

**Playwriting festival scheduled for Barter Theatre B2**

**Barter Theatre crosswalk will get upgrades to increase visibility B1**



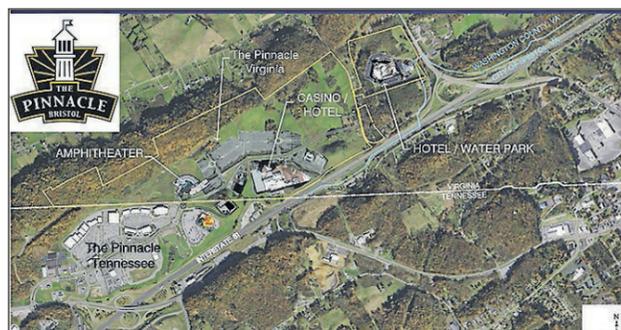
# Washington County News

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**COMMUNITY**

## Dueling casinos

Pinnacle owner, Cherokee agreement sets up conflicting proposals for Southwest Va. gambling



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO  
The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has reached an agreement with developer Steve Johnson to develop and operate a casino on a 350-acre tract in Washington County, Virginia, adjacent to The Pinnacle retail center.

BY TIM DODSON  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

BRISTOL, Va. — Developer Steve Johnson and a federally recognized Cherokee tribe announced an agreement last week to establish a proposed casino in Washington County, Virginia, just one day before the General Assembly convenes for a session that could see the state legalize casino gaming.

The new casino proposal raises questions about whether

See **CASINOS**, Page A5

## General Assembly Pillion plans to focus on education

BY DAVID MCGEE  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

New 40th District Virginia Sen. Todd Pillion counts two education issues — reducing the number of standardized tests and seeking increased funding — among his priorities for the new legislative session.

Lawmakers returned to Richmond last week. Speaking with the Herald Courier last week, Pillion, a Republican from Abingdon, said both issues are top of mind



Pillion

See **PILLION**, Page A6



Rotary Frolics returns for 71st year at Barter Theatre stage

» B1

**AGRICULTURE**



Beekeeping and related classes on the rise in region

» B3

**MLK DAY**



Member of 'Clinton 12' will speak in Abingdon for MLK Day events

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CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
BELOW: Doug Beatty turns the head gate control to start the water wheel at White's Mill in Abingdon. The White's Mill Foundation has spent the last 20 years restoring the 18th century Abingdon landmark to a working grist mill that will grind cornmeal and grits.



## WHITE'S MILL

CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

LEFT: Recently restored gearing will enable White's Mill to be up and running by spring.



# Run of the mill

## White's Mill back in working order, plans for community center

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
ABINGDON, Va. — After 20 years of volunteer restoration efforts, White's Mill Foundation is putting the pieces in place that will help a historic Abingdon landmark once again operate as a working water-powered grist mill. The exciting news, said foundation members Jennifer Kling

and Doug Beatty, is the centuries-old mill that once served as a post office and polling place is also being transformed into a living history museum, recreating historical settings for tourists and members of the community.

In addition to structural upgrades to the building, most recently, the mill's gearing has been restored and the wooden

flume rebuilt after years of neglect. The mill used water power until 1989, after which it succumbed to the ravages of time and the elements.

According to both Beatty and Kling, the original mill could be up and grinding corn and grits as early as spring — more than 30 years since a farming community last heard the thunderous roar of gears meshing

together on the banks of Toole Creek.

The refurbished grist mill will grind corn once hooked to the gears. "The millwright has to do some fine-tuning before that can happen," said Kling.

In the meantime, the mill has continued to supply local restaurants with freshly ground

See **MILL**, Page A5

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## 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.

# Lifetime dog tags next proposal for Washington County



**Joe Tennis**

ABINGDON, Va. — Wanna buy one dog license for life?

Right now, that's just an idea in Washington County, Virginia.

But it's on the drawing board after a presentation by County Treasurer Fred Parker at the latest Washington County Board of Supervisors meeting on Feb. 24.

In recent years, dog-tag sales have consistently gone downward, Parker said.

The cost of processing dog licenses over the past 10 years has also increased, with consideration of processing orders with postage, Parker said.

"It's very labor-intensive," Parker said.

Statewide, more people are also choosing to use mobile devices to register such items as dog licenses, Parker said.

And yet some people may not register a dog.

People don't like "the Big Brother syndrome," Parker said. "They don't like us knowing everything about their dogs."

Parker says a lifetime dog license would "streamline sales, saving both time and money and energy."

Currently, the county mails up to 3,000 notices to renew dog tags each year, according to Parker.

And, he said, several localities have already made the change to a lifetime dog tag — just as he proposed.

Cost of the lifetime license is yet to be determined.

But Parker requested County Attorney Lucy Phillips to create a proposal for the lifetime license for dogs to be considered by the Board of Supervisors at an upcoming meeting.

Yet, Parker said, this license would be not transferrable, even if the dog had a new owner.

The change would require a public hearing.

"The original reason for dog tags was never revenue but health and safety," Parker said. "It was [because of] rabies."

## Abingdon marks Restaurant Week

WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — The town of Abingdon is celebrating Restaurant Week (March 2-8) with specials and tasting menus at restaurants all over town.

Eleven of Abingdon's most high-profile restaurants are participating in the promotion, offering prix fixe menus, or special packages. Restaurants include 128 Pecan, Greeko's Grill and Café, JJ's Restaurant and Sports Bar, Luke's Café, Morgan's, The Peppermill, Rain, Sisters American Grill, The Tavern and White Birch Food & Juice. For a full list of menus and specials, go to <https://visitabingdonvirginia.com/blog/abingdon-restaurant-week>.

Other events include:

### March 4: Sean Brock & ravis Milton

The Virginia Highlands Festival presents "An Evening with Chef Sean Brock & Chef Travis Milton," two renowned culinary personalities with Appalachian roots, in conversation at Barter Theatre's Gilliam Stage. The event will be followed by a Q&A.

### March 6: The Crooked Road on Tour

A live performance featuring Martha Spencer & Whitetop Mountain Band and Wayne & Jeanie Henderson at Barter's Smith Theatre.

### March 7: Stories of Supper and Salvation

A live storytelling event from Roanoke-based Hoot and Holler, focused on how food is the community's great unifier at Barter's Smith Theatre.

# SUBS OF SUBSTANCE



David and Jeanie Wampler take a break at their Jersey Mike's in Abingdon. The couple say they wouldn't spend their retirement any other way.

## Couple's franchises for Jersey Mike's have staying power

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — David Wampler wakes every morning loving what he does.

And serving the community is a big reason he feels that way.

David and his wife Jeanie, of Kingsport, recently opened their sixth Jersey Mike's franchise in Abingdon — the No. 1 fastest-growing sandwich chain in the country. The couple plays active roles in the operation of their businesses — two in Kingsport, three in Bristol and one in Abingdon, which opened Jan. 29.

It's not uncommon to see the retirees working alongside the youthful high school and college staff, wearing aprons and hats while they slice meats and cheeses and prepare subs with baked-on-site bread.

"It's such a pleasure to take a customer's order and watch them see us make their subs. A guy told me the other day, 'This is a beautiful sub.' That makes you feel good," said David.

The secret of success, he said, comes with food that is authentic and fresh.

"Everything we do is fresh, and everything is made to order. We slice all of our meats, cheeses, onions, tomatoes and lettuce every day. Other sub shops use precooked beef, but we oven-bake our roast beef and cook our Philly steaks on a grill while the customer waits.

"My philosophy is that I want our customers to leave feeling better than when they came in."

### Giving back to the community

The Abingdon restaurant got off to a whirlwind pace when the couple officially opened the doors of the Abingdon store at the end of January. The new restaurant had circulated 7,500 coupons throughout town offering a free regular sub for a minimum \$2 donation.

"We helped out in the Abingdon restaurant because our staff was so busy that first week," said Jeanie.

"Every week, we receive a newsletter from the Jersey Mike's headquarters," said her husband. "During that first week — which was only five days — we were No. 4 in sales among all of the country's nearly 2,000 stores.

"But it's more than just making subs. We give back to the community," he said.

They credit a lot of the opening-week traffic to a fundraising event that benefited a scholarship fund for Abingdon teen Kirk Nairn, who was killed in a car wreck the day before his high school graduation in 2019.

"Anytime a new franchise opens, the owner picks a local charity to benefit," said David, whose family is acquainted with the Nairn family.

"Part of the culture of Jersey Mike's is giving back to the community. In fact, you can't be a Jersey Mike's franchise owner unless you have that sense of giving back. Everything we do is based on our Christian faith. We try to live by the verse in 1 Corinthians 10:31 that reads, 'Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.'"



TOP: David Wampler, owner of Jersey Mike's of Abingdon, slices ham for a sub sandwich. All meats, cheeses, onions, tomatoes and lettuce are sliced fresh every day. BOTTOM: Aspen Wood, a server at Jersey Mike's in Abingdon, prepares dozens of subs for customers during a work day.

The owners raised a little over \$6,000 in their first five days to benefit the Kirk Edward Nairn Memorial Scholarship Foundation.

The couple is also participating in the "Month of Giving" during the entire month of March, when their customers will receive incentives to donate to the Wampplers' chosen local charity, Bristol Speedway Children's Charities.

"If customers donate a dollar, we give them a coupon for a dollar off their next purchase," he explained. "For a \$3 donation, they get a coupon for a free bag of chips and a drink. For a \$5 donation, they get a coupon for a free sub on their next visit to Jersey Mike's. It's a no-brainer. They are donating \$5 to a good cause, and they're getting back a sub that costs \$7 or \$8."

Every Jersey Mike's franchisee throughout the country participates in the "Day of Giving," which will be on Wednesday, March 25, this year. On this day, 100% of each store's sales are donated to a local charity. Last year, the nine Tri-Cities Jersey Mike's stores were able to raise over \$42,000 for the local charity.

### What is your perfect sub?

The couple agrees they like Sub No. 5, one of the 26 hot and cold subs they serve.

"My favorite has provolone, ham, prosciuttini and cappaciuolo," David said. "By far, one of the best customer favorites is the 'Mike's Famous Philly,' grilled fresh to order with tender steak,

peppers, onions and white American cheese."

Cold subs are served "Mike's Way," which includes lettuce, onions, tomatoes, spices and "The Juice," a blend of red wine vinegar and olive oil.

Other favorites include "Jersey Shore's Favorite," which is stacked with provolone, ham and cappaciuolo. Then there's the "Original Italian," crafted with provolone, ham, prosciuttini, cappaciuolo, salami and pepperoni.

Subs are available in 7-inch and 14.5-inch sizes with regular subs starting at \$6.95. Subs can be purchased alone or as part of a meal with chips and drinks.

### 'I love what I do'

David was first introduced to a Jersey Mike's restaurant while working at Eastman Chemical Co. in Kingsport as a senior systems analyst.

"I would eat lunch at Jersey Mike's often. I had always wanted to own my own business, but with four daughters to help support, it was hard to leave a secure job."

Turns out, David and a business partner managed to open up a franchise on Bonham Road in Bristol in 2001 while still working at Eastman. Two years later, David bought out his friend's half of the business and retired from Eastman after 31 years of service.

The couple said they could be spending retirement in a more leisurely way. "But that's just not us," said Jeanie.

"The Lord has given you a talent and blessed you with the ability to do things right, so why stop?" David asked.

After that first franchise, the couple gradually accumulated additional Jersey Mike's franchises during the two decades that followed.

When he learned about The Meadows shopping center coming to Abingdon, David jumped at the opportunity to own the Jersey Mike's franchise there.

The entrepreneur said he's always admired the origin of Jersey Mike's. In 1975, Peter Cancro, a 17-year-old high school senior who had worked for Mike's Subs since he was 14 and loved the business, purchased the operation with the help of his football coach. At the time, Peter wasn't even old enough to legally slice a sub.

Over the next decade, Peter opened two other local Mike's Subs stores and continued to build his businesses. In 1987, Peter began franchising the Mike's concept. He changed the name to Jersey Mike's Subs to capture the authenticity of the original store. Today, Peter is CEO of Jersey Mike's Franchise Systems, Inc., headquartered in Manassquan, New Jersey.

"I say this with all sincerity," said the franchise owner. "I love what I do. I never dread coming to work."

It's important that he leave a legacy for his family, he said. Three of his four sons-in-law already work for his Jersey Mike's franchises. Even his young grandchildren help out sometimes cleaning tables at the restaurants.

"This is our children's and grandchildren's future."

**Sheriff's Office investigates meat packing incident A3**

**New Abingdon police chief Jon Holbrook lays out his philosophy A5**



# Washington County News

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## COMMUNITY



Virginia Highlands Festival seeking feedback for next year  
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## BUSINESS



White Blaze Outdoors puts business challenge grants to work  
» B1

## SPORTS



NASCAR All-Stars Race could be perfect fit for Bristol Motor Speedway  
» B2

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# COAL AND COVID

Virginia's coal industry sees furloughs and idled mines amid pandemic

BY TIM DODSON  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

As the coronavirus swept across the globe this spring, Southwest Virginia's coal industry felt the pandemic's impacts as companies furloughed employees and idled production at several sites amid safety concerns and reduced demand for electricity and steel.

COVID-19 is the latest challenges for an industry already under pressure from cheap natural gas, a rise in renewable energy sources and big bankruptcies, among other factors.

"Coal has been declining in Appalachia for the past 30 years," said Matt Hepler, an environmental scientist with Appalachian Voices, a nonprofit advocacy organization.

Virginia mines produced more than 45.9 million tons of coal in 1990, and by 2019, that annual figure fell to 12.4 million, according to federal data. As production fell, so did employment in the state's mines, from about



A coal miner takes a break while operating a continuous miner machine in a coal mine roughly 40 inches high. For more than a century, the coal seams that run through Appalachia have made the steel used to build U.S. cities and the electric power to light them. As technology has improved, though, it has taken fewer and fewer workers to mine that coal.

See **COAL**, Page A6

## LOCAL FARMING



Will and Amy Campbell sell most of their products directly to consumers, packaging meat and delivering cuts of beef, pork and chicken — raw or home-cooked to perfection — to customers across the region.

# Go to market

Couple shares marketing strategies with other farmers

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — A young farm couple has found a niche for connecting with customers, a strategy that has turned their local farm into a direct marketing business.

Will and Amy Campbell of Old Rich Valley Farm will

### If You Go

» **What:** Direct Marketing: A Panel Discussion  
» **When:** Tuesday, June 30, 12-1 p.m.  
» **Where:** Online webinar through the Knowledge Center of Farm Credit of the Virginias (www.farmcreditknowledgecenter.com)

To register, go to <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/1626087945185406224>

be guest speakers for a webinar on June 30 when the Knowledge Center of Farm Credit of the Virginias presents a program open to the public on direct marketing for agriculture products.

The couple will explain their direct-to-consumer

See **FARM**, Page A6

## Board of Supervisors adopts 2020-2021 budget

Barter Theatre awarded \$10K emergency grant

BY JOE TENNIS  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — On Tuesday night, the Washington County Board of Supervisors was slated to approve the budget for fiscal year 2020-21 at its regular meeting.

The \$132.58 million budget includes a last-minute grant of \$10,000 to the Barter Theatre in Abingdon to help fund its upcoming shows at the Moonlite Theatre on Lee Highway, where live productions of "The Wizard of Oz" start July 14.

Yet the budget does not include \$490,000 in state funds that are still expected to arrive this year, though perhaps not before the start of the next fiscal year on July 1, said County Administrator Jason Berry.

Those funds, largely from lottery ticket sales, are slated to go to Washington County Public Schools, Berry said.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Berry said, "Things are in flux from the state to the local level on revenues. ... Lottery dollars will just come much later this year."

The new budget does not include tax increases, Berry said.

Yet Berry did note

See **BUDGET**, Page A2

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