

> This week: OCHS Class of 2020 ... B-section

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Center Store crushed

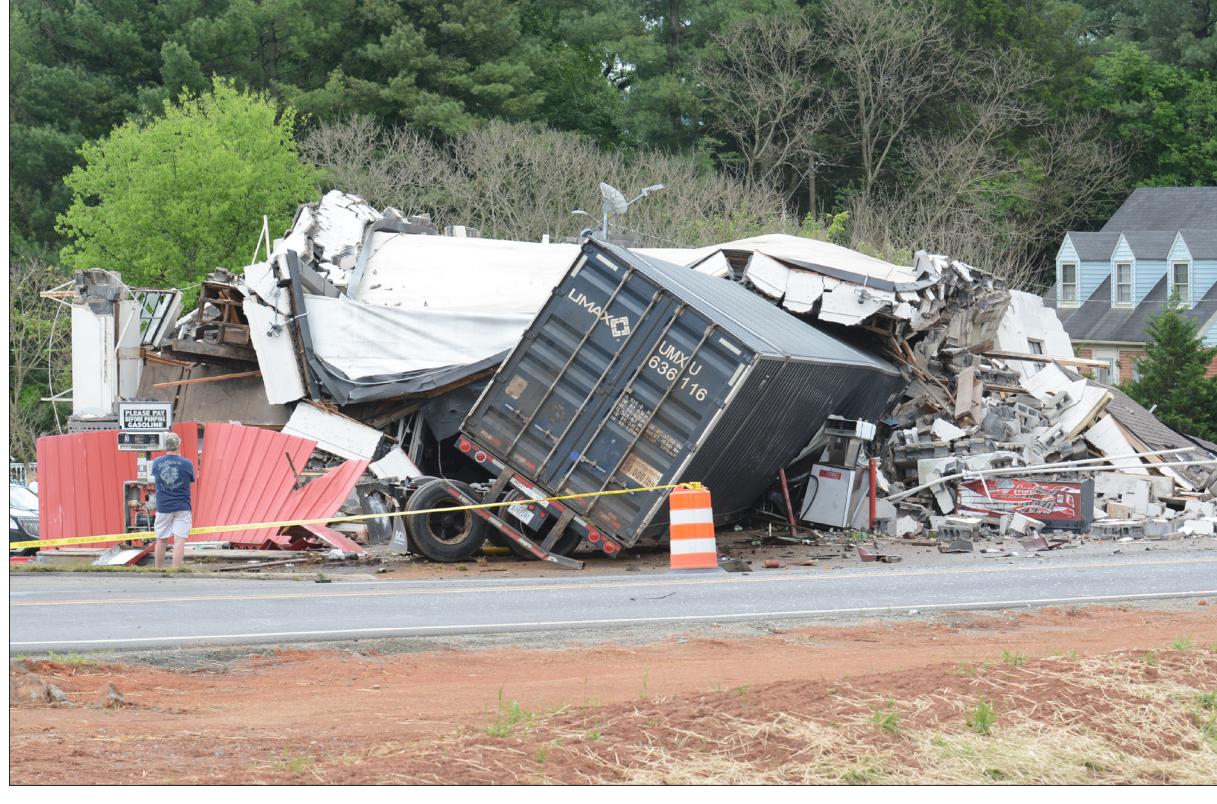


PHOTO BY JEFF POOLE
Somerset Center Store owner David McElheney stares at the destruction caused when a tractor-trailer ran a stop sign on Route 231 and plowed into the storefront last Wednesday morning. Miraculously, no one was seriously injured.

No one severely injured after truck plows through Somerset landmark

BY JEFF POOLE
Editor

"We all said it would happen one day." Renee McElheney sat on the ground outside the Somerset Center Store unhurt after a tractor-trailer plowed into the front of the store last Wednesday morning, ultimately leveling the iconic structure. According to Virginia State Police Sgt. Brent Coffey, a 2013 Peterbilt tractor-trailer was traveling from the Madison side of Route 231 when it ran a stop sign at the intersection of Route 20 and collided with a 1994 Freightliner dump truck heading toward the town of Orange. The impact caused the tractor-trailer to run off the roadway and collide with the Somerset Center Store. The impact forced the dump truck off the roadway, into a tree and a nearby house.

The driver of the tractor-trailer, Gabriel J. Garcia, 29, of Womelsdorf, Pa., was uninjured in the crash. He was wearing his seatbelt.

The driver of the dump truck, Brent M. Spitzer,

54, of Gordonsville, suffered minor injuries in the crash and was transported to the University of Virginia Medical Center for treatment. He also was wearing a seatbelt.

Sgt. Coffey said there is no indication either of the drivers was speeding at the time of the collision. Garcia's trailer was loaded with vegetables bound for the Walmart distribution center in Zion Crossroads, Coffey said. Spitzer's dump truck was empty. Garcia was charged with failure to obey a stop sign. Not long after Garcia's truck plowed through the store's gas pumps and brought the building down upon his truck, the popular Somerset store was swarmed with fire and rescue units, law enforcement officers and anxious onlookers.

As motorists were waved through the intersection by Orange County Sheriff's deputies, many had their phones out taking photos or videos of the crumbled cinderblock structure and the tail end of the large truck emerging from it. Onlookers

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Praise and prayers amid the pandemic

Some local churches have returned to in-person worship services following Gov. Ralph Northam's phased reopening of Virginia. Pictured here, Blue Run Baptist Church holds a May worship service with masked parishioners in alternating pews.

PHOTO BY MELISSA IRBY



Churches cautious about reopening

BY HILARY HOLLADAY
Staff Writer

On March 23, Gov. Ralph Northam banned gatherings, including church services, of more than 10 people. With Easter Sunday less than three weeks away, local churches scrambled to come up with alternative modes of worship. Some ministers began hosting services online. Others arranged drive-up services. Many made a concerted effort

to contact their flock by phone or email. But it still was a long, lonely time for those who love going to church and being part of a faith community they can see in person.

Then, in mid-May, the governor allowed churches to resume their services as part of the first phase of reopening the state. Even with the governor's per-

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