



## A second chance

*Nathan Dowell, a graduate of the Twin County Recovery Court, tells the story of his battle with drug addiction and his path to recovery.*

By SHAINA STOCKTON  
Staff

INDEPENDENCE — Nathan Dowell is a son, an employee of the Grayson County Recreation Department, a man of God, and a survivor.

Today, with his outlook on life at a complete 180-degree turn from what it was 19 months ago, he shared a memory of when he came face to face with his demon for the first time.

"It started when I began hanging around people who were using drugs. I started using drugs, and trading drugs in exchange for gas money," he told the newspaper. "Some days, I would run out of gas just trying to make it back home. And then one day, a so-called friend asked me if I wanted to try [something new]."

When Dowell asked what the drug would do, the response was cryptic. "Try it, and you'll find out," they said.

That was Dowell's first introduction to methamphetamine, a drug that would send him into a downward spiral and a long and difficult battle towards recovery.

"The first time I tried it, I was hooked. I was literally hooked. I was spending all of my money; and then when I would run out of money, peo-

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## Thirty-nine indicted in Grayson

By Larry Chambers  
Staff

INDEPENDENCE — A Grayson County Circuit Court grand jury, which met Oct. 23, issued indictments against 39 people on drug, larceny and a variety of other charges.

There were also several sealed indictments that will not be opened until the suspects are arrested.

An indictment indicates that a grand jury found sufficient evidence for a case to go to trial, and does not indicate guilt. All of those indicted are innocent until proven guilty.

### The indictments included:

- Haley Renae Holderfield, was indicted on seven charges, including: sale, gift or distribution of marijuana; two counts of possession of a Schedule I controlled substance (LSD); possession of a

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Jacob Bowman, CCEC student, pictured with the storybook character submissions for the contest

## Storybook characters



Arthur - Mrs. Jones' second grade class



Dinosaur - Mrs. Poe's CCEC class



Principal Tanya Lawrence's social distancing pumpkin

Just in time for Halloween, the hallway at Fairview Elementary School was teeming with decorated pumpkins, submitted for a contest hosted by Mrs. Dawn Poe's Cooperative Center for Exceptional Children (CCEC) class.

Jacob Bowman, a CCEC student, launched the school-wide pumpkin contest for the holiday season. The classrooms were prompted to create pumpkins decorated as their favorite storybook characters, ranging from Pete the Cat and Arthur, to a dinosaur and the winning entry, "Dog Man." Each class voted for their favorite storybook character, and then designed and decorated the pumpkin for their class.

"Students have enjoyed looking at the character pumpkins, and had the opportunity to vote for their favorite pumpkin," Poe said. Fifth grade students counted and tallied the votes for the contest.

Declaration photos by Shaina Stockton



Winnie the Pooh - Mrs. Canning's fifth grade class



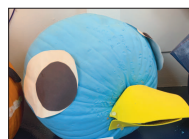
Rainbow Fish - Ms. Shinault's kindergarten class



Dog Man - Winning design, Mrs. Flemming's third grade class



Creepy Carrots - Mrs. Jones' first grade class



Pigeon - Ms. Hawk's kindergarten class



Inside Out - Ms. Martin's fourth grade class



Pete the Cat - Mrs. Burnette's first grade class



The Leaf Man - Mrs. Hernandez's remote learners



## DEQ partners with BRDC for redevelopment

*Contributions totaling \$105,000 will assist the BRDC in their transformation of Kommarock Training School and surrounding properties into a new destination site in Troutdale*

Staff Report

RICHMOND — The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) Brownfields Program recently provided the Blue Ridge Discovery Center (BRDC) \$55,000 in grant support to complete master planning efforts for a major redevelopment project. An additional \$50,000 from DEQ and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership was provided for environmental assessments and remediation to ensure Brownfield properties on the site are viable for reuse.

The BRDC is a non-profit organization committed to preserving and sharing the natural history of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Located in Troutdale, the project involves transforming two adjoining gas

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## SWVA drives new COVID cases

*Southwest Virginia is driving new COVID-19 cases, but there are no plans for regional restrictions - for now*

By KATE MASTERS  
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Virginia's COVID-19 infections are increasing again, but the latest spike is targeting the Southwest — a region that largely avoided significant case growth for much of the pandemic.

Gov. Ralph Northam said Wednesday that he currently has no plans to place the area under more stringent safety restrictions or step up enforcement at public-facing businesses — measures he took this summer in response to a surge in cases in the Hampton Roads region. There, health officials attributed much of the growth to residents gathering in bars without wearing

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We are always on the lookout for interesting news stories. If you have a story to share, please email:

editor@independence  
declaration.com

# Recovery

Continued from front

ple would want nothing to do with me. No one wanted anything to do with me unless I had money or drugs," said Dowell.

Soon, abusing the drug turned into selling drugs in order to continue to afford his habit. Before Dowell would admit that he needed help, he would go through several run-ins with law enforcement, drug-related criminal charges, jail time and relapses.

Dowell's story is just one example of many. Grayson County Commonwealth's Attorney, Brandon Boyles estimates that 90% of the cases he sees in circuit court are rooted in substance abuse. To combat this, he and several other entities work with clients to establish a solid foundation for recovery. It begins in Twin County Recovery Court.

The recovery court program began in early spring of 2018 as a joint effort between two circuit court judges: Lee Harrell from Grayson County and Brett Geisler from Carroll County. In partnership with Mount Rogers Mental Health, and with the assistance of local law enforcement, the commonwealth's attorneys from both counties, probation and parole officers, and several local church groups, the program is designed to provide assistance for people who struggle with substance abuse problems, and are at risk for committing more serious crimes.

In 2018, former Galax Police Chief Rick Clark spoke to the growing drug abuse problem in the Twin Counties, which is not unlike the rest of the United States. "I think overall I've come to realize, in the last three or four years, we have not arrested our way out of the drug problem," Clark said during his exit interview with the local newspaper. "Drug arrests are up into a triple-digit percentage from where they were, and they don't go down."

Throughout his 42 years in law enforcement, Clark said that he began seeing kids go through the system, then "the grandchildren of people I arrested 40 years ago, which tells me we're not doing something right. There's an issue. If we were a private business, we'd be bankrupt, because that's not an efficient model. We need to see that change," Clark said.

## The Monster

After meeting what recovery programs would refer to as his "drug of choice" (DOC), Dowell would have several run-ins with area law enforcement, both in Carroll County and Grayson County.

When Dowell first received distribution charges, he was sentenced to a year of house arrest. After serving that time, and attending Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings, he said he had a brief reprieve from the addiction.

"I was good for a little while, but then I'd run into my old so-called friends, and they reeled me right back in," Dowell said.

Dowell shared the typical loop that would follow: he'd visit a "friend," leave their home with drugs and paraphernalia on his person, and then get pulled over about a mile down the road.

One of the hardest things to remember, he shared, was how much his addiction hurt his family.

"There were so many times when I'd be gone from home for a week or two at a time, without a change of clothes, without taking a shower. I was at the point where I was stealing from [my parents] just to support my habit."

"With everything I did, I actually probably deserved to be in prison for the rest of my life," Dowell said.

Dowell had previously tried to get clean through NA, but said that he'd often ignore or miss key steps in ridding himself of the triggers that would inevitably

pull him back into the loop. "NA teaches you that rule about changing the people, places and things that trigger you," Dowell said.

But, as soon as the meeting was over, he would go right back to the source of his addiction: the people who got him hooked in the first place.

"NA was a good program. The problem was that I wasn't taking it seriously. I had to change everything," Dowell said.

Jail time, while it kept him away from the crowd outside, only gave him new avenues for his addiction.

"I don't know how they manage to do it, but when people say there aren't any drugs in jail, they are wrong," Dowell shared.

The last time Dowell was arrested, he was visited by his attorney, David Boisvert. Prior to this visit, Dowell had spoken to his parents on the phone and told them that he needed help.

At that time, Dowell had charges in Carroll County, and pending charges in Grayson County for an old possession charge.

"I was sitting in jail and [Boisvert] asked me, 'Nathan, you were doing good. What happened?'"

At this stage, Dowell felt like he'd exhausted all of his options. Boisvert suggested the recovery court program; and while Dowell was hesitant because everything else had failed him to that point, he decided to give it a try.

"I asked [Boisvert] what would be in this program that would help me. And he said that I would have supportive people," said Dowell.

That, as it turned out, was exactly what Dowell needed.

## Reinforcement

When an individual is charged with drug offenses — or a criminal charge that ties to substance abuse in some way — they can apply for consideration to have their case deferred and enter into the program.

There are criteria that need to be met. The person needs to be determined as high-risk, meaning that they are headed towards more violent criminal acts.

"Each person goes through a screening process, and then we come back as a group and vote on whether or not to allow them to enter the program," said Boyles. "There are some reasons we will say no, such as if someone has a violent criminal history. But those are really few and far between. If we feel that someone really needs help, we can find ways to get them into the program."

Boyles shared that some of the services provided by Mount Rogers may also have a cost, depending on the needs of the person, but they offer either sliding scale fees or no-cost services. The program is grant-funded, and local churches also pitch in to support the program where they can.

"What essentially happens is that [the defendant] comes in, enters a plea of guilty to whatever charges they have pending. And the judge accepts their plea, but doesn't enter a finding of guilt at that time," Boyles explained.

At this point, everything is put on hold for the defendant to go through the recovery program, which consists of a multitude of services to address substance abuse.

"Each participant is monitored. They are subjected to unannounced, random drug screenings. Most start out doing intensive outpatient rehab at Mount Rogers, but we have secured beds for our more intense cases," said Boyles.

Every other Tuesday, a meeting is held to determine how defendants who are going through the program are progressing.

"We have certain sanctions from having them write an essay detailing what is going on to cause the substance abuse issues, or we can go as far as sending them to jail

for a period of time," Boyles explained. "Basically, when they go into recovery court, there is no guarantee of what will happen for their case. It ranges from them being able to get a dismissal, or they could get less prison time. They essentially go into this blind. They don't know the outcome, but they know they are facing a problem and need help."

Not only can the program help with substance abuse problems, it can also put defendants who are battling addictions back on the path to living as contributing members of society.

In Dowell's case, his time with the program eventually led to an employment opportunity with the Grayson County Recreation Department.

"I got home and I was looking over the requirements, you know, crossing the T's and dotting the I's, when I noticed that [the paper] said that I needed 500 hours of community service," Dowell said.

At that time, Dowell shared that he'd already fulfilled that time frame and more.

"At that point, I was working four to five days a week at the Grayson County Courthouse. This was after seven months of me doing community service," Dowell said.

When this was brought to their attention, Dowell was told that he had two choices: either continue working for free, or find a job.

Due to an accident that occurred when he was younger — he was hit by a vehicle while riding a bicycle — Dowell was receiving disability, and wasn't aware that he could work within a certain set of limitations.

While this new knowledge freed him to take steps to find employment, he was faced with another dilemma: "Then I had to wonder, who would hire me with the record that I have?"

As it turned out, Dowell had done more than simply over-fulfill his community service requirements. He'd caught the attention of Mitch Smith, deputy county administrator, who told him that if he ever wanted to work for the county, that he would be willing to help.

Though there was not a job available at the courthouse itself, Smith was able to refer Dowell to the Grayson County Recreation Park, where he has worked full time since October 2019.

"My mouth dropped. I called my mom and dad, and they were crying. And my dad said, 'Son, this is a step up for you.'"

## Victory

The recovery court offers a number of positives for the community. It diverts people from the prison system, which saves the counties money and keeps the population of the system down. But the main focus of the program is to rehabilitate and help those who have addictions, while focusing punishments on the distributors who victimize them.

But while the program is helpful to some, it doesn't save everyone.

"Some do very well with this program. But unfortunately, a lot of people don't," said Boyles.

The commonwealth's attorney shared that he could think of a handful of graduates, with two or three others about to meet eligibility for graduation, during his time with the county. That's what makes Dowell's success such a victory.

To meet the criteria for graduating the program, defendants must pay their court costs — this can be paid off through community service — and stay in recovery for a set period of time.

Unfortunately, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the typical ceremony that is held for graduates was not possible for Dowell. But Dowell was given a private hearing to have his charges dismissed, and he was photographed with his lawyer to commemorate the milestone.

The last drug Dowell ever took, he says, was the day he



Nathan Dowell (left), shown in court with his attorney, David Boisvert (right), the day his cases were dismissed upon successful completion of the Twin County Recovery Court. Also pictured are Judge H. Lee Harrell (back, center) and Clerk Susan Herrington (back, right).

got out of jail. Halfway through this month will mark 20 months of sobriety, and continue a new chapter.

As for his triggers, Dowell shared, "It came to the point where, once I stopped dealing and doing drugs, [old influencers] began to drop away from me. I wasn't a benefit to them anymore."

When Dowell got out of jail, he got a new cell phone and changed his number. He created mostly new social media accounts; and the ones he didn't completely start over with, he purged extensively.

"My Facebook account was still the same, but I went through and everyone who had ever messaged me, about anything to do with drugs, and anyone I knew who was still living that lifestyle, I blocked them."

Dowell culled the list from 4,000 down to his close family and friends, and positive influences.

With these negative influences safely out of his life, that leaves the ones behind the program with a sobering fact: potential hundreds, thousands of others, who may still be in need of help.

"Our drug problem is more prevalent than the average citizen would understand. But I believe any of us would be hard pressed to find someone who doesn't know someone in their family or community who has been affected by substance abuse," said Boyles. "Our police are doing as good a job as they can to fight the

problem, but the public has to do their part, too. This is a serious issue."

With younger teens and children discovering more serious substances, Boyles shared that another goal is to promote education for the community to stop substance abuse in areas before it can begin.

"We have to do things to educate others and not have children repeat the same mistakes they've seen adults make in their lives. If you have a child who grows up in the home of a parent or guardian who is an addict, their chances are much higher. It's a tough thing," said Boyles.

He concluded, "Addiction doesn't discriminate. Every socioeconomic background, every race, every religion... dealers don't care who you are. They care about dealing."

Boyles said cases like Dowell are rays of hope in his line of work.

"I'm very proud of Nathan. He did a wonderful job, and all of the other

members of the program who have worked with him would echo my sentiments," said Boyles. "He is one of our success stories."

Dowell extended credit to the program, in addition to his family and his faith in God for where he is now. "I thank the Lord, Jesus Christ, every day for the difference in my life, and for the change and the recovery."

In addition to focusing on his continued journey of self discovery and improvement, Dowell now serves as a chairperson for a local NA meeting. He shared that he is open to and excited about helping others achieve the same goals he did.

To others battling addiction, Dowell had this to offer: "Talk to someone. I had nobody to talk to, because everyone I was hanging around with was just like me. I have stepped up and come a long way in my life, and if I can do it, anyone can do it. Point blank."

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## GRAYSON COUNTY DOG CLINIC

# NOVEMBER 21, 2020

**ELK CREEK DISTRICT:**

GUYN SHOPPING CENTER (UPPER ENTRANCE).....7:30 AM TO 8:00 AM  
ELK CREEK RESCUE SQUAD (BEHIND BUILDING).....12:15 PM TO 12:45 PM  
RIXEY'S MARKET.....6:05 PM TO 6:30 PM

**WILSON DISTRICT:**

FLATRIDGE COMMUNITY CENTER.....2:00 PM TO 2:20 PM  
GRANT GRANGE.....2:35 PM TO 2:55 PM  
TROUTDALE FIRE HOUSE.....3:00 PM TO 3:15 PM  
WHITETOP FIRE HOUSE.....3:45 PM TO 4:00 PM  
MT. ROGERS SCHOOL (PARKING LOT).....4:10 PM TO 4:25 PM  
RUGBY FIRE & RESCUE.....4:40 PM TO 5:00 PM  
MOUTH OF WILSON POST OFFICE.....5:15 PM TO 5:30 PM  
TED'S MARKET (HIGHWAY 58).....5:40 PM TO 6:00 PM

**PROVIDENCE DISTRICT:**

FRIES FIRE HOUSE.....10:00 AM TO 10:30 AM  
PROVIDENCE SCHOOL.....10:40 AM TO 11:15 AM  
NEW RIVER WILDLIFE BLDG. - ON RIVERSIDE DRIVE.....11:30 AM TO 12:00 PM

**OLDTOWN DISTRICT:**

BAYWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (PARKING LOT).....8:15 AM TO 8:45 AM  
FAIRVIEW SCHOOL (PARKING LOT).....9:00 AM TO 9:30 AM

**RABIES VACCINATION: \$6.00 EACH, CATS & DOGS**

To be administered by Dr. Karen Saintings, Owner  
Countryside Mobile Veterinary Services 336-816-9208

\*\*\*\* DUE TO A CHANGE IN VIRGINIA LAW, THERE CAN NOW BE NO VACCINE ADMINISTERED AT A RABIES CLINIC EXCEPT THE RABIES VACCINATION \*\*\*\*

**2021 DOG TAGS: \$5.00 EACH (ALL SEXES)**  
**KENNEL TAGS: 1 TO 20 DOGS - \$35.00**

\*\*\* DOG TAGS EXPIRE DECEMBER 31 OF EACH YEAR \*\*\*  
CLINIC WILL BE HELD - RAIN OR SHINE

RAYMOND L. HALL, JR., TREASURER