



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.

Puerto Nuevo restaurant docking in former Harbor

ABINGDON, Va. — Like you, I'm waiting.

That is, we all sadly said bye-bye last year when the Harbor House sailed out of sight along U.S. Highway 11 in Abingdon, Virginia.

And now?

Well, current plans call for opening a new location of Puerto Nuevo at what was once the mighty Harbor House, less than a mile from I-81's Exit 19 in Abingdon.

But wait!

There ain't nothing opening right now with Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam's latest order, telling us all to stay home due to concerns over the coronavirus.

To let you know: Puerto Nuevo is a restaurant hybrid, serving seafood on half the menu and Mexican dishes on the other. It's also part of a chain of restaurants with the same name — with locations in Toccoa, Georgia; Wytheville, Virginia; and Boone, North Carolina.

Just outside of Washington County, you'll find another location of Puerto Nuevo on Linden Drive at Exit 7 in Bristol, Virginia.

As for the upcoming location, well, I noticed several workers there when I pulled into the parking lot on Saturday afternoon.

But its opening is "on hold," said co-owner Felipe Reyes, who lives in Abingdon and tends to a garden to grow peppers and tomatoes to use at the Bristol restaurant.

Like the old Harbor House, Reyes plans to serve seafood whenever the Abingdon location opens.

Whenever.

"Most of our customers come from Abingdon," Reyes said at the Bristol location. "And Abingdon does not have any full set-up restaurant with a nice bar. So we think that will be a good place to be."

The Abingdon location is slated to offer as many seats as the Bristol site: 175, according to Reyes.

"It's bigger," Reyes said, referencing the Harbor House.

"But we're going to save one of those rooms only for special occasions, by reservation."



Joe Tennis



JOE TENNIS/WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Puerto Nuevo is slated to open a new location the former Harbor House Restaurant in Abingdon, a seafood restaurant that closed last October (below).



Down the drain

Dairy farmers hurting with loss of school sales

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON

FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

GLADE SPRING, Va. — Rena Johnson said she and other local dairy farmers were looking forward to getting on better footing in 2020, especially after the dairy industry had suffered less than favorable prices the past four years.

But the onset of COVID-19 is changing all of that.

The novel virus has sickened just about every part of the country's economy, and the dairy industry is no exception.

Milk may have been flying off the grocery store shelves in the last few weeks, but it's still not enough to offset the reduction of milk not being sold to schools and restaurants, many of which have closed throughout the country, according to Johnson, who operates the family-owned Highland Dairy in Glade Spring.

"Right now, there's a big demand for fluid milk in the United States. People are stocking up, and the supply chain cannot keep up.

"I read today that sales are up 33%, and that's unheard of. But it's still not enough to offset our losses," said the young dairy farmer, who took the reins of the farm in 2006 after graduating from Virginia Tech.

"Our last check was down \$1.30 per 100 pounds of milk. Who knows about this coming check?" said Johnson, with hesitation in her voice. "No one knows how low it will go. I guess it just depends on how long the ill effects of the virus last.

"We rely on milk sales to schools a lot," she said, "and now people are not eating out at restaurants unless it's takeout."

Exports of milk are down because of unsettling economy abroad.

"This is a good example of our new global economy," said Andy Overbay, a Smyth County Extension agent.

"An issue, even an isolated one, can upset the markets and affect prices negatively.

"Even though the Southeast is a milk-deficit area — more demand than supply — and our milk goes mostly to fluid use, which garners the highest prices, milk is still priced based on the prices of cheese and butter.

"Cheese and butter prices are down due to lower demand and market uncertainty," said the Extension agent.

Most of the milk produced in the United States stays in this country, with about 15% exported to other countries, such as China and Mexico.

"When those imports of milk slow down," said Johnson, "there goes our prices down even farther."

Johnson said the futures market began to drop in January when the virus hit China, more than a month before the virus even showed up in the United States.

Most of the prices are driven by financial speculators, people who analyze and forecast futures price movement, and trading contracts, she said.

"Now that the virus is here in the United States, things are all out of whack."

The young dairy farmer said the last good year for dairy farms was in 2014 when milk prices were at record highs because of an unprecedented milk demand in countries like China and Russia.

"We were getting \$28 per 100 pounds of milk. We had never had prices like that before."

When the demand fell off, it left the dairy industry with farmers producing more milk than could be exported.

"Our prices were terrible for the following four years," Johnson said. "Our prices dropped down to between \$16 and \$18. Most dairy producers need \$20 per 100 pounds to just break even.

"As a result, we lost hundreds of dairy farms throughout the country that were forced out of business. It's been heartbreaking to see families lose their generations-old farms."

Johnson said, before the coronavirus, everything pointed to a better



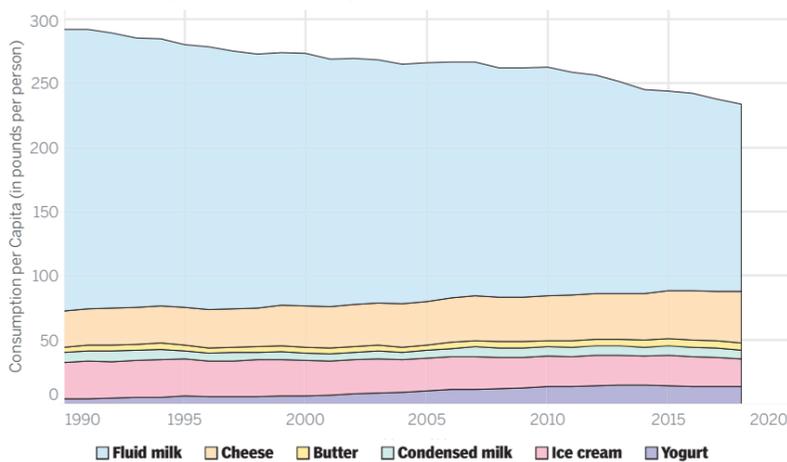
CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS/FILE

A refrigerator in a barn at Highland Dairy in Glade Spring holds an in-line sampler that takes a representative sample of the milk to check it for milk quality and bacteria, fat and protein content.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Many dairy farms have had to cut back production or go out of business altogether due to a shrinking demand in recent years.



SOURCES: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, California Department of Food and Agriculture, USDA Economic Research Service calculations

GRAPHIC BY CHELSEA GILLENWATER/WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Dairy farmers were hoping for a better year in 2020, after about four years of price drops, but the coronavirus has driven down restaurant and school sales, which the dairy industry counts on to stay in business. Consumption of fluid milk has gone down steadily for decades.

year of prices in 2020.

Fewer dairy farms are not oversaturating the market, she said.

"Before the virus hit us, we were exporting more milk, and our country was getting trade deals in place with other countries. Everything was looking up. The futures market was rising with indications we would have \$20 to \$21 prices of milk.

"The last couple of months of 2019, we had better prices. We got a little more money in the bank, but that's not going to be there much longer because the first feed bill we get this month will take pretty much all of that," she said with a laugh.

Prices are not the only concern at the local dairy farm.

The farm is being especially careful to clean surfaces that each of their nine employees touch during milking operations.

"Fortunately, this is not a virus that cows contract. Cows get their own form of coronavirus that we vaccinate for.

"But pasteurization of milk kills any virus anyway," said Johnson.

The rise of input costs is also taking a toll on local farms.

"The stuff we have to pay for to keep the farm going must be considered, too. We have to keep the cows fed and pay for hauling costs. It's time to plant corn on the farm," she said. "There are corn seed costs, fertilizer and chemicals to buy.

"I'm afraid this is going to be another bad year for farmers. I'd say we'll see more dairy farms go out because they cannot sustain another year of these prices.

"Thankfully, our farm is holding its own. We're operating on the short term and hoping this setback doesn't last long," said Johnson.

"I hope people keep buying milk. And, don't worry, it's going to get to the stores," she said with a laugh.

"We're still here milking cows."

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

2020 Virginia Highlands Festival canceled A2

Hours of interviews holding up Boswell indictment A3



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AGRICULTURE



VHCC instructor offers beginner gardening classes online

» B1

THEATER



Barter Theatre holds events on demand to build up donations

» B2

EDUCATION



Emory & Henry plans to hold classes on campus in fall semester

» B2

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- At a Glance.....A2
- Crime & Courts.....A3
- Opinion.....A4
- Homefront.....B1
- Sports.....B3
- Faith & Worship.....B4
- Classifieds.....B5-B6



BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Business is booming for local beef farmers, processors despite supply chain woes

DAMASCUS, Va. — A recent trip to the grocery store may leave you asking, “Where’s the beef?” Once again, the effects of the coronavirus pandemic are managing to change the way we live, especially when it comes to what we put on the dinner plate tonight. Beef cattle farmer Adam Wilson in Damascus explained sparse cuts of beef on the grocery store shelves are more than likely caused by a disruption of the supply chain — not a lack of beef.

Many large meat processing plants through-

out the country recently were forced to close or slow down when the coronavirus infected their workers, causing a massive bottleneck in the meat and livestock supply chain. “These closings are really presenting challenges to the beef supply chain,” he said. Closed meat plants mean less meat on the grocery shelves, he said. “But there is no widespread shortage of beef in the United States. I believe these are temporary conditions that are causing the limitations. It’s not the producer’s fault that the meat

See **BEEF**, Page A6

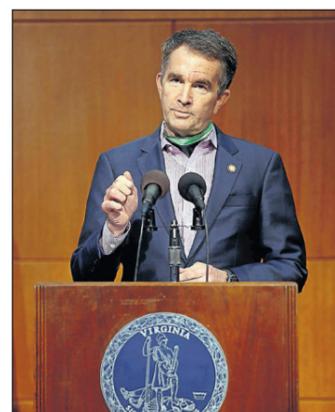


METROCREATIVE



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Beef cattle farmer Adam Wilson in Damascus explained sparse cuts of beef on the grocery store shelves are more than likely caused by a disruption of the supply chain — not a lack of beef.



MARK GORMUS/RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH

Gov. Ralph Northam speaks during a news conference on the coronavirus Friday at the Patrick Henry Building in Richmond.

Governor details reopening plans in Virginia

BY ROBERT SORRELL
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

If current COVID-19 trends continue, Virginia will begin to open in stages at the end of this week, Gov. Ralph Northam said Friday.

Numbers in the state have improved, Northam said, and phase one could begin on May 15 — two months after the governor issued orders that resulted in a number of business closings.

The governor said the reopening will be a “safer-at-home” order, rather than the current stay-at-home order. People will be allowed to leave their homes for more things, he explained.

Nonessential retail businesses may open May 15, but they must retain 50% capacity. Nonessential businesses have been closed since March 24 in Virginia.

Restaurants and beverage services, such as breweries, will remain open for takeout and delivery, leaving dine-in

See **NORTHAM**, Page A2

Health service vendor to establish regional center with Ballad, hire 500

BY DAVID MCGEE
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Ensemble Health Partners, a North Carolina-based medical billing management company, announced Thursday it plans to establish a new operations center in this region to employ 500 through a new partnership with Ballad Health.

In addition, Ensemble will immediately begin employing 1,100 current Ballad employees who work in patient registration, records, insurance and billing as

part of a strategic agreement. Officials of both companies announced the partnership during a video media briefing. Affected Ballad employees were notified last Wednesday.

Ballad is investing \$200 million to acquire Ensemble’s comprehensive revenue services technology to use throughout its network of regional hospitals and health care facilities. Ballad’s board of directors unanimously approved the partnership, which meets one of its goals to reinvent and mod-

ernize its revenue cycle functions and improve patient satisfaction.

Plans call for Ensemble hiring 500 employees to staff the new operations center and service hospital and health care clients from throughout the nation, company CEO and founder Judson Ivy said.

“When we think about why Ensemble was attracted to Ballad and the Appalachian Highlands, it’s really three reasons,” Ivy said. “There is a great amount of dedicated talent here. The culture

of this region has a terrific work ethic in addition to quality education. We’re very excited to locate a regional service center here and welcome the 1,100 Ballad team members to the Ensemble family.”

Based in Huntersville, North Carolina, Ensemble presently employs more than 5,000 serving hospitals and health care systems in 36 states and Europe. Earlier this year, the company opened a

See **BALLAD**, Page A6

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Ballad

From Page A1

400,000-square-foot facility that will ultimately employ 2,500 near Cincinnati, Ohio.

"We've grown significantly over the past five years. As health care systems struggle with the [COVID-19] pandemic and running a health system, we're actually busier than ever because our clients and others are reaching out to us to help them with some

of the pressures of the pandemic," Ivy said.

Locally, Ensemble will consider either revising an existing building or constructing a new facility, Ivy said. Asked by a reporter, Ivy didn't reveal a specific timeline to identify a location, open the new facility or begin hiring. In the meantime, Ensemble will use Ballad's existing locations for revenue cycle functions for the transitioning workers.

Ensemble officials have already spoken with Ten-

nessee Gov. Bill Lee and Stephen Moret, president of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership.

"We built into our relationship with Ensemble incentives for them to reach that 500 mark no later than the end of the fifth year," Ballad CEO Alan Levine said. "We already have a ready-made workforce. As Ensemble grows, their growth is going to be here."

Ensemble began working with Ballad predecessor Wellmont Health System around 2015, but

Ivy said this arrangement would have been impossible with either of Ballad's legacy firms [Wellmont or Mountain States Health Alliance] individually because each lacked the scale for Ensemble to make that kind of commitment.

"As we developed our relationship with Ensemble over the last four-and-a-half or five years, they learned we have the people and the culture and the work ethic in the region," Levine said. "So why should we see our

jobs disappear and go somewhere else?"

Ballad is the region's largest employer with about 15,000 employees. In response to a question, Levine said that some of the Ballad employees furloughed last month have been called back as elective procedures are again

occurring.

"The region isn't going to be able to grow without Ballad, and Ballad is not going to be able to thrive without the region growing," Levine said.

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Beef

From Page A1

isn't in the stores. It's just that things are so much different than what there were."

According to the USDA, U.S. processing plants are operating between 50-75% of their normal capacity to allow for worker protections and distancing requirements that will help keep plant workers safe and on the job.

Markus Vaughn, manager of the Washington County Meat Packing in Bristol, Virginia, said business is booming for the local facility. More people are responding to the shortages in the stores by turning to local meat packers to process meat for their own use or to resell to customers.

"Usually, we're booked up about two to three weeks this time of year because it's our slower time of the year. But instead, we are booked up for six months," said Vaughn.

Vaughn said all meat that will be sold to the public must be inspected. "We're doing more inspections for meat resale than we ever have."

The meat packing facility processes meat from lamb, goats and pigs, in addition to beef.

Most of the increase is being seen in beef, he said.

"I think more people are buying local meat to help support the farmers. And consumers also like to know where their meat comes from. Meat no longer carries labels that tell customers where it was processed."

Last December, Congress repealed the law that requires Country of Origin Labeling, which informs consumers of the origins of the animals and where it was slaughtered.

Panic-buying

Wilson believes panic-buying is also responsible for a lot of the meat shortages.

"As a consumer, when you go to the grocery store and you really want that pack of rib-eye steaks and it's not there, you may

panic and think they have run out," he said.

"But that's not the case. The cuts you are looking for may be there tomorrow. It's a temporary thing.

"When processing plants do not run at full capacity but the demands for beef stay the same, that causes the problems you are seeing. It makes it hard for every cut of beef to be there consistently.

"It's like the toilet paper deal," he said. "People buy five packs of toilet paper instead of their normal one. All [of] the sudden, grocery stores run out of toilet paper. It's the same way with beef.

"I know for a fact that you can't find a freezer anywhere — at all. It's because people are buying up a surplus of beef, pork and chicken and freezing it. People who normally buy four steaks are purchasing twice as many each week."

Crippled supply chain

The crippling effects of COVID-19 are testing the nerves of cattle producers.

Wilson, who sells an average of 20 processed beef to customers per year, is worried about how long it will take for the supply chain to recover.

"Cattle sold to feed lots out west to fatten up are not being moved to the next step at processing plants because of the closings of some plants. Some farmers may have to keep their animals longer before moving to the next supply chain.

"It's going to take a while for feed lots to move the cattle and restock their inventories."

Wilson is among several local farmers who sell their processed beef to area restaurants and individual customers. The farmer regrets not scheduling appointments with Washington County Meat Packers before the pandemic hit.

"Normally, it takes a month to get an appointment to take a cow to be processed. Last week, I called for an appointment and was told the earliest would be mid-September. Now, I'm out of the products because I can't get

them to the processors.

"Some people are good with waiting that long, and some are not."

The cattle farmer mostly sells his beef to 7 Trails Grill in Damascus, but since they have been closed, he has relied on selling to individual customers.

"I've had more calls in the last two months about beef than in the last two years. It's amazing how many calls I've been getting."

Even at selling ground beef for only \$4 per pound, Wilson said he gets more for selling the cuts of processed beef than he would from selling the cow at the market.

"You get more money for a processed beef, but it also has more in it." Wilson's cattle are grain-finished, adding an extra expense for the producer.

"You get more, but you have to spend more, too."

Increased beef sales

Seth and Courtney Umbarger, who own and operate Laurel Springs Farm and Store in Marion, said they take a load of cattle to Mays Meat in Taylorsville, North Carolina, every week to accommodate the increasing demand for beef in their community. They also occasionally use Seven Hills Food in Lynchburg, Virginia, for processing meat.

"We have definitely seen an increase in our retail sales, and we've seen a huge decrease in our wholesale sales because a lot of restaurants have closed, and that has been about 80% of our business," said Courtney. "Our business has flip-flopped now and become primarily

retail, which has been our goal all along.

"We raise all-natural, pasture-raised cattle that is grain finished. We don't use any added growth hormones, steroids or antibiotics," she said.

"We also raise our own pork, which is sold at our store on Main Street."

The business is a local incubator, carrying the products of several small businesses, including Southern Fork Farm, Duchess Dairy Products, Abingdon Olive Oil, Dark Hollow Micro Roasters, Gather Ye Honey, Vintage Kitchen Cast Iron and Collectibles and Dreamland Alpacas.

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

Coomes Center down \$1M in next year's Abingdon budget B1

Carol Thomason shows oil and watercolor paintings at The Gallery A2



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ENVIRONMENT



17-year cicadas are emerging this summer

» B1

SPORTS



16-year-old Chase Dixon makes his mark in motorsports

» B2

COMMUNITY



The Tavern's long history predates town of Abingdon

» A5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- At a Glance.....A2
- Crime & Courts.....A3
- Opinion.....A4
- Homefront.....B1
- Sports.....B2
- Faith & Worship.....B3
- Classifieds.....B4-B6



ABINGDON VIGIL



DAVID CRIGGER/WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

The Appalachian Peace Education Center hosted vigil to mourn the lives of African Americans lost due to racial violence on Saturday in Abingdon. Following the vigil, they marched down Main Street, where town church bells tolled for the loss of life.

'We remember'

Hundreds gather in Abingdon for victims of racial injustice

BY ROBERT SORRELL
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — Hundreds of people in Abingdon knelt or lay on the ground Saturday morning for 8 minutes and 46 seconds — the amount of time George Floyd was pinned by a Minneapolis, Minnesota, police officer last month.

People from across the Mountain Empire gathered at 11 a.m. at the Abingdon Farmers Market, which is currently not operating as normal due to the COVID-19 pandemic, for an event to remember African American citizens killed during

encounters with police.

"We're here to mourn the victims of violence against black people in this country," said Buckey Boone, co-chairman of the Appalachian Peace Education Center, which organized the event.

During a more than 30-minute vigil, several people spoke about social injustices. Names of 100 deceased black men and women were read aloud, and participants knelt and lay on the ground for nearly 9 minutes, as described in a recent autopsy

See VIGIL, Page A5

SMALL BUSINESSES



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Flip It Décor and More reopened in mid-May after business restrictions were lifted on COVID-19 lockdowns. But the furniture consignment shop is struggling to draw customers.

GOT TO CHANGE

Local shops struggle to draw customers after lockdown

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

MEADOWVIEW, Va. — A small business owner in the Meadowview town square said she has a long way to go until her

See SHOPS, Page A6

Social media post leads to Abingdon police chief's retirement

BY ROBERT SORRELL
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

The police chief of Abingdon suddenly retired after a social media post, which he described as "satirical," surfaced Friday regarding a Second Amendment rally.



Sullivan

Tony Sullivan, who was named the town's police chief in 2002, submitted a letter to Town Manager James Morani on Friday. In the letter, which Sullivan provided to the Bristol Herald Courier, he said a resident had contacted him regarding a social media post he made on Jan. 20, 2020, the date of the Second Amendment protest in Richmond.

The resident told Sullivan that he was displeased with the post and shared it to several other social media accounts.

Sullivan said that the weeks leading up to the protest were filled with rhetoric from all sides. The protest was considered by some as a Second Amendment rally and by others as a white supremacist rally.

"I believe that God created each

See SULLIVAN, Page A5

\$2M cut from 2020-21 budget for Abingdon

BY JOE TENNIS
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — Abingdon's upcoming budget for the next fiscal year contains more than \$2 million in cuts, largely due to an expected \$1.5 million decrease in meals and lodging tax revenue.

"The meals and lodging tax has plummeted," said Town Manager Jimmy Morani.

Ranking among the biggest cuts is a 79% reduction, \$1.02 million, in funding for the Coomes Recreation Center.

The center remains shuttered in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus has resulted in a decrease in tax revenue, which helps support the center, Morani said.

Yet, Morani predicted, the center could reopen in August — if tax collections increase.

"The town's ability to reopen the Coomes Center will be dependent on what revenues look like for the month of July," Morani said.

Town Council reviewed the \$26.68 million budget on first reading at its May 18 meeting, and it's now slated for second reading on June 15 prior to its adoption by July 1, Morani said.

As the year goes on, Morani expects revenue from meals and lodging taxes to improve, which will necessitate

See BUDGET, Page A5

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Vigil

From Page A1
 for Floyd, who died May 25.
 “Over the last few weeks, it’s become apparent that racism is still pervasive in this country,” Boone said prior to the event. “Not only are black people being killed by police, they are dying at a higher rate because of COVID. Our system doesn’t treat.”

Boone said participants are dedicated to the “struggle against racism in all its forms.”
 The names of several black men and women killed by officers were written on the sidewalk at the farmers market.

Boone said speakers only read 100 names because of time restraints.
 “Lots of people have died because of racial violence in this country,” Boone said. “It’s not just deaths due to violence; African Americans and people of color are not given the same opportunities that I have and that other white people have. We need to change that system.”

He added that Abingdon, Minnesota and the rest of the country should be places where all people feel safe.

Saturday’s gathering was completely peaceful. After meeting at the farmers market property on Remsburg Drive, participants walked in solidarity along the sidewalk of Cummings Street and Main Street.

Once they reached the intersection of Main Street and Pecan Street, they stopped as church bells rang.

Abingdon Police Department officers and Washington County Sheriff’s Office deputies joined the event and provided traffic control as the hundreds of people marched up Main Street. Officers, including the town’s interim police chief and county sheriff, often chatted with participants during the event.

“The organizers of this vigil are the people of the Appalachian Peace Education Center,” Boone said. “We’re dedicated to peace, and we’re here dedicated to justice.”

Patricia Reilly, of Elder Spirit in Abingdon, joined the event with others.

“I’m here because all across the country, people are peacefully gathering to honor the memory of African American men and women who actually have been killed in the line of duty by police officers,” said Reilly, who has lived in Abingdon since January. “We know that’s not the story of every police person, but any person who saw that video of George Floyd’s

death knows that there was a murder that happened. We are here to say that we remember you.”
 Reilly, originally from Ann Arbor, Michigan, carried a sign declaring “we remember you.” It included the names of Floyd, Tamir Rice — who was killed by Cleveland, Ohio, police in 2014 — and Trayvon Martin, who was killed in 2012 by a neighborhood watch member in Florida.

Reilly said that since moving to Abingdon she has spoken with people of every race and economic level about their interactions with others.

“I don’t know the whole history,” she said. “Obviously, there are very few African Americans here. I don’t know what their experience is.”

Although Reilly said she’s seen thousands gather for similar events in larger cities, she was excited to see such a large turnout in Abingdon.

“You have so many people that believe in justice and equality and who would honor these folks,” she said.

Reilly, and several others in attendance, also joined recent events in Bristol, including a gathering at the historic Bristol Sign on State Street.

“It was so encouraging,” Reilly said.

Several local religious leaders from Abingdon also participated in the gathering. The Rev. Boyd Evans said the vigil gave people from Southwest Virginia an opportunity to pray for the community in the midst of current events.

As he spoke to participants, Evans, who received a long applause, said he was tired of having to view viral videos of African American men and women being killed by officers.

The arrest of Floyd was caught on video, which was shared worldwide, leading to dozens of protests in communities of all sizes.

When participants knelt to the ground for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, Boyd lay across the pavement at the front of the crowd.

“It is my hope that after you leave here today, you will be woke,” speaker Jerry Hill said.

Hill and other Appalachian Peace Education Center members regularly organize similar events, including the annual Martin Luther King Jr. celebration each January. During that event, several people speak and sing and march down Main Street.

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CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

“I’m always looking for new consignors who have home decor, lamps, vases, picture frames, working clocks and antique pieces to sell,” says Rebecca Milhorn, owner of Flip It Decor and More.

Shops

From Page A1

business is up and running as usual after the COVID-19 pandemic began.

According to Rebecca Milhorn, who owns and operates Flip It Décor and More in a historic train depot, business was good the first two weeks after she reopened mid-May.

Then, it dropped off again, leaving the store owner to wonder how long she can remain open for business.

“Something has got to change in order for me to stay in business,” said Milhorn, who opened the consignment shop with new and gently used furniture, antiques and home décor in 2015. During that time, she has accumulated more than 350 consignors.

Milhorn believes her business is unique to this part of Southwest Virginia, with few similar businesses closer than Bristol, Virginia. The store owner has hands-on experience in interior re-design and floral design, and a passion for mingling old and new home décor.

During her five years of operation, Milhorn said she’s seen some ups and downs in foot traffic and sales — but nothing like this.

The store owner estimated she has lost \$20,000 in sales as a result of being closed for two months due to the COVID-19 crisis.

According to an online report by CNBC, “7.5 million small businesses will shut permanently if business disruption caused by COVID-19 continues unabated, according to a new survey from Main Street America.”

A U.S. Census Bureau Small Business Pulse



Survey indicates “a large negative effect from COVID-19 for the majority (51.4%) of respondents and an expectation that it will take more than six months for their businesses to return to normal.”

“I’ll have to close if things don’t pick up. If it keeps going like it did this past week, there’ll be no way I can stay open. I hardly made \$150 all week long.”

She’s holding out hope for her business after selling a red sofa the first week of reopening. “A woman from Blountville bought the sofa sight unseen after seeing it on my Facebook post,” said Milhorn.

Some of her customers have purchased small items to show their support, she said. “They told me they don’t want to lose me.”

“But it will take a good month or more of steady customers to help me recover. I’m taking it day by day, relying on word of mouth and social media. I’m hoping people will remember I’m still open and want to utilize my business.”

Milhorn said she realizes she’s not alone when it comes to struggles caused by the pandemic.

“We don’t know how

many local people have been affected by this. I know many people have lost their jobs.”

Milhorn has numerous eye-catching items in the store, such as a Yarber locally hand-crafted cherry table and four matching chairs. Milhorn said an oak side board buffet with mirror and shelves is another favorite. In addition to having Fenton glass, clocks and lamps, the store owner also carries modern sofas and accent chairs.

“I’m always looking for new consignors who have home décor, lamps, vases, picture frames, working clocks and antique pieces to sell.”

Layaway is available for customers. During June, the store owner is inviting customers to include their names in a drawing for a free \$50 gift certificate.

Flip It Décor and More is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday. Milhorn can be contacted by calling the store at 276-944-4401 on those days or by sending her a message on Facebook.

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

Barter announces June events and plans reopening

WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Barter Theatre will host weekly virtual events for its “Inside Barter” series for the remainder of June, and today, Producing Artistic Director Katy Brown will announce the date for the premiere of the Barter season as the theater plans its reopening.

Brown’s announcement will take place tonight at 7:30 p.m. on Facebook. Barter Theatre was forced to close before its spring season opening in March after Gov. Ralph Northam restricted public events to fewer than 100 people in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Macbeth,” the first show scheduled to premiere, was replaced with a virtual performance in May with actors reading their parts from home. Other shows including “Driving Miss Daisy,” “Junie B. Jones” and “9 to 5: The Musical” are listed as postponed on the theater’s website.

Recorded shows from the Barter Players including “Peter Pan” and “Aesop’s Fables” are still available for families to stream online on a donation basis.

Meanwhile, each Thursday evening, Barter will host a live Zoom event featuring cast and crew from past and future Barter productions, taking audience members behind the scenes for each show.

Thursday, June 11, will feature a chat with Hannah Ingram, a member of Barter’s resident acting company since 2008, who has starred in shows like “Bridges of Madison County,” “A Streetcar Named Desire” and many more. June 18 will focus on Barter’s “Keep on the Sunny Side,” written by Doug Pote and starring Eugene Wolf, who will both attend the event to discuss one of Barter’s most popular recent shows.

Director Katy Brown, set designer Derek Smith and actors Andrew Livingston and Sean Campos will discuss Barter’s “Richard III,” from 2018, on June 25.

To register for the events, visit bartertheatre.com.



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