Reed Samuel. “He taught me to not back down from challenges, not only on the court but also in life. Lastly, I would want to share that he was a great man. He cherished his family and was kind to everyone. You could really see God shine through him, and I think he set a great example of how we should live our lives.”

Samaritan

From Page A1

involved in creating the ministry in 2017.

“There was an immense amount of work involved in running the store with the help of a small group of volunteers. After bills were paid, there was not much left to go toward our mission.

“While we are sad to close the store, the board of directors is looking forward to our next chapter. We are looking ahead to new directions the ministry will take.

“We have a deep appreciation for all of the people who have donated their goods, time and money to this effort. We really appreciate the faithful work by our store manager Kim Yarber. We also thank our customers. We will miss being here.”

A job well done

Working with People Inc. and Hands and Feet Ministry of Damascus, the Glade Spring ministry has accomplished amazing things since its creation — and much of the financial help has come from the thrift store sales.

Odum had brief stints as an assistant hoops coach at Patrick Henry and Virginia High, but the school located off Interstate 81’s Exit 7 was not only his alma mater, but it was his home.

“John Battle is special to me and my family,” Odum said in a 2016 interview with the Bristol Herald Courier. “My dad went to school there and played sports. My sister and two brothers went there, and my grandmother worked there. My time in school was great. ... Being a coach at a school I love so much is an added bonus.”

Odum also made his mark as a player for the Trojans, and he was the centerpiece of a team that finished as the 1998 VHSL Group A state runner-up.

He averaged 21.7 points and 6.8 rebounds per game that winter, while shooting a sublime 69.4% from the field. He earned Bristol Herald Courier Southwest Virginia player of the year honors.

“Jon was quiet and humble in his high school days but played like a dude on the basketball court,” said John Battle baseball coach Jimmy Gobble, who was Odum’s high school hoops teammate. “He was a big guy who could score. He had, in my opinion, one of the single best basket-

ball seasons of anyone in Battle basketball history that year. ... Battle has lost a superstar who impacted this community as a coach and a player.”

Odum spent four seasons at now-defunct Virginia Intermont College and racked up 1,798 career points.

“He was outstanding,” said Phil Worrell, Odum’s coach at VI. “You go through 35 years of being a head coach, and there always will be a few you remember standing out among the field, and he’s one of those. I’ll always remember him as just being a pleasure to coach, and it was a blessing to have been his coach. This is not only as a player but just as a teammate and a person. He was just top drawer and a five-star.”

Odum carried himself as a college kid the same way he did in the final years of his life.

“He was just the kind of leader you appreciate as a coach,” Worrell said. “He was always there and working hard. He didn’t have a bad day as far as his attitude was concerned. Even if he did have a bad day, you wouldn’t know because he had such an even temperament.”

Odum was steadfast on the sideline as well.

“His teams competed and played hard every game,” Vermillion said.



WCN FILE PHOTO
Jon Odum puts up a shot for John Battle during the 1998-99 season.

“They kind of took over his personality. He was a fierce competitor and did it with class. I never heard an ill word come out of his mouth.”

Those in the John Battle community had rallied behind Odum since his diagnosis and Pray4Odum could be seen on shirts and signs around the school. Folk Soul Revival held a benefit concert for the Odum family in January.

His wife, Ashley, teaches at John Battle.

“He coached at John Battle, taught at Wallace [Middle School] and his kids [Macy, Luke and Jase] go to High Point [Elementary School],” said Battle principal Jimmy King. “This whole community has been aware of the situation and are all hurting.”



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS
(From left) Susan Copeland, Ginger Addison, Mary Bassetti and Anne Ledgerwood (front) sort through donated items to be sold at the Samaritan House Thrift Store in 2017.

The most impressive feat was being able to help 15 women reenter society after being released from jail.

Samaritan House Ministries primarily helped women with housing and transportation, but it also has paid deposits in rent, Department of Motor Vehicle reinstatement fees and utility hookup fees.

The ministry also worked with Danny Thompson, chaplain at Southwest Virginia Regional Jail, to help provide a temporary place for women to stay once they are released from jail.

“We paid for women just released from the South-

west Virginia Regional Jail to stay in a hotel for a night or two while they wait to be transported home or to a women’s shelter,” said Ledgerwood.

Thrift store served a real need

The thrift shop also became an unexpected ministry to the community.

“The store has allowed people in the community to purchase clothing and other household items at very affordable prices. I’ve seen many families with children take advantage of our Stuff-a-Sack for \$5 events, and they are able to get so much nice cloth-

ing for the family. It served a real need,” she said.

“Where do we go from here?” asked Ledgerwood.

“We are trusting God will show us the path forward that He wishes us to take in ministry.

“There are many hurting people in the world. We hope that we can continue to make a difference.”

Samaritan House Ministries can be contacted at P.O. Box 21, Glade Spring, VA 24340, by email at samaritanhouseglade@gmail.com or by calling 276-623-6140.

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.

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