

# The News & Advance

na NEWSADVANCE.COM

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2020

Vol. 155, No. 287, Our 153rd Year • Lynchburg, Va.

## Staying on course

Special Olympics golfer with cerebral palsy focuses on the bright side of life



PHOTOS BY KENDALL WARNER/THE NEWS & ADVANCE

Roger Johnson grabs a golf club while practicing at Ashley Plantation Country Club in Daleville on Sept. 24. **BELOW:** Johnson takes a practice swing at Ashley Plantation Country Club.

**BY KENDALL WARNER**  
kwarner@newsadvance.com  
(434) 385-5592

From the trunk of his gold minivan, Roger Johnson slung his Carolina Hurricanes golf bag over his left shoulder and headed into the pro shop at Ashley Plantation Country Club just north of Roanoke.

Johnson, 44, of Blue Ridge, came to love golf later in life; he only has played since 2007.

“Growing up, my dad would watch [golf] on TV and I’d go in the bedroom and watch something else because I just didn’t find it

SEE **JOHNSON** | A5



## RUSTBURG MIDDLE SCHOOL Building project may get addition

Campbell County School Board votes to add \$1.3M for six more classrooms

**BY SARAH HONOSKY**  
shonosky@newsadvance.com  
(434) 385-5556

RUSTBURG — The new Rustburg Middle School could grow by 5,000 square feet this month after the Campbell County School Board voted unanimously Monday night in favor of a county proposal to increase student capacity.

The expansion means an additional \$1.3 million will be tacked onto the \$41.3 million project total, with the additional square feet — totaling six additional classrooms — added onto the proposed 136,500-square-foot structure.

Blair Construction, the Gretna-based firm selected to spearhead the new middle school project, unveiled its proposed middle school plan to Campbell County supervisors and school board members in September.

Last week, supervisors delayed Tuesday night’s final contract approval with Blair Construction to push for potential expansion.

Subsequently, the delay will push back the school’s opening day, originally intended for the start of the 2022 school year.

At a minimum, the tabled discussion will cause a two-week delay. If supervisors ultimately decide to pursue the

SEE **BUILDING** | A4

## Early voting in Va. surges despite virus, mail-in ballot worries

State well above national average with more than 880K votes cast

**BY ANTONIO OLIVO**  
Washington Post

A large portion of ballots already will have been cast in Virginia by the time Election Day rolls around next month, after a record turnout for early voting that has featured long lines outside some polling stations and mail-in ballots coming in by the thousands per day.

So far, nearly 887,000 Virgin-

ians have voted in person, by mail or by hand-delivering their ballots to a registrar’s office or drop box — the menu of options available to voters worried about going to potentially crowded polling stations on Nov. 3 and risking exposure to the novel coronavirus.

The number of ballots already cast is approaching a quarter of the 3.75 million counted for the entire 2016 general election.

Early voting is surging here despite conventional political wisdom Virginia — a critical battleground in the last three presidential cycles — is not in play in the contest between President Donald Trump and former vice president Joe Biden.

Voters from both parties have expressed fears about the virus and election security, the latter stoked by upheaval at the U.S. Postal Service and comments

Trump has made, without evidence, about potential voting fraud.

The turnout so far puts Virginia — one of a handful of states to kick off balloting 45 days ahead of Election Day — well ahead of most states in early voting, according to an analysis by University of Florida professor Michael McDonald, who puts the national average at 5%.

“We’re probably looking at three times the rate for early voting that we saw in 2016,”

said Gary D. Scott, the head of the office of elections in Fairfax County, where election workers have taken in about 2,000 mail-in ballots per day while several hundred voters have lined up to cast their ballots inside the county government center since early voting began in Virginia on Sept. 18.

Democrats are widely seen as more inclined than Republicans to vote early, given that

SEE **VOTING** | A5

<b>Mostly sunny</b> Weather, B8 <b>76°</b> <b>43°</b>	Classifieds.....B7,8	Lottery.....A2	Opinion.....A6	<b>Online:</b> newsadvance.com <b>Facebook:</b> /newsadvance <b>Twitter:</b> @newsadvance	<b>\$2 DAILY</b> <b>\$3 SUNDAY</b> <b>Miss a paper?</b> Call (434) 385-5440	
	Comics.....B5,6	Markets.....B4	Scoreboard.....B2			
	Crossword.....B6	Nation/World.....A7,8	Sports.....B1			
	Jumble.....B5	Obituaries.....A4	Sudoku.....B6			

**JES**  
Foundation Repair  
A Groundworks Company

Call Today for a **FREE** Inspection

**(434) 338-7006**

Foundation and Structural Repair | Basement Waterproofing | Crawl Space Repair and Encapsulation | Concrete Lifting and Leveling

The **highest level of expertise** in foundation repair and waterproofing — **guaranteed**

**SPECIAL OFFER\***

**SAVE UP TO \$500** OR **NO INTEREST NO PAYMENT FOR 12 MONTHS**

\* Financing offer subject to credit approval. Interest accrues during the promotional period. 17.99% interest rate if not paid off within 12 months. Discount offer: ten percent off any job over \$2500 up to a max of \$500. Coupon must be presented at time of inspection. Discount and finance offers may not be combined. Offer may not be combined with any other offer. Limit one per customer. Ask inspector for further details. Promo valid through 10/31/2020.

# Voting

From Page A1

Democratic Party leaders embraced it for years as a matter of policy to make it easier to vote. The GOP, as a whole, has been more focused on tightening restrictions at the polls.

For that reason, Democrats are touting the surge in early voting as proof of enthusiasm for Biden, as well as for Democrats in several congressional races.

"Thanks to Democratic leadership and the game-changing voting rights laws we passed earlier this year, Virginia has led the nation in early votes cast," said Virginia Democratic Party chairwoman Susan Swecker. She called the surge a sign Virginians are "fed up" with Trump.

But state GOP chairman Rich Anderson said coronavirus fears, not Democratic zeal, are likely driving early voting. He expressed confidence that Republicans will turn out for Trump in force on Election Day, calling GOP enthusiasm "stratospheric."

"Early voting this year is elevated to unprecedented proportions, likely driven by COVID-19," Anderson said in a written statement. "We expect that a higher proportion of

Republicans will vote on November 3."

The number of Virginians who have voted early so far already exceeds the 538,410 voters who voted early in all of 2016, either in person or by mail, according to an analysis by the nonprofit Virginia Public Access Project.

Another 675,714 Virginians have requested mail-in ballots this year but have not yet returned them.

Election officials attribute the surge to the legislature's decision earlier this year to allow early voting for any voter. Previously, it was allowed only for those with an excuse, such as business or personal travel. Legislators also lifted requirements that voters fill out their absentee ballots in front of a witness.

Democrats in the newly blue state House and Senate pushed for the measures before the coronavirus pandemic to make voting more accessible, but amid the health crisis, many voters have welcomed the changes as a way to keep them out of Election Day crowds.

As of Friday, about 401,000 ballots had been cast statewide by "mail," a term that covers absentee ballots returned by U.S. mail as well as those hand-

delivered to a registrar's office or drop box, state officials said.

But nearly 486,000 Virginians had chosen to stand in line to vote early in person, a reflection of the doubt sowed into the mail-in voting process after Trump's allegations about an election featuring mail-in ballots, and warnings from the financially strapped U.S. Postal Service that it won't be able to process thousands of absentee ballots in time for them to be counted.

On Thursday, Democratic members of Virginia's congressional delegation tried to ease those doubts by urging Postal Service officials to confirm that ballot envelopes will be postmarked with a date, citing examples where that hasn't happened in previous elections.

"We must protect the franchise of all Virginians who wish to cast a ballot by mail," a letter sent to Postal Service officials by Democratic Reps. Gerald Connolly, Don Beyer, Jennifer Wexton, Bobby Scott and Donald McEachin said. "If ballot return envelopes are not postmarked, they risk being invalidated through no fault of the voter."

Postal Service spokeswoman Freda Sauter said the agency received the letter and would "respond directly" to the represen-

tatives.

"Our policy is to postmark all ballots mailed by voters, whether they are prepaid by election officials or mailed with a stamp affixed by the voter," Sauter said.

Several voters who stood in early voting lines this week said they had requested absentee ballots to avoid the risk of being infected by the coronavirus while going into a polling station.

Yet, there they were, waiting to do just that after deciding that their concerns about the mail-in voting process outweighed that risk.

"I just want my vote to count," said Betsy Cromwell, 60, after voting for Biden at a state Department of Motor Vehicles office in Prince William County, where a separate line of cars with voters waiting to cast their ballots from behind their steering wheels snaked out onto the highway.

In Alexandria, Phil Calabrese said he became increasingly worried about the absentee ballot he requested in late August after it had still not arrived at his home early this month. The local elections office confirmed it had been sent.

But Calabrese, 70, was unwilling to take a chance. So, he overcame his fears

about the coronavirus and walked into his local elections office to also vote for Biden, making sure to keep his distance from the others around him.

"It's a lot of trouble," he said about making sure his vote gets in.

That anxiety — and some confusion caused by duplicate ballots sent out to some voters, while others received ballot applications with the wrong return address — has led to some delays in the early voting lines, officials said.

In Fairfax, where about 74,500 absentee ballots have been returned and 19,000 ballots have been cast in person so far, the wait outside the county government center had been as long as three hours before it dropped to about an hour this week.

Fairfax officials expect the process to further speed up after 14 satellite voting locations open across the county on Wednesday. The county also opened the government center for voting on Saturday to help meet the extra demand.

Scott, the elections director, said the longer waits are partly because of the physical distancing restrictions in place due to the pandemic, since only a small number of voters at a time are allowed inside the voting area.

But, he said, it also takes longer in cases where someone received an absentee ballot but instead decided to vote in person.

"That takes much more time to process than a person who is just coming in to vote," Scott said, explaining that those voters need to fill out paperwork before they are allowed to cast a ballot.

Juliet and Andre Ayer took the easier route of using a county ballot drop box, which Fairfax officials said will be installed inside every one of the county's early voting stations and inside its local voting precincts on Election Day.

"We thought this would be faster," Juliet Ayer, 26, said cheerfully from behind her face mask as the couple walked to their car past the scores of people still waiting to vote.

Matt Wilson, the deputy registrar in Prince William County, said he expects the early voting turnout to die down over the next week before surging again just before the election. The deadline to register to vote in Virginia is Tuesday and the last day to vote early is Oct. 31.

"We're kind of in this period where the 'eager beavers' have gotten it taken care of and we're waiting for those last-second people," Wilson said.

*"A lot of people that have CP aren't able to walk or talk. I didn't start walking and talking until I was 3, but God had a different plan for me, and I thank him for that."*

— Roger Johnson

# Johnson

From Page A1

interesting," Johnson said.

Johnson formerly was a Special Olympics tennis player, but when the season for tennis got switched, he decided to pick up golf.

"I wasn't sure how I would do playing golf. I didn't really find it interesting until I started playing it in the Special Olympics," Johnson said. "Now I watch golf 24/7. I sleep golf, eat golf, wake up golf, so it's been something I just picked up really well and I went with it."

Cerebral palsy affects Johnson's speech and mobility, specifically on his right side.

"A lot of people that have CP aren't able to walk or talk," Johnson said. "I didn't start walking and talking until I was 3, but God had a different plan for me, and I thank him for that."

Johnson's wife, Angie, is his biggest supporter. She accompanies him to the golf course and tournaments whenever she can.

"I'm there for him to keep him positive because I'm allowed to go out with him," Angie said. "When he makes a bad shot, I



Roger Johnson stretches before beginning a nine-hole round of golf at Ashley Plantation Country Club in Daleville.

say, 'Don't worry honey, it's going to be okay, the next one will be better,' and he perks up and he does better."

Before Johnson and Angie met, she wasn't very into sports. She bowled for the Special Olympics but wasn't interested in golf.

Johnson sees golf as a good fit for him. He has successfully

taught himself to swing in a way that compensates for his mobility deficits.

"Am I the best golfer in the world? No," Johnson said. "I'm not ever going to be but it gives me something that I can enjoy."

Through hard work, dedication and time spent on the course, Johnson has achieved many accomplishments. He

won his first state championship in North Carolina in 2012, and in 2013 he got a phone call asking if he wanted to be part of North Carolina's Special Olympics team for the 2014 USA games in Princeton, New Jersey.

Jumping at the opportunity, Johnson grabbed his stepfather to caddy for him and participated as one of only two nine-hole

golfers from the state.

In 2017, Johnson, who works at Panera Bread, learned he was moving to Lynchburg for work, so he called up Special Olympics Area 24 Regional Director Lisa Wimbush, who covers Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, Campbell, Lynchburg and Nelson counties.

"I don't think she really thought that I was moving," Johnson said. "Because they get a lot of calls from athletes and stuff about moving into a different area or state and it never pans out."

When Johnson did move in June, he established the Special Olympics golf program in this region of Virginia.

Although he is uncertain what his future holds when it comes to golf, Johnson said he will trust what God has in store for him.

"I thank him [God] every day for my disability or what people call a disability," Johnson said. "It's given me so many avenues that I didn't ever think were possible."

Johnson looks on the bright side of life and chooses to focus on what he can do as opposed to what he cannot do.

"There's a lot of stuff out here that isn't for people with disabilities. Golf is for everybody."

## ATTENTION MEDICARE RECIPIENTS



A privately owned, non-government website powered by e-TeleQuote Insurance, Inc.



**"easyMedicare made getting the coverage I deserved easy."**

— Joe Theismann  
NFL MVP and Super Bowl Champion

You could be missing out on benefits like:

\$0 Copays - \$0 Deductibles - \$0 Premiums

Plus Dental, Vision, Hearing and more.

Call now to speak with a licensed insurance agent!

# 844-960-3775

TTY 711 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Eastern, Monday to Friday  
9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern, Saturday

easyMedicare is an affiliate of e-TeleQuote Insurance, Inc., a private licensed representative of Medicare insurance organizations with a Medicare contract. easyMedicare is not affiliated with or acting on behalf of any government agency or program. Prescription, dental, hearing and vision benefits are not guaranteed, are only available in select plans and are not available in every state or zip code. The product described in this advertisement is a Medicare Advantage Plan with Part D prescription drug coverage and may not be available in your area. Your eligibility is not guaranteed. This is not a complete listing of plans available in your service area. For a complete listing, please contact 1-800-Medicare (TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048), 24 hours a day/7 days a week or consult www.Medicare.gov. This information is not a complete description of benefits. Contact the plan for more information. Limitations, copayments and restrictions may apply. Benefits, premiums and/or member cost-share may change on January 1 of each year. You must continue to pay your Medicare Part B premium.



150 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

SAVE \$1000<sup>00</sup>  
EXCLUSIONS APPLY



NEW SHOWER DESIGN

ENJOYING A NEW SHOWER IS EASIER THAN YOU THINK

FREE IN-HOME DESIGN CONSULTATION CALL TODAY

newshowerdeal.com/lna | 866-967-2042

\*Offer valid only while supplies last. Limit one per household. Must be first time purchase. Minimum spend amount applies. Financing subject to third party credit approval. Some financing options cannot be combined with other offers and may require minimum monthly payments. All offers subject to change prior to purchase. See AmericanStandardShowers.com for other restrictions and for licensing, warranty, and company information. CSLB B982796; Suffolk NY: 5543H; NYC: 2022748-DCA. Safety Tubos Co. LLC does not sell in Nassau NY, Westchester NY, Putnam NY, Rockland NY.