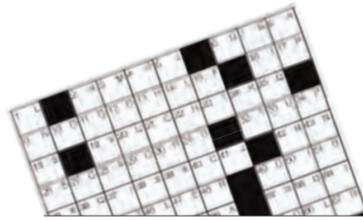


SOFTBALL: BULLDOGS VARSITY TEAM ENDS BEFORE IT BEGINS » SPORTS



EXTRA FUN IN BACK » B3-5B

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

THE VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY FOR 130 YEARS

Sunday, April 5, 2020 • MARTINSVILLEBULLETIN.COM • Martinsville, Virginia \$2



Martinsville Fire and EMS responding to the intersection of Moss St. and Market St. on the night John Vincent Eames was struck and killed as he tried to cross the road. BILL WYATT/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

They want his death to bring light

John Vincent Eames tried to cross the blind intersection of Moss and Market streets on a rainy, foggy night. He didn't make it. His family wants two things for their loss: a stoplight installed by the city and an apology from the driver whose car struck him.



BILL WYATT/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN
Donna Acuna-Rivera at her home on S. Barton Street.



BILL WYATT/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN
Mae Woodruff, John Vincent Eames' sister and caregiver.

By Bill Wyatt
bill.wyatt@martinsvillebulletin.com

On a rainy, foggy night in October, a man out looking for his sister tried to cross a busy intersection of Market Street in Martinsville and was struck by a car and killed.

John Vincent Eames, 79, was attempting to traverse Market at Moss Street when an eastbound 2011 Chevrolet Cobalt driven by Tammy Marie Hines, 39, of Ridgeway ran over him.

Family members said it appeared to them Eames had been dragged about seven or eight feet down the street by the Cobalt.

The 911 Communications Center dispatched the Martinsville



BILL WYATT/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN
A gold mop cypress tree at Moss and Market Streets hinder visibility. This was the point where John Vincent Eames entered Market Street on foot and was struck and killed.

SEE **LIGHTS** | A9

CORONAVIRUS

Henry woman exposed to virus

Testing site at Speedway opens Wednesday.

By Holly Kozelsky
holly.kozelsky@martinsvillebulletin.com

The woman with Henry County's third confirmed case of the coronavirus appears to have contracted it from someone at home.

A woman in her 40s was tested for COVID-19 on Tuesday. The positive results of her test were reported to the West Piedmont Health District of the Virginia Department of Health at 8:17 p.m. Wednesday, according to Nancy Bell, the district's Population Health Manager.

The woman developed symptoms consistent with COVID-19 on Saturday, Bell said. On Sunday, she had "exposure to known household COVID-19 case," Bell's report stated.

On Monday morning the Virginia Department of Health reported the first case of coronavirus in Henry County: a man in his 50's, who was recuperating at home. It was not known if his case was acquired locally or through travel.

SEE **VIRUS** | A7

MORE ON THE VIRUS

» VDE comes up with a way to allow graduation. A3
» Sovah-Martinsville looks for donations. A5
» Expanded coronavirus coverage. A6-8
» For the latest updates on canceled events, visit www.martinsvillebulletin.com.

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WEATHER

Today will contain some sun, with a shower and then turning cloudy.
72 HIGH | 48 LOW
For detailed weather information, see Page A2

Plan ahead for using your federal relief.

Page A7



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3 arrested in unrelated crimes in Patrick County

Break-ins and weapons charges lead to arrest of an adult and two juveniles.

By Bill Wyatt
bill.wyatt@martinsvillebulletin.com

Patrick County authorities have arrested two people believed to be involved in an attempted break-in in the Fairystone area.

Patrick County Sheriff Dan Smith said video surveillance captured two individuals trying multiple times to break-in at the 57 Pit Stop on March 26, at approximately 6:30 a.m.



Nicholas Giles Cameron

The pair tried pulling open the door with a strap tied to a vehicle and fired into the door with a shotgun. When they failed to gain access to the building, they left.

Around 10:30 that night, Master Deputy Winfred made a traffic stop, and

the two people in the vehicle were armed with two sawed-off shotguns.

The guns and vehicle were seized, and police arrested Nicholas Giles Cameron, 21, address unknown, and a juvenile whose name and age was not released.

Cameron has been charged with attempted breaking and entering with a deadly weapon and possession burglary tools and has been held without bond in the Patrick County jail.

Petitions against the juvenile have been obtained for attempted breaking

and entering with a deadly weapon and possession of a sawed-off shotgun.

Smith said more weapons charges are expected to be filed.

In an unrelated case, a juvenile from North Carolina has been charged with multiple felonies, including carjacking, armed robbery and breaking and entering, related to an incident at a residence on Little Dan River Road in Claudville on March 28.

Smith said shortly after noon someone kicked open the door of the house, and a female inside threatened the person with

a knife. The person fled in a vehicle with two other people in it.

Smith said the juvenile who has been charged had been involved in an ongoing dispute with a man who lives at the house.

After fleeing the scene, the car with the three people in it stopped by the side of the road less than a mile away, and one of the three stole a truck and, at gunpoint, robbed a man who was mowing nearby.

The following day, a Guilford County deputy in North Carolina spotted the stolen truck and conduct-

ed a traffic stop. The same juvenile was found to be driving and was arrested without incident.

Smith said because the person is a juvenile, the extradition process is more difficult than it is with an adult.

Commonwealth's Attorney Stephanie Vipperman is now working with the the Guilford County District Attorney's Office to bring the juvenile back to Virginia to face the felony charges, Smith said.

Bill Wyatt is a reporter for the Martinsville Bulletin. He can be reached at 276-638-8801, Ext. 236. Follow him @billwyatt

BRIEFLY Fieldale man charged with assault

A Fieldale man is in the New River Valley Regional Jail under no bond after being

charged Tuesday with assault and battery at the West-End Delmart on West



Hoover Ray Meeks, Jr.

Main Street in Radford.

Hoover Ray Meeks, Jr. is suspected of threatening store employees with a knife, Radford Police reported. Meeks left before police arrived, but he was stopped and arrested a short time later. Meeks was charged with three counts of assault and battery and one count of reckless driving.

Meeks appeared in Radford General District Court on Thursday and was assigned a public defender. He is due back in court on June 18.

Road projects

» Work began March 18 on U.S. 220 East to include trench widening and he addition of rumble strips and guardrails from Dyer Street to the Franklin County Line. Work is scheduled to be completed by Oct. 23.

» A portion of Cox Road will be closed to through traffic for approximately 500 feet from Morgan Ford Road for a pipe replacement. A detour is in place. This project should be completed by next Monday.

» Installation will begin in

Bill Wyatt of the Martinsville Bulletin staff contributed to this report.

Lights

From Page A1

Fire and EMS, describing Eames as bleeding from the head. Rescue workers transporting him to Sovah-Martinsville notified dispatch that Eames was unconscious. He was pronounced dead at the hospital.

There is no traffic signal at the intersection of Market and Moss, despite prior requests to install one there. Visibility can be obscured by dim lighting and other factors.

Police reports indicate Hines may have been exceeding the 30 mph limit based on her admission, but no citation was issued, and Martinsville Commonwealth's Attorney Andrew Hall declined to file charges after investigating the case.

Those two factors have only brought anguish, frustration and unanswered questions to the family of John Vincent Eames, who died while searching for his sister who was sleeping at her daughter's house nearby, crossing at an intersection the family already had complained was dangerous.

Looking for his sister

His family called Eames simply John.

He lived with his sister, Mae Woodruff, at 110 Gravelly St. She was his caregiver.

"He was mentally disabled," said Donna Acuna-Rivera, Eames' niece. "He liked to argue."

On the night Eames died, he was picking at Woodruff for an argument. "He wouldn't let me sleep," Woodruff said.

Acuna-Rivera is Woodruff's daughter. She lives at 300 S. Barton St., about a 3-minute walk from Woodruff's house on Gravelly Street, and Woodruff had gone to Acuna-Rivera's house to get some rest.

When Eames realized Woodruff wasn't at home, he left her house and went outside to look for her. A steady rain had begun to let up, but a heavy fog had descended over the area.

Woodruff's home is less than 500 feet south of the intersection of Moss and Market streets. Eames was crossing when the Cobalt, traveling east, came over the rise and struck him.

The crash

Martinsville Police investigated the crash, and Lt. Ben Peters, Sgt. Robbie Jones and Sgt. Chris Bell of the accident team reconstructed the scene.

"In cases of fatal accidents, we consult the Commonwealth's Attorney for the determination of what charges to place," Deputy Chief of Police



This diagram was part of the crash report involving the pedestrian fatality of John Vincent Eames

Robert Fincher said.

And Hall decided not to charge the driver at all.

The crash report, obtained by the Martinsville Bulletin, included three boxes for the elements of speed as contributing information in the incident. One is for the posted speed limit, another is for the speed of the involved vehicle just before the crash, and there is a box for the maximum safe speed based on conditions.

According to Virginia law, the maximum safe speed can be less than the posted speed limit if there is inclement weather, road construction or a road defect, and a motorist can be found liable for negligence even if they are observing the speed limit but exceeding the maximum safe speed.

In the crash report involving Eames, the speed limit is listed as 30 mph. Despite wet road conditions, light rain and fog, the maximum safe speed was listed the same as the speed limit — 30 mph.

The speed before the crash is listed as 40 mph, an admission by Hines to officers. There were no tire marks, no independent speed measuring devices in use at the scene and no witnesses.

Fincher said that regardless of the road conditions and the excessive speed admitted to by the driver, the physical evidence did not indicate that speed was the cause of the crash.

The report did not indicate how far the Cobalt traveled after striking Eames, but according to Drive and Stay Alive, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing road safety information, the possible breaking distance on a wet road at 30 mph is 90 feet and the overall stopping distance can be 120 feet.

At 40 mph those figures are increased to 160 feet and 200 feet, respectively.

"It was raining, and she was coming off of work," Hall said of Hines.

"There was no evidence of speeding. The evidence has to corroborate the confession."

Hall explained that if there were no witnesses at the time of the crash, then even if the driver confessed to exceeding the speed limit there would have to be evidence to

support the admission.

Why no signal?

"It was a dark night, and the gentleman was dressed in dark clothes and had a black umbrella," Martinsville City Council Member Danny Turner said at a council meeting on Feb. 11. "He was elderly and didn't get around so good."

"That is kind of a blind spot both ways. You better have your giddy-up and ready-to-go when you get there."

Turner said this in response to Acuna-Rivera, who went to City Council's meeting specifically to appeal to officials to install a traffic signal light at the intersection where her uncle was killed.

"I come before you praying that you will take into consideration putting a spotlight or some kind of warning signal at the intersection of Moss and Market street," Acuna-Rivera said. "There have been numerous wrecks and [now] one fatality [Eames]."

Acuna-Rivera and Woodruff had accumulated 178 signatures from people in the area who agreed something should be done to make the intersection safer.

"My grandchildren, when they went to school, their bus almost got hit. Am I going to have to watch my great-grandchildren and their bus almost get hit there?" Acuna-Rivera said.

Hall said, although he found no evidence worthy of charging the driver, after discussing the case with the accident team, he became convinced something needed to be done.

"There needs to be a traffic light there. It needs to be better lit, and the big ol' bush there needs to be cut back," Hall said.

The intersection

The intersection appears mundane enough. W. Market Street runs almost due north and south at the point where it intersects with Moss Street S. running east and west. On the west side of the intersection Gravelly Street intersects with Moss Street S., less than 20 feet from W. Market Street.

Gravelly, Moss and Market are separated by a small grassy area where a thick gold mop cypress

tree stands.

This tree makes it difficult for drivers on Moss approaching Market from the south to see vehicles approaching the intersection from the north and vice versa.

It was exactly at this point of the intersection where Eames attempted to cross Market Street.

Fincher says the crash data at this intersection shows no accidents in 2016, one accident with no injuries in 2017, one accident with minor injury in 2018 and then the fatality involving Eames last year.

"The fatality with Mr. Eames is the only accident in that intersection that involved a pedestrian," Fincher said.

Not enough traffic

Martinsville City Manager Leon Towarnicki says the city will look at the intersection again and evaluate possible options, but it is not the first time officials have considered options for making that intersection safer.

"About ten years ago we did a traffic signal study there," Towarnicki said.

The Martinsville Bulletin obtained a copy of that study, which was presented to City Council in February 2009.

The Public Works Department counted traffic and determined about 11,000 vehicles traveled through the intersection each weekday. That number dropped to 7,500 on the weekends.

Average speed for the vehicles counted was 33 to 34 mph, with a posted speed limit of 30.

There were 11 reported accidents at the intersection between 2004 and 2008, and none involved pedestrians.

Towarnicki described the numbers as "fairly light for a four-lane street" and did not recommend a traffic light be installed.

It was noted in the report that a traffic light, 11 years ago, would cost the city approximately \$35,000.

"Traffic count and accident data were reviewed and compared against Federal Highway Administration criteria to see if the intersection met any of indicators for possible consideration for signalization," Towarnicki said, but none of the criteria were met. "While the intersection is perceived to be somewhat problematic at the local level, in comparison to generally accepted and widely used traffic engineering standards, the intersection simply doesn't have sufficient traffic volume or accident history to justify the expense of signalization."

At the City Council meeting in February, Towarnicki advised the members that the administration is "still looking to see if there might be safety improvements, warn-

ing lights, signage, street markings or combinations that might be worth considering to improve awareness and safety of motorists and pedestrians."

Martinsville Mayor Kathy Lawson pointed out that Market Street and Moss Street "is the only intersection on Market that does not have a traffic light."

Said Acuna-Rivera: "There isn't even a crosswalk in the area. You can't see on either side."

"I told them [city officials] there needs to be a stop light or rumble strip, but they said it wasn't feasible — not enough traffic."

'Never heard a word'

Four days after Acuna-Rivera spoke before city council, another wreck occurred at the intersection of Moss and Market, and she was there taking pictures with her cellphone.

She did not learn of the details of the crash, and because there was no record of the wreck, details were not available from police.

"When my uncle got hit, the car drug his body after it hit him," Acuna-Rivera said. "My 10-year-old granddaughter was the first one to see it."

"I've been trying for five years to have a light put there. You can't see over the hills coming up to Moss and Market."

"People speed up coming up the hill and don't think about somebody crossing the road. They just think about getting up the hill."

Court records indicate Hines has a record of traffic infractions.

She was found guilty in Henry County General District Court for failing to stop for a school bus in 2011.

In 2016 she was found guilty in Martinsville General District Court of going 54 in a 35 mph zone and in Henry County in February 2019 for going 58 in a 45 mph zone.

On Nov. 26, less than a month after she struck and killed Eames, she was charged in Henry County with failure to yield the right-of-way. She was found guilty in absentia in Henry County General District Court in December and paid the court \$246 last month.

The Bulletin was unable to reach Hines via various telephone numbers or by visiting a house where she has resided, and neither has Eames' family heard from her since that foggy night when Hines found him in her path.

"She hasn't even bothered to say she was sorry," Woodruff said. "We've never heard a word from her."

Bill Wyatt is a reporter for the Martinsville Bulletin. He can be reached at 276-638-8801, Ext. 236. Follow him @billwyatt

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Wednesday, August 5, 2020 • MARTINSVILLEBULLETIN.COM • Martinsville, Virginia \$1.50

They're going to town for the city

The new group Uptown Partnership aims to revitalize uptown Martinsville, starting with reacquiring Virginia Main Street designation.

By Holly Kozelsky
holly.kozelsky@martinsvillebulletin.com

Uptown Partnership, a new non-profit organization, aims to inject some new life into uptown Martinsville.

The mission of Uptown Partnership, as stated on its website, is "to create a vibrant, attractive, adaptive, and charming Uptown District that is welcoming to visitors, residents, and investors, by:

- » Increasing the stock of high-quality housing options.
- » Championing the development of diverse businesses, entertainment, and dining options.
- » Improving the visitor experience.
- » Supporting the rehabilitation of existing buildings and

SEE **UPTOWN** | A7



PHOTO SUBMITTED

City council member Jennifer Bowles (in front) and Social Butterfly director Jailyn Draper (behind her) take part in Thursday's Uptown Vision Walk. Notes about uptown from the 40 participants are being used to guide Uptown Partnership in its efforts to revitalize uptown Martinsville.

Martinsville eyes fix for deadly corner



BILL WYATT/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Cross in remembrance of John Eames at the intersection where he died.

The intersection of Market and Moss streets in Martinsville is where John Vincent Eames, 79, was struck and killed by an oncoming motorist in October. Residents, including his family, for years have been trying to have a traffic signal or improvements made there.

By Bill Wyatt
bill.wyatt@martinsvillebulletin.com

Martinsville officials are appealing to the Virginia Department of Transportation to help make an intersection safer almost nine months after a resident died there while crossing the street.

John Vincent Eames, 79, was struck and killed by an oncoming motorist in October at the intersection of Market Street and Moss Street.

Although the driver of the vehicle admitted to officers she was driving over the speed limit at the time of the incident, Commonwealth Attorney Andrew Hall declined to press charges, saying there was no evidence to support her admission.

But a lot of people have blamed the intersection. In February, Donna Acuna-Rivera, Eames' niece, presented Martinsville City Council with 178 signatures from people in the area who agreed something should be done to make the intersection safer, which is in a curve and has obstructed sight lines.

SEE **DEADLY** | A6



BILL WYATT/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Martinsville Fire and EMS responding to the intersection of Moss and Market streets on the night John Vincent Eames was struck and killed as he tried to cross the road.

Translating his trauma for all

From pillow to pages: Former Henry County resident Lee Houston has translated his PTSD experiences from Vietnam into a book.

By Amie Knowles
Special to the Bulletin

It's not a take you often hear, but Vietnam veteran and former Henry County resident Lee Houston said he was excited when he signed up to fight overseas.

Ever since his ancestors came to America in 1630, each generation performed service to the country through the military. Even though he was three and a half years into a 4-year college degree when action started heating up in Vietnam in the mid-1960s, Houston said, he

knew it was time to follow in the family tradition.

He was 21, a student at North Carolina State University, and he worked out a deal to finish out the semester. In January 1966 Houston found himself in the United States Army.

Like many veterans of Vietnam Houston fought tough fights, endured traumatic experiences and returned home with many nightmares embedded in his psyche. He also came home to a country that didn't appreciate the war or the men who were fighting it.

And, like many veterans with those experiences, he developed post traumatic stress disorder, which through therapy led him to write and publish his memoirs about the war as his way of telling the stories of the tens of thousands who fought and died in South Vietnam.

"An Enlisted Man's Point of View: Lessons Learned in the 1990s" was published last month.

Houston now lives in Galax, where he is a Methodist minister, but you may recognize his name from the six years (1986-1991) he spent as general manager of Pulaske Furniture's division in Ridge-

SEE **BOOK** | A7

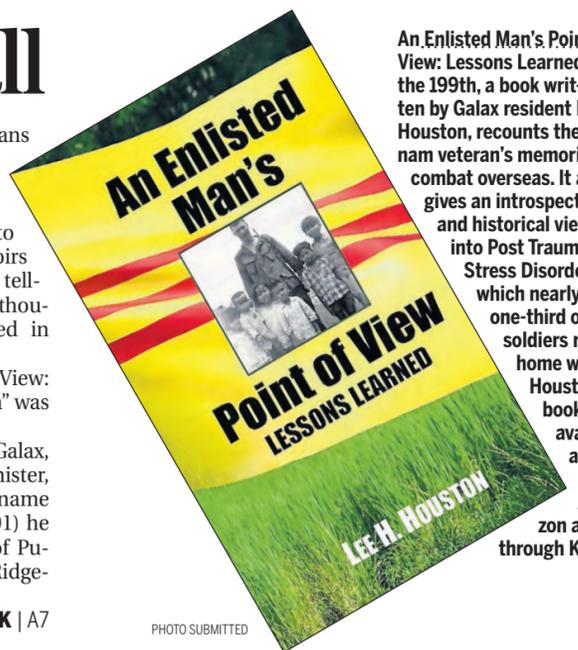


PHOTO SUBMITTED

An Enlisted Man's Point of View: Lessons Learned in the 1990s, a book written by Galax resident Lee Houston, recounts the Vietnam veteran's memories of combat overseas. It also gives an introspective and historical view into Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which nearly one-third of soldiers return home with. Houston's book is available on Amazon and through Kindle.

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WEATHER

Xxxx xxx brief daily weather description to go in this space inctur, ut et dolor.
For detailed weather information, see Page A2



Isaias leaves trail of damage across Virginia.
Page A3



Deadly

From Page A1

"I come before you praying that you will take into consideration putting a stoplight or some kind of warning signal at the intersection of Moss and Market street," Acuna-Rivera said to council when the agenda allowed for matters from the public to be presented. "There have been numerous wrecks and one fatality."

City Manager Leon Towarnicki said officials conducted a traffic signal study at the intersection more than a decade ago and described the 11,000 vehicles that traveled through the intersection each weekday as "fairly light for a four-lane street" He did not recommend a traffic light be installed, noting the cost of doing so would be about \$35,000.

Mayor Kathy Lawson pointed out that Market Street and Moss Street "is the only intersection on Market that does not have a traffic light."

W. Market Street runs almost due north and south at the point where it intersects with Moss Street S. running east and west. On the west side of the intersection Gravely Street intersects with Moss Street S., less than 20 feet from W. Market Street.

Gravely, Moss and Market are separated by a small grassy area where a thick gold mop cypress tree stands. This tree makes it difficult for drivers on Moss approaching Market from the south to see vehicles approaching the intersection from the north and vice versa.

Acuna-Rivera appealed for anything to make the two roads less dangerous.



This gold mop cypress tree at Moss and Market Streets hinder visibility.



Donna Acuna-Rivera appeals to City Council to install stop light at Moss Street and Market Street

"There isn't even a crosswalk in the area," Acuna Rivera said. "You can't see on the other side."

"I told them [city officials] there needs to be a stoplight or rumble strip, but they said it wasn't feasible — not enough traffic."

Towarnicki said in February that city officials would revisit the intersection again and see if something could be done and those efforts were disclosed at a regular council meeting in late July.

Director of Community Development Mark McCaskill asked City Council members to adopt a resolution authorizing him to file an application for funding of "certain transportation projects through the Virginia Smart Scale Funding process."



McCaskill

The Smart Scale process is the method used by VDOT for the past five years to determine what projects generate the greatest benefit to taxpayers.

Decisions are driven by priority determined by accumulated data from submitted projects by localities and other planning organizations.

Basically, projects score points according to their importance, and the projects with the most points get funded.

"This is for the fourth round of Smart Scale," McCaskill told City Council. "We've put in three applications, and the due date for this one is Aug.

17. "We're working with VDOT Resident Engineer Lisa Hughes and looking at ways to make the projects more effective — small tweaks to make them fair better this time around."

Two Fayette Street corridor improvements that were turned down by VDOT are back on the list, and the other one was the intersection that cost Eames his life.

We are asking for "pedestrian improvement at the intersection of Market and Moss that has seen a pedestrian fatality," McCaskill said. "The details are still being worked out with Lisa Hughes and her team of engineers."

Hughes is VDOT's resident engineer for the Martinsville office. She did not respond to a request for

comment on the project.

"What we've gotten from them so far involves crosswalks and flashing pedestrian beacons with pedestrian buttons and a refuge island in middle," McCaskill said. "Those are the current drawings and plans that we've received from VDOT."

The Bulletin requested a copy of the plans, but Towarnicki declined saying "a firm design has not been finalized, [but] could include some type of pedestrian signal system, crosswalks and a possible island."

McCaskill told City Council that, before the final submission goes through, "there may or may not be changes based on engineering judgment and discussions that the city has with VDOT staff."

Lawson said all three projects had received the approval of the West Piedmont Planning District.

McCaskill pointed out the Smart Scale system is competitive, and submitting an application is no assurance a project will be funded.

"Lisa Hughes is looking at ways to make the projects more effective — small tweaks to make them fair better," said McCaskill.

A white cross now stands on both sides of Market Street where it intersects with Moss Street in remembrance of Eames.

"When my uncle got hit, the car drug his body after it hit him," Acuna-Rivera said. "My 10-year-old granddaughter was the first one to see it."

"I've been trying for five years to have a light put there. You can't see over the hills coming up to Moss and Market."

Bill Wyatt is a reporter for the Martinsville Bulletin. He can be reached at 276-638-8801, Ext. 236. Follow him @billwyatt

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WEEKLY RECIPE

Can you taste it?

"It's Grill Time!"

Marinated Barbecue Salmon

Start to finish:
1 hour, 15 minutes
(15 minutes active)
Servings: 4

INGREDIENTS

- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 quarter-pound salmon filets, skin on
- Parsley and lemon wedges

DIRECTIONS:

1. Mix all of the ingredients — except the salmon, parsley and lemon wedges — in a bowl.
2. Place the salmon filets in a large freezer bag and pour half of the marinade in. Seal the bag, removing as much air as possible and marinate in the fridge for 1 to 3 hours.
3. Preheat the barbecue. Oil the grill using a silicone brush.
4. Put the salmon filets directly on the grill, skin side up. Close the barbecue cover and let cook for 3 to 5 minutes, depending on the thickness of the filets.
5. Flip the filets, and brush the remaining marinade on the fish. Close the barbecue lid and cook for another 3 to 5 minutes.
6. Place the filets on a plate, cover with aluminum foil and let rest for about 5 minutes.
7. Garnish with parsley and lemon wedges, and serve with a green salad.

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Sunday, July 19, 2020 • MARTINSVILLEBULLETIN.COM • Martinsville, Virginia \$2

Man in hospital after hit by vehicle

Police are searching for a vehicle in a suspected hit-and-run on Northside Drive.

By Bill Wyatt
bill.wyatt@martinsvillebulletin.com



John Eric Johnston

John Eric Johnston was late for his overnight shift as a guard at Eastman Chemical Corporation. He rode his bicycle to work, so his boss tried calling him on his cellphone.

But Johnston couldn't answer because he was lying in a ditch. That's where he was left unconscious after his bicycle was

struck from behind by a passing vehicle that never stopped, the driver leaving Johnston lying there perhaps dead.

Now he is lying in a hospital in Roanoke, suffering from various broken bones, brain bleeds, a concussion and numerous other injuries so severe that

he could face permanent disability.

Johnston, who lived on Grandview Street in Martinsville, had just turned 55 years old six days before the crash that nearly took his life and has left his family looking for answers and a Martinsville Police Department with few to offer.

"My brother, 'John Eric' we call him, was riding his bicycle from his home in Martinsville to Eastman, where he worked as a security guard for Allied Security," Connie Nystrom said.



MPD

SEE BICYCLE | A10

Johnston's 2015 Huffy bicycle found at crash scene by police.

Back-to-school shopping for answers

School plans test parents

Families are looking for comfort and safety when considering how to resume learning during the coronavirus pandemic.

By Holly Kozelsky
holly.kozelsky@martinsvillebulletin.com

Lisa Smith and her daughter, Claire, are at odds on how to handle the upcoming school year.

The mother thinks schools students should not return to the school buildings for another year, "when the plan is solid for the students, teachers and administration," but her daughter is eager to get back to Bengal Tech at Bassett High School.

"My husband and I decided that she will go entirely remotely," Smith said, though she has impression that Claire "is not happy about our decision. She misses her friends and the class interaction."

As the 2020-21 school year looms ahead, families are debating about how to return safely, in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most aren't confident.

In Martinsville, the original plan was for preschool students to attend four days a week; students in elementary school would attend two days a week; and students in middle and high school would attend one day a week. On Friday that all changed to distance learning.

In Henry County students have the option of going to school two days a week or staying home. Patrick County had a plan and backed away. Students at Carlisle School will return to the classroom.

Or will they? As fast as a school district announces a plan — Martinsville already has changed twice — it is adjusting, with

SEE PLANS | A9



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Former Bassett High School teacher Nadia Kriger-Sells said the decision not to renew her teaching contract for this year was difficult, but she was concerned about the pandemic. Her children, Tori (on swing, left), Katelyn (on swing, right) and Nikolas will attend Westover Christian Academy, a small school Kriger-Sells said should be better able to maintain safety measures — but she's still worried.

Martinsville, Patrick Co. change plans

By Bill Wyatt
bill.wyatt@martinsvillebulletin.com

Martinsville City Schools issued a notice Friday afternoon that the opening of the school year now will be totally by remote learning for students, backpedaling from the plan the school board had approved on Monday night.

That plan, labeled as Phase 3, had called for a hybrid approach of remote and face-to-face learning. The surprise arrived late Friday afternoon in a one-paragraph email from MCPS spokesperson Parker Gunn.

The release did not explain when the change was made or how the decision was reached.

"Monday night our approval of the plan gave [Superintendent] Dr. [Zeb] Talley the authority to make changes as needed, when needed, at his discretion," MCPS Board Chair Donna Dillard said Friday night.

Talley had presented a painstaking, 135-page proposal that involved schedules under three detailed phases and then announced as of Monday that schools would operate under Phase 3. He did not respond immediately to a request for comment on Friday.

That included mostly in-classroom learning by the lower grades and mostly remote learning for the higher grades, and it was a departure from the Phase 1 plan that Talley had announced just a few days before that.

Now all classes will have remote learning when school resumes on Aug. 10.

"Please emphasize that our priority is the safety of our students, staff and teachers," Dillard said. "That is our main concern."

The release from MCSP

SEE REMOTE | A9

School opening plans

- » **Martinsville City Schools:** Aug. 10 with all students learning remotely.
- » **Henry County Public Schools:** Aug. 10 with students split into groups, each attending class on campus two days and learning remotely three days.
- » **Patrick County Public Schools:** Aug. 11 but a decision on what form that will take has been rescinded and not decided until a school board meeting on Tuesday.

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WEATHER

Humid with some clouds with a possible thunderstorm in the evening.
For detailed weather information, see Page A2

93 HIGH | 70 LOW



Carlisle School graduates celebrate their 'resilience'.
Page A7



Bicycle

From Page A1

“He was the victim of a hit-and-run driver, and the driver of the car that hit him left him lying in a ditch and drove away.”

‘Ya’ll might want to come and check on him’

According to the police crash report, the 911 communications center received a call at 10:43 p.m. on June 27. It was a clear Saturday night.

“Yes, I was on Northside Drive in Martinsville, and I’m driving to work, and I can see that there’s a man laying in a ditch,” said a person in a calm and collected voice that sounds like a young, adult female. “It’s nighttime, and I figured ya’ll might want to come and check on him.”

“I mean I don’t know if he’s alive or anything, but it’s definitely a man in a ditch. He’s actually got on a reflective thing — that’s how I knew it was a person.”

The caller also said Johnston was “not moving” and might be “passed out.” The call did not include a name or phone number.

Martinsville Police Officer Jason Vaughan found Johnston and his mangled 2015 Huffy bicycle just off of the northbound side of Northside drive, one-tenth of a mile south of its intersection with Dudley Street.

Vaughan classified the crash as a hit-and-run, with both vehicles going straight ahead. Skid marks were noted coming from the bike but not from the vehicle that fled the scene.

Late to work

“He was one of my guards and worked the night shift,” Eastman Guardhouse Supervisor Raymond Hairston said. “We thought maybe he had overslept, so I kept calling his cellphone, but I didn’t get any answers.”

Hairston and Nystrom both explained Johnston’s routine of



This is the ditch where John Johnston and his mangled bike were found on Northside Drive.



Exact location where Johnston and his bike were found based on longitude and latitude coordinates in the police crash report.

Want to help?

» Anyone who has information about the incident involving Johnston should contact Martinsville Police Officer Jason Vaughan at 276-638-8751 or Crimestoppers at 276-632-7463.

» A gofundme account has been set up to help raise money for Johnston’s medical bills as he did not have health insurance.

he couldn’t tell who he was.”

Nystrom said they were fortunate Vaughan had found Johnston’s wallet at the scene, and once he was able to identify Johnston, he made contact with the guardhouse, which supplied Nystrom’s contact information.

“I’m John Eric’s older sister, and he has an older brother that lives in California,” Nystrom said. “Our dad lived in Franklin County, where he retired after a career in the Marines.”

Their father died in 2013 and their mother died in 2017.

‘Not in a good place’

Johnston had been an assistant teacher in the Franklin County Public School system for 12 years, took linguistics classes through the University of Virginia, spoke both English and Spanish and spent time as a substitute teacher for Martinsville City Schools.

“John moved to Martinsville last year and was ready for something new, so he applied to Allied Security, went through the criminal justice training class required for the job and was employed with Allied Security at Eastman,” Nystrom said.

“He had not been doing so well since mom died. He was not in a good place mentally — John was not in a good place —

so he moved into an apartment and was riding his bike to work.”

Johnston had been employed with Eastman as a night guard for almost four months when the accident occurred.

“We have one person per shift — six people altogether,” Hairston said.

The close-knit group are friends, and Johnston was quickly accepted by his new work family.

“We just felt bad that there was nothing we could do,” Hairston said. “He [Johnston] was always on time, a little early. We knew when he didn’t make it on-time something had to be wrong.”

The suspect vehicle

Martinsville Deputy Police Chief Robert Fincher says the case remains under investigation.

“A full reconstruction of the accident was done, and based on the evidence, the suspect vehicle is a Subaru Crosstrek,” Fincher said. “It is a 2016 through 2018 model, and right now the vehicle color is unknown.”

“It will have [or have had] damage to the passenger front of the vehicle.”

As for the 911 caller, Nystrom said that Fincher assured her

they had followed up with the caller but didn’t provide any additional details, and Sgt. Harley Durham has been assigned as the lead investigator.

Significant injuries

Johnston remained bedridden nine days after the wreck and was only able to recall his name and birth date. He didn’t have health insurance, so a gofundme account has been set up to help raise money for his medical bills — which are significant.

“My brother has no memory of the last 10 years of his life right now,” Nystrom said. “He talks as if he lives in Franklin County still, and he thinks my parents are alive.”

His injuries included two brain bleeds, a severe concussion, five broken ribs, both collarbones broken, a fractured pelvis and a fractured fibula.

“He was assessed by the speech pathologist and will qualify for the cognitive/memory therapy when he is more consistently alert,” Nystrom said. “It looks like he will be healing for four to six weeks with extremely small amounts of therapy.”

Bill Wyatt is a reporter for the Martinsville Bulletin. He can be reached at 276-638-8801, Ext. 236. Follow him @billwyatt

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HCPS goes all-virtual

School board votes to change its plan from hybrid to all remote classes starting Aug. 10.

By Kim Barto Meeks
kim.meeks@martinsvillebulletin.com

The Henry County School Board has voted to begin school virtually for all students on Aug. 10, in a departure from the hybrid reopening plan approved in June.

In a 4-1 vote, with one member abstaining, the board agreed Thursday morning to delay

students' return to classrooms for the time being and revisit the issue when they next meet in August. Teachers will still return to school buildings as scheduled on Aug. 5.

The move came during a 3-hour board planning retreat after officials raised several concerns about the district's readiness to reopen schools safely, such as the rising local COVID-19 infection rates and delays in receiving shipments of technology, protective gear and cleaning supplies needed to comply with health guidelines.



The Henry County School Board hears a strategic plan update on Thursday morning from Lisa Millner, the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning. The board met for a three-hour planning retreat that included an extensive discussion on school reopening and approval of an all-virtual start to school on Aug. 10.

BY KIM BARTO MEEKS/
MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

SEE HCPS | A8

Breakthrough in bike hit-and-run



Johnston's 2015 Huffly bicycle found at crash scene by police.

Police have a suspected vehicle in custody after a Martinsville man sees an article in the Bulletin and has a lawyer come forward.

By Bill Wyatt
bill.wyatt@martinsvillebulletin.com

Martinsville Police have a breakthrough in a hit-and-run last month that left a man lying severely injured in a ditch.

John Eric Johnston, 55, of Martinsville was riding his bicycle to work for Allied Security at Eastman Chemical Corporation, where he was an overnight security guard, on Northside Drive in the late-night hours



John Eric Johnston

of June 27. His 2015 Huffly was struck in the rear by a vehicle, and the driver fled the scene.

A woman who said she was on her way to work called 911 and reported seeing Johnston by the side of the road.

SEE WRECK | A8



Ditch where John Johnston and his mangled bike were found on Northside Drive.

BILL WYATT/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

COVID-19 claims Patrick resident

Third death from the coronavirus emerges on day after outbreak at long-term care facility.

STAFF REPORT

A third person in Patrick County has died of COVID-19.

That information was revealed Thursday morning in the daily report from the Virginia Department of Health.

Patrick County, which was one of the last five counties in Virginia to have a positive, has seen three deaths since June 1. The county now has had 67 cases, and 14 people have been hospitalized.

Those numbers took a large surge this week after it was revealed that there had been an outbreak of COVID-19 at a long-term care facility in Patrick County.

VDH and the West Piedmont Health District declined to name which facility might have been the scene of the outbreak, but Stuart has two large long-term care facilities: The nursing home Blue Ridge Therapy Connection has 190 beds, and its neighbor and sister facility, The Landmark Center, an assisted-living facility, has 75 beds.

Staff members at those facilities declined to answer directly questions about cases at the facilities.

Nancy Bell, spokesperson for the West Piedmont Health District, said she had not received information from staff about this latest death in Patrick County, although she did confirm it was the third. Two earlier deaths had been inexplicably categorized incorrectly on the VDH's website.

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WEATHER

Partly cloudy and humid with a thunderstorm

87 | 66
HIGH | LOW

For detailed weather information, see Page A2

First COVID-19 doctor receives a promotion.

Page A3



6 56525 10671 2



Northside Drive looking south near where John Johnston and his mangled bicycle were found along the side of the road.

BILL WYATT/MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

WRECK

From Page A1

cue arrived, and Johnston was transported to Sovah Health-Martinsville and then flown to Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital, where it was determined he had various broken bones, brain bleeds, a concussion and numerous other injuries so severe that he could face permanent disability. He remains hospitalized.

Johnston's story and the search for the runaway driver were described Sunday in the Martinsville Bulletin.

"A person of interest in the Johnston hit-and-run case has come forward," MPD Deputy Police Chief Robert Fincher said. "I attribute this to your [the Bulletin's] reporting of the incident."

Police and based on the evidence at the scene, police had determined the vehicle that struck Johnston was a 2016-18 Subaru Crosstrek.

"I cannot give too many more details as the case is still under investigation, but the suspect vehicle has been identified, and we are currently conducting additional search warrants and further forensic testing," Fincher said.

According to those search warrants, on file with the Martinsville Clerk's Office, Danville Attorney Michael Nicholas came to the Martinsville Police Department on Monday, the day after the article appeared in the Bulletin, and identified himself to Sgt. H.T. Durham, lead investigator in the case, as the attorney representing a Martinsville resident who owns a 2016 Subaru Crosstrek that has

damage.

Durham's statement in the search warrant explained that Nicholas said his client felt like the damage to the vehicle may have been the result of the hit-and-run case involving Johnston that appeared in the Bulletin and arranged for Durham to speak with his client at his home and to view the vehicle.

Nicholas' client is named in the search warrant, but the Bulletin is not including that name because police have not named a person of interest.

Durham wrote in the warrant that he "observed that the vehicle was missing a right front fog light housing and the fog light was still present. The vehicle also had damage to the front bumper to include dents and scratches and a dent above the front passenger

door, with paint chipped off."

There were other identifiers that Durham wrote were all "consistent with parts found at the scene and damage to the bicycle."

Police impounded the vehicle at the Martinsville City Shop on Fishel Street and seized a paint sample from above the passenger door, the front bumper and the right front fog light, headlight and headlight mounting bracket.

Those car parts, Johnston's mangled bike and his bloodied clothes now will be analyzed by the Virginia Forensic Science Trace Department in Richmond.

Nicholas did not respond to a message left Thursday with his secretary at the Daniel Medley and Kirby law firm in Danville.

"I'm headed to the hospital tomorrow [Friday]," said Connie Nystrom, Johnston's sister. "John

had his COVID test today and is supposed to go to a skilled nursing facility on Friday to heal some more before any rehab takes place."

Nystrom lives in Culpeper, a 6-hour round-trip to Roanoke. Johnston did not have health insurance, and a gofundme account has been set up to help defray his increasing medical costs.

Police continue to ask for anyone with any information related to the case to contact them.

"John Eric is still pretty out of it cognitively," Nystrom said. "The main questions now are how much better is he going to get and will he ever be able to live independently again?"

Bill Wyatt is a reporter for the Martinsville Bulletin. He can be reached at 276-638-8801. Ext. 236. Follow him @billwyatt

HCPS

From Page A1

Originally, the district planned to split students into two groups, each attending class on campus two days per week and learning remotely three days starting Aug. 10.

Parents also could choose a 100% virtual option for their children.

No timeline was given for when students might resume face-to-face instruction, but Superintendent Sandy Strayer told the board one metric would be when Henry County sees a decline in COVID-19 cases over a 2-week period.

"I do want to open schools when we have a decline in cases. I do think it's the best place for children," Strayer said.

However, she added, "You all know our cases are on the rise."

Voting in favor of the motion were school board members Thomas Auker, Francis Zehr, Teddy Martin II, and Benjamin Gravely. Dr. Merris Stambaugh cast the dissenting vote, and Cherie Whitlow abstained. Horsepasture District representative Terri Flanagan was absent.

Martinsville City Schools officials have made a similar change, announcing late last week that they are scrapping their original hybrid attendance plan and will

start the school year with virtual learning for all.

Stambaugh, a physician who practices family medicine, has brought up his view at previous board meetings that students need to resume in-person instruction and pointed to data from the Virginia Department of Health showing "the low medical risk to children," he said.

Explaining his vote against the virtual learning motion on Thursday, Stambaugh said, "I want to support as much in-person learning as possible."

The virus is "devastating to adults, especially the elderly," he said. However, VDH statistics show only 10% of statewide cases and zero deaths have occurred in school-age children, he added.

Whitlow said she abstained from the vote because "I agreed with going virtual, but I'm hesitant that we will be totally ready for virtual content with the delay in receiving the technology."

She was referring to an earlier point of the school reopening discussion, when Strayer and district Technology Director Elizabeth Adkins told the board they are still waiting to receive some shipments of iPads that were ordered months ago.

"We are on hold for getting devices" for three grade levels, Strayer said.

These additional devices are needed in order to have enough equipment to distribute to all Henry County students in

preschool through 12th grades for use at home.

The district is facing the same problem with receiving health and safety supplies such as thermometers, sanitizer, disposable gloves and masks, and other items ordered using federal relief funds, Strayer said.

"That's the problem now — every school district across the nation is ordering these supplies. Now we're just waiting, hoping the supplies come in time," she said.

To prepare for remote learning, teachers are receiving extra training and stipends this summer to aid in the development of a virtual curriculum, she said.

Once the devices arrive, iPads will be distributed to parents, along with some training on how to use them, at back-to-school events to be held in early August.

Back-to-school events

Instead of having a single, drop-in, back-to-school night like most years, Strayer said these events will be "stretched across a week or two." Schools will have families make appointments to come by "individually, 6 feet apart, to learn how to use these digital tools."

"Parents are going to need to come in get their child's iPad, and then we're going to need to teach them how to use that. That will take some time," she added. "I know there's no perfect plan, and we're

asking a lot of our parents, students, and staff."

Even if the technology does not arrive by Aug. 10, schools can accommodate certain families who do not have home computers or internet in other ways, like using homebound instruction, said Assistant Superintendent David Scott.

Safe environment

From a legal perspective, school board attorney Mike Gardner said there are pros and cons to starting the school year virtually.

"With virtual starts, keep in mind the obligation to provide 'free, appropriate, public education,'" he said. On the other hand, virtual learning reduces some liability for the school division because there is less danger of students becoming sick.

Potential liability remains "with teachers in schools, you have concerns about providing a safe working environment," Gardner said.

Throughout the vigorous 1-hour-long discussion of reopening issues, board members and school administrators repeated their desire to give parents as much advance notice as possible about changes to the instructional schedule.

Kim Barto Meeks is a reporter for the Martinsville Bulletin. She can be reached at 276-638-8801.

VIRUS

From Page A1

"The third death is not related to the outbreak," she said.

VDH tracks cases by the residence of the person, not where he or she might have been hospitalized or

quarantined.

That death in Patrick also emerged on the same day that Franklin County, also part of the district, reported 50 new positive tests for the novel coronavirus, the largest one-day/one-locality total in the district since the beginning of the pandemic. Franklin County did its first big testing ef-

fort about a week ago.

There also was an outbreak recently of four residents and three employees of Stanleytown Health and Rehab in Henry County.

The West Piedmont District has had nine outbreaks — four in long-term care facilities, and the others in congregate settings, such as businesses — and

101 associated cases. Some 41 cases have involved health care workers.

On the day when cases in the U.S. surpassed 4 million, growth rate in Virginia continues to be much more moderate than in most states that are posting records for new cases, hospitalizations and deaths. More than 143,000

have died in the U.S.

VDH reported there have been 81,237 cases and 2,054 deaths statewide (an increase of only 3 since Wednesday). Some 7,437 people have been hospitalized.

Henry County's number of positive cases stands ticked up to 422, and 42 hospitalized and five

deaths. Martinsville now has 147 cases, with 21 hospitalized and one death.

With its big leap on Thursday, Franklin County's total is at 182, with eight hospitalized and one death.

By comparison, Danville now has 229 cases, and Pittsylvania County has 253.