

# CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Your Hometown Newspaper

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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2020

## Drive-Thru Nativity shines at Ole Country Store

BY ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION  
CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Electric lights shone bright last weekend along U.S. 29 in Culpeper, leading the way to the Drive-Thru Live Nativity outside Ole Country Store.

So did the spirit of Christmas, as members of Mount Lebanon Baptist Church, of Scrabble, acted out the stories of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus.

An estimated 1,600 people

drove by the manger scene last Saturday and Sunday night, passing in a slow parade. Family members looked out the windows of cars, trucks, vans and SUVs to capture quick glimpses, plus cellphone photos, of camel, sheep, the three Wise Men and a shimmering angel watching over Mary, Joseph and a baby doll Jesus.

A scene of the crucifixion followed, with Roman soldiers keeping watch and three

women, including mother Mary, at the crosses. The drive-by program ended with Jesus dramatically emerging from his tomb, flanked by two male angels in white, stretching out their arms.

Mount Lebanon Baptist Church Pastor Steven Harrelson and his wife, Hannah, greeted vehicles as they filed into the cordoned-off display. The couple handed out religious tracts, "The Hope of

Christ," and welcomed visitors to the Nativity scene, which the church has held the past five years.

This year looked different, as so much else does, due to the COVID-19 bans on large gatherings. In the past, children could interact with the animals and the actors.

Nonetheless, the church adapted, shifting to the drive-thru, which included a radio

See **NATIVITY**, Page A4



ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION/CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT  
A local motorist takes a picture at last weekend's Drive-Thru Live Nativity at Ole Country Store hosted by Mount Lebanon Baptist Church.

## CULPEPER SCHOOL GIVES LOL A NEW MEANING



EMILY JENNINGS/STAR-EXPONENT

Erika Parkinson, a behavioral interventionist at Culpeper's Sycamore Park Elementary School, describes the Loads of Love Laundry program started there this fall. Parkinson helped make a homey space where families can do laundry and choose from donated clothes and shoes.

## Culpeper school's Loads of Love Laundry helps families endure tough times

BY EMILY JENNINGS  
CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Most of us take for granted the ability to do our own laundry, with a washer and dryer easily accessible to keep clothes clean and tidy.

But for parents struggling to earn enough to provide children with basic necessities, clean clothes can be an unaffordable luxury.

A new program at Culpeper County's Sycamore Park El-

ementary School addresses this issue directly, helping local families who are displaced or otherwise struggling to provide clean clothes for their kids.

Sycamore Park Principal

Derek McWilliams won a \$10,000 grant to start the Loads of Love Laundry Center at the school.

"While this doesn't take care of all the concerns for

See **LAUNDRY**, Page A6

## Virginia State Police re-accredited for 10th time

STAR-EXPONENT STAFF REPORT

The Virginia State Police recently received national re-accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies.

In 1986, the agency was the second state police force in the nation to achieve accreditation for the first time. The designation serves as the foundation for a successful, well-managed, transparent and community-focused law enforcement agency, the agency said in a statement this week.

On Nov. 13, the Virginia State Police was awarded the honor for the 10th time. Read the 2020 Final Assessment Report on the Virginia State Police online at [vsp.virginia.gov/accreditation.shtm](http://vsp.virginia.gov/accreditation.shtm).

"This is a proud moment for the Department of State Police," said Col. Gary T. Settle, Virginia State Police superintendent. "Our employees work hard each and every day to best serve and protect Virginia. Achieving this accreditation reinforces our commitment to not just do our job well, but to consistently go above and beyond in public service to others. We do this not for ourselves, but for those living, working and traveling in Virginia. So that those who need us can rest assured that when one calls upon the Virginia State Police, we are there to provide the exceptional service one expects and deserves."

Gaining accreditation requires a voluntary, multi-year self-assessment phase and a site-based assessment of community engagements, policy, procedures, equipment and facilities by CALEA officials.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the panel of independent assessors

See **POLICE**, Page A8



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Nan Butler Roberts (seated) interviews brother and sister Ernest Dennis and Barbara Dennis Shanks as part of a documentary on Rappahannock County's Rosenwald schools. Filmmaker Metta Bastet works the camera.

## Scrabble School collects alumni stories for film

BY ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION  
CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

The Scrabble School Preservation Foundation has launched a project to collect the stories of Black students who attended Rappahannock County's four Rosenwald Schools during the period of government-mandated segregation.

Philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, who was presi-

dent of Sears, Roebuck & Co., helped the Tuskegee Institute's Booker T. Washington, a renowned educator, author and adviser to presidents, build these state-of-the-art schools for African-American students across the nation.

Besides the surviving school in Scrabble, which is now a museum and senior center, Rappahannock

See **FILM**, Page A7

### INSIDE

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COMMUNITY	A3	SCOREBOARD	B2
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FAITH & VALUES	A4	TELEVISION	A7, A8
LOTTERY	A2	VIRGINIA & BEYOND	A2



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Happy Holidays



# UVa hospital sees more COVID cases, but has room

BY BRYAN MCKENZIE

CHARLOTTESVILLE DAILY PROGRESS

The number of COVID-19 patients being treated at the University of Virginia Medical Center is increasing as more area residents catch the virus, but hospital officials say they are not overwhelmed.

Officials on Wednesday said the hospital has a lot of bed-space flexibility and can move staff around as needed to treat people who contract the disease. The hospital is treating regular medical and emergency patients as well as those who have COVID, although the latter are isolated.

The number of people reported as hospitalized at UVa for COVID increased from about 40 last week to nearly 60 this week. The number of patients varies from day to day, depending on how many are admitted or discharged.

Numbers posted on the UVa COVID dashboard showed 63 patients in the hospital being treated for the virus on Dec. 21. Other counts distributed by the hospital show 56 people were in the hospital on Wednesday, with 15 on ventilators.

The Thomas Jefferson Health District statistics showed about 345 under hospital care in the region.

Early in the pandemic, UVa accepted many patients from outside of the area, but officials said the recent influx has been from Central Virginia.

"The majority of our patients



To handle COVID patients, the University of Virginia Medical Center's new Emergency Department tower was opened earlier than expected.

are being treated through our outpatient program, but we have seen an uptick in our inpatients," said Wendy Horton, the medical center's chief executive officer. "A lot of the volume we're seeing today is literally from within our community."

Horton said the hospital has plenty of room to increase COVID-care capacity and has cross-trained staff members to work in the COVID unit, if needed. That, she said, allows administrators to respond quickly to solve a sudden surge.

"We're feeling well prepared. We have adequate personal protective equipment and we check on the status of each unit each day," Horton said. "We're working as a team and members are flexing and filling in throughout the system, where they're needed. We have the ability to flex-in new [COVID treatment] beds, if

needed."

Horton said nearly 1,600 medical staff and caregivers who work near or with COVID patients have received their vaccinations since the shots became available last week. Another 4,300 have signed up for the vaccines.

Both currently available vaccines require two doses to provide protection.

"Our goal is to try and vaccinate all of UVa Health personnel by March, and that would include the second dose," Horton said.

Dr. Costi Sifri, director of hospital epidemiology, only three staff have reported adverse reactions to the vaccine shot, which occur with 15 minutes to 30 minutes of the shot. Those included bouts of nausea and light headedness, but nothing more serious.

There have been scattered reports in Great Britain and across the U.S. of some people having serious adverse reactions, including anaphylaxis, a serious and sometimes fatal allergic reaction. The reaction is rare.

Federal Centers for Disease Control statistics show about one person in a million suffers such a reaction after taking vaccines of any sort.

Sifri said the hospital is receiving shipments of both the Pfizer vaccine and Moderna vaccines, which have received emergency approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. He said three other vaccines are far along in development and could hit the market by March or early summer of next year.

The two approved vaccines use tiny pieces of the COVID-19-causing virus' spike protein, called lipid nanoparticles, to stimulate the body to produce immunity. The other vaccines in development use different stimuli to produce antibodies.

"There are different types of vaccines that focus on different aspects of the virus to create antibodies and they are still under development," Sifri said. "Our hope is to have different types of vaccines that will lend themselves to different types of people."

Mutant strains of the pandemic virus that reportedly make it more communicable should still be limited by the vaccine, Sifri said.

"The mutation is very small, one or two amino acids among

hundreds, and it may change the binding of one antibody, but there are hundreds of others it doesn't change," he said.

Sifri noted that researchers are still unsure if a COVID vaccine will prevent a person from spreading the virus to others. They recommend people who receive it continue to socially distance and wear masks.

The relatively short time it took to create the vaccines is due in part to the effort that governments around the world put into it, he said. The speed is also due to lessons learned in developing other vaccines over the past two decades and the fact that there were plenty of patients to study.

"It was about 10 months from the mapping of the [virus] genome to an effective vaccine, and that's because we were dealing with a pandemic," Sifri said. "There will be more emerging pathogens in the future, but it's good to know we have these vaccine platforms developed for [COVID] that we can work off of."

While officials await more vaccines to distribute, officials said the UVa Health system will continue its community COVID testing program offered Monday evenings at Church of the Incarnation in Albemarle County and Tuesdays at Mount Zion First African Baptist Church in Charlottesville.

The Thomas Jefferson Health District also offers free testing. Times and dates for both are available on the Virginia Department of Health's website.

## Laundry

From Page A1

these families, us being able to help provide clean clothes is one less thing for the families to worry about," McWilliams said of the effort.

The Loads of Love Laundry Center Initiative is a program of the Washington Football Charitable Foundation. Its goal is to help eliminate a barrier to student achievement: having clean clothes. Studies have shown that school attendance improves when a child is able to wear clean clothes, according to the initiative's website.

Operating in schools across Northern Virginia, the District of Columbia and Maryland, the program was started with a \$25,000 donation in 2017 by Washington Football long snapper Nick Sundberg.

At Sycamore Park, McWilliams said he worked with Russell Houck, Culpeper schools' executive director of student services, and Assistant Principal Angie Fiscus to determine who would qualify for the laundry service. They identified about 20 students.

"We have a lot of families that would benefit from the service, but we knew the number of displaced families was a manageable number to start with," McWilliams said.

Families who are homeless, or through lost or reduced income are in tem-



Fallon Grimsley, a behavioral interventionist at Sycamore Park Elementary, shows how donations are organized in the Loads of Love Laundry Center set up for displaced families who don't have access to a washer and a dryer.



Bailey's Cookies Bar donated these treats for a walk-through of the Laundry Center.



Donated winter wear is available for families in need at Sycamore Park's Loads of Love Laundry Center.



Children who need to try on donated clothes may do so in Sycamore Park's Loads of Love Laundry Center.

porary housing, are facing problems much bigger than getting the laundry done, McWilliams said.

"They have so many hardships," he said. "This is just one small thing we can do to help."

Sycamore Park behavioral interventionists Erika Parkinson and Fallon Grimsley were tasked with finding a place for

the center and preparing it for use. A former storage room with an outside door was identified as a suitable space.

"A lot of staff helped move all kinds of things out of there—desks, books, chairs, you name it," Grimsley said. "We cleaned it, painted it, tried to make it homey."

Parkinson attended Sycamore Park herself as a child, and graduated from Culpeper County High in 2004.

"I'm grateful and feel very lucky to be a part of this program and amazing opportunity to provide support to the children and families in our community," Parkinson said.

In the midst of an unusual COVID-19 school year, given the school division's hybrid schedule of in-person and online classes, the two specialists created a vision for the place and set out to realize it.

"Piece by piece, little by little, we made it loving and homey," Grimsley said. "We wanted it to be a comfy space they could feel good in."

After opening the center in October, they have continued to build on their vision and make constant improvements.

The cost of plumbing, electrical work, supplies and appliances took most of the grant. Besides laundry facilities, the duo decided to invite donations and make a place where children and families can "shop" for items they need, such as a winter coat, mittens or socks.

"When we have a family in need, you build a relationship with them, and they might ask if we have any food, or other things," Grimsley said. "Blankets, that's another thing. 'It's getting colder at night, do you have a blanket?'"

Grimsley said she has



With a \$10,000 grant awarded by the Washington Football Team's charity foundation, Sycamore Park Elementary School Principal Derek McWilliams purchased this washer and dryer to provide a laundry service for students in need.



Derek McWilliams shows a visitor the Loads of Love Laundry Center set up at the school this fall with a \$10,000 grant from the Washington Football Team's charity foundation.

helped some of the families on her own time by looking for giveaway or inexpensive furniture in online sales, for example.

"Recently, we had a family that was living in a motel move into an apartment," she said. "I know how hard it is to get started—this single mom, it took everything she had just to get the apartment."

That family's Sycamore Park student told Grimsley her mom and brother were sleeping on a mattress on the floor.

"We were able to get them a bed and dresser—and we took over a big container of food, too," Grimsley said.

Grimsley, who has worked at the elementary school for seven years, has a degree in social work and a passion for helping others.

"I haven't always been as blessed as I am now," she said. "When it was me and my kids starting over, I got to where I am today because of help from others."

After nine years of supporting children behaviorally in a public school, Parkinson said she loves to see the joy in a child's eyes, and the relief and gratitude of parents to provide support through Loads of Love.

"It may seem like a small task, but it can be an enormous burden, both in finances and time, for those who don't have easy access to washers and dryers," Parkinson said. "I love focusing on the good, the positive, helping students identify and utilize their own strengths to empower them."

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Sycamore Park Elementary School is near the Culpeper County school system's administrative offices on Radio Lane.

# CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

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TUESDAY, AUGUST 25, 2020

## COVID hits county courthouse

### Potential exposure to virus forces Monday shutdown

BY ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION  
CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Possible exposure to COVID-19 closed the Culpeper County Courthouse on Monday for a deep cleaning, officials said. Judge Dale Durrer is-

sued the order August 24 closing the circuit court clerk's office for a day, "owing to the possible exposure to COVID-19," thus constituting "a threat to the health and safety of the clerk's office personnel and the general public," the order stated.

Cases in circuit, general district and juvenile & domestic relations were continued by order of the

court. The sheriff's office reported Monday morning the courthouse would be closed.

Since onset of the pandemic in March, Culpeper County has contracted to have an additional cleaning person dedicated full time to the courthouse, according to County Administrator John Egerton. He said ventilation, air filtration and all as-

pects of CDC workplace safety guidance have been addressed.

Culpeper County Director of Environmental Services Paul Howard said custodians normally clean each evening from 5:30 to 9 p.m.

"Our custodial contractor is performing a special cleaning and fogging all the rooms and See **COURTHOUSE**, Page A5



EMILY JENNINGS / CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Culpeper County Courthouse was closed Monday due to possible exposure of COVID-19. It's expected to reopen Tuesday.

## Culpeper students return to classes amid pandemic



Floyd T. Binns Middle School Principal Nathan Bopp helps a student find his way on the first day of school, Monday, Aug. 24 in Culpeper.



Teacher Heather Sutherland (right) greets Pearl Sample Elementary School students as they arrive on the first day of school Monday.



PHOTOS BY EMILY JENNINGS / CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Wendy Aber presents expectations to her Algebra 3 students, seated six feet apart and masked, on Monday at Eastern View High School.

Culpeper County Public School students, or at least some of them, returned Monday for the first day of the academic year amid many restrictions due to the continued pandemic.

CCPS, like many school districts nationwide, has employed a hybrid model offering two days of in-school instruction with three days virtual or all-virtual.

## Culpeper nursing patient dies from COVID-19

BY ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION  
CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

An ongoing outbreak of COVID-19 at Culpeper Health & Rehab Center continued to impact the nursing home facility as of Monday with one death of a resident while in the hospital reported along with numerous recoveries from the infectious respiratory illness.

Statewide, 113,630 cases were reported by VDH as of August 24 – an increase of 2,770 since Friday.

In total, 15 patients and 14 staff members at Culpeper Health & Rehab have tested positive for the novel coronavirus, according to an update on Monday from Administrator Emmanuel Motley.

"Several patients and staff are expected to clear the virus later this week," he said in an email to the Star-Exponent. "We are proud to celebrate the 12 recoveries that occurred among our patients and 10 recoveries among our staff. These recoveries are a true testament to the high-quality treatment and care that our nursing team provides every day.

"Despite the challenges we've faced, we have never wavered in our commitment to our patients' health and well-being."

Motley said while no one has died in the nursing home facility from COVID-19 that a former resident died from it while in the local hospital.

"The threat this invisible virus poses cannot be overstated, and we continue to mourn with the patient's family," he said.

Of 300 tests completed at the center Aug. 14, all came back negative, Emmanuel said. Another full See **VIRUS**, Page A5

## INSIDE



### KELLYANNE CONWAY LEAVING

» Longtime Trump adviser to leave the White House at end of the month. **A2**

## Local private schools provide all-day, in-person learning



EMILY JENNINGS / CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Kaiya Joseph tests out her desk after meeting her new third grade teacher, Kathy Landon (right). Mom Tina looks on.

BY EMILY JENNINGS  
CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

While thousands of children in Culpeper begin their fall instruction with a mix of methods in Culpeper Public Schools, not far away two private schools—Epiphany Catholic and Culpeper Christian—are meeting in person on a traditional school schedule five days a week.

Starting Monday, parents of public schoolchildren are

navigating a two-days-in-school, three-days-at-home schedule, determined in a vote earlier this month by the Culpeper County School Board.

The five-days-a-week schedule at the private schools in town presents a stark contrast.

At Culpeper Christian School, officials met with families in staggered meetings Thursday to avoid overcrowding as they reviewed their reopening

plan. Classes began for students on Monday, Aug. 24.

"Under the CCS Board and with input from the CCS faculty and staff, a CCS task group created a reopening and school operations plan that was released to our school community in mid-July," CCS Administrator Mike Owings wrote in an email to the Star-Exponent.

With guidance from See **PRIVATE**, Page A4

CLASSIFIEDS	B3	SPORTS	B1
COMMUNITY	A3	TELEVISION	A6
COMICS	B5	VIRGINIA&BEYOND	A2
LOTTERY	A2	WEATHER	A2



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# Private

From Page A1

the CDC and state health officials, Owings said, "Our plan is designed to maximize in-person student learning, while implementing mitigation strategies to maximize student and school community health and safety in relation to COVID-19."

Classes resume at Epiphany on Wednesday, Aug. 26. Epiphany Principal Austin Poole said in an interview Friday, "We're very grateful that we're small enough to do this safely."

He added, "The Diocese [of Arlington] works with the CDC and the Virginia Department of Health, and through them we've been encouraged to open if we can establish the appropriate social distancing and follow the protocols needed to keep everyone safe."

After the school closed in March according to Governor Ralph Northam's order, many children were left without the resources needed to provide a good education, Poole said.

"Some didn't have access to the internet, most parents don't have an education background or both had to work or had trouble with the laptops," Poole said. "We have wi-fi here, but most people don't want to go and sit for two or more hours in a car outside a building to do schoolwork."

He said because of these issues, "We had a number of families not engaged as much as we would like."

Poole added he's very grateful to be able to open the school five days a week.

"Generally we all feel like in-person is the best



Principal Austin Poole (left) visits with Elisa Kucia (right), and her children, first-grader Genevieve and third-grader Isaac, at Epiphany Catholic School during orientation day on Friday.

PHOTOS BY EMILY JENNINGS / CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Generally we all feel like in-person is the best way to go."

—Epiphany Catholic School Principal Austin Poole

way to go," he said. "Obviously some families with health issues at home or multigenerational families are not sending their children to school, and that's the best choice for them."

For those students, the Diocese is providing an online curriculum, entirely separate from Epiphany's in-person instruction. Teachers who did not want to teach in person could volunteer to teach this way, Poole said.

"Some of our teachers and parents are anxious about the unknown, and we're having meetings regularly and trying to ad-



Tape on the gym floor at Epiphany Catholic School in Culpeper mark where students may sit for COVID-19 safety.

dress concerns," he said. "This is something none of us have dealt with before, so we'll continue to fine-tune and make it the best it can be."

Under normal circumstances Epiphany's enrollment is about 185. Currently, they have 160 students. Poole said three grades are at their maximum capacity, but several others still

have available spots.

"We've lost a few who have decided to do their schooling virtually," Poole said. "And we've gained a few—possibly because we're able to provide every-day instruction."

The amount of tuition varies. Many students are provided assistance through the Diocese and a program to which church

members can donate money to help underprivileged students pay for tuition.

Poole said 30-40 percent of the student body is Latino. Father Kevin Walsh of Precious Blood Catholic Church in Culpeper speaks Spanish, Poole said, and is often the first to recommend a family for attendance at the school.

"Every parish can contribute whether they have a school or not, and the program really helps families out here in Culpeper," he said.

Parents and students visited the school at 1211 East Grandview Avenue on Friday, Aug. 21, for orientation.

Elisa Kucia toured the school during orientation, stopping in the library with her two children, Isaac and Genevieve, to visit with Poole.

Kucia said her son and daughter, starting third and first grades this fall, respectively, last year were attending Wakefield Country Day School, a private school in Rappahannock County.

Both Kucia, who is a nurse surgeon, and her husband, Matthew Kucia, who is an obstetrician, work at Culpeper Medical Center.

"We really need to have them closer to home," she said, adding that she also has a 2-year-old. "This will really reduce the amount of travel time, for everyone."

Being doctors, Kucia said she and her husband are masked and wear PPE all day while they work.

"The science behind it is clear—following the CDC measures is critical in preventing spread of the virus," she said.

Of the school's CO-

VID-19 protocols, she said, "I'm very impressed. They're doing everything right, with all the safety measures."

All teachers are required to wear face coverings, at the minimum an N95-quality mask or clear face shield, Poole said. Students must wear masks in close quarters or stay at least six feet apart. Taking classes outdoors is encouraged as much as weather permits, and specific areas are being developed for that purpose on the school's grounds.

Parents are advised to screen regularly for the illness at home, and student temperatures, as well as staff, are taken before they enter the school building.

"Each classroom is provided with a thermometer, so if a student in that room isn't feeling well they can be screened in the classroom before sending them to the office," Poole said.

What happens if the school has an outbreak? "We will follow the Health District's guidelines," Poole said. "We'll do what the governor orders."

He added that the Diocese's protocol requires that the school report cases within 24 hours to health officials, after which the school would obey whatever they were directed to do, whether it be close a classroom or close the school.

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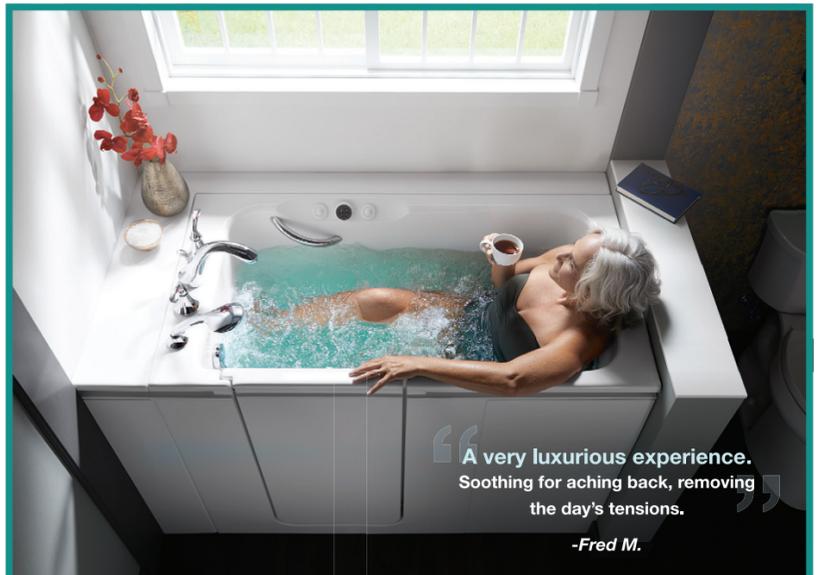
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# CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

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WEATHER High: 51° Low: 36° Forecast: A2

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2020

## PAVING THE WAY TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE



EMILY JENNINGS / CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Culpeper County High School junior Ana Gonzalez (left) answers a question posed by Ed Dunphy, one of about 80 volunteers from the local business community who helped conduct 298 practice job interviews at both Eastern View and Culpeper County high schools this week to better prepare students for the workplace.

## Business leaders help boost Culpeper students' job skills

BY EMILY JENNINGS

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Culpeper County High School junior Ana Gonzalez appeared alert and professional as she sat across the table from Ed Dunphy, a volunteer from the local business community who met with students in the school library Friday.

"What does good customer service mean to you?" Dunphy asked Gonzalez in his role portraying an employer interviewing a job candidate.

Gonzalez didn't hesitate. "Good customer service means you're checking on them constantly and making sure

their needs are met," she said. "You want to be friendly and answer their questions so they will want to come back."

Gonzalez was among 298 students interviewed by Dunphy and other volunteers at Eastern View and Culpeper County high schools. About 80 business leaders visited

to help the young people better prepare themselves for a career after graduation.

Career Partners Inc., a local nonprofit, oversees the mock interviews. It is just one of many programs the organization conducts throughout the year.

See CAREERS, Page A8

## Northridge neighbors decry re-zoning request

Residents object to 31 new homes and associated traffic in already-dense area

BY ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION  
CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Neighbors of the Northridge community, just north of the town of Culpeper, came out in force last week to express growing pain frustrations.

The residents' reaction came in the face of a rezoning request that could bring another 31 homes, and associated traffic, to the increasingly dense area bordered by Route 229, Ira Hoffman Lane and Bus. Route 29.

The Culpeper County Board of Supervisors, at its meeting Tuesday night, ultimately delayed action on the rezoning, sending it back to the planning commission, due to a major, last-minute road-connection change. The vote came after hearing opposition to more cars on their streets from at least a



ALLISON BROPHY CHAMPION/CSE

Beyond this cul-de-sac on Belle Avenue a road connection is proposed as well as construction of 31 homes.

dozen residents.

Applicant Blue Ridge Property Management Group LLC, of Tinsley Place in Culpeper, has requested to rezone 31.8 acres of mostly pastureland along Chestnut Fork Road, near the Route 229 intersection, from Rural Area to Residential. The landowner plans to build single-family houses on the parcel adjoining Northridge,

See REZONE, Page A7

## Preliminary CCPS budget requests 8% funding hike

Superintendent blames increase on a sharp hike in health insurance

BY EMILY JENNINGS

CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Culpeper County Public Schools Superintendent Anthony Brads estimates the district will need 7.94 percent more, or another \$2.61 million, in county funds next school year.

Brads gave the School Board that news at a recent work session during which he outlined his preliminary budget recommendations for fiscal 2021.

Most of the increase will cover the steep rise in the cost of school employees' health insurance, a 31 percent hike, Brads said.

"That's enormous. That's harsh," he said. "It takes the air out of the room, that number does."

"Whatever compensation increase that is contemplated, clearly, your increase in health insurance is going

to eat up some or all of that," Brads said.

On Monday night, Feb. 10, school officials encourage Culpeper residents to attend the board's "Talk About Budget" (or TAB Time) work session at the county administrative office at 302 N. Main St. The 5:30 p.m. meeting is an informal opportunity to share ideas or concerns about educational needs and the 2020-21 school budget with the board.

Brads' preliminary budget requests a 2.1 percent salary increase for teachers and staff, totalling \$1.97 million.

He calculates that Culpeper teachers' pay is 4.4 percent behind the midpoint of the

See BUDGET, Page A4

## Uproar results after vote on assault weapons

BY AMY FRIEDENBERGER

THE ROANOKE TIMES

RICHMOND—House Democrats used their majority Friday to advance the most controversial gun control bill this General Assembly session, a ban on the sale of assault weapons and the possession of "high capacity" magazines of 12 or more rounds.

The House Public Safety Committee backed HB 961 on a 12-9 party-line vote, sending it to the floor of the House of Delegates. The bill would, among other things, require Virginians to turn over or destroy ammunition magazines considered to be "high capacity" and allow the possession

See GUNS, Page A4

## Coach announces retirement



STEPHANIE OLINGER / CULPEPER STAR-EXPONENT

Eastern View field hockey head coach Peggy Allen smiles after being presented with a plaque for her 40 years as a coach at both Culpeper and Eastern View high schools during

a ceremony held Thursday night at EVHS. Allen has decided to retire after leading the Cyclones to their first state championship last November. See B1 for the complete story.

### » HOMETOWN LIVING:

Visit the Culpeper club that helps elders make new pals. C1



» SUNDAY POLITICS: Some say that former vice president Joe Biden has campaigned as the comfortable expression of establishment Democratic politics. Is that a problem? B4

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# Careers

From Page A1

Founded 20 years ago and run by volunteers, Career Partners also works with young entrepreneurs to develop business plans, encourages study and interest in science and technology through organized STEM activities and events, and presents an annual career expo for Culpeper students in the 8th, 10th and 12th grades.

"We're a partnership between education, business, government and the community with a goal of preparing students for the workplace," said Marty Bywaters-Baldwin, director of workforce services for Rappahannock Goodwill Industries Inc., who is serving this year as president of Career Partners.

"Culpeper is unique with this—a trust has built between these groups over years that you don't see in other communities," Baldwin said. "This trust, with a unified goal of serving the next generation, makes it possible to do the fantastic collaborative initiatives that are happening here now."

Randi Richards-Lutz, Culpeper County Public Schools' director of career and technical education, serves on the Career Partners board.

"Some form of practice interviewing has been part of Career Partners from the beginning," Lutz said. "But it's only in the last four years that every high school student is able to participate."

At one of the Career Partners monthly meetings, the directors decided to include mock interviews in a class that teaches economics and personal finance, which every student must pass to graduate.

"As part of that class, we were already teaching resumes and writing a cover letter and a thank-you note, but now we teach the soft skills that are so crucial to job success—how to shake hands, dress professionally, make eye contact, communicate," Lutz said.

Local business leaders come into the high schools to conduct the mock interviews twice each school year, in the fall and early spring.

"It's one of my favorite things we do; all of them benefit from it," Lutz said.

One of Friday's volunteers was Marie Hawley, a career counselor at Germanna Community College's Career and Transfer Center in Fredericksburg.

"I'm always impressed by the students when I do these interviews," Hawley said.

Part of her job is to visit area schools and help young people figure out how to pursue their talents and interests in the workplace.

"So many of these kids have a part-time job already, helping to support their families or saving for college, while at the same time keeping up academically. And they are helping out at church or other places in the community," Hawley said. "You've got to admire them for juggling all their different responsibilities."

Emma Wilt, a CCHS junior enrolled in the economics and personal finance class, was "a little nervous" as she waited to be interviewed.

"I want to give my best interview and not mess up," Wilt said.

Dillan Vick, her classmate, said they had been practicing for the interviews with other students, trying out questions on



Michelle North (left), who serves on the CCPS School Board, talks with Ava Gibbons, a CCHS junior, as part of an economics and personal finance class that includes mock job interviews.

one another and doing speed interviews. This was his first-ever experience meeting with an adult who he knew would interrogate him about his ability to work.

"I'll be glad when it's over," he said.

Later, both students said they were grateful for the experience.

"It wasn't as bad as I expected it to be," Vick said. "It was actually pretty natural. To me, it was a good starting mark. Now I feel more ready for a real interview."

Wilt was pleased with the feedback she was given by her interviewer, School Board Chair Michelle North, who is retired from a career in health marketing and communications.

"I got a lot of positive feedback and tips for interviewing in the future," Wilt said. "She said my answers were well thought out, and I made good eye contact, and she liked how I asked her some questions and made it more of a conversation."

North was complimentary of the students she

interviewed. "I never cease to be amazed at how well prepared the kids are for this," she said. "They're clearly getting good instruction and practice in the classroom. It's very impressive."

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# Convicted rapist accused of threatening Spotsylvania judge, prosecutor and victim

BY KEITH EPPS  
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

A man who was recently ordered to serve 14 years in prison for raping his estranged wife has picked up an additional 13 felony charges for allegedly writing threatening letters from jail to three people involved in his prosecution, court records show.

Deandre Johnson, 25, of Ridgeley, W.Va., was convicted in Spotsylvania County Circuit Court in June of charges that included rape, strangulation and domestic assault. A jury recommended a 14-year prison sentence, and Judge Ricardo Rigual imposed the sentence in November.

Johnson has been in the Rappahannock Regional Jail since his arrest in December 2018, after he

found the woman with her new boyfriend at a home in Spotsylvania.

On Feb. 3, a Stafford County grand jury indicted Johnson on nine felony counts of communicating threats and four felony counts of violating a protective order (third or subsequent offense). The charges were filed in Stafford because the jail is in the county.

Court records show that the alleged threats were made between May of last year and Jan. 2. Each charge carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison.

Stafford prosecutor Ed Lustig said the targets of the threatening letters were Judge Rigual, Spotsylvania prosecutor Amanda Sweeney and the rape victim. Lustig declined to



Johnson

discuss the details of the threats.

Johnson, who represented himself during his Spotsylvania trial,

had a major outburst in court during his Spotsylvania sentencing after Rigual denied his request for a new trial. He was hauled out of the courtroom by bailiffs and witnessed the remainder of the hearing through a window in a room adjacent to the courtroom.

The proceedings were also interrupted by the victim's mother, who stood up in Johnson's defense and said, "He didn't rape my daughter." The victim broke down crying after hearing what her mother said.

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