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The Voice of the City of Galax, Carroll County & Grayson County

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Some business ordered to close

Governor issues order closing entertainment and recreation venues, barber shops and salons to contain virus spread; most other businesses, restaurants can remain open with restrictions.

By BRIAN FUNK Staff

In a briefing on Monday afternoon, Gov. Ralph Northam announced that Virginia's public and private schools will be closed for the remainder of the academic year, and ordered recreation and entertainment businesses - where large groups gather - as well as barber shops and salons.

The closings are part of an attempt to control the spread of the COVID-19 respiratory virus.

Northam signed Executive Order 53, which took affect at 11:59 p.m. on March 24 and ends at 11:59 p.m.

WHAT BUSINESSES MUST CLOSE AND WHICH ARE CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL?

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on April 23, banning gatherings of more than 10 people and setting guidelines for restaurants and other businesses that can remain open.

Restaurants must close dining rooms, but can continue to offer delivery, takeout and curbside service. Essential services - such as grocery stores, pharmacies, banks, etc. - can remain open.

At the briefing, Deputy Secretary

of Commerce Angela Navarro said non-essential brick-and-mortar stores can stay open, too, if they limit customers to 10 or fewer at a time and increase their sanitization. Answering a reporter's question, she said the construction industry is considered essential.

Northam also clarified that the 10-person limit applies to customers, not staff.

The ban on gatherings of more than 10 people does not apply to health care or medical services; access to essential services for low-income residents, such as food banks; media; law enforcement; or government.

The governor also urged all Virginians to avoid non-essential travel outside the home, if and when possible.

"This is an unprecedented situation, and it requires unprecedented actions to protect public health and save lives," said Northam in a statement Monday afternoon. "I

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Gov. Ralph Northam speaks at Monday's briefing.

Debunking myths about coronavirus

The only thing spreading faster than COVID-19 is misinformation. Here are some common myths and facts about the virus.

By SHANNON WATKINS Staff

Another unfortunate thing that's spreading along with the COVID-19 pandemic? Misinformation.

A lot of incorrect information about COVID-19, aka the coronavirus, transmission and prevention is circulating, and if you've been on social media in the last few weeks, you've probably heard it all.

There's so much misinformation that it's difficult to address every last bit of it, but we'll look at some of the more prevalent types here.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has a web page specifically devoted to debunking myths regarding the virus, listing some that might be new to even the most avid online sleuth. Below is a summary of their information, with a little additional information from other sources.



WHO Mythbusting

Q: Can COVID-19 survive in warm weather, hot climates or humid conditions?

A: "From the evidence so far, the COVID-19 virus can be transmitted in all areas, including areas with hot and humid weather," says the WHO website.

Q: Does this mean that snow, cold weather or frigid conditions can kill the virus?

A: There's no reason to believe that cold weather can kill the new coronavirus or other diseases, says the

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KEEP UP WITH THE LATEST

FOR ONGOING AND UPDATED COVERAGE OF NEWS RELATED TO COVID-19, FOLLOW "GALAXGAZETTE" ON FACEBOOK OR GO TO GALAXGAZETTE.COM



'HOBBIT' FORMING

Though high school drama productions are off due to school closings for the COVID-19 virus, a small ray of hope shone through on Sunday at the Arts Council of the Twin Counties' office. Young thespians auditioned for Wandflower Theatre's summer production of "The Hobbit," a condensed, 90-minute play based on J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy world of Middle Earth, about the hobbit, Bilbo Baggins, who is drawn into an adventure unlike anything else. The audition was kept to a carefully low number of participants in the room at any time, and of course, sanitizing wipes played their own small but crucial role. Above, Ashley Bovia strikes a casual pose (left); and cast members chat and clown around in the Arts Council's office at the audition (right).

Gazette photos by Shannon Watkins



ABOVE, LEFT: Levi (foreground) and Mason Blevins, brothers who are no strangers to the Twin Counties theater scene.



ABOVE, RIGHT: Emily Brooks, who played the female lead in the Arts Council's production of "Our Town."



LEFT: Wandflower Theatre founder Wesley Harmon. Wandflower Theatre is a youth theatre program that hopes to present its third production this summer.

Va. closes schools, but seniors will be able to graduate

Department of Education offers options for school districts, such as summer classes or extending this or the next school year

Staff Reports

All schools in Virginia will remain closed through the end of this academic year and state Standards of Learning (SOL) tests will be cancelled.

At a briefing on Monday, Gov. Ralph said closing schools was necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19. "I know this raises a lot of questions for parents and students, and school division leaders will decide how students will learn the information schools were meant to cover the rest of year."

The Virginia Department of Education will submit a waiver to the federal government to lift end-of-year testing requirements and is exploring options to waive state-mandated Standards of Learning (SOL) tests, as well.

Superintendent of Public Instruction James Lane announced Tuesday that he is using his authority under Northam's Executive Order 51 to ensure that high school seniors who were on track to earn a diploma later this spring are able to graduate, despite the closure of schools for the remainder of the year as a means of slowing the spread of COVID-19.

The Department of Education also issued guidance for school districts, offering options for them to choose to keep classes going.

Closing school facilities doesn't mean classes will not continue, as Carroll County Schools Superintendent Mark

See SCHOOLS, Page 2A

WEATHER

WEDNESDAY

MOSTLY CLOUDY, MORNING SHOWERS

High 55°F • Low 41°F

PRECIP: 70%

THURSDAY

MOSTLY SUNNY, WARMER

High 62°F • Low 51°F

PRECIP: 0%

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THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

Nonprofits adapting to COVID-19 changes

By SHANNON WATKINS
Staff

Two Galax nonprofits weighed in on how the COVID-19 outbreak has affected their operations.

“Yes, we are packing the regular number of bags,” said Backpack Buddies’ Stephanie Dees.

Backpack Buddies collects nonperishable foods for Galax City Public Schools students who may be experiencing food scarcity, in order to feed them over the weekends. The children have been privately selected by teachers; their parents sign permission

slips to receive the food. The program takes allergies into account, as well.

Dees and Galax Schools Superintendent Susan Tilley have coordinated the delivery since schools closed. “School personnel will pick up the bags from us and they will have the info they need to get the bags to the kids in our program,” Dees said.

The food is handed out at the schools’ drive-by lunch and the school will “deliver the others when they go to several sites around the city on Fridays,” Dees added. “The only thing that might disrupt our

program is if we can’t get our groceries on a timely basis. Hopefully that won’t be a problem.”

At Willing Partners, “the Coronavirus has certainly slowed us down,” said Director Kathy Cooley. “We have not reopened yet because we’re not quite where we need to be with funds raised, but we’ve got an enormous amount of accomplishments completed and we’re right now at over 39% of our goal.”

Willing Partners runs a food bank and thrift store. The nonprofit had lost its home at the beginning of last year and struggled to stay afloat while looking

for a new home, which it found less than a month ago on Meadow Street.

“We are just hoping that by the time we get fully organized and cleaned, both in the storage space and the new retail location, that we’ll have some of the restrictions with COVID-19 lifted and be able to move right into a smooth re-opening,” Cooley continued.

“We would remind people that they can send contributions by any of the means listed on our Facebook page, but preferably they can just drop a check in the mail to Willing Partners Inc., 21 Matthews Street,

Galax VA, 24333.

She reminded donors to remember to get a receipt from any of the other means of giving, as the details are not shared with Willing Partners due to privacy laws.

“Also, we are taking some in-kind donations on an appointment basis now,” Cooley said. “They can call (276) 233-5416 and if there is no answer, leave a message and someone will call them back.”

“With all the uncertainties at the present time, it’s hard to set a definite date to re-open, but we’re working diligently to make it soon!” she concluded.

Health district activates public call centers

Public health districts across Virginia have activated public health call centers to answer questions and provide information about COVID-19 and related issues, including symptoms, how to minimize the risk of exposure for yourself and your loved ones, local and statewide conditions, testing resources and how they are used, and what to do if you think you may be ill.

Residents of the Twin Counties can contact Mount Rogers Health District offices, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Local office numbers are: Carroll County, (276) 730-3180; Galax, (276) 236-6127; and Grayson County, (276) 773-2961.

Or, visit vdh.virginia.gov/mount-rogers/. For information on COVID-19 and ways to protect yourself and those you love, visit vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/.

Galax Social Services office closed to public

The Galax Department of Social Services is closed to the public until further notice.

To report a Child Protective Services (CPS) or Adult Protective Services (APS) concern during office hours, call (276) 236-8111. After hours, contact the CPS hotline at 1-800-552-7096 and the APS hotline at 1-888-832-3858.

You may apply for benefits online at [\[monhelp.virginia.gov\]\(http://monhelp.virginia.gov\); by phone at 1-855-635-4370, or for Medical Assistance only at 1-855-242-8282 \(TDD: 1-888-221-1590\).](http://com-</p>
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You may also use the agency drop box to submit paperwork.

Should you need a replacement EBT card, call 1-866-281-2448.

You can reach benefit workers at (276) 236-8111.

WCC announces changes due to coronavirus

Staff Report

Based on increasing concern related to COVID-19 and current available information, Wytheville Community College (WCC) will begin operating with only designated staff beginning today, Monday.

Other college employees will telework now through April 3. WCC’s off-site location at the Crossroads Institute in Galax will be closed.

A small number of designated employees will staff the Wytheville campus from 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday through Thursday, to monitor overall college services and assist students via email, phone or online chat. However, buildings will be closed to students and the public.

This announcement follows last week’s decision to cancel face-to-

face classes from March 16-23, while continuing online classes. The faculty is working to transition face-to-face classes to an online format, and they will communicate with students enrolled in their courses.

“The safety and health of our students and employees are our highest priority,” said Dr. Dean Sprinkle, WCC president. “We understand that moving to the remote delivery of instruction may be challenging, especially for students who prefer face-to-face classes. However, this is our best option under the circumstances.”

To help students who may not be familiar with taking online classes, WCC has posted tips about taking online classes on the college website, and faculty and staff are working directly with their students dur-

ing the transition. Tutors are available to “meet” with students through online technology to assist, as well.

Students who do not have internet access or who do not have electronic devices (computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc.) should contact their faculty. WCC is also working to expand wifi access to parking lots near WCC’s Wytheville campus for students who may not have internet access.

Faculty will work with students enrolled in clinicals or internships to determine if these will continue. Workforce/Occupational Program classes are cancelled through April 3.

The Testing Center will be closed. Faculty will communicate with students regarding alternative testing options.

The Virginia Community College System has cancelled all spring

commencement ceremonies, including WCC’s graduation and pinning ceremonies.

“We regret that we will not be able to honor our achievements in a formal ceremony, but students will still receive their designated academic awards,” said Sprinkle. Pending the duration of the current coronavirus, the possibility of graduation and pinning ceremonies will be considered at a later date.

“What’s difficult is that the very things that make these ceremonies meaningful also make them dangerous in this pandemic,” said Glenn DuBois, chancellor of the Virginia Community College System. “While it’s a celebration of individual achievements, it’s a community celebration. Many of the same family members who travel far and wide to attend are at particularly

high risk with this virus. And the hugs and high-fives that come naturally to so many of us in that moment fly in the face of the social distancing practices we are asked to observe.”

DuBois said the colleges will honor the achievements of their Class of 2020 graduates later, “at a time and in a manner that is safer for all concerned.”

The WCC Bookstore will be closed from March 23 through April 3. Students who have already purchased graduation regalia or invitations and have a receipt will be eligible for a refund when the WCC Bookstore re-opens.

Summer and fall registration will be delayed until April 6. Additional updates will be posted periodically on the college’s website at wcc.vccs.edu.

Myths

Continued from Page 1A

WHO; “The normal human body temperature remains around 36.5°C to 37°C (97.7°F to 98.6°F), regardless of the external temperature or weather,” the WHO states.

Q: Will taking a hot bath kill the virus?
A: As with warm weather, hot climates and humid conditions, a hot bath won’t kill the virus. And, as stated in the previous question, the human body maintains a temperature of 36.5°C to 37°C (97.7°F to 98.6°F).

Q: Can I catch the coronavirus from a mosquito bite?

A: The WHO says, “To date there has been no information nor evidence to suggest that the new coronavirus could be transmitted by mosquitoes.” Some infectious diseases, like malaria, can be spread by mosquitoes, but the coronavirus is not among them. (Malaria is largely unknown in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.)

Q: Can hand dryers kill the coronavirus?

A: No, just as a hot bath or hot weather cannot, neither can a hand dryer. You should, however, frequently wash your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds, or rub them with an alcohol-based sanitizer. You can still dry them with a hand dryer, but it provides no extra protection. Of course, you can also use paper towels; in both instances, be thorough.

Q: Can I kill the virus with a UV lamp?

A: According to the WHO, “UV lamps should not be used to sterilize hands or other areas of skin as UV radiation can cause skin irritation.”

To explain this further, according to a BBC story (“Coronavirus: Robots use light beams to zap hospital viruses”), UV-C light can kill bacteria and viruses on surfaces, but requires exposure of 10-20 minutes at intensities that are harmful to humans. UV radiation should not be used to sterilize skin as it can cause skin irritation, says the WHO.

Q: Can I detect if someone has the virus with a thermal scanner?

A: You can detect if someone has a fever with a thermal scanner, but not whether it’s from a virus vs. something else, nor can you detect a virus itself with one. This also means that a person who is infected with the virus but not yet showing a fever will not appear unusual to a thermal scanner.

Q: If I spray myself all over with alcohol or chlorine, will that kill the virus?

A: According to the WHO, “No. Spraying alcohol or chlorine all over your body will

RELIABLE INFORMATION AND UPDATES ABOUT CORONAVIRUS

- CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION: CDC.GOV
- WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION: WHO.INT
- VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH: VDH.VIRGINIA.GOV

not kill viruses that have already entered your body.” It’s still a good idea to use sanitizer or disinfectant wipes as directed, though not in or near any of your mucus membranes, such as your eyes, nose and mouth.

Q: Do pneumonia vaccines protect you against the coronavirus?

A: No. “The virus is so new and different that it needs its own vaccine,” says the WHO, which is supporting research efforts to develop one. Although pneumonia vaccines are not effective against COVID-19, vaccination against respiratory illnesses is highly recommended to protect your health.

Q: Can regularly rinsing your nose with saline help prevent a coronavirus infection?

A: No, there is no evidence that proves this, though there is some that suggests doing so can help people recover from the common cold faster. It does not, however, prevent respiratory infections.

Q: Will eating garlic help prevent infection?

A: While garlic is good for you and may have some antimicrobial properties, “there is no evidence from the current outbreak that eating garlic has protected people from the new coronavirus,” according to the WHO.

In other words, it’s delicious and won’t hurt you (unless you’re allergic or have been instructed by your doctor not to eat it for medical reasons), but it won’t prevent a viral infection.

Q: Does the coronavirus only infect older people?

A: Anyone can become infected with the virus, and it can make anyone ill. However, older people and those with underlying medical conditions, such as respiratory illnesses,

heart disease or diabetes, are more vulnerable to becoming severely ill because of it.

Q: Do antibiotics prevent or treat the coronavirus?

A: No. Antibiotics are effective against bacteria (one-celled organisms), but not against viruses. If you are hospitalized with the virus, you may receive antibiotics if you develop a bacterial infection.

Other Myths

Q: What about all the other stuff I’m seeing online? Does drinking warm water every 15 minutes prevent me from catching the virus? Can I self-test to see if I have it by holding my breath? If garlic won’t kill the virus, can I kill or cure it with herbs?

A: Snopes.com and factcheck.org, websites devoted to unbiased debunking of myths and misinformation, are often useful places to double check against anything you may be seeing and hearing, though again, it’s hard to keep up with every new claim because there are so many of them.

Some false claims include keeping your throat moist or taking a drink of warm water every 15-20 minutes will prevent you from getting the coronavirus. These are not true, though it is true that part of being healthy is staying hydrated, and it’s important to drink plenty of fluids if you get sick.

Likewise, the ability to hold your breath for 20 seconds, another claim that’s making the rounds, is also no sign that you don’t have the coronavirus. The claim often mentions the “Stanford Hospital Board” or some similar entity; Stanford Health Care has stated they have nothing to do with the information and did not generate it.

Part of the reason for the test is to see if you have “pulmonary fibrosis,” which is not a symptom of coronavirus per the CDC and WHO. See these sites for updated info about health misinformation and scams related to the virus.

Additionally, no alternative cures, including herbs or vitamin and mineral supplements, have been validated scientifically, according to the National Institute of Health.

While there is anecdotal evidence that some supplements are helpful to some individuals, there are no repeated, in-depth studies that indicate their efficacy for the broader population. Additionally, there are no federal regulations that guarantee their strength or potency, which can vary from brand to brand.

Some claims floating around say that supplements, such as zinc, echinacea and probiotics, which are associated with strengthening the immune system against ordinary cold and flu viruses (though evidence of this is still weak), can also help fight the coronavirus.

Examine.com, an independent database about supplement research, cautions that, “Nobody knows how these [supplements] apply to COVID-19, since the viruses are completely different. Some supplements could be harmful given all the unknowns involved. Sufficient sleep, stress management, and a diet low in ultra-processed food have a better risk to benefit ratio.”

Examine.com also says on a page devoted to the coronavirus, “For all we know, some supplements could worsen specific manifestations of COVID-19 or interact with potential medications.”

Q: So what do we know to be useful and what can I do?

A: People buy into misinformation because they don’t know it’s not real, and it’s popular because we’re all scared right now, and want to feel like we can fix the problem ourselves, or at least lessen it. That’s totally understandable. However, it’s best to approach the problem armed with facts, not falsehoods.

The only things we know that are scientifically validated are what we’re being told already:

- wash your hands for at least 20 seconds; dry them thoroughly;
- use a hand sanitizer;
- avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, nose and mouth;
- cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze;
- practice social distancing;
- clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily; and
- if you develop fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek out medical attention, but call ahead before you go.

While these steps seem very basic and unexciting, they are our best line of defense against illness until COVID-19 peaks and/or a vaccine or cure is found.



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The GAZETTE



WEEKEND EDITION

DECEMBER 18, 2020

City of Galax • Carroll County • Grayson County



Mass testing sites check for COVID-19

What's it like to get tested?

By SHANNON WATKINS Staff

Everyone is being told to protect themselves from the COVID-19 virus with a mask and social distancing, but what's it like to get tested? Free testings were held this week, on Tuesday at First Baptist Church in Galax and on Thursday at the Carroll County High School

lower lot in Hillsville. Both events were staffed by Virginia National Guard members from all over the state and held by the Mount Rogers Health District.

When you get to the Galax site, where about 180 people will get tested that day, Senior Airman Daniel Murillorodriguez, swaddled in

See TESTING, Page 2A

Capt. Calvin Simo of the Virginia National Guard prepares to administer a test in Galax. Gazette photo by Shannon Watkins

Suspects charged with eluding police, drug crimes



COLLINS KENYON SMITH

Carroll County Sheriff's Department reports arrests

By ETHAN CAMPBELL Staff

Three Virginia residents and one from out of state were arrested this past week for crimes involving illicit substances and eluding police.

Carroll County Sheriff Kevin A. Kemp reported that on Dec. 11 a deputy was on patrol in the Laurel Fork community on Keno Road when a car was observed driving with signs of possible impairment.

According to the report, a traffic stop was initiated near the 1300 block of Keno Road. The driver of the vehicle was identified as Chad Everette Kenyon, 38 of Hillsville. The report states that the deputy checked Kenyon's driving status and was "advised he had an outstanding warrant."

Police placed Kenyon under arrest. "When questioned, [Kenyon] advised he had a glass smoking device in his car he used to smoke methamphetamine," Kemp said.

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Grants aimed at rebuilding local tourism industry

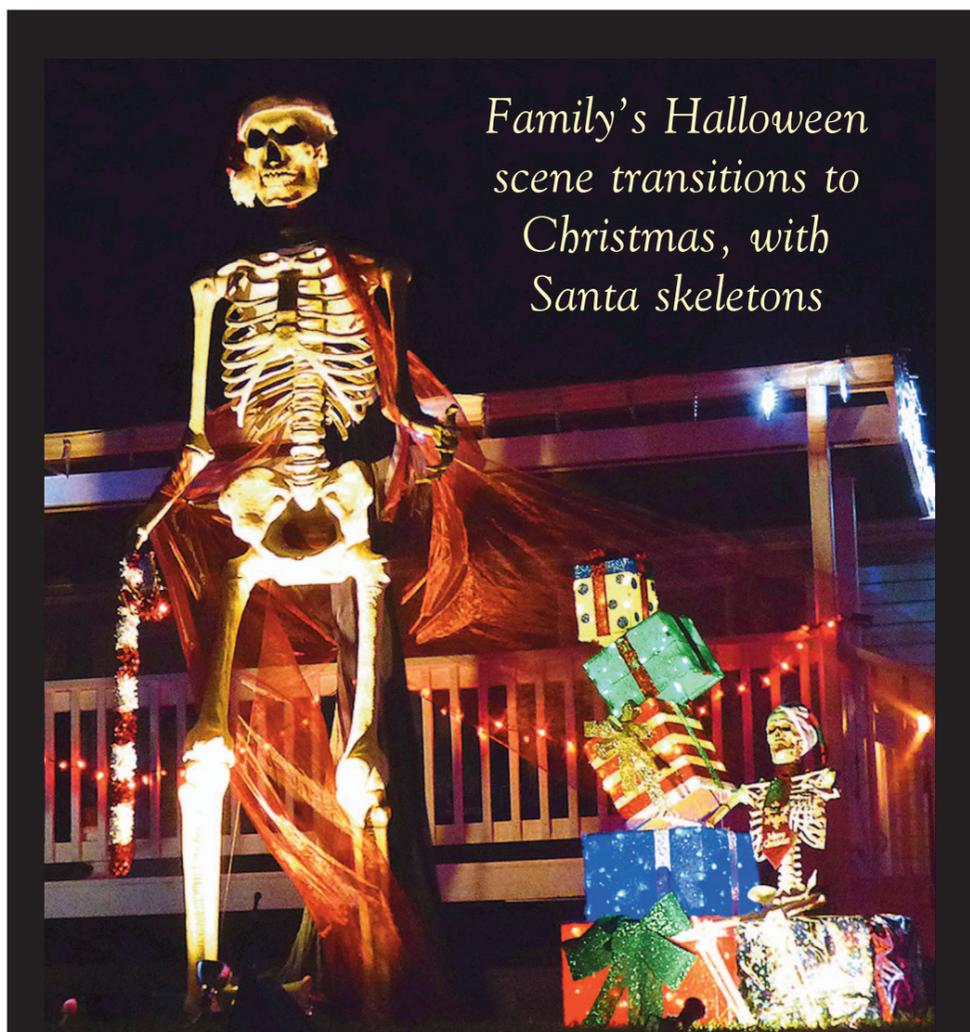
Staff Reports

Grayson County, Blue Ridge Discovery Center, Blue Ridge Parkway Association and The Crooked Road have all received matching grants from the Virginia Tourism Corporation's (VTC) Recovery Marketing Leverage program.

It has been a difficult year for the travel industry, and VTC created the grant program as an effort to support tourism initiatives in responding to and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Grayson's tourism department received \$20,000 for its Ultimate Outdoor Recreation marketing program; the Blue Ridge Discovery Center in Troutdale received \$8,545 for its grand opening

See TOURISM, Page 3A



Family's Halloween scene transitions to Christmas, with Santa skeletons

JINGLE BONES

By SHANNON WATKINS Staff

If you described this year's Spurlin's Christmas Extravaganza as "bare bones," you'd be right in more ways than one.

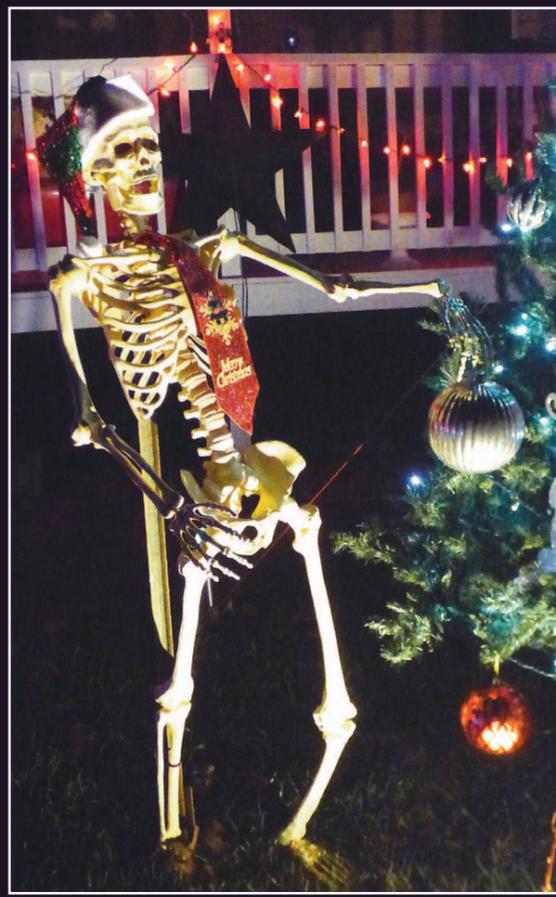
The Spurlin family's Christmas lights display, which is usually much bigger and located on Creekview Drive, is a bit smaller and located on Gambetta Road — where the family usually has its Halloween display up.

However, it's pretty hard to be upset that it's not as grand as usual,

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Festive skeletons in the Spurlin family's yard on Gambetta Road in Galax.

Gazette photos by Shannon Watkins



BBQ contest to return in 2021

After a year off due to the pandemic, Smoke on the Mountain is set to return with sanctions from both major national contests

By SHANNON WATKINS Staff

Smoke on the Mountain — Virginia's official barbecue contest, held annually in Galax — is coming back in 2021.

Twin County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Laura Whitt made the announcement at the Dec. 14 Galax City Council meeting, and said sponsors can get a 10% discount on their sponsorships through Jan. 31, 2021.

The event has been moved forward a week, which also means the Chamber managed to get the Kansas City Barbecue Society back in the mix to sponsor part of the contest. "We are excited to have this sanction back," said Whitt.

The Memphis Barbecue Network competition will still be part of the event as always, she said.

The Chamber is working with Galax City Tourism to bring in more vendors and food trucks, as well as hosting a "refit" event on the main stage (hosted by Galax Xtreme Fitness) and activities for younger children to participate in.

After the meeting, Whitt answered further questions about the event and its planning.

The 2020 event was cancelled due to the pandemic. As far as vaccinations go,

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Testing

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a white gown and wearing both a mask and a face shield, is holding his hands up in the glow of warmth from a twin-bulbed heat lamp. "There" is outside and around back at First Baptist, with soldiers either performing swabs, running testing kits back and forth from the makeshift desk in the fellowship hall to the carside test line, or trying to warm up indoors or in a minivan.

Murillorodriguez will put on fresh gloves when another car drives up. There's already a line, which waxes and wanes. It's about 8:30 a.m.; the event goes until about 4 p.m.

Lt. John Rivera and Staff Sgt. Timothy Pike joke around with one another at the desk as tests are procured fresh and brought back completed by others, but they're never less than meticulous in receiving and cataloguing information. When Justin Haga from the Department of Emergency Management shows up to check on the event and make sure everything's OK and to make sure the soldiers have everything they need... well, everything's OK, and they have everything they need. "We're just glad to be out here and doing something for people," says Rivera.

The drill, from the viewpoint of the person who's actually getting tested, is fairly simple: stop at the first station, where someone with a clipboard — possibly Specialist



Capt. Calvin Simo of the Virginia National Guard prepares to administer a COVID-19 test at the Galax site (left); Specialist Ronnie Stovall (right) and Specialist Asia Jones at the testing site.

Gazette photo by Shannon Watkins

Asia Jones or Specialist Ronnie Stovall — to get your contact information, and ask whether or not you have nasal or sinus problems, if you're on any blood thinning medication or have a clotting disorder, or if you any questions about the test.

Then you pull up after the person ahead of you is done. Murillorodriguez — or, in this case, Capt. Calvin Simo — in a blue gown but equally protected in a mask, face shield and gloves, will speak with you briefly. (You should still be

wearing your mask at this point.)

The test will be brought out to him by someone who's not on a brief warm-up break, and then he'll carefully take the swab out of its sealed tube and ask you to power your mask.

What happens next has been described anywhere from "really painful" to "practically nothing," depending on who you ask. You get warned at the first station that the swab will be inserted deeply for seven to eight seconds. It seems to

go by much faster. It's not comfortable, and your nose will run and your eyes will water, but it provides valuable information and hopefully peace of mind for you.

Then you're done. Simo rehouses the swab in its tube, and you go on about your day while the person behind you is tested. You'll get results in two or three days, though if you test positive, you're told, the lab may call right away.

It's more work to perform as a tester than as the one being tested,

and one of the fastest procedures you'll go through. It's also, possibly, one you won't have to go through again — Breaanne Forbes-Hubbard of Mount Rogers says that hopefully the vaccine will be available before there's another testing event scheduled.

For more information, visit the Mount Rogers Health District website at vdh.virginia.gov/mount-rogers/.

Health official stresses importance of testing, precautions

Testing a week before Christmas "is all about having a safe holiday."

By ETHAN CAMPBELL Staff

HILLSVILLE — The Virginia National Guard and Virginia Department of Health (VDH) reported over 50 COVID-19 tests conducted at the Hillsville location on Thursday.

On the scene, VDH Public Information Officer, Robert Parker also provided health and safety information to the community.

Parker, who has been with the VDH since 2006, said the department is focusing the deployment of testing sites "particularly where we have seen significantly higher rates of positivity and concerns for surge in cases."

Carroll County and Galax — and Southwest Virginia in general — have infection rates higher than the state average.

"This is a testing effort to help folks identify whether or not they are infected with COVID, because as we know many people that are infected with COVID don't show symptoms, Parker said. "They might not even know they're healed, and yet if they are around other people they may be exposing them to the risk."

He said testing now, a week before Christmas, "is all about having a safe holiday."

"The safest thing people can do is celebrate at home with the people that they live with and not travel, and not be with others who are not housemates with them," Parker continued. "We know that's a hard thing, especially at this time of the year, and so we are asking that if people do choose to travel that they remember the precautions that we have advised folks to remember everywhere and all the

times — those being wash your hands, wear a mask, and watch your distance. We call it the 3 Ws."

He said that, in particular, "if you are around people that you don't live with that's especially important to prevent transmission. If you are in a situation like that, we ask that you quarantine for a couple weeks following your return so that if you are exposed or are infected then symptoms will typically develop within that time. Again that's a safety measure to avoid exposing others before you show symptoms."

Some people are either presymptomatic or asymptomatic, he explained. "Presymptomatic means that they are infected but are not showing symptoms yet. Asymptomatic means they are infected and never show symptoms. Taking precautions and staying home is the safest things we want people to remember to protect themselves and the ones they love."

Regarding recent changes to contact tracing protocols, Parker advised that those who know they have been exposed should still contact the health department.

He explained that previously, the health department was expected to contact each and every individual that has been in contact with those who test positive. "As you can imagine those numbers grew exponentially. It has become a matter of resources, and we no longer have the time or the ability to track down every single potential contact for every single case. We are focusing on those that are more likely to fall ill. We are relying on people to help take care of each other."

Parker addressed communities



Virginia National Guard members and Virginia Department of Health workers at the test site at Carroll County High School on Thursday (above). At right, Senior Airman Daniel Murillorodriguez prepares to administer a test.

Gazette photos by Ethan Campbell (above) and Shannon Watkins (right)

across the Mount Rogers Health District. "We know what works and we ask for everyone's help in protecting each other. It's a very difficult time for businesses, we recognize that. It's a terrible time to be a small business owner, or a restaurant owner, or just be someone who wants to spend time with their loved ones. We understand this."

Still, Parker stressed "our responsibility to take care of those around us. We ask people to remember these simple precautions that allow businesses to stay open, children to stay in school, and for us to continue to be able to worship so that we can eventually get back to a time where we can be together more comfortably."



Arrests

Continued from Page 1A

The report states that a search of the vehicle was conducted and that "multiple glass smoking deciders with white residue, a plastic bag with a white crystalline substance, and a set of scales" was discovered inside.

Kenyon was transported to a magistrate, where a warrant was obtained and served for possession of Schedule I or II drug. The outstanding warrant was also served, and he was later transported to the New River Valley Regional Jail and held without bond.

On Dec. 12, a deputy was on patrol in the Cana community of Carroll County on Wards Gap Road when a pickup truck was observed traveling south with no registration displayed.

The report states that as the deputy turned around to initiate a traffic stop on the vehicle, it began to elude at a high rate of speeds and that "after losing sight of the truck, the deputy turned back north at Epworth Road."

Near Tilley's Store, the deputy once again observed the truck traveling south on Wards Gap Road and turned around in pursuit, the report said. "Blackmarks and white smoke were observed as the truck had exited the roadway and attempted to

hide near a residence."

While approaching the vehicle, the driver attempted to exit; three other occupants were inside. The driver was taken into custody and identified as Keith Wright, 35, of Cana.

According to the report, Wright "stated that he ran because his driver's license was revoked."

The front seat passenger, identified as Taylor Thomas Collins, 24, of Ararat was found to have multiple outstanding warrants and was taken into custody. A backseat passenger, identified as Jonathan Marcus Smith, 30, of Mount Airy, N.C., was found to have an outstanding warrant out of Surry County, N.C., and was taken into custody. The other passenger was released from the scene.

The three in custody were taken before a magistrate where warrants were obtained and served. Wright was charged with eluding police, reckless driving and driving on a revoked license. Collins was served with his outstanding warrants. Smith was charged with being a fugitive from justice for the outstanding North Carolina warrant.

All three were transported to the regional jail. No photo was available for Wright.

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These animals are waiting for homes at the Galax-Carroll-Grayson Regional Animal Shelter, at 201 Fair St. in Galax. Hours are 1-5 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 1-4 p.m. Friday-Saturday. For more information, call 236-8501. Strays without collars are held five days before they are available for adoption. Strays with collars are held for 10 days. The owners of animals with tags are contacted immediately. Animals become available for adoption on a first-come, first-served basis.

MORE ANIMALS CAN BE FOUND AT THE GALAX ANIMAL SHELTER PAGE ON FACEBOOK



Valerie Rives of Galax (left) worked as an assistant to legendary actress and singer Liza Minnelli in the 1990s.

Theater community remembers Valerie Rives

Friends from NYC to L.A. to Galax celebrate Rives' life

By SHANNON WATKINS
Staff

Valerie Ann Gardner Rives was born in Covington on Feb. 22, 1953, and died in Winston-Salem, N.C. on Dec. 17, 2020, at age 67.

In between these dates, Rives lived the life of a theater professional with wit, patience, a generous heart and a keen eye for talent that she helped actors coax out of themselves. Her loss is felt far beyond Galax, from New York to Houston to Los Angeles, where she worked as an assistant to the legendary Liza Minnelli.

She is survived by her husband, Michael Rives of Galax; her sister, Rene Revene, and brother, Jeff Gardner, both of Richmond.

Rives lived in Galax until she was about 8; then her family moved to Richmond, where she grew up. In recent years, she had returned to Galax and worked in the local arts community.

Everyone who talked about Rives spoke of her big heart, and all of them came close to tears at least once when describing her.

See RIVES, Page 3A



Say goodbye to 2020 (or good riddance) with fireworks in Galax

Staff Report

Ready to wave a heartfelt goodbye to 2020? You're not alone.

Galax City Tourism and High Country Lights are pairing to bring the community a "Goodbye 2020 Fireworks" event on New Year's Eve.

The display is free and open to the public, and will be held on Dec. 31 at 10 p.m. in Felts Park.

All are welcome, but please remember to wear a mask and practice safe social distancing.

Grayson looks back at 2020

County officials also detail 2021 plans, pandemic status

By SHAINA STOCKTON
Staff

INDEPENDENCE — The Grayson County Board of Supervisors closed out the year with an update on COVID-19 numbers, a look ahead at 2021 and a look back on what the county has managed to accomplish in spite of the year's unique

series of obstacles.

The board on Dec. 10 heard an update on the county's COVID-19 status from Emergency Services Coordinator Paul Hoyle. He said the county experienced a "substantial" surge in cases in the weeks after Thanksgiving.

"We are seeing increases in all categories, no particular place it is coming from

specifically, just community-wide spread," Hoyle said. "So all of us need to be doing everything we can to maintain social distancing. We need to wear masks, avoid public spaces and do everything we can in the next few weeks to avoid further spread."

See GRAYSON, Page 2A

Healthcare workers receive vaccinations



Protecting the frontlines of the pandemic fight

By SHANNON WATKINS
Staff

When Sandy Jones, a Galax dental technician, stepped into the COVID-19 vaccination clinic at the Rec Center on Monday afternoon, there were plenty of Virginia Department of Health (VDH) employees and Medical Reserve Corps volunteers, all masked and shielded, ready to help her.

The clinic was the first in the Twin Counties but more are to come. It was a closed clinic, only open to people in what the Centers for Disease Control has designated Group 1a — healthcare workers and long-term care facility patients. The groups were created to prioritize those who are most vulnerable to infection. Eventually, as each group is vaccinated, the clinics will become open to the general public.

What might you expect when it's your turn? Here's what Jones experienced:

Jones was stopped at the first table — there were several scattered at safe distances about the first-floor gymnasium, each with its own purpose — and had her temperature taken, along with being asked basic COVID screening questions, such as if she'd been around someone who had the virus or was exhibiting symptoms.

See VACCINE, Page 2A



Top: Sandy Jones, a dental technician in Galax (right) receives her COVID-19 vaccination from a VDH nurse on Monday.

Above: Jones receives post-shot information from volunteer Melissa Peddy (left).

Gazette photos by Shannon Watkins

Suspects sought in Fairview break-in

Police seek help from community

By SHAINA STOCKTON
Staff

FAIRVIEW — The Grayson County Sheriff's Department is asking the community to be on the lookout for suspects in a Dec. 10 break-in at a home in the Fairview area.

According to the sheriff's report, officers responded to the scene of an active burglary at a residence in the Fairview area on Dec. 10 around 1 p.m.

The report summarized that a male juvenile was home alone and called 911 when he noticed that someone was breaking into the home. The juvenile described a suspect as a Black male wearing a black hat, a black jacket and a COVID mask.

After calling 911, the juvenile hid in his room, according to the report.

See SUSPECTS, Page 2A

Child advocacy center to locate at Joy Ranch

Office provides services for victims of abuse and neglect

Staff Report

Twin County Community Foundation has awarded \$10,000 to the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) in Roanoke, which will enable Children's Trust to add a local CAC at Joy Ranch Home for Children in Carroll County.

This local office "will allow staff to see and be a part of the community, have a well-rounded understanding of services available, and strengthen trust and our col-

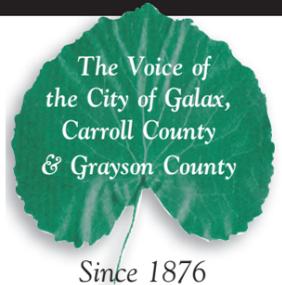
See ADVOCACY, Page 3A

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Grayson

Continued from Page 1A

As of the meeting date, Hoyle added that he was concerned about hospital space, because intensive care units were at 85% capacity in Southwest Virginia.

Hoyle advised everyone to remain vigilant as the community moved through the holiday season.

Supervisor John Fant asked Hoyle how he counts cases in the Grayson County area.

"Every day, I look at two different sets of data. One is the department of health, and that is data that is not protected," Hoyle said. "It has been cleaned up so there is nothing that can be traced back to any individual. And while those sources are the same, there's a delay until the data is aggregated. So we might see nine cases today on the Virginia Department of Health website, but if you look at that same day weeks from now it might be different."

The other set of data is the actual case data from the health department, Hoyle said. "They are more exact for us locally because I am looking at specific case data, and we get this information so we can protect our emergency responders and those who are still interacting with the public."

Fant asked Hoyle what the impact has been on the area's first responders.

"There has been a definite impact on operations in all of the Southwest Virginia region, but also particularly in Grayson County," Hoyle responded. "We are a volunteer system here in Grayson, with relatively small EMS agencies who handle our case load. We don't have a large number of providers, and any who are positive and have to be taken out of play, even if they're not symptomatic, has a significant impact on operations."

Continuing, Hoyle explained that this was another area where case numbers struck hard in the weeks after the Thanksgiving holiday.

"Right now, thankfully, we have enough [personnel], and some get help from other agencies. And leadership has been willing to stand up and do what it takes to make sure all of our county calls are covered," Hoyle assured.

"I think this is important for the public as a reminder to stay vigilant and do the right thing," Fant said. "When we call 911, we want someone to show up; but if we don't take care of each other, that person might not show up at all."

Chairman Kenneth Belton thanked Hoyle for his work, stating, "You're doing a good job and our volunteers are doing a good job."

2020 Accomplishments

County Administrator Bill Shepley closed out the board meeting with a brief summary of what the county accomplished in 2020.

"As we all know, 2020 has been a great challenging year for our nation, the commonwealth and our county; but we have seen significant accomplishments," he began.

First, Shepley highlighted the efforts made in the county's broadband expansion project. "The work has begun, and through these efforts, Grayson County will be transformed from the least-connected in the commonwealth to one of the most-connected in the nation," said Shepley.

"We also secured MetalWorx in the former Core Health and Fitness building this year, through our partnership with the Town of Independence. We hope to see this business offer as many as 40 new jobs to our area," Shepley continued. "We also worked successfully with River Ridge Meats on their expansion plans, with 20-40 new jobs coming through that partnership."

Food City, another business in Independence, also finalized an agreement to expand its store to include a deli, and potentially more than 20 new jobs, Shepley said.

"We worked closely to bring accessible healthcare to our area. The county worked out a deal with Tri-Area Community Health Partnership, and we will open a former doctors' office in Grant to serve as a satellite provider for the people of Grayson County in 2021," Shepley announced.

Looking Forward

Turning to projects coming up in 2021, the administrator shared his excitement for the county's work with the old Mount Rogers School.

"This icon of our county is something we want to keep as part of our history and our future. There was a creation of a plan to revitalize the original portion of Mount Rogers School, to develop a welcome, performance and heritage center. Virginia Tech is working with us to make that vision a reality, and we are hoping to move that forward over the next few months," Shepley said.

Finally, Shepley noted that the county is hiring a project director for the Baywood Technical Center.

"We have laid the foundation for a tremendous amount of growth economically. As we recover from COVID-19, we are poised to expand and improve. There may have been COVID-19 here, but we have progressed at a rapid rate and there are great things on the horizon for us," said Shepley.



SHEPLEY



Sandy Jones checks in for her COVID-19 vaccination on Dec. 28 at a Virginia Department of Health clinic at the Galax Recreation Center, which was set up for healthcare workers.

Gazette photo by Shannon Watkins

Vaccine

Continued from Page 1A

(She answered "No" to anything troubling and her temperature was in the acceptable range.)

Jones was then sent to one of two registration tables for more questions, and confirmed she hadn't already had the vaccine, nor did she have any allergies that would interfere with her receiving it. Patients also are asked if they're pregnant or breastfeeding, if applicable.

Then Jones was ushered further back to one of two vaccine stations, where she was seated for the shot itself, administered by a nurse who was given special VDH training. Even nurses who already know how to inject a patient must receive the training and pass before being allowed to perform this duty at a clinic.

Jones rolled up her sleeve, and from there it was like any other shot: an alcohol swab, a needle injection, a piece of gauze pressed against the injection site after the needle was removed, and it was all over. The entire process from entering the clinic to removing the needle took about 10 minutes and was only notable for how mundane it felt.

There was one more part: Jones spoke with an exit volunteer who made sure she was feeling well afterwards. The volunteer on this shift was Melissa Peddy, who also serves as a Galax School Board member.

"Did it go OK?" Peddy asked, genuinely curious.

"Yeah," said Jones. "It didn't even really hurt."

Still, they kept to the protocol – Jones was asked to have a seat on a folding chair for 15 minutes, just to make sure she was well. If she felt dizzy, there was juice available, but she said she felt fine.

Peddy gave her an info sheet on the CDC's "V-Safe" program, which asks subjects to register online and report their experience, including side effects, if they have any.

Dr. Karen Shelton, director of the Mount Rogers Health District, was also on site and discussed the clinic and the vaccine.

"Healthcare providers are being hit by COVID; they're at the highest risk," said Shelton, of how the CDC decided to rank the vaccine's recipients.

Both versions of the vaccine require a second shot to be fully effective, said Shelton; the Moderna vaccine in 28 days; the Pfizer vaccine in only 21.

She noted that the vaccine being administered at these clinics via the health department is from Moderna, which does not require ultracold storage conditions. Because of this requirement, the Pfizer vaccine is largely being distributed to hospitals and other facilities that have the capacity for such storage, she said.

The Moderna and the Pfizer vaccines are "very similar, they're both the relatively newer type of vaccine, called the messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine," she noted. "It's pretty exciting that two companies came to develop the same type of vaccine."

Monday's clinic was one of three that day; the others were in Washington and Wythe counties. The timetable for upcoming clinics should be released soon, Shelton said; and members of Group 1a will not necessarily have received the second injection before Group 1b receives their first (they'll also be notified of the clinic when the time comes).

"We'll advertise once it's open to the community," Shelton said.

TCRH receives vaccine for frontline workers

Twin County Regional Healthcare has received an initial allocation of COVID-19 vaccines and is in the process of distributing them in accordance with prioritization guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the federal government and Virginia Department of Health (VDH).

Vaccine administration began with frontline workers and physicians, and TCRH had administered 264 vaccines as of Dec. 22, according to a news release.

Dr. Panid Borhanjoo, hospitalist at TCRH, volunteered to be the first to receive the vaccine. "We have fought this battle for almost a year and have lost 300-plus thousand innocent lives to this deadly virus. It is time for each of us to set the example, trust science and come together with a goal of vaccinating the entire community," said Dr. Borhanjoo.

"The vaccine allotment is not available for the public at this time, but, once the vaccine becomes more broadly available, we will strongly encourage our community to get vaccinated," said Gregory Pearson, CEO of TCRH.

Shelton said.

What happens if you take the vaccine while you have the virus? First of all, notes Shelton, if you know you have it, you shouldn't come in; but getting the vaccination while the virus is active in your system won't hurt you.

However, it won't really help that particular round of illness, either; it doesn't act like Tamiflu or any other medication that treats symptoms.

"It gives future immunity," said Shelton. "We recommend that you wait until 90 days after your diagnosis to get the vaccine, because we do feel that you have some natural antibodies during that 90 days. So when you hit the 90-day mark, you're eligible."

Already, the tracking of aftereffects has been deployed, said Shelton. "One person about an hour later [after the injection] last week got a little lightheaded and had to lay down for a little while," she said. "It was one of our staff. And I did receive a call from a gentleman today who said he did feel a little tingly and confused for a while, but after three hours he woke up from a nap and felt perfectly fine. The CDC does track all side effects from it. They want to know."

A video released earlier this month by Carilion Clinic indicated that usually anyone who is going to feel side effects from the vaccination – which it stressed were rare – would most likely feel them after the second injection, but they should pass fairly soon.

Most people, however, likely won't notice much of anything.

Jones left after an uneventful wait. "I don't feel any different," she said. "My arm's not sore. It's not a painful injection; I'd recommend it to anyone."



Firefighters battle outbuilding blaze

No casualties or injuries were reported in a structure fire on Taylorwood Road at 6:13 p.m. on Dec. 15, according to the Galax Volunteer Fire Department. An outbuilding connected to two other buildings caught fire; the building contained tools, a mower and a Chevy truck. Homeowners were in their residence at the time, said firefighter Chris Hennis.

Suspects

Continued from Page 1A

Surveillance cameras at the residence were obtained, and the video shows two suspects entering the home by breaking out a window pane on the door.

While on scene, Carroll County Sheriff's Department deputies engaged in a vehicle chase with a motorcycle nearby, with a suspect partially matching the clothing description of one of the suspects. No apprehension was made, according to the sheriff's report.

The case is still under investigation, and any help with the identification of the suspects is appreciated, police said. The Grayson County Sheriff's Office can be contacted by phone at (276) 773-3241.



A photo taken from a security camera shows two men entering a Fairview home. Police are asking for the community's help in identifying them.

Grayson County Sheriff's Office photo

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