



Lifestyle/page B1
**BV MAN'S ZEAL
 FOR LIFE INFECTIOUS**
*Jordan Gibbons Not
 Letting Cancer Stop Him*



Sports/page B10
**CHANGE OF PACE
 FOR KAREN ROBINSON**
*Mainstay In VMI Football
 Office Retiring After 47 Years*

The News-Gazette



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ABOVE, friends of Asher Williams help him celebrate his sixth birthday last month with a drive-by party, complete with Silly String. BELOW, a parade in Lexington Friday of police and fire vehicles, along with those of family members of nursing home residents, brings joy to those residents and salutes health care workers. (Stephanie Mikels Blevins photos)



Parade Time

*Drive-by Events
 Boosting Morale,
 Marking Birthdays*

BY HARRISON MINES

Though social gatherings have been discouraged for weeks, area folks are

finding new ways to celebrate the everyday at a physical distance.

The drive-by party has popped up across the country as a means for people to see one another on special occasions, all while in compliance with governing bodies' ban of social gatherings. In the Rockbridge area, residents have turned to this method of celebration over the last month to show support of friends and loved ones at an uncertain time.

"It's been hard to help him understand," Lacie Williams, of Buena Vista, said of how her son, Asher, 6, is dealing with the social isolation of the coronavirus pandemic. The Williams family had planned to celebrate Asher's birthday last month at a Harlem Globetrotter's event, but the public health crisis arose to cancel their plans at the beginning of the shutdown.

See Parade, page 2

Medical Reopening Begins

*Dentists,
 Optometrists,
 Vets Taking
 Precautions*

BY JONATHAN SCHWAB

Following Gov. Ralph Northam's announcement last Wednesday that non-emergency medical procedures, including dental and veterinary, could resume as of last Friday, a number of medical practices in the Rockbridge area are reopening while others remain closed.

The relaxing of the medical restrictions is the first "reopening" measure to be taken by the governor since restrictions were put in place at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. On Monday, Northam extended his executive order that closed restaurants, hair salons and other businesses from May 8 to May 14, but he indicated that based on current data he expects to be able to enter "Phase 1" of reopening businesses by May 15.

Dentists that are reopening are following detailed interim guidelines from the American Dental Health Association, the Virginia Dental Association, the Virginia Department of Health and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to keep patients, dentists and dental team members safe.

See Reopening, page B7

INSIDE

RCHS making plans for a virtual graduation/page B7

Pandemic concerns cause registrars to urge absentee voting for GOP primary next month/page A4

VPAS temporarily expanding its transportation program/page B12

Heritage Hall Employee Tests Positive For Virus

BY KATIE DOAR

An employee at Heritage Hall, a long-term care facility in Lexington, has tested positive for COVID-19.

The facility itself has not experienced an outbreak and no residents have shown symptoms associated with the virus following screening. A screening is composed of a series of questions and an assessment of health, and it determines whether or not a person will be tested.

Trent Roberts, a lieutenant with the Lexington Fire

Department and a member of the local coronavirus emergency management team, said that there has been no mass testing in the facility due to state restrictions.

Roberts said that the affected person, a female, feared that she had been exposed to the virus through a family contact. She notified her employer, who furloughed her immediately. "Presumably with pay," Roberts said.

See Virus, page B8

South River Market Not Forgotten One Year Later

BY HARRISON MINES

The explosion at South River Market, which claimed the lives of four area residents one year ago Sunday, still remains under investigation by state police.

State Police spokesman Sgt. Rick Garletts told The News-Gazette Tuesday officials have nothing to

release regarding the incident at this time.

Roger Roberts, 69, who owned the South River Market; Roberts' son, Kevin Roberts, 44; Roberts' granddaughter, Samantha Roberts Lewis, 27; and Paul Ruley, 54, a patron of the store, died as a result of the fire. The explosion, which also injured a number of people present

at the market, marks a dark day in history for many in the Rockbridge area, with countless in the community experiencing a sense of loss after the event.

Around 9:23 a.m. May 10, 2019, first responders were dispatched to reports of an explosion at the intersection of Old Buena Vista Road and South River Road. When responders

arrived, the gas station was engulfed in flames.

Witnesses to the incident said bystanders outside of the market ran into the building immediately after the fire started to rescue the individuals trapped inside. Roger Roberts was reportedly pulled out of the burning structure by nearby individuals. Roberts died the fol-

lowing day from his injuries at the Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center in Richmond. Three sets of remains were recovered by investigators following the incident and later identified by the medical examiner as Kevin Roberts, Lewis and Ruley.

See South River, page 4



ALSO INSIDE:

*Local Businesses,
 Groups Offer Ways
 To Serve You.
 See pages A8 and A9*

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INDEX

Classifieds B11
 Editorial/Letters A6-A7
 Government Notices A5
 Lifestyle B1-B3
 Obituaries A3
 Religion B9

WEATHER

Today: Mostly Cloudy
 High 57
 Low 39

Thurs. Mostly Sunny
 High 65
 Low 44

Response To The Coronavirus

AMONG THE DRIVE-BY BIRTHDAY PARTIES recently in the Rockbridge area was one for Asher Williams (as seen in photo at right and below, far right) and another for Mary Mackey Williams Leech (below). The Glasgow Volunteer Fire Department, meanwhile, has been offering birthday parades for children, and also presented an Easter Sunday parade. During the Easter parade, a firetruck brought the Easter Bunny along to help Melissa Blankenship celebrate her 13th birthday (below, center).



Parade

continued from page 1

"He's been so upset about his birthday," Williams said. "He loves life; he's the life of the party. My husband is in ministry so he loves people and being social."

"I thought, 'he loves parades,'" she continued. "I thought we might as well have everyone drive by at the same time."

Drawing inspiration from the growing trend on social media, Williams planned for a birth-

day parade to surprise Asher at their home the afternoon of Monday, April 27.

Contacting friends, family and teachers, Williams organized for parade participants to meet around Enderly Heights Elementary to be led past their home by a firetruck.

That afternoon, vehicles lined the streets for blocks leading to the Williams home to wave hello to Asher. Police got involved with one of their patrol vehicles in the parade, and friends and family decorated vehicles with balloons and banners. Some folks rode by on golf carts,

armed with Silly String to blast the birthday boy and his siblings from the road.

"It was incredible and we are so blessed," Williams told The News-Gazette.

Williams said she had "returned" the favor for another family's birthday caravan days prior to her son's celebration.

"Whatever you can do to entertain your kids," she said.

- - -

Children aren't the only ones celebrating with parades during the coronavirus.

The family of county resident Mary Mackey Williams Leech organized an impromptu "drive by" for her 90th birthday April 19.

"We were surprised by the number of people who participated," one of Leech's family members told The News-Gazette. Her family members reportedly didn't start thinking about organizing a parade until the night before. Through phone call, text and email, the family was able to pass the word on about Leech's birthday.

See Parade, page A11



A RESIDENT blows kisses to her family as a staff member at Heritage Hall waves to the participants in Friday's parade in Lexington. (Stephanie Mikels Blevins photo)



FAMILY MEMBERS of nursing home residents drive by in front of Heritage Hall during Friday's parade. (Stephanie Mikels Blevins photo)

NOTICE

The next regular monthly meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on **Tuesday, May 12, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.** The meeting will be held via electronic means pursuant to the Continuity of Government Ordinance. School Board members and RCPS Staff members will be participating remotely.

As the COVID-19 public health emergency continues, the location and nature of future School Board meetings will be determined on a meeting-by-meeting basis. The May 12, 2020 School Board meeting will be held via "Zoom" video communications. Citizens are encouraged to join our meeting by logging into Zoom using the following address link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81105040996>

At this time, because there will be no public attendance for this meeting, citizens are encouraged to submit public comment in writing to the following email address: rcps-boardcomments@rockbridge.k12.va.us, or by U.S. mail to Rockbridge County School Board Office, Attention: Public Comment, Clerk of the School Board, 2893 Collierstown Road, Lexington, VA 24450. Comments will be read aloud to the board. The standard two-minute limit will be observed, but the full text of the comments will be provided to the Board in writing. We apologize for this inconvenience.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING #1 PROPOSED 2020-2021 TAX RATES CITY OF BUENA VISTA

The City of Buena Vista will conduct a public hearing on May 7, 2020 shortly after 6:00 p.m. The hearing will be conducted to receive public input on the proposed FY 2021 Tax Rates.

*****THIS MEETING IS VIRTUAL — THE PUBLIC CAN ATTEND THROUGH ZOOM — PLEASE VISIT OUR CITY WEB SITE AT [HTTPS://WWW.BUENAVISTAVA.ORG](https://www.buenvistava.org) FOR INFORMATION ON HOW TO JOIN THE MEETING USING ZOOM**

THE HEARING WILL BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. ANY PERSON DESIRING TO BE HEARD WILL BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT ORAL OR WRITTEN TESTIMONY WITHIN REASONABLE TIME LIMITS AS DETERMINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL. WE ENCOURAGE THE PUBLIC TO SUBMIT ANY COMMENTS IN WRITING PRIOR TO THE MEETING AND ALL COMMENTS CAN BE SUBMITTED TO DWHEELER@BVCITY.ORG.

A complete copy of the budget and tax rates is available for review in the City Manager's office, City Hall, 2nd Floor, 2039 Sycamore Avenue.

The City Council is giving consideration to adopting the following real estate tax and refuse fees for FY 2021:

Real Estate — \$1.33 per \$100 assessed valuation
Personal Property — \$5.85 per \$100 assessed valuation
Refuse Fee — \$21.00 per Month

PUBLIC HEARING:

BUENA VISTA PUBLIC SERVICE AUTHORITY WATER AND SEWER RATE FEE INCREASE FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020-2021

That in accordance with the Virginia Water and Waste Authorities Act (Chapter 51 of Title 15.2 of the Code of Virginia of 1950, as amended) the Buena Vista Public Service Authority (the "Authority") hereby proposes the following schedule of water and sewer rates for fiscal year 2020-2021:

Water rates \$8.58 per 1,000 gallons
Sewer rates \$8.54 per 1,000 gallons

A PUBLIC HEARING FOR COMMENT ON THE PROPOSED WATER AND SEWER RATES INCREASE SHALL BE HELD FOLLOWING THE REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING ON MAY 7, 2020.

*****THIS MEETING IS VIRTUAL — THE PUBLIC CAN ATTEND THROUGH ZOOM — PLEASE VISIT OUR CITY WEB SITE AT [HTTPS://WWW.BUENAVISTAVA.ORG](https://www.buenvistava.org) FOR INFORMATION ON HOW TO JOIN THE MEETING USING ZOOM*****

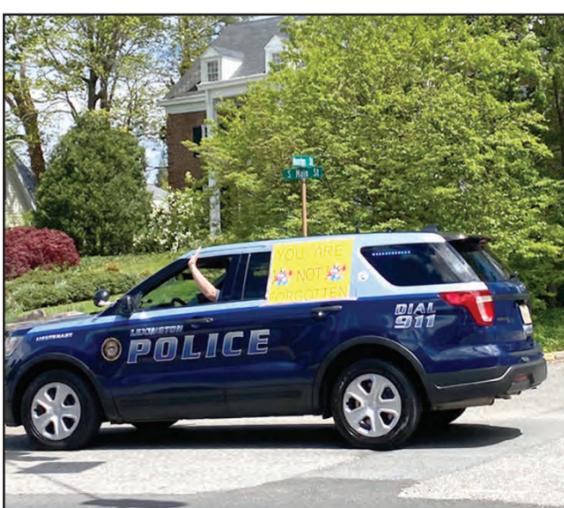
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WE ENCOURAGE THE PUBLIC TO SUBMIT ANY COMMENTS IN WRITING PRIOR TO THE MEETING AND ALL COMMENTS CAN BE SUBMITTED TO DWHEELER@BVCITY.ORG.

A copy of the Resolution proposing the water and sewer rates may be obtained from the Secretary of the Authority in the City Manager's Office located at 2039 Sycamore Avenue, Buena Vista, Virginia.

Response To The Coronavirus

POLICE OFFICERS, fire-fighters, family members of nursing home residents, and even a dinosaur joined together for a parade Friday that went past Heritage Hall, Carilion Stonewall Jackson Hospital and The Mayflower. The parade was organized to honor health care workers and boost the morale of residents at the nursing home and assisted living facilities and the hospital. (photos by Stephanie Mikels Blevins and Harrison Mines)



Parade

continued from page A2
Weather permitted the family to sit outside with Leech to enjoy the honks and waves from friends passing by in their vehicles.
“People drove one direction, then turned around and came back another,” her family member said. “A few peo-

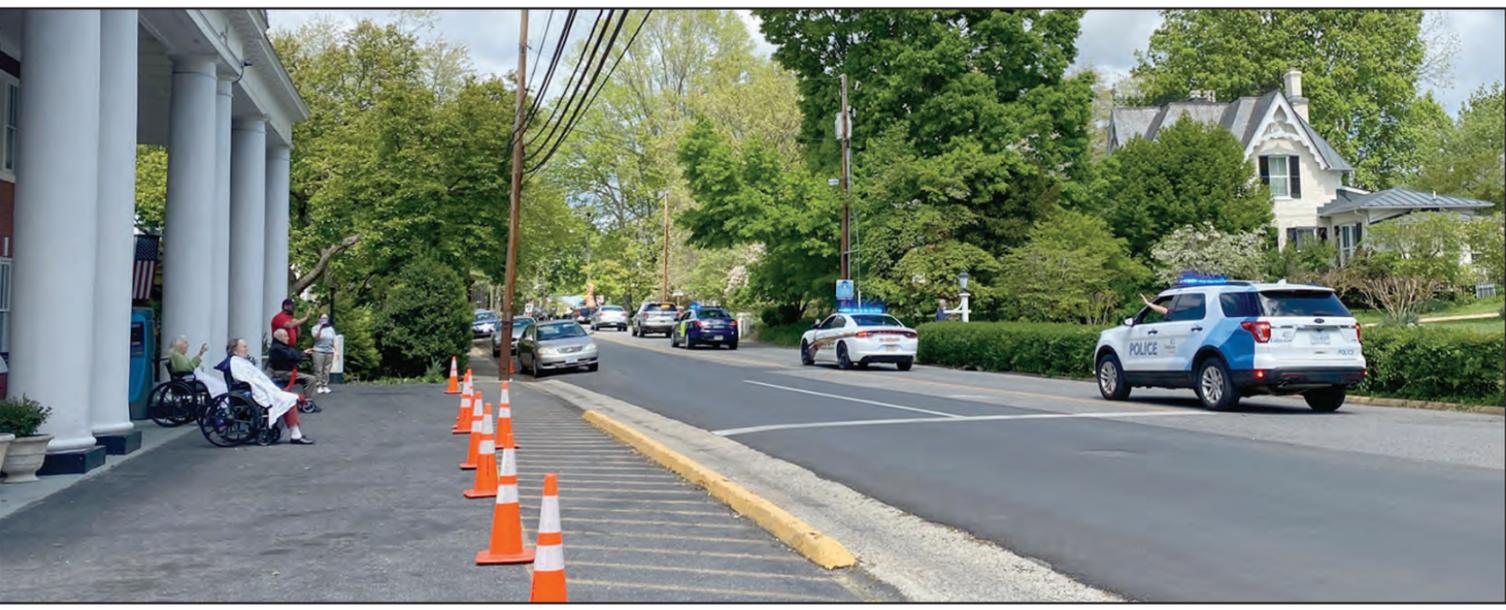
ple on Facebook said it gave their family the opportunity to do something that day.”
Her family member shared that Leech enjoyed sitting outside and asking “Who’s that?” when vehicles passed. Leech also knew people were thinking about her birthday through a card shower her family organized with help from her church, in which she received dozens of birthday cards.

Boosting morale with parades has also become common during this time.
First responders joined forces in Lexington Friday, May 1, to celebrate local medical staff and patients with a short parade.
The Lexington Fire Department, joined by Lexington Police, Virginia Military Institute Police and Rockbridge County Sheriff’s Office, made

a caravan with agency vehicles to pass by Heritage Hall, Carilion Stonewall Jackson Hospital and The Mayflower.
“The police department couldn’t say no,” Lexington Interim Chief Mark Riley said with a smile Friday, describing the “great” turnout for the effort.
Some residents also joined in with their private vehicles to be a part of the parade. Two

young girls held up a sign reading “We Miss You, Paw-Paw” from an open back hatch of their vehicle as they passed their grandfather’s care facility.
First responders rode through their route with sirens on and encouraging signs displayed on their vehicles to thank essential staffers and greet those receiving care.

In their gesture of goodwill, a loudspeaker in the processional played the cheerful tune “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.”
As law enforcement and firefighters rode by, waving to staff and patients, simple signs reminded the community: “We will overcome together” and “You are not forgotten.”



RESIDENTS of The Mayflower (at left) and Heritage Hall (below) enjoy Friday’s parade of police and fire vehicles. Family members of some of the residents also participated in the parade with their vehicles. (Harrison Mines and Stephanie Mikels Blevins photos)

