



**Virginia Highlands Festival preview shows changes B1**

**Four charged in June firebombing in Marion A5**

**Southwest Virginia member steps down from redistricting panel A2**

# Washington County News

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## COMMUNITY



Donnamarie Emmert hosts new spirit tours on Courthouse Hill  
» B1

## SPORTS



Emory & Henry becomes Division II school  
» B2

## COMMUNITY



Family from Glade Spring makes cross-America trip  
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# New milelong section of Mendota Trail to be officially opened July 16

BY JOE TENNIS  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

BENHAMS, Va. — Nearly another mile is slated to be added to the Mendota Trail this week. The Benhams Crossing Trestle has been completed in this Washington County agricultural community, once the site of regular train stops — and its own Benhams Depot. Today, Benhams stands along the ever-growing Mendota Trail, a project to convert what had been the property of the Southern Railway into a recreation route for hikers and bikers.

Trains stopped running in 1972. Decades later, trail proponents tried to turn this old rail into a trail. But adjacent property owners fought back, arguing that the property now belonged to them — after the railroad's demise. Court officials said otherwise. And, in 2016, new work began to complete the 12.5-mile-long Mendota Trail. The line links Bristol, Virginia, to Mendota, a riverside community at the foot of Clinch Mountain.



COURTESY OF JACK DUNHAM/MENDOTA TRAIL CONSERVANCY

A new section of the Mendota Trail and the restored trestle at Benhams Crossing is scheduled to open on July 16 with a ceremonial ribbon-cutting.

See **MENDOTA**, Page A5

## GLAMOROUS HAIR & NAIL PALACE



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Ava Dawson, 45, has begun her dream job, opening her own hair and nail salon in downtown Glade Spring.

# Downtown dream

## New hair salon opens in downtown Glade Spring

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

GLADE SPRING, Va. — A hair stylist has opened her own salon business in Glade Spring, completing a dream she's had ever since she was a little girl fixing the hair on her dolls.

Ava Dawson, 45, believes the pandemic crisis

was a catalyst for inspiring her to become an entrepreneur. Dawson was nudged to dream big while recently looking for a vacant building to rent for her business in the town square.

And it just so happens that John Hargroves had been looking for a good real estate investment

See **SALON**, Page A6

## Republican candidates rally in Abingdon

BY ROBERT SORRELL  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — The Republican Party's ticket for statewide offices in Virginia said Saturday that this is the year for change in Richmond — following years of Democratic Party control in the commonwealth.

Rich Anderson, chairman of the Republican Party of Virginia, told a large gathering of GOP supporters at Lois H. Humphreys Park in Abingdon that gubernatorial candidate Glenn Youngkin will pull the state out of the ditch, where he said Democratic Party leaders have put it in recent years. The Democratic Party moved into the governor's mansion in 2014 and has remained there ever since.

Youngkin, a longtime businessman and politician newcomer, joined Winsome Sears, Republican nominee for lieutenant governor, and Jason Miyares, the party's nominee for attorney general, at a rally Saturday. They were introduced by Anderson and Del. Terry Kilgore of Gate City.

"Virginia is a very different place," said Youngkin, describing the differences between 2021 and before the Democratic Party won the governorship. "Virginia really is different than it was eight years ago."

Youngkin said Virginia's cost of living now is above the national average. He said more people

See **GOP**, Page A2

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**Measure to ban farm equipment taxes to get public hearing **A2****

**Business owner presents petition in opposition to cigarette tax **A2****

**Glade Spring, Saltville officials consider how to connect Salt Trail **B1****

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## FOOD



New restaurant Real Good swaps politics for catering

» **A8**

## ART



Arts Depot exhibit shows off region's landscapes

» **B1**

## SPORTS



Kyle Larson wins Bristol Night Race

» **B3**

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## PANDEMIC BABIES



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS/RACHAEL WILBUR

Five local couples gathered for a party to celebrate their children's first year. All of them were born during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Expecting in COVID-19

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

**E**MORY, Va. — Baby showers, baby scans and maternity clothes are exciting milestones for any mom-to-be expecting a newborn, but for five local couples, the shadow of the pandemic in 2020 hovered over their memorable time with anxieties and uncertainties.

The couples, whose spouses each work at Emory & Henry College, shared something in common during the onset of the pandemic — they all were expecting babies.

Although the couples expressed their thankfulness for delivering healthy babies and escaping COVID-19 while pregnant, they were sorry to miss out on celebrations and rituals that usually mark the joyful occasions.

It was just a weird time to be pregnant, they agreed.

Rachael Wilbur, web content manager and chief photographer at Emory & Henry College, recently threw an informal birthday party for her 1-year-old daughter Lily and invited the four other couples who also were expecting babies at the same time she was pregnant.

Wilbur said the network of friends on campus was a big comfort for her dur-



Rachael Wilbur's daughter, Lily, celebrated her first birthday recently with a gaggle of other babies born during the pandemic.

ing a time when visiting with family and friends was restricted.

"I'm not originally from this area, so it was hard not having family here," said Wilbur, who grew up in Granite City, Illinois. I'm thankful for the other moms

on campus. We all shared very similar experiences. It was like our own little community that bonded us together."

Wilbur found out in early January 2020 that she and

See **PREGNANT**, Page A5

## Elections begin in Virginia

BY ROBERT SORRELL  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Virginia residents hoping to cast their votes early for the Nov. 2 general election can now do so.

In-person early voting and absentee voting will take place at local election offices, including at Bristol Virginia City Hall. Registrar Penny Limburg in Bristol said Virginia has one of the longest early voting periods — at 45 days — in the country. This is the second year that voters have had a chance to vote early in Virginia, after early voting was allowed in 2020 due to the pandemic.

She expects about 30% of voters to use early voting.

Residents can go to City Hall at the corner of Lee and Scott streets to vote, and Limburg said voters do not need a reason to vote early. Both inside and drive-thru voting will be permitted. Residents are reminded to take their proper identification to vote. Face masks are also recommended.

Those who vote by mail are required to have a witness signature, which was not required last year.

People can vote between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. at the registrar's office.

One difference this election is the size of the ballot, Limburg said. Previously, voters used a ballot that was 8 by 11 inches. A legal size ballot is being used for this election to allow all of the races to be included on one side.

For those affected by this year's address changes in Bristol, Virginia, Limburg said the staff has been trained and have books that show both old and new addresses. She noted that 95 households have changed precincts due to address changes.

The biggest race on the ballot is for governor. Former Gov. Terry McAuliffe, the Democrat, faces Republican Glenn A. Youngkin and Libertarian Princess Blanding. Current Gov. Ralph Northam, a Democrat, is unable to run for reelection, per state law.

Republican Winsome E. Sears and Democrat Hala S. Ayala are battling it out to become the next lieutenant

See **ELECTIONS**, Page A5

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**'Clown murder' trial postponed to 2022 in Florida A3**

**Baby Doe Sullivan opioid lawsuit settled for \$35M A3**

**Bristol, Virginia hit by cybercriminal attack A3**

**Fleenor's seat to stay open; masks not required in schools A3**

# Washington County News

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## COMMUNITY



Former pageant contestant steps in as new director

» B1

## SPORTS



Lucas tradition continues for Abingdon Falcons

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## EDUCATION



New therapy dog arrives at Emory & Henry

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# Ballad weighs vax mandate for workers

BY DAVID MCGEE

WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

JOHNSON CITY, Tenn. — Ballard Health officials are reviewing their employee vaccination policy in the wake of widespread calls for all health care workers to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Ballad has allowed its employees to choose whether to take one of the three commercially available vaccines against COVID-19 since they first became available

last December. To date, about 63% of all Ballard employees are fully vaccinated — compared to 37% of the region's population.

Last week, as the number of COVID cases rose nationwide, the federal Department of Veterans Affairs announced it will be the first federal agency requiring all health care workers to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

That announcement followed a

call by 56 leading medical groups to require vaccinations for U.S. health care workers. The list includes the American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Physicians, American College of Surgeons, American Public Health Association, Association of American Medical Colleges, American Pharmacist Association, National Association for

Home Care and Hospice, National League of Nursing and Society of Hospital Medicine.

"Obviously, we are having a lot of discussions about requiring vaccines," Ballard Chief Operating Officer Eric Deaton said during Ballard's COVID briefing last week. "I know the Virginia Hospital Association has recom-

See **BALLAD**, Page A5

## FIRST FRIDAY



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

David Ledgerwood and his wife Ann Ledgerwood will perform songs from the new original CD, "Mississippi Snapper," this Friday at Lois Humphreys Park.

# Original CD springs from songwriting club sessions

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON

FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

EMORY, Va. — An Emory singer and songwriter, who finds inspiration from the simpler things of life, has produced a CD of original songs about snapping turtles, porch dogs and whimsical things.

David Ledgerwood, along with his wife, Ann Ledgerwood, will perform many of the songs from the new CD, "Mississippi Snapper," at Abingdon's First Friday celebration from 5 to 6 p.m. on Aug. 6 at Lois Humphreys Park in town.

David, who has produced a few previous recordings in his own home recording studio, said this CD has resulted from inspiration found after joining the Virginia Highlands Songwriters' Group, local musicians who gather each month to share their craft and encourage



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

TOP: David Ledgerwood holds his first guitar when he was a boy. BOTTOM: The cover of "Mississippi Snapper" was created by artist Jonathan Davis.

creativity.

The lyrics of his songs often come to him when least

See **CD**, Page A5

# First Friday event begins in Abingdon

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON

FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — More than a dozen downtown businesses will stay open late, and a host of fun events are planned when Abingdon celebrates its First Friday event on Aug. 6.

"Summer Lovin'" is the theme for the August celebration.

There's no better time to celebrate local small businesses while connecting with friends in the community, according to Nicole Childress, executive director of Abingdon Main Street Alliance, which hosts the First Friday events each month in town.

"This is our fourth First Friday, and we have had a really excellent response so far," said Childress.

"The small business owners and employees in our downtown have really gone above and beyond in making this series a success by constantly innovating new

See **FRIDAY**, Page A5

# Barter Theatre reopens Sept. 30

BY JOE TENNIS

WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — Barter will soon be back in business on Main Street in Abingdon.

Come September, the venerable Barter Theatre will move back to its main stage on Main Street in Abingdon after being shuttered since the end of 2019 due to coronavirus concerns.

It's opening its doors for the fall production of "Frankenstein," which runs Sept. 30 through Halloween night, Oct. 31.

Barter Theatre was founded in 1933 and is considered "The State Theatre of Virginia," as well as one of the top tourist attractions in Abingdon and Southwest Virginia.

Over the past year, Barter has produced 11 plays and three concerts at the Moonlite Drive-In Movie Theatre — an outdoor alternative in the wake of

See **BARTER**, Page A5

# EPA wraps up air study for Bristol landfill

BY SARAH WADE

WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Bristol, Virginia's city manager said Saturday that the Environmental Protection Agency found "no immediate risk to human health" in completed air samples it collected in communities around the city landfill — and that he will request an additional \$1 million in funding for work on the site.

Eads shared the announcement in a Saturday post to the Bristol City-VA/TN Air Pollution Community Page, a popular

See **LANDFILL**, Page A6

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