



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.

## Abingdon gets some new faces

ABINGDON, Va. — Hats off to Derek Webb as the new mayor of Abingdon, Virginia.

He's calm and cool and collected.

Webb marched right into the job at the July 1 meeting. And he brought his youthful zeal and wit to the town meeting; from now on, he'll be orchestrating a very different kind of Town Council.

Why, just five years ago, you would've found all different council members plus a different town manager and a different police chief in charge of Abingdon.

Now, it's a new day and a new way of working through the town's business, with new members like James Anderson and Amanda Pillion.

It is indeed a new day with even more change to come — with a vacancy on the Town Council.

Al Bradley has resigned, which opens up the possibilities of trying to find someone else to fill his spot. Someone will be appointed, according to the town attorney, Cameron Bell.

And that will likely change the dynamic even more.

Even Bell is a newcomer, having filled the spot for only a couple of years.

Town Manager Jimmy Morani, too, has been in town little more than a year.

Times change.

Unless she is appointed or wins election again, we may no longer hear the pleas by Cindy Paterson to look deeper into issues. The former vice mayor is no longer in office.

And what about Wayne Craig?

The very spiritual former mayor of Abingdon told me that God told him to run for reelection.

Unfortunately, Craig lost the vote.

But who knows?

Craig might reappear on the planning commission or some other place.

Times change.

And so do the faces of a town.



Joe Tennis

### Barberitos to open new location in Abingdon

ABINGDON, Va. — Barberitos will open an eatery in the town of Abingdon next week.

The new restaurant is scheduled to open Monday at 101 Cook St., according to a news release. The fast-casual chain is known for its southwestern fare like burritos, tacos and quesadillas.

During the grand opening week, Barberitos will hold a drawing for free food for a year, T-shirts and other prizes, the release states.

### Four residents test positive in Christian Care nursing home

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Four residents at the Christian Care Center of Bristol tested positive for COVID-19 after an employee there tested positive, according to Jennifer Skaggs, the Bristol, Tennessee nursing home's executive director.

Two of the residents are being quarantined and two are being hospitalized, according to a Monday statement from Skaggs. The employee received a positive test result June 25.

Skaggs said the facility's medical director, Dr. Vivian Clark, is working closely with the Sullivan County Regional Health Department and "following strict Joint Commission, Department of Health and CDC precautions and guidelines."

From staff reports

## MOJO'S TRAILSIDE CAFÉ AND COFFEEHOUSE



David Calvert, a Buddhist monk who moved to Damascus from California, has purchased Mojo's Trailside Café and Coffeehouse. Calvert holds a photo of the former owner, John Seymore, who was killed in a motorcycle accident in March.

DAVID CRIGGER/WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

# Preserving a legacy

Mojo's reopens under new management after death of previous owner

CAROLYN R. WILSON

FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

DAMASCUS, Va. — Three months after a tragic accident took the life of a beloved restaurant chef, his Damascus eatery is reopening with a new owner who is keeping the same name and menu — and most all of the staff.

Mojo's Trailside Café and Coffeehouse, formerly owned by John Seymore, began serving the community again on July 4, according to new owner David Calvert, who has spent the last few weeks configuring the interior of the building located on Douglas Drive in town.

Calvert, better known by friends as "Paragon," said that lifted COVID-19 restrictions have allowed him to operate at full capacity.

The interior of the café is about the only thing that will change for the small-town café that drew customers from all around to savor recipes made with what Seymore once described as "American traditional with a Southern flavor."

Seymore, who started the café five years ago, was known for his upscale menu that included shrimp and grits, crab cakes, Reuben sandwiches and Greek salads.

Locals said they couldn't start their day without a cup of coffee from Mojo's. Hikers were pleasantly surprised to find the hidden treasure within a few feet of the Virginia Creeper Trail.

"I'm keeping the menu items so John's history and vision can continue," said Calvert, who plans to add a few of his own Mediterranean dishes.

The interior of the café includes memorabilia that was displayed when Seymore was chef.

"Every chef has a tool — a knife, fork or spoon — that they like to covet.

"From my understanding, John had a fork and mixing bowl — it was his whipping fork and bowl for things like making scrambled eggs. No one has allowed to touch the fork. It was John's fork."

In the new interior design, Calvert added a wall at the entrance of the café. Calvert placed the fork inside the wall with a caring note from the staff.

"So, the first thing people are going to feel is John's energy and passion for what he did," said the owner. Calvert will continue to use the bowl for mixing eggs, and it will be passed down to future chefs.

"I'm here to continue that legacy."

A recent visit to Damascus led Calvert, a California businessman, to purchase the café that had been up for sale since June.



Calvert said he was looking for a peaceful place "to reinvent himself" when a friend invited him to spend some time in Damascus.

After learning about Seymore and his passion for cooking, Calvert decided he would buy the place and become the new proprietor.

A former chef of a 10,000-square-foot restaurant in Santa Barbara, California, Calvert dabbled in other entrepreneurial ventures before arriving in Southwest Virginia. He performed medical research in Sydney, Australia, and started an environmentally-friendly chemical company after the BP oil spill — before selling it all and traveling to Thailand to become a Buddhist monk until COVID-19 forced him to return to the United States.

"After doing some research, I absolutely fell in love with John and his vision for this restaurant," said Calvert.

"When I saw the place, I got emotional. I'm not going to let this man's vision die.

"But this is not about me. It's more of a contribution to John's vision and to keeping his history alive."

Calvert said a percentage of the restaurant sales will fund a scholarship program in Seymore's name to help a local community member attend a culinary school.

"His story touched my heart so much that my visit turned into a decision to move to Damascus," he said.

"John had a large following on social media. When I recently posted about reopening the café, hundreds of people responded. He touched so many lives just by his smile and being a happy man.

I'm touched by the love the community still has for John even though he's gone. It says so much about the power of his love for this community."

Calvert said he cooks very similarly to the style of Seymore.

"Like John, I change the menus with the seasons, I like to use higher-end quality items, and I subscribe to the farm-to-table concept where bringing in local foods reiterates giving back to the community."

His new menu items include a watermelon salad pizza made with large slices of melon topped with arugula salad, feta cheese, cherry tomatoes with balsamic vinaigrette. A vegetarian stack is made with risotto with grilled onions, broccoli and carrots.

The new owner said every customer with a Damascus address automatically will receive a 10% discount off their meal.

"Damascus customers will know that this is their place."

Calvert is extending the café's hours to 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day for breakfast and lunch menus; however, the dinner menu will not be offered until August.

Live music will be a regular feature.

"If we could put Mayberry somewhere on the planet these days, it would have to be Damascus. The people here are amazing and so helpful and loving," said Calvert.

"I've decided I'm staying here. I want to be part of this town and active in this community."

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

**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  
» B1

## 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.

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**BUSINESS**



White Blaze Outdoors puts business challenge grants to work  
» B1

**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.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

## 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](http://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

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# Farm

From Page A1  
operation during the presentation from noon to 1 p.m., followed by questions from the audience.

The farm family began selling their meat products directly to customers about four years ago. It's a plan that is working well for the Saltville, Virginia, couple who has actually seen an upswing in business since the pandemic began.

In addition to selling pasture-raised beef, pork and chicken, they also prepare and sell bone broth and smoked meats cooked in their own farm kitchen.

Economic shutdowns from the pandemic have caused farmers throughout the country — and here at home — to rethink the way they do business.

Like many farmers, the couple is relying on a direct-to-consumer operation, delivering their products straight to individuals.

To start their operation, the couple began following the same ideals of Joel Salatin, a farmer, lecturer and author in the Shenandoah Valley, who is known for putting into practice many innovative agriculture methods, including direct marketing.

Amy estimated that most of their meat sales are done directly with customers, especially since the arrival of the pandemic.

Farms that sell directly to consumers are flourishing even as the country suffers from an economic downturn, she said.

Many small producers faced hardships when schools and restaurants closed due to COVID-19 guidelines, which caused disruptions in the supply chain.

"People are realizing that the model of grocery store buyers is not sustainable. Meat became scarce when big processing plants were forced to close their doors when employees became infected with the virus," said Amy.

Consumers are realizing that it's easier to buy meat directly from the source, she said.

The couple has organized a local meat-buying club where orders are delivered to customers at designated sites. Once a month, meat orders are packed in coolers and driven to Bristol and

Knoxville for consumers to purchase.

During the week, the couple also makes local deliveries to prearranged sites in Abingdon and Marion.

Amy said Facebook and emails have helped them accumulate as many as 300 regular customers who buy direct.

A new addition to their operation is an on-farm inspection kitchen, where the couple can use some of their meat cuts to prepare, heat and serve meals, such as brisket, chicken quarters and pulled pork.

"We have an on-farm inspection kitchen that allows us to take our meats another step by actually cooking it for you. Now you can feed your family home-cooked, quick and easy meals without compromising the quality or the taste," said Amy.

According to Sarah Syphers, Knowledge Center program specialist, the weekly webinars held this spring have focused on everything from the economic outlook and running a business during COVID to mental health in agriculture and staying positive during a troubling time.

"The Knowledge Center is the education arm of our Farm Credit, and there are only four of them in the nation," she said. "We provide education, learning opportunities and advocacy resources."

"Our goal and mission is to make sure that people have access to timely and meaningful resources."

The webinars are designed for people who are active or interested in agriculture.

The live webinar can be viewed with a smartphone or computer by clicking the link found on the Farm Credit of the Virginias Facebook page.

A recording of the webinar will be available on the Farm Credit of the Virginias Facebook page when the Knowledge Center presents "Watch It Back Wednesday" on July 22.

To learn more about the Knowledge Center and upcoming events, go to their website at [www.farmcreditknowledgecenter.com](http://www.farmcreditknowledgecenter.com), or follow their Facebook page.

Check out the website for Old Rich Valley Farm at [www.oldrichvalleyfarm.com](http://www.oldrichvalleyfarm.com), or follow them on Facebook and Instagram.

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at [news@washconews.com](mailto:news@washconews.com).

# Coal

From Page A1  
10,662 workers to 2,576 over the same 30-year period.

"The coal industry was in a bad place to begin with going into the COVID crisis, and I definitely think it will exacerbate the situation," Hepler said.

At least 11 mining sites saw operations come to a halt at some point this spring, affecting over 900 workers, according to reports received by the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy.

Most significantly, production came to a halt at the state's leading underground coal mine in Buchanan County at the end of March. The facility employed 543 people and produced about 4.94 million tons of coal in 2019 — or about 40% of the state's overall annual tonnage, DMME figures show.

DMME spokeswoman Tarah Kesterson said the agency estimates that about 100 people are currently working at the site.

The Buchanan facility mines metallurgical coal used in steelmaking.

While metallurgical coal doesn't face the same competitive pressures from natural gas and renewable energy as coal used to generate electricity, the U.S. Energy Information Administration observed in a report earlier this month that "metallurgical coal mines in Appalachia have slowed production based on reduced demand from global steel production and coking coal."

The EIA forecast a 35% drop in annual coal production in Appalachia for this year, from 193 million short tons in 2019 to 125.7 million in 2020. The EIA's Appalachian coal region includes parts of Alabama, Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

Harry Childress, president of an industry group called the Virginia Coal and Energy Alliance, also noted the ties between the state's coal production and steel. Most of Virginia's coal is metallurgical.

"The steel market rises and falls on the worldwide economy," Childress said in a recent interview. "If everybody is building and producing a lot of steel, there's a lot of demand for it."

First-quarter production of Virginia's coal industry was about 3.13 million tons, a decrease from 3.18 million over



Virginia State Sen. Todd Pillion, R-Abingdon, listens to debate on the floor of the state Senate during the session at the Capitol on Feb. 28 in Richmond, Virginia. Legislators from Southwest Virginia were mounting a huge push to oppose the possible early closure of one of the country's newest coal plants.

the same period in 2019. Hepler said he expects the pandemic's impacts — including the effects of the Buchanan mine furloughs — to be reflected in next quarter's figures.

## Coal comeback?

Despite coal-friendly rhetoric from the Trump administration, the federal government's own figures document coal's continued decline.

Last month, an EIA analysis described how U.S. coal-fired electricity generation fell in 2019 to a 42-year low of 966,000 gigawatt hours. The EIA analysis said increased output from natural gas-fired plants and wind turbines was the main force behind this trend.

"U.S. coal-fired capacity peaked at 318 gigawatts (GW) in 2011 and has been declining since then because many plants retired or switched to other fuels and few new coal-fired plants came online. By the end of 2019, U.S. coal-generating capacity totaled 229 GW," the EIA analysis states.

Nationwide, coal mining employment fell 42% from 92,000 in 2011 to 54,000 in 2018. The EIA noted a slight increase between 2016 and 2018 for Appalachia occurred at the same time as an increase in coal exports overseas.

But both steam and metallurgical coal exports from the U.S. fell last year, the former dropping 30% in 2019 from 2018 and the latter 12%, according to the EIA.

Childress, a former coal miner, said he tries to be frank when it comes to questions about the future of his industry.

"Coal is never going to come back to what it was, especially in Virginia," he said. "There's no way we would ever get back to 40-plus million tons of production a year."

Yet Childress still sees opportunities for the industry — for example, infra-

structure legislation could lead to higher demand for metallurgical coal used in steel for public projects.

"We can still be there, especially on the metallurgical side," he said.

## Diversifying the region's economy

As the once-dominant coal industry has receded, the region continues to look at ways to attract industries like manufacturing, information technology and renewable energy.

The Abandoned Mine Land Pilot Program is one way that local and state leaders are trying to support these efforts.

This federal program provides grant funding to reclaim former coal sites and develop new uses. A total of \$20 million has previously been distributed to projects through the AML Pilot in recent years.

A group of 10 projects in Southwest Virginia are currently being vetted by the federal Office of Surface

Mining Reclamation and Enforcement for an additional round of \$10 million in funds, according to Kesterson with the DMME.

One would be for "Project Greenhouse" in the South Clinchfield area of Russell County, where the local Industrial Development Authority is proposing to construct a 35,000-square-foot commercial greenhouse with related infrastructure.

The other is for "Project Thoroughbred" in Norton, where an abandoned coal loadout facility would be redeveloped into a grain processing, storage and distribution terminal.

"A Southwest Virginia grain terminal will be a catalyst for creating economic activity in two areas: the upstream agriculture base and the downstream craft beverage industry," states the application from the Lonesome Pine Regional Industrial Facilities Authority.

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The Campbell family will present their marketing strategies at a live webinar sponsored by the Knowledge Center of Farm Credit of the Virginias at noon on June 30.

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**Musician Jerry Castle's tour on hold, but he still plays to fans B3**

**Barter Theatre director named part of COVID-19 Task Force B1**



# Washington County News

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**COMMUNITY**



6-year-old honored with birthday parade from officers, teachers »A3

## Northam moves elections to May 19

BY DAVID MCGEE  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Local elections across Virginia will move from May 5 to May 19 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Gov. Ralph Northam announced Friday.

Northam scolded the state Senate during his regular COVID-19 news briefing for not agreeing to his amendment last Wednesday that would have shifted local elections to the November ballot. The House narrowly approved the plan 47-45 after first rejecting it by that same margin.

"Virginians should not have to choose between their ballot and their health," Northam said. "I am grateful to the House of Delegates for supporting it. I am greatly disappointed in the Senate for failing to take this action



Voters cast their ballots at Van Pelt Elementary School during the 2016 elections. Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam signed an order Friday to move local elections ahead two weeks to May 19. The governor had initially urged the state Legislature to move all elections to November.

WGN FILE PHOTO

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**New Voting Deadlines**

- » **Election Day:** May 19 (previously May 5)
- » **Deadline to request absentee ballot by mail:** May 12, 5 p.m. (previously April 28)
- » **Deadline to submit absentee ballot by mail:** Received by registrar on May 19, 7 p.m. (previously May 5)
- » **Dates to submit in-person absentee ballot at Registrar's Office:** Mondays-Fridays, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., now through May 16 (Saturday) at 5 p.m.

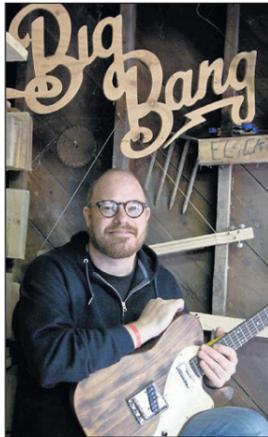
For more information, contact the Registrar's Office at 276-676-6227 or visit [washcova.com/registrar](http://washcova.com/registrar). The Registrar's Office is located at 1 Government Center Place, Suite A, in Abingdon, Virginia.

**AGRICULTURE**



FARM program interns get real experience on local farms »B1

**MUSIC**



Bristol man makes custom guitars at Big Bang Bristol »B2

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## SMALL business

## BIG challenge










How local businesses are weathering the economic storm

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
BINGDON, Va. — While most of the population worries about staying safe during the coronavirus outbreak, small business owners are faced with a different kind of stress.

The unforeseen economic crisis that has resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic has put small business owners in a cash crunch, with relief perhaps months down the road for some.

Many local small business owners are changing the way they work.

Bradley Clifton has picked up a few construction jobs just to help pay the bills after his new barber shop on Main Street in Abingdon was forced

to close at the end of March.

The young entrepreneur opened his first business, Clifton's on Main, just four weeks before the local outbreaks of the coronavirus.

"Business was getting to where I was happy with it. I was really starting to do well," said the master barber.

"I absolutely love barbering. It doesn't even feel like work to me."

The full-service traditional barber shop offers men's cuts, straight razor shaves and hot steam towel shaves.

"We're been pushed back to opening early May. I'm ready to get back to work," said Clifton.

"Right now, the doors are locked, but my barber pole is

(From top left) Stephen Curd of Lavelle Manufacturing, Ralph Wilson of Damascus Diner and the Dragonfly Inn, Hana Eichin of Spot of Color, Alan Necessary of Sarge's Pay Lake and Jenny Carlisle of Crafts on Main are some of the small business owners in the region coping with reduced hours from the COVID-19 pandemic.

still standing."

Hana Eichin opened up her dream business, Spot of Color, in mid-March right before the country went on lockdown.

The Abingdon store owner said she barely had time to market her art supplies before her business took a tailspin.

Since then, she's worked to put all of her merchandise online in hopes that she can generate more sales.

"I'm also offering curbside

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## Mary's Lunch Box providing 40 meals a week to families

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

MEADOWVIEW, Va. — A local backpack ministry for elementary students has turned into a community effort, answering the needs of families during the coronavirus pandemic.

Rebecca McKinney, organizer of the Mary's Lunch Box program, said the ministry ordinarily provides bags of nonperishable foods for students at Meadowview Elementary, who receive the main staples in their bookbags to take home on the weekends.

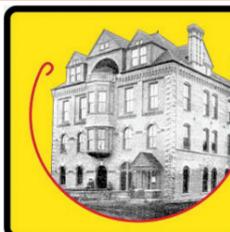
"Now that schools are closed, we want to offer food in our pantry to families in need. There are so many people in the community struggling from the effects of COVID-19," said McKinney.

Anyone in need of food can visit Meadowview United Methodist Church, next to the Meadowview Post Office, where food is available three times each week.

The food pantry program is supported by members of Meadowview United Methodist Church and other area churches, including their sister church, Shady Grove United Methodist Church.

McKinney credits Stella Hockett for helping to facilitate and plan the food

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# Business

and delivery services," she said. "One customer ordered a beginner kit of acrylic paints. I think a lot of people are searching for ways to fill their time at home.

"I've had a few customers, but it's so much slower than I had ever anticipated after opening. I just need to get past this hurdle and reopen full time."

She plans to offer small art classes as soon as possible.

Since retail is allowed to operate on reduced hours, Eichen's store is open from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. every day — just in case a customer wants to stop by during that time.

Eichen said she applied for financial help from the federal government but never heard anything from them.

"If I can be in full swing by June — that would be amazing."

Some small business owners are getting creative in order to keep the doors of their business open.

Jenny Carlisle had no idea the direction her Crafts on Main business would take after opening the textile and fiber arts store in February.

"We were just a few sessions into a series of sewing classes when everything took a dive. I found out we couldn't continue the classes until June because of the outbreak of the coronavirus."

But something better came along for the new entrepreneur. Carlisle began making face masks that may offer some protection from the virus. The CDC recommends wearing face masks in public settings where social distancing may be difficult to maintain.

So far, she's made 400 of the masks that are in big demand in town. Her masks sell for \$5 to help cover the fabrics she uses.

"I opened the shop at noon the other day, and I had a line of eight to 10 customers waiting at the door to purchase the masks. It's been like that daily. I made 88 masks over the weekend and sold out within 22 minutes," said Carlisle.

"I can't make them quickly enough. I've even had people from as far away as Johnson City request that I mail the masks to them."

The store owner said the popularity of the masks could be credited to the materials she is using.

Instead of elastic ear loops, Carlisle is using a soft cotton spandex knit that she said is more comfortable for long wear.

"I would never want to take advantage of this terrible virus, but it's been a way to keep my business open.

"It's been a full-time gig for me, and it's working."

The coronavirus outbreak has kept one local business owner from growing his business anytime soon.

Businessman Ralph Wilson had already signed the lease on a Main Street store building in Damascus when the coronavirus caused him to change his plans.

Wilson, who also owns the Damascus Diner and Dragonfly Inn, has a goal of opening a bakery and deli business that will serve sub sandwiches, meats and cheeses and to-go foods such as potato and macaroni salads.

"I wanted to open the new business in mid-April just in time for Trail Days, but when all this happened, I had to put it



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**Bradley Clifton just opened his new barber shop on Main Street in Abingdon. The pandemic has forced him to push the opening back to May.**

on the back burner," said Wilson.

"Now, it may be fall or next year before I can open."

Many businesses are suffering due to cancellations and closings.

Alan Necessary, who owns and operates Sarge's Pay Lake, a catch-and-release fishing business in Damascus, said he lost money when he had to cancel nine camping scout groups last month due to the coronavirus.

In the meantime, the business owner started a new company, Appalachian Baits, that has taken off locally and throughout the country — despite the economic downturn.

"We had three major trout tournaments planned to attend in North Carolina and Tennessee, and they were canceled," said Necessary. "That will hamper marketing our new bait products. That's really going to hurt us."

Necessary described the bait that took two years for him to develop as soft, sinking dough similar to putty that, when rolled up, is placed on fishing hooks.

"In a way, the lockdown and closings in the country may have helped get our new business off the ground," he said.

"Lots of people are unemployed right now. They're bored and want to get outdoors. Gov. Northam has not banned fishing in Virginia, and that is helping us.

"This business is just me and my wife. We're not suffering a big loss because Sarge's Pay Lake only opens on weekends. That's why we never applied for a small business loan. We don't have the overhead that a lot of businesses do," said Necessary.

"We're going to weather this storm, and we'll stick around. When you're a weekend and seasonal business, you have to accept losses.

"But when it's months in a row, it does take a toll."

The owner of a Glade Spring business has turned his circumstances around during the pandemic.

Stephen Curd, owner of Lavelle Manufacturing, hired four seamstresses to help him make 2,000 masks in the past few weeks.

"This was an opportunity for us to utilize the services I already offer in my custom clothing business and also turn it into something the community really needs," said Curd.

"I'm trying to help create a few local jobs and at the same time keep my door open as a small business owner. Now is the time to support our community while also supporting small business."

While production of the face masks has slowed, Curd said he will continue to make the masks as long

as there is a demand.

Just recently, Curd was awarded a grant to assist him in his endeavors for the community.

As part of its commitment to supporting the local economy, Emory & Henry College, through its Appalachian Center for Civic Life, has provided a grant to Lavelle Manufacturing to support the work of producing face masks during the pandemic, according to Dr. Tal Stanley, director of the center on campus.

"The funds are derived from money the Appalachian Center has received to support community and economic development initiatives. This grant speaks to Emory & Henry's belief that investing in local economies and developing a strong, vital quality of life in local communities is the best, most viable path to restoring economic health to Southwest Virginia," said Stanley.

Starting a new business is a critical endeavor anytime, much less during a worldwide pandemic.

The 1901 Group, a leading provider of IT services for the public and private sectors, recently opened a new Enterprise IT Operations Center in the Virginia Highlands Small Business Incubator in Abingdon.

Sonu Singh, CEO of the company headquartered in Reston, Virginia, said in an email that they are "well-poised to shift seamlessly to telework status" as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

The newly launched Enterprise IT Operations Center, which promises to create more than 100 new jobs in Washington County, opened its doors during the onset of the outbreaks.

"We have started hiring for our Abingdon location and currently have our employees teleworking from home," said Singh.

The company is developing creative ways to work around this difficult time for business owners.

"We have ensured that all of our employees have the necessary tools and connectivity to fully perform their duties via a secure telework status as they are the most important part of our unique service delivery model — well trained, creative, resilient, and take pride in what they do.

"The 1901 Group continues to function at 100% operational capability, capacity, and efficiency," Singh said.

"We look forward to operating out of the Virginia Highlands Small Business Incubator and will do so when the restrictions are lifted and when we know it's safe for our employees."

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



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**Volunteers Montana Turley and her father Wayne Turley prepare a table of food bags at Meadowview United Methodist Church in Meadowview. Anyone who needs help can pick up a food bag from 5 to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays and 12 to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays in the church parking lot.**

## Lunch

From Page A1

pantry at the church.

An endowment left to the church by Mary Virginia Smith also helps buy food for the pantry. In addition, the church received a grant from the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church to support the pantry.

Prepackaged food bags are available on tables in the church parking lot from 5 to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays and 12 to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays.

In case of bad weather, the food may be inside the door of the church where signs are posted.

"Each food bag is packed for a family of four, but you can receive more than one bag if you have a larger family," McKinney said.

"We have given away as many as 40 food bags in

### If You Need Food

» **Where:** Meadowview United Methodist Church, 29043 Walker Lane, Meadowview, Virginia

» **When:** Prepackaged food bags are available in the church parking lot from 5 to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays and 12 to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays.

Any family who cannot come to the church can request food be delivered to them by texting or calling 276-698-8750 or 276-698-8390.

one week."

Food bags contain canned fruits and vegetables, saltine crackers, peanut butter, snacks and meal items like pasta and sauce.

Typically, one or two people work each of the pickup days.

"We've been really mindful of the guidelines

and recommendations during the pandemic," said McKinney.

Any family who cannot come to the church can request food be delivered to them by texting or calling 276-698-8750 or 276-698-8390.

"No questions will be asked. This is a hard time for everyone, and we want to support our community during this difficult time.

"Recipients do not have to have children in the home. The food bags are for anyone in need."

She said the church will offer the service as long as there is a need and depending on their ability to sustain the program. Monetary donations and volunteers are welcome.

"I have faith that we will keep it going as long as possible."

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

## Election

From Page A1

to protect our fellow Virginians."

On Friday, Northam signed an executive order postponing the elections for two weeks — which is his constitutional limit. He also urged people to use absentee ballots to cast their votes.

"If you plan to vote in that election, I strongly encourage you to vote absentee by mail," the governor said.

"For people who do come out, we will make it as safe as possible. We are planning to use some volunteers through our Medical Reserve Corps to help election workers and polling places put additional safety measures in place."

Poll workers will have personal protective equipment, including masks and gloves.

The deadlines regarding absentee voting have also changed. The deadline to

request an absentee ballot is now May 12, and the deadline to submit an absentee ballot is 7 p.m. on May 19, the new Election Day.

Northam's proposal proved highly contentious during the General Assembly's reconvened session last Wednesday.

Some lawmakers criticized the proposal because it called for discarding all absentee votes already cast, would have reopened races to allow other candidates to enter and would have extended terms for existing elected officials, in violation of many city and town charters that specify terms end June 30, prior to the start of a new fiscal year.

In the Senate, Sen. Chap Peterson, D-Fairfax, urged the calling of a special session rather than a decision "based on hysteria." Peterson successfully urged the matter be "passed by" — meaning the Senate would not vote — which killed the issue.

On Wednesday, the orig-

inal House vote was 47-45 to defeat the Northam proposal, but one member immediately asked for reconsideration. Another request was for the question to go by temporarily. Minutes later, when the next vote was 45-44 to again defeat the measure, House Speaker Eileen Filler-Corn, D-Springfield, ordered it destroyed after an apparent technical issue. The third vote was 47-45 in support of the amendment.

Those events were part of the Senate's discussion later on Wednesday night.

"It was defeated twice — twice — in the House, and the speaker struck the board the second time. Finally they were able to marshal the votes the third time, after they had beat up on some of the members," Sen. Tommy Norment, R-James City, said. "That's the reality."

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