

## WANDERING AROUND WASHINGTON

Editor's note: "Wandering Around Washington" is a regular, exclusive column from Joe Tennis highlighting the untold stories in the county, direct from the people who live and work here. Watch for him to wander into shops, restaurants and parks to bring you the gab and gossip — only in the Washington County News.

## Heartwood's new focus on mapping the mountains

ABINGDON, Va. — I love maps. Always have.

But even after eight years of going in and out of Heartwood, a visitor center at the entrance to Virginia Highlands Community College, I never quite noticed what was missing on the wall.

You guessed it: a map.

And why not? This barn-shaped building in Abingdon tells the stories of Southwest Virginia while sharing the crafts of artisans who make baskets, weave, paint, make music and write books.

It needed, still, a map to pinpoint places. And now it has something about the size of that ultra-cool, billboard-sized map at the visitor center in Wytheville, Virginia, which notes all that's great in the southwest part of the state.

Over the past few days, with a renovation, Heartwood has actually gained more than a map.

Today, Heartwood has since been renamed the "Southwest Virginia Cultural Center & Marketplace."

And its new map is a multipiece puzzle of wood, culled from counties across the region — from Franklin and Patrick on the sunrise side of the Blue Ridge to Lee, which stretches further west than Detroit.

This map, of course, includes Washington County.

And, for that, that Washington-shaped wood on the map came from the family of Chris Cannon, who runs this facility as the executive director of Friends of Southwest Virginia.

"Washington County," Cannon said. "This is actually a personal connection of mine."

Cannon reached back to his roots in Cedarville, a side-of-the-road community near Meadowview.

Specifically, Cannon used a piece of cedar that was logged in the 1960s at Meadowview and traded to one of his ancestors for a piece of oak lumber.

Though that cedar was milled, it was placed in storage at a farm shop and kept there — until Cannon donated the piece for this map.

It has since joined other pieces from localities like Bland, Grayson, Smyth, Wise and Wythe counties.

And, like the other localities, it's a conversation-starter.

"People got excited about this map," Cannon said. "They really wanted to give us something significant from each of the communities."



Joe Tennis



JOE TENNIS/WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Chris Cannon, executive director of Friends of Southwest Virginia, points to the new map on display at Southwest Virginia Cultural Center & Marketplace, formerly Heartwood. Each county on the map is made from a different kind of wood that tells the story of each region. Washington County's piece was made from cedar purchased by Cannon's family in the 1960s.



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Rena Johnson, who operates the family's dairy business, Highland Dairy, said the new milking parlor allows the cows more room to stand and move around. The efficiency of the new DeLaval system allows Johnson enough time to milk their 550 cows three times each day.

## DAILY DAIRY

### State-of-the-art milking parlor in Washington County an investment draw for farms around the world

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

GLADE SPRING, Va. — Rena Johnson knows firsthand that happy cows produce more milk.

Johnson, who operates the Glade Spring family business Highland Dairy, is seeing a lot of happy cows these days since they installed a brand-new milking parlor that's not only making the cows more comfortable but improving dairy profits for the three-generation farm family.

Highland Dairy is a pilot farm for a new revolutionary design by DeLaval, a worldwide leader in milking equipment and solutions for dairy farmers with headquarters in Sweden.

"We're the first farm in the world to use this design commercially," said the young dairy farmer.

"It's a pretty big deal for our farm in this little corner of Southwest Virginia."

Last week, a video crew representing DeLaval traveled from New Zealand to the Washington County farm to make a promotional video of the cutting-edge equipment in use.

The video, which includes interviews with Johnson, eventually may be used as a DeLaval Virtual Farm Tour on the company's website to advertise the P-500 model of the milking parlor.

DeLaval dealers from throughout the country are expected to bring prospective buyers to the Glade Spring farm throughout the year to see the revolutionary milking parlor.

"A month ago, we had 60 DeLaval dealers visit the farm, representing 20 different countries," said Johnson. "People who work for the company visit us to learn about the parlor and return to their respective countries to promote the new equipment."

Johnson, who grew up learning about the dairy business and graduated from Virginia Tech in 2006,



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

A refrigerator in the new barn holds an in-line sampler that takes a representative sample of the milk, which is regularly checked for bacteria count, milk quality and fat and protein content.

described the purchase of the new milking parlor as a "leap of faith."

"We definitely needed to do this if we were going to stay in business," she said, "and I wanted to make this change while I had the help of my dad."

Her father, Dave Johnson, was instrumental in designing the barn for the new parlor. The construction, which began a year ago, suffered several delays before it was completed and ready to use in January.

"We had a sinkhole appear, two hurricane events and I don't know how many inches of rain to endure before it was done," Johnson said.

The milking parlor they had been using, a 1970s model, was outdated, and repair costs were increasing each year, she said.

"We knew if I wanted to milk cows for my lifetime, we had to have a new parlor. It was scary to borrow the

money, but we did it. Now, I've sealed my future. I'll be milking cows for the rest of my life," Johnson, 35, said with a laugh.

The new parlor has replaced a herringbone design that was previously used on the farm. With the herringbone parlor, cows were stacked in a 45-degree angle, milking from the sides of the udders.

The new parlor is a double 16, milking 32 cows at a time. Milking equipment is attached to the udders at the rear of the cow between the legs.

Marcos Rodriguez, a three-year employee at the farm, said he likes milking the cows in the new parlor. "Especially since I get kicked less with this system," he said.

"The challenge with the new equipment was getting the cows to enter the parlor and make a 90-degree turn when they were used to making a 45-degree turn. Cows are creatures of habit," Johnson said.

"Extra helpers — friends and neighboring farmers — were called on to help physically push the cows into the parlor spaces because they had no idea what was going on. Now, they're used to it, and I think they really like it better. They have more room to stand and move around. That makes me happy, too."

The new parlor is amazingly quiet. Milking equipment is located under the parlor, leaving the milking area free from noise and distractions.

The new milking parlor is also making the milking process more efficient and quicker.

"In the old parlor, we milked at best 80 cows in an hour. In the new one, we have the capability of milking as many as 140 cows an hour," said Johnson.

Because the equipment is faster,



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Rena Johnson, who operates the family's dairy business in Glade Spring, said an investment in a new, state-of-the-art milking parlor will enable her to milk cows for at least the next 40 years. The new parlor is a double 16 configuration, milking 32 cows at one time.

# Dairy

From Page B1

Johnson is able to eliminate three hours off each milking time during the day.

“With the old system, we were just milking half of the herd three times a day because we didn’t have enough time to milk all of them three times. Now, we can milk all of them three times a day — at 4 a.m., noon and 8 p.m. — which is better for the health of the cows,” she said.

Johnson explained milking the cows more often helps increase milk production.

“We’ve gained five pounds of milk per cow. When you milk them an extra time during the day, you get more milk.”

Johnson is impressed with the efficiency of the new equipment.

“Cows spend less time in the new milking parlor than before, even though we’re milking an extra time during the day. The equipment is so much quicker. The cows can get in and out, allowing them to go back to the barn to eat or lie down.”

Safety is another important benefit to operating with the DeLaval system.

“Before, the milk went into two big bulk tanks, which stored and cooled it before it was loaded onto milk trailers. Now, we do direct load, which means the milk goes straight from the cow through a chiller, bringing the milk from 101.5 degrees to around 33 or 34 degrees, then on to the milk trailer.

“A flow meter lets me know when the trailer

is full and ready to be switched to another trailer.”

Johnson said an in-line sampler takes a representative milk sample of each trailerload of milk, which is sent off to check for bacteria count, milk quality and fat and protein content.

“Before, we had to take the samples from the tank and send them off to be checked.”

The cows even wear their own form of technology.

Cows on the farm wear blue collars with built-in pedometers that monitor their activity and relay the information to a computer. Increased activity signals a cow is in heat and ready to be bred. Low activity may signal that she is not feeling well.

Radio Frequency Identification Technology (RDIT) ear tags track and relay information about each cow to a computer at the barn.

“For example, the computer alerts me if a cow’s milk production is not what it’s supposed to be. I can enter her tag number in a keypad here in the parlor, and she is automatically sorted before leaving the parlor. That way, we can address her needs while she’s here inside the barn.

“Technology in the dairy business is the wave of the future,” said Johnson. “After all, we milk 550 cows, so I have to keep track of each one of them.

“Who knows what technology will come to the milking parlor by the next generation?”

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

# Two North Carolina residents wanted on murder charges arrested in Saltville

BY ROBERT SORRELL  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Three people — including two people arrested in Saltville, Virginia, this weekend — face murder charges in Alexander County, North Carolina.

Robert Bryan Hoover, 35, and Brandy Lynn Miller, 29, both of Stony Point, North Carolina, were arrested after an investigation in Southwest Virginia, according to Smyth County Sheriff Chip Shuler.

Detectives in Smyth County received information that Hoover and Miller were involved in a double homicide that occurred in February in Alexander County, between Hickory and Statesville in western North Carolina, Shuler said.

The couple had since relocated to Smyth County, where Miller is believed to have connections, Shuler added.

Back on Feb. 9, Alexander County 911 received a call about two people found in a home on Mount Wesley Church Road. First responders went to the home and found two men dead from multiple gunshot wounds, according to a press release from the Alexander County Sheriff’s Office.

Police identified the men as Chad Lee Kennedy, 38, of the residence, and Mark Jefferson Furey, 57, of Taylorsville, North Carolina. Alexander County Sher-

iff Chris Bowman told the Hickory Daily Record that the two men were shot multiple times with a rifle. Officers also seized a variety of items, including drug paraphernalia, from the Alexander County home, the newspaper said.

Detectives in Smyth County pinpointed a residence on Davidson Street, not far from Saltville Elementary School, where Hoover and Miller may have been staying, Shuler said.

On Friday, the Alexander County Sheriff’s Office obtained warrants for Hoover and Miller’s arrest. A be-on-the-lookout alert was given out to area authorities, and the two were taken into custody without incident by officers from the Saltville Police Department during a traffic stop on state Route 107.

In North Carolina, Hoover is wanted on two counts of first-degree murder, and Miller is wanted on two counts of accessory to commit murder. They were arrested in Smyth County on fugitive from justice warrants, but additional charges are pending, Shuler said.

A third person, 20-year-old Adam Thomas Morgan, of Statesville, North Carolina, was arrested on Saturday morning, according to the Statesville Record and Landmark. He’s also been charged with two counts of first-degree murder.

# Washington County won’t get USDA office

BY NICK SHEPHERD  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

BRISTOL, Va. — A proposal by Washington County and Bristol, Virginia, is no longer in the running to become the new home of two U.S. Department of Agriculture agencies.

County and city officials worked together to submit a proposal for the vacant Alpha Natural Resources headquarters building to become the new home of the USDA’s Economic Research Service and National Institute of Food and Agriculture headquarters.

They were among 136 localities or entities to express interest. The USDA, which announced the relocation last August as part of a reorganization, announced last week it has whittled the initial list to 67.

The Washington County-Bristol effort was not among them.

“I think it’s certainly disappointing,” said Saul Hernandez, chairman of the Washington County Board of Supervisors. “I’m really appreciative and thankful to all our partners and our regional partners that came together to help us release this proposal.”

A community effort to sell the region as a whole was launched in November.

Hernandez said, even though the end result was

disappointing, it was encouraging to see the region come together.

Alicia Roland, public information officer for the county, said the submission provided a competitive and persuasive proposition.

“At this time, we do not have specific details or metrics for how USDA and Ernst & Young arrived at this list,” she said. “However, as we review this release, we do see that a strong majority of facilities are located within or contiguous to larger metropolitan areas and/or land grant universities.”

The USDA said it applied a guiding set of principles, including travel requirements, labor force statistics and work hours most compatible with all USDA office schedules.

Hernandez said a lot of time and energy were dedicated to the project and that it’s important to examine what happened and whether anything could have been done differently.

But banding together will pay off in the end, he added.

“Going forward, when we as a region pool all our resources together, it puts us in a better position to go after projects,” he said. “I think we need to continue to work together. We’ll get one eventually. This is a marathon, not a sprint.”

## Briefly

### Elder abuse legislation signed into law in Virginia

Legislation to help combat elder abuse has been signed into law in Virginia.

The legislation would establish a framework for multidisciplinary teams to be assembled and would be tasked with reviewing cases of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation, according to a news release.

The legislation was sponsored by Del. Todd Pillion, R-Abingdon, and state Sen. Ben Chafin, R-Galax.

“Every day, the elderly are taken advantage of financially and abused, and it is our responsibility in the General Assembly to help protect the most vulnerable of our citizens,” Chafin said. “Commonwealth attorneys and law enforcement need all of the tools available to effectively prosecute elder abuse and financial exploitation.”

Chuck Slemp, commonwealth attorney for Wise County and the city of Norton, requested the legislators carry the bill.

“Elder abuse is a growing epi-

demic in our commonwealth, yet these cases are under-reported and remain very difficult to prosecute for various reasons,” Slemp said in the release. “That is why I am thrilled that this legislation will become law to give us more tools in the effort to fight elder crimes and to establish a framework for a team approach to review these situations.”

Gov. Ralph Northam signed the legislation, and it will officially become law on July 1.

### Kaine introduces bipartisan bill to address teacher shortages

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., introduced a bill in the Senate last week that would address principal and teacher shortages, especially in rural communities.

Kaine introduced the bipartisan bill with U.S. Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine. The bill is named the Preparing and Retaining Education Professionals Act and aims to help ensure there are enough teachers

and principals to prepare students for the future.

The bill would expand the definition of high-need districts to include schools experiencing teacher shortages in rural communities and in areas such as special education, English, science, technology, engineering, math and career and technical education.

It would also create partnerships with local community colleges and universities and increase access to teacher and school leader residency programs and preparation training.

“As schools across our nation continue to face growing class sizes, many are struggling with a shortage of qualified teachers,” Kaine said in a news release. “By creating high-quality teacher residency programs like Grow Your Own and increasing support for these programs at Minority Serving Institutions, this bill will help provide schools and districts with the teachers to prepare students for future success.”

From staff reports

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**Gaming report finds Bristol casino would have large impact B1**

**Feeding America of Abingdon delivers meals on Thanksgiving A2**



# Washington County News

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**COMMUNITY**



Christmas markets open in Glade Spring town square

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**MUSIC**



Emory & Henry band prepares for New Year's parade in Rome

» B2

**EDUCATION**



Friends 4 Life mentoring program goes to the movies

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## Committee to study options for Washington County Courthouse

BY JOE TENNIS  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — It may take more than two years, according to Washington County Administrator Jason Berry, before the Washington County Courthouse sees a reconstruction and expansion.

“That’s the million-dollar question,” Berry said, now that a referendum to move the court

functions was defeated in the Nov. 5 election.

Voters soundly said they did not want the courts moved to a vacant Kmart, instead opting to keep functions atop Courthouse Hill, where the first courthouse at that site was built in 1779 at the center of Abingdon.

Now, Berry said, the Courthouse Committee should soon

meet again in January or February and work with town of Abingdon officials on what steps can be taken to improve the county courthouse facilities.

“The issue is space, and the issue is security,” Berry said. “As for construction, you’re probably not doing anything until late 2021. And if something stalls us, it may be early 2022.”

The Courthouse Committee, according to Berry, should include town officials like the town manager and mayor plus an independent attorney, chief judge of the circuit court, commonwealth’s attorney, clerk of the court and two members of the Washington County Board of Supervisors.

See **COURTHOUSE**, Page A3

**REACH OUT AND READ**



Dr. Sarah Seeley-Dick gives 4-year-old Cameron Ellis a new book to read at home. The nationwide Reach Out and Read program supplies books to pediatricians to help children develop healthy minds.

# Patient readers

## Why local pediatricians are prescribing books for children and their families

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — During a checkup last week, 4-year-old Cameron Ellis not only received a clean bill of health; he also got a new book, handed to him by his pediatrician, Dr. Sarah Seeley-Dick, one of four doctors at Highlands Pediatrics in Abingdon.

It’s not the first book the youth has received at the doctor’s office. His mother, Sarah Ellis, of Meadowview, said her son has received at least two free books to take home through

the program, Reach Out and Read, a national nonprofit organization designed to be implemented by medical professionals who provide primary care to children.

“Cameron loves to be read to. We’ve read the book he recently received every night at home,” said the mother.

Since becoming members of Reach Out and Read, the local pediatricians prescribe reading time for all their young patients.

The program highlights the importance of

See **READ**, Page A5

## Supervisors unanimously pass ‘Second Amendment’ resolution

BY JOE TENNIS  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — Dozens of people packed the Washington County Board of Supervisors meeting last Tuesday, and about a dozen people voiced opposition to proposed gun laws in Virginia.

“This crowd of people here tonight and this resolution sends a strong message,” said Supervisor Randy Pennington, who made a motion to adopt a resolution deeming Washington County a “Second Amendment Sanctuary.”

This symbolic resolution, passed unanimously, says that Washington County’s government supports the Second Amendment right to bear arms.

“It’s a very, very important issue,” said Board of Supervisors Chairman Saul Hernandez, who said Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam’s proposed gun restrictions have been “dismissive” of Washington County’s way of life.

“If we don’t have our guns to protect our rights, we’re not going to be able to worship freely,” said Dr. Mark J. Matney, one of several speakers at the meeting.

“Law-abiding citizens don’t need any more gun law restrictions,” Matney said.

Another speaker, Rex Carter, said, “Our Second Amendment rights matter.”

Roman Blevins, another speaker, called the proposed restrictions “an attack on gun owners” and added, “Our rights as free Virginians are at stake.”

Blevins said the proposed laws “are a direct infringement” on the Second Amendment.

“Washington County is going to send a message to Richmond,” Blevins said. “This county needs to take a stand, even if it is a symbolic one.”

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Dr. Sarah Seeley-Dick checks the supply of books at Highlands Pediatrics, which are given out to young patients. The books are provided through donations and grants from local charities.

# Read

From Page A1

reading to both kids and parents, and then it gives them the tools to get started.

According to Seeley-Dick, she and her colleagues gave away 1,900 books from in the first six months of 2019.

The intervention program provides children with books during pediatric checkups, putting books in the hands of children from five months to five years.

According to its website, Reach Out and Read is the only national pediatric literacy model endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The organization serves 4.8 million children each year, half of whom are from low-income families.

Highlands Pediatrics is among more than 6,400 program sites throughout the country that are participating in the model, including Primary Care Center of Abingdon.

## A new book, a bright smile

Seeley-Dick became familiar with the program while completing her residency in Chattanooga nearly 10 years ago and wanted to adopt the program once she moved to the Abingdon practice.

"It's such a nice experience to see kids' faces light up when they receive a new book that becomes their own," said the doctor. "The nice thing about this program is I get to hand the book to the child, talk about the pictures and have fun interaction with the child."

"The kids love them. They love the distraction of having a book handed to them during a well-check [checkup]. I like to remind parents to read, sing and talk to their children. I also try to model how to read to children. Just talking about the pictures is beneficial, too."

Reading to your children, she said, not only helps parents and children bond, but it gives kids a strong sense of well-being.

"Feeling warm and snuggly on the lap of a parent or grandpar-

ents helps children feel loved," said the pediatrician.

"There are so many benefits to reading a book that you do not get from a child watching TV. Pages are turning slower than images on a TV screen, so the child has a chance to absorb the images better."

The pediatrician recognizes that not all families have the resources to purchase books for their children.

"A young family recently told me they didn't have books at home to read to their young child, and they lacked transportation to get to a local library. It feels good to be able to supply books to families in need."

## Raising funds

Reach Out and Read affiliate sites in Virginia are responsible for raising their own book funds.

The program was implemented at Highlands Pediatrics in July 2018 after receiving initial funding from a grant through Niswonger Children's Hospital in Johnson City.

According to Seeley-Dick, Niswonger Children's Hospital and East Tennessee State University's book program, funded through the First Tennessee Foundation, supported them with 1,720 books. United Way of Southwest Virginia also donated 500 books as part of their third grade reading level initiative.

"East Tennessee State University has graciously funded our program again this year with an 800-book donation, but we are running short on those books."

"I wasn't sure we would be able to continue the program without continued financial support," said Seeley-Dick, who recently approached community organizations for help to keep the program going.

## Rotary clubs donate

As a result, the Abingdon clinic has received donations of \$1,500 from local groups to purchase more books for children.

The Washington County Rotary Club donated \$1,000; the Abingdon Rotary Club donated \$250; and the Washington County Public Library

Foundation matched the \$250 donation.

"I'm hoping we will be able to purchase 800 to as many as 1,500 of books with this money," she said.

"We are so pleased that we will be able to continue giving out books at our well-checks through the funding provided by our local rotary clubs this fall."

"My vision for our program," she said, "is that every child who visits our practice will sit and read with their parents or caregivers every single night for at least 20 minutes. It will help stimulate their brains and increase their vocabularies so that they will do better in school and develop a love of learning and reading."

To learn more about the Reach Out and Read program, visit [www.reachoutandread.org](http://www.reachoutandread.org).

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at [news@washconews.com](mailto:news@washconews.com).

## Council fills appointments for town leadership

BY JOE TENNIS  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — Abingdon Town Council approved a series of appointments at its Monday meeting.

That included naming Police Chief Tony Sullivan as the town's Coordinator of Emergency Management, reappointing Mike Rush to the town's Redevelopment and Housing Authority, filling a va-

cancy left by former Martha Washington Inn manager Chris Lowe on the town's Tourism Advisory Committee with Samir Patel, appointing Callie Hietala to the arts and culture position of Tourism Advisory Committee and naming Tim Wade to Susain Abingdon to replace Melissa Kalb.

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## Enjoy a better quality of life through pain management

### Welcome pain management specialist Deneene Booth, MD

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When patients come to Dr. Booth, they might be in pain for any number of reasons - from osteoarthritis to chemotherapy-related discomfort - but she knows the best treatment plans begin with listening, as well as taking her patients' personal beliefs into consideration. She also finds listening itself can be therapeutic.

Dr. Booth works with her patients and their care team to develop an effective treatment plan. Options could include:

- Behavioral healthcare to reduce depression and anxiety
- Epidurals and cortisone shots
- Lifestyle changes, such as exercise, healthy eating, weight management and reducing stress
- Medication that temporarily eases discomfort
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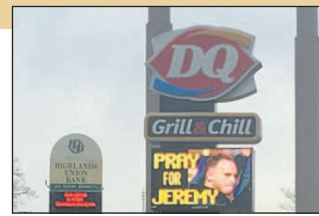
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**Patrick Henry coach gets support from students, community after accident A6**



# Washington County News

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## BUSINESS



Three Abingdon business celebrate their success stories

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Police rescue kitten during daring holiday mission

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Bristol Hotel nominated for 'best of' list in USA Today

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## 'GIVING THEM HOPE'



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

From left, Sonny Wright, Roger Phelps, Dennis Schuler, Emily Schuler and Charlie Lowdermilk pose in front of a sign that promotes Recovery at Meadowview, a nonresidential recovery and rehabilitation program. The program is a ministry of Woodland Hills Christian Church in Meadowview.

# Recovery Road

Woodland Highlands helps addicts of all kinds find new direction

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

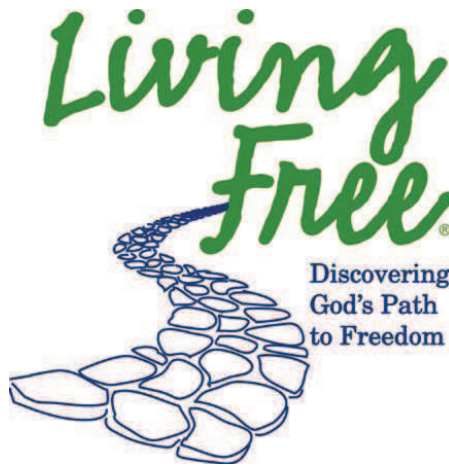
**M**EADOWVIEW, Va. — A small town's answer to the opioid crisis is making a difference in the lives of Southwest Virginia residents, some of whom are calling a newly formed recovery group a "godsend" for their community.

"It's helped me a lot. That's why I don't miss any meetings," said Emily Schuler, who started attending Recovery at Meadowview three months ago after trying other addiction programs in the region.

"I like being involved in these types of groups because it helps me to stay sober," said Schuler, who was charged with possession of methamphetamine in April.

"I went to jail, and part of my release was to attend counseling services when I got out. I've been totally sober for four months."

Schuler is among more than a dozen men and women who attend the weekly recovery group, which meets from 6 to 8 p.m. every Tuesday at Woodland



Hills Christian Church's new campus on Lindell Road.

Charlie Lowdermilk, the group's lead facilitator, and Sonny Wright, co-facilitator, started building the ministry program last spring after realizing there weren't many faith-based recovery programs between Bristol and Marion.

"I don't think it's too extreme to say

See **RECOVERY**, Page A5

# Sheriff Newman won't seek re-election

BY DAVID MCGEE  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

**ABINGDON, Va.** — Long-time Washington County Virginia Sheriff Fred Newman announced at the end of December that he won't seek re-election for a sixth term.

"In my almost 20 years' tenure as sheriff, our county has seen tremendous growth and change. The way the criminal element operates has made the job of law enforcement much more difficult than in previous times," Newman said in a letter distributed by the Sheriff's Office. "To meet these ever-changing law enforcement needs, our sheriff's office has grown from approximately 70 appointed personnel to over 100. Also, our personnel are better trained than ever before."



Newman

Newman, a 38-year law enforcement veteran, began his career in 1975 as a patrol officer with the Chilhowie Police Department. In 1976, he accepted a position as a Virginia State Police Trooper, where he remained until 1991. In 1996, Newman rejoined the law enforcement ranks as a patrol captain with the Washington County Sheriff's Office, running for and successfully being elected county sheriff in 1999. He took office in January 2000.

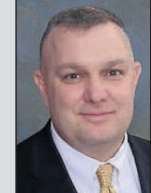
"Two accomplishments that I am extremely proud of during my tenure as sheriff is our

See **SHERIFF**, Page A5

# Blake Andis announces bid for sheriff

WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

**ABINGDON, Va.** — Blake Andis, a lifelong Washington County resident who currently serves as police chief at Virginia Highlands Community College, announced his bid for sheriff of Washington County on Friday.



Andis

Andis' announcement came after current Sheriff Fred Newman announced last week that he will not seek re-election.

Andis began his law enforcement career as a volunteer at the Washington County Sheriff's Office and was hired as a full-time officer in 1989. He held various positions in the jail, patrol, school resource, and investigation divisions. He rose to the rank of chief deputy before he was hired to lead the VHCC Police Department in 2012, the announcement states.

The candidate pledged to work closely with deputies, first

See **BID**, Page A5

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# Recovery

From Page A1

that there is a drug epidemic going around,” said Lowdermilk. “It’s not just Washington County, it’s everywhere.

“We have a deep burden in our hearts for lifting up people and giving them hope.”

The recovery program, a ministry of Woodland Hills Christian Church, is a nonresidential group ministry, offering biblical solutions to people who are imprisoned by life-controlling struggles, including drugs and alcohol abuse; behavior issues like gambling, pornography and anger; and codependent and unhealthy relationships.

“Everyone is affected in some way by alcohol and drug abuse, and we want to help that problem in our community and the surrounding areas,” said Roger Phelps, discipleship pastor at Woodland Hills Christian Church in Abingdon, where Phelps is forming another ministry recovery program at the Abingdon church located on Elementary Drive. “The majority of people who need recovery won’t go to a residential program. That’s why these groups in churches are so valuable,” said Phelps.

Woodland Hills Christian Church uses the Living Free curriculum, a Christ-centered approach for helping people who are caught in the bondage of addictions related to substance, behavior or relationships. Other Living Free programs operate in Southwest Virginia locations, including Grundy, Castlewood, Richlands, Southwest Virginia Regional Jail, Sullivan County Jail and Bristol City Jail.

The Abingdon church will provide a free training session for anyone who wants to become a program facilitator for the recovery program on Saturday, Jan. 19, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Mark Mitchell, who has led both community and jail outreach programs, will lead the training session with a goal of helping to develop spiritual, family and community leaders.

Schuler plans to attend the training session so that she can become a group facilitator. “I want to dedicate my life to working with addicts. I’m comfortable with people like that because I’m one of them. I feel uncomfortable talking to people who don’t understand because they judge you,” she said.

## A common thread

Each member of the recovery group shares a common thread, even the people who facilitate the meetings.

“No one understands an addict like an addict,” said Phelps. “I’ll be clean for 33 years in March.

“I’m not proud of my background, but it’s who I am,” said Phelps, who dealt with a cocaine addiction. “I want to help people who are struggling the way I struggled.”

Although Lowdermilk has never struggled with substance abuse, he knows the pain of addiction suffered by a family member.

“Everyone is affected somehow,” said Lowdermilk, whose son is a recovering drug user. “Our group is also for concerned persons — family members and friends who have a loved one experiencing life-controlling problems.”

Wright said he can relate to the group members because he also was a drug addict for as many as 40 years, most of the time while driving a tractor-trailer across the country.

“My life-controlling problem has always been drugs, and my drug of choice was meth.”

Wright started using drugs at age 17, a habit that landed him at Brushy Mountain Prison in Tennessee for seven years. He learned to drive a tractor-trailer truck when he was released from jail at age 25, but drugs still consumed his life. He went back to jail for three more years, where he met Mitchell, who introduced him to the Living Free program.

“Not only did Jesus save me, but He showed me that I have people who care.”

Schuler said it’s changed the way she copes with life, too.

“It’s brought me closer to God. I used to turn to drugs instead of trying to face them on my own and looking to God for help,” she said.

“I’ve since crossed paths with people who have offered drugs to me. I used to never say no to them, but not this time. I don’t want it. I don’t want my daughter growing up in that kind of atmosphere.”



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

**From left, Charlie Lowdermilk, Roger Phelps, Sonny Wright, Dennis Schuler and Emily Schuler (sitting) pose in the sanctuary at Woodland Hills Christian Church at Meadowview. Lowdermilk and Wright facilitate Recovery at Meadowview, a ministry program that offers biblical solutions to people who are imprisoned by life-controlling struggles.**



## ONLINE

Watch a Facebook video about the training session at <https://www.facebook.com/whccaabingdon/videos/216032365964766>.

## Living Free curriculum

“Nationwide, the average statistic shows that for recovery programs that don’t focus on Jesus Christ, the success rate is 17 percent. When we include Jesus Christ as the healer, the success rate goes to 84 percent,” said Phelps.

Phelps explained that Living Free ministry gives each recovery group the freedom to name its own group. “While Living Free is a global, international program, our recovery program may not be as widely known because individual groups carry different names.”

The group format includes an opening prayer, food and fellowship, worship in songs, devotion and time devoted to group sharing.

“Even though we have a book to follow, we depend on the Holy Spirit to lead us,” said Wright. “You don’t have to have a religious background or be saved. That’s what this program is for — to bring you to the Lord,” said Wright.

“We’re nondenominational, but we focus on the Lord,” added Lowdermilk.

“No one is looking down their noses at them. There’s no judgment going on here. We want to let people know that we are here to change the way they live their lives,” he said.

## Five components of recovery

Lowdermilk said the five components of recovery start with the decision to get serious about recovery.

“I was actually really dead set on staying sober, but I wasn’t 100 percent in doing it at first,” said Schuler.

The second component is to surround yourself with people who are serious about your life-change and who will encourage you.

“My dad, Dennis Schuler, has taken me to every substance abuse class since I’ve been out of jail. My parents said they will do anything to help me if I really want to stay sober,” said Schuler.

According to Lowdermilk, people who attend recovery group meetings hold themselves accountable to others who can evaluate their progress and help them assume responsibility for their conduct. They learn about boundaries — people they must not see and places they must not go — to help them make better decisions and stay on track to recovery.

“And, finally, it’s important to stay consistent,” he said. “Recovery and discipleship are for a lifetime.”

Recovery at Meadowview meetings are free and open to the public. To learn more, call 276-206-3699 or 276-695-9371, or follow both Woodland Hills Christian Church and Recovery at Meadowview on Facebook.

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at [news@washconews.com](mailto:news@washconews.com).

# Sheriff

From Page A1

sheriff’s office accreditation, which was attained in 2006. The agency has been reaccredited three times since the initial accreditation,” Newman said. “The other accomplishment for which I am extremely proud and thankful for is working with our county Board of Supervisors and county School Board to attain

funding to place a school resource officer in every school in Washington County. In today’s society, the safety of our students, faculty and staff is of paramount importance.”

The sheriff’s position and other local government slots will appear on the Nov. 5 general election.

“It has truly been an honor and privilege to serve the citizens of Washington County Virginia as their sheriff,” stated Sheriff Newman.

# Bid

From Page A1

responders, town officials and other county leaders to ensure that residents feel safe.

“If elected, I want to build trust and communication between law enforcement and communities,” he said. “I would like to develop a Citizen Advisory Board to cultivate a proactive approach to crime prevention within our communities, schools, businesses, and houses of worship. I also want to provide specialized training to all school employees especially teachers and bus drivers on how to respond and handle emergency situations.”

Andis said he is committed to examining and combating emerging crime trends, particularly those that impact senior citizens.

“I want to develop a fraud division dealing with scams such as lotteries, taxes, vehicles, inheritance and other various phone scams,” he said.

Andis also vowed to tackle Washington County’s growing drug problem.

“If elected sheriff, I intend to increase drug enforcement efforts and launch the most aggressive enforcement against drug dealers, illegal drug manufacturers and drug importers in Washington County history,” he said. “I have worked with lawmakers to create laws preventing the development of methadone clinics near schools, churches and residential areas. I have also worked with lawmakers to reduce pseudoephedrine sales to help reduce manufacturing of methamphetamine in Southwest Virginia.”

Andis said he would increase the number of deputies on patrol across the county to ensure they are familiar and available to citizens in their assigned patrol areas. He also favors using retired law enforcement officers and veterans to support the additional programs with their specialized trainings.

The election is Nov. 5.

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## Steinlen : CATS

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Image: Winter: Cat on a Cushion, 1909, VMFA, The Maxine Hornung Collection, Gift of Frank Raysor