



Editor's note: "Wandering Around Washington" is a regular, exclusive column from Joe Tennis highlighting the untold stories in the county, direct from the people who live and work here. Watch for him to wander into shops, restaurants and parks to bring you the gab and gossip — only in the Washington County News.

Historical homes stand firm on Main Street

ABINGDON, Va. — Emmitt Yeary ain't selling. Nope.

He's holding on to the Col. James White House on Main Street in Abingdon, standing immediately south of the Washington County Courthouse on U.S. Highway 11.

"It needs to be kept as it is as a home," said Yeary.

Talk about old. This brick structure was built in 1820 on what would have then been best known as the Great Road, which connected Abingdon to old towns like Blountville and Jonesborough in Tennessee.

The home predates the current Washington County Courthouse by more than 45 years!

Next door stands the Elliott Building.

Oh, the Elliott Building. It's been dubbed by county leaders as something that just needs to be torn down to make way for progress: an expanded courthouse.

Yeary, a retired attorney, lives part time on Main Street at the White House.

He's concerned about blasting the bricks of the Elliott Building, which is slated to come tumbling down by early June.

The Elliott Building and the White House stand little more than a foot apart from each other.

And while Yeary, 79, campaigned heavily to save the courthouse at its current location prior to a county-wide referendum in 2019, he has been concerned enough about the impending demolition next door that he has flagged down county leaders and asked for an additional engineering study.

In 2019, Yeary made a few speeches at public meetings prior to the referendum, in which voters decided to keep the courthouse where it stands on Main Street — instead of rolling down the road to a vacant Kmart.

And today? "I certainly feel like the people in Washington County won a tremendous victory," Yeary said. "And having a building next to it, I feel personally gratified."



WGN FILE PHOTO

Emmitt Yeary, 79, owns the Col. James White House on Main Street in Abingdon, just south of the Washington County Courthouse.



Joe Tennis

WASHINGTON COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Twelve-year-old Juniper Haslam, a sixth grade student at Wallace Middle School, uses the Sora app on her Chromebook computer to browse free age-appropriate e-books from the Washington County Public Library.

School system, library partner to bring e-books to students

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — A partnership between Washington County Public Schools and the Washington County Public Library is opening the world of books to local students who may not have access to reading materials.

Aimee Haslam, youth services coordinator at the Washington County Public Library said the pandemic has made access to books more difficult.

"All five library branches offer curbside services but not all young readers have someone to drive them to a library," said Aimee Haslam.

Thanks to a digital app called Sora, books are now only a click away.

The Sora app, installed on students' Chromebook computers, gives students access to thousands of e-books and audiobooks through the public library.

Twelve-year-old Juniper Haslam, a sixth grade student at Wallace Middle School, said she likes the Sora app because it's easy to use.

"The public library and the school library have lots of books for me to choose from," said the student. "I like graphic novels and audio books because I think they are fun to read and listen to. I prefer to download the books onto my Kindle so I can read before bed."

The beauty of the program, said Aimee Haslam, is the app allows students who may not have library cards to still use the library. Students only need their student ID to access their portals and click on the Sora app.

The youth services coordinator said students have two weeks to keep the checked out materials.

"The good thing is students can't lose or misplace the digital book because it gets returned automatically," Aimee Haslam said.

Students can borrow titles from home, on the weekends, or during school breaks without worry about misplacing a book. Homeschooled

students can get the same materials using a library card and the Libby app.

According to her, more than 300 e-books and audiobooks already have been checked out by students through Sora just during February.

The system is safe for all young readers to use, she said. Students can explore age-appropriate digital books from the local public library.

Students in kindergarten through fifth grade can only access juvenile collections. Middle and high school students have access to juvenile and young adult collections.

"This project was initiated by teachers who are eager to get more reading materials to their students — whether they were at home or at school," said Aimee Haslam. "This is only the beginning of what we have planned to support local education."

Valerie Cox, librarian at Damascus Middle School, is one of those teachers who was instrumental in working with the library to obtain the program.

Connecting students with free books has long been on her wish list.

"When schools were closed, it caused a halt to reading unless the students had books at home. This connection between the school library and the public library has been a desire for some time, with both working to get students free public library cards. However, access remained somewhat limited," said Cox.

"I've had several students over the years — particularly those in rural areas — ask for e-books and access to the public library. Using the Sora app to connect students to our public library without the need for a library card was the answer."

Jason Lester, technology supervisor at Washington County Public Schools, worked to authenticate students' accounts, enabling each

student access to the free e-books through OverDrive, a digital distributor of e-books, audiobooks, magazines and streaming video titles.

Sora also offers multi-user books for classrooms, allowing groups of students to read books at the same time.

"Recently, a couple of students checked out the same e-book and challenged each other to read it at the same time, which is really nice because it encouraged them to talk about what they are reading," said Cox.

When the program kicked off last October, students had access to more than 400 free books, just by signing into the Sora app on their Chromebooks.

Through the work of the Washington County Public Library, students were given access to the public library's digital collection in January.

"During our time of virtual and hybrid learning, students accessed more than 1,300 eBooks using the Sora app," said Cox. "With the connection to the public library's collection, this number has increased by approximately 60%."

"As we have returned to in-person learning, we are finding that many of our students continue to access e-books. One of our goals as librarians is to get books into our students' hands, and it's so exciting to help our students access more books, particularly during a time when it has been difficult to actually get hard copies of books for them. It's also exciting to partner with our public library to make this possible."

For more information about youth programming, visit www.wcpl.net, or call 276-676-6382. The Washington County Public Library is located at 205 Oak Hill St. in Abingdon. Its four branches are located in Damascus, Glade Spring, Hayters Gap and Mendota.

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.

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High benzene levels may account for smell in Bristol landfill A2

Galax takes win over Holston in VHSL Class 1 state semifinals A3



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EDUCATION



VHCC sees high demand for truck-driving certification classes **» B1**

SPORTS



Abingdon has rough day in loss to Liberty Christian **» B2**

COMMUNITY



How to keep the Santa magic for over 40 years **» B5**

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FLORAL DESIGN



From left to right, Holston High School students Dalton Campbell, Brian Cordell, Jackson Williams and Austin Hollick use fresh flowers to create a floral arrangement. The horticulture students are enrolled in a Floral Design course this semester that teaches the artistic side to horticulture. CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Student florists

Holston High brings out artistic side of students in horticulture class

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS
DAMASCUS, Va. — It's 8:10 a.m. when the first bell of the morning rang at Holston High School last Friday.

Instead of opening books and notebooks, students in a horticulture course reached for scissors and stems of fresh flowers to try their artistic hands at creating floral arrangements.

Welcome to this semester's floral design class, where 17 students — male and female — are learning how to create works of art with flowers.

Sprigs of carnations, mums, liatris, larkspur and baby's breath flowers were scattered on a worktable in the school greenhouse, where the design process began for each student.

The students have sharpened their design skills this semester



Madeline Statzer and Lane Blevins, both horticulture students at Holston High School, create pyramid-shaped floral arrangements, a capstone assignment for the school's Floral Design course. Statzer said she has more respect for florists after taking the course. "It (floral design) takes longer than you think it would." CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

by creating corsages, boutonnieres, coffee cups and other small floral arrangements. Last week's capstone project was

to create a triangular-shaped, single-mound floral design, said Lawrence Cox, horticulture instructor at the school.

"The course focuses on the artistic side of horticulture," said the instructor. "We study a lot of the same principles that a first-year art student would study — rhythm, symmetry and repetition of flowers used in an arrangement. We even go over the color wheel," he said.

The instructor's first words of advice to his students are to relax when beginning a floral design. "They sometimes overthink the process and stress about where every flower should go," Cox said.

"Once they can visualize what it's going to look like, they don't stress nearly as much about the end result.

"Ultimately, I tell them that if they are happy with it, I am happy with it."

Dillon Bott, a junior agriculture student at the school and

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Abingdon Holiday Lights Driving Tour premieres this year in town

BY JOE TENNIS
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS
ABINGDON, Va. — Abingdon shines this month — from Christmas trees to twinkling lights.

What beckons for visual delight during the Yuletide season can also be found on a map of both businesses and residences — thanks to the town's tourism staff.

"We are moving and shaking Christmas in Abingdon up to our eyeballs," said Tenille Montgomery, the town's community relations specialist.

The newly organized Abingdon Holiday Lights Driving Tour premieres this year with four dozen destinations like the Barter Theatre, Martha Washington Inn and Washington County Public Library.

"We have 48 addresses on the list," Montgomery said. "Most are along Valley and Main streets."

Maps are being distributed at the Abingdon Town Hall on Main Street.

"We got this idea because they do this in Richmond, but also places like the Outer Banks have these light tours," Montgomery said.

Running through Jan. 3, this light tour is also a safe way to share holiday cheer during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic while promoting the town, said town Tourism Director Tonya Triplett.

"We felt like this was something very nostalgic," Montgomery said. "We hear people say,

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Landfill

From Page A2

a wastewater storage tank and the technology needed to remove the benzene. The agreement also includes a series of fines should the city fail to comply with the terms of the agreement.

Benzene history

Last week, the city received another notice of violation, including the highest reading to date — 4.09 milligrams per liter, or 58 times the Occupational Safety and Health Administration-approved “maximum instantaneous limit” 0.07 — recorded on Oct. 28, according to the notice.

A subsequent sample collected Nov. 10 had a reading of 0.55.

Of 32 samples collected since 2018, the average reading was 1.321 milligrams per liter. In 2021, the average reading was 1.76 across the 19 samples that have been collected and analyzed.

BVUA has increased the frequency of its monitoring — from every few months to twice monthly — because benzene from the landfill has appeared each time a sample was collected, Bowman said.

“I’m optimistic, if the city can figure out a solution for the landfill subsurface reaction, the benzene levels should fall in the wastewater,” Bowman said.

Because no other state agency fills the role, as the wastewater operator, BVUA is responsible for issuing the violation notices to the city.

Work to begin

The agreement was completed days before the city’s initial step in responding to the benzene issue, which is to begin this week.

It involves contractor Charles R. Underwood of Sanford, North Carolina, coming to replace and repair pumps that service the landfill’s deep wells, which reach the bottom of the landfill floor.

“The plan is to start Tuesday [Dec. 7],” said Ernie Hoch, manager of solid waste and environmental services for Draper Aden Associates and the city’s primary landfill consultant. “With a little luck, we’ll have the two largest pumps back and replaced before Christmas.”

One of three pumps is currently running, so if it fails, the city would be unable to pump out any of the water, Hoch said.

That was the emergency action the City Council took Nov. 22, hiring the contractor to perform the pump and related work, after the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality sent a warning email early last

month directing the city to address this issue immediately.

Once the pumps are replaced, a team of trained divers will be brought in to determine what happens next, Hoch said.

“We are going to send a rescue dive team down into the well to do some exploration and some repairs then replace the last pump early in January. Potentially, we could have that done by the end of January,” Hoch said.

The divers will enter through a metal door on the surface and go down the 320-foot shaft to the bottom. They are specially trained in this type of work and will have specific duties once they reach the bottom, Hoch said.

“We’re looking to see if there is any deterioration of the wet well down there, check the pipes, check the pumps, the amount of sediment at the bottom. There are some smaller pumps down there we will probably replace. We don’t know what we’ll find until we get down there,” Hoch said. “There are two wet wells. One is leachate, and one is groundwater.”

Landfill leachate begins as rainwater that flows into and percolates through the degrading trash and typically emerges contaminated with high concentrations of pollutants. Groundwater is present below the earth’s surface and typically doesn’t contain pollutants.

“The two types of water are mixing together right now, and we don’t know where or why it’s mixing together, so we’re trying to determine that,” Hoch said. “The bigger plan is to put in a benzene stripping device to take the benzene out of the water, but in order to do that, we need to understand the volumes — whether they’re part of the gradient or part of the leachate — and right now we don’t know. It appeared the benzene was more in the gradient water than the leachate, but what we’re trying to determine is how we treat it. Do we have to treat 200,000 gallons a day, or can we treat it separately with different concentration levels?”

City Manager Randy Eads previously said the planned benzene treatment will involve another phase of work.

“Benzene pretreatment is expected to be an 18-month project expected to begin in January or February,” Eads said. “That will consist of building a 1-million-gallon storage tank, reroute our current leachate and gradient water into the storage tank, where we will install air strippers that will agitate the water, which will evaporate the benzene out of the water. We will capture that [benzene] through a charcoal filter then dispose of it appropriately.”



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

Horticulture instructor Lawrence Cox (right) offers some suggestions to student Brian Cordell about a floral arrangement he created in class. The Holston High School student is enrolled in this semester’s Floral Design course at the school.

Floral

From Page A1

secretary of the school’s FFA, wasn’t sure what to expect when he signed up for floral design as a class elective. “I’ve learned it’s not just sticking a flower in a piece of foam. It’s actually a lot of work.”

Madeline Statzer, a senior, said she has more respect for florists after taking the course. “It (floral design) takes longer than you think it would.”

The hardest part of the course for Emily Gregory, an agriculture student and second vice president for the school’s FFA, was creating a pleasing design. She plans to take her finished arrangement home to her grandmother.

Students also study how different time periods in history affected the way people arranged and designed flowers. They learn about contemporary arranging, as well.

“Each arrangement we work on has a unique style based on either a different time period in history or a particular style of designing and arranging,” said Cox.

The assignment will take a spin on the math side of the floral business this week when Cox will ask his students to tabulate what their arrangements would cost at the wholesale and retail levels. The students also will be asked to critique their designs and to self-reflect on their experiences.

Plant sale proceeds

The floral design course is not only the most artistic-driven horticulture course; it’s also one of the most expensive offerings in the horticulture curriculum, said Cox.

An annual sale of plants grown by the

horticulture students each spring helps to pay for the supplies needed for the floral design course, which usually is offered at the school every other year.

Cox estimated the plant sale brings in a substantial \$10,000 that is primarily used to help run all horticulture activities, not just floral design. A smaller portion of the proceeds is returned to organizing the plant sale for the next year.

Last week, the students got to incorporate fresh roses into their floral designs, an extravagant flower used in class after students have developed stronger design skills. Cox said he spent more than \$400 on flowers just last week for each student to make the one arrangement.

Despite the costs, the coursework is valuable because it allows students to gain skills that will stick with them for years to come, he said.

“It’s a good experience for the kids to work with flowers. A lot of them will choose to make their own flower arrangements when they get married one day.”

“The students learn what a good arrangement looks like so that when they purchase flowers for someone, they have a much better idea if they are getting a quality product,” said Cox.

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.

Lights

From Page A1

‘We used to drive around with our parents and look at Christmas lights.’ And this is kind of bringing back that tradition.”

Businesses comprise more than half the list.

In particular, Montgomery praised the lights outlining the barn at the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center and Marketplace — a place still regionally known as “Heartwood.”

“They went all out,” Montgomery said.

Participating busi-

nesses include Polished Diamond, Landmark Realty, New Life Thrift Store, Abingdon General Store, Goodman Jewelers and Brown Dental — to name a few.

Along East Main Street, the Abingdon Olive Oil Company is also on the map at the Greenway-Trigg Building.

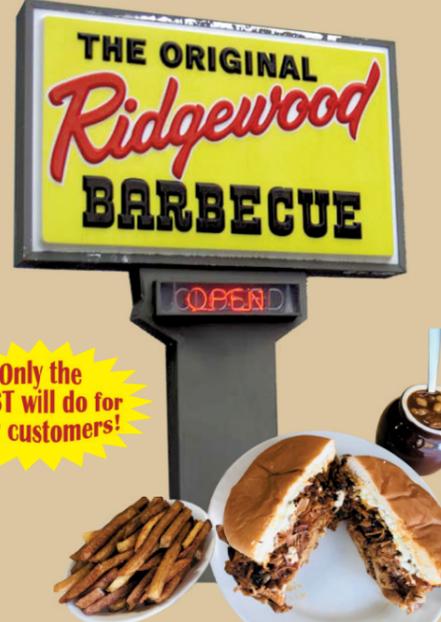
“Ours are twinkling lights,” said the company’s owner, K.C. St. Louis. “We’ve got the garlands across our railing and the red bow and a big beautiful wreath. And the lights don’t blink. They twinkle in and out.”



DAVID CRIGGER/WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

The newly organized Abingdon Holiday Lights Driving Tour premieres this year with four dozen destinations like the Barter Theatre, Martha Washington Inn (pictured) and Washington County Public Library.

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Fire victim remembered as family man A3

Bristol man charged in murder of child A3

Ballad Health looks to future after acquiring 2 new hospitals B4

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COMMUNITY



Damascus offers Christmas trees directly to residents
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SPORTS



Abingdon beats Bassett in Region 3D semifinals
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COMMUNITY



Santa Train hosts drive-thru gift events at Food City locations
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MEADOWVIEW ELEMENTARY



Victoria Sullins, a special education teacher at Meadowview Elementary, holds up several donated and newly purchased board games, which teachers hope to be able to give to every student in the school for the holidays.

All over the board

School collects board games to give to students

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

MEADOWVIEW, Va. — More than 500 students at a Washington County, Virginia, elementary school will have board games to put under their Christmas trees this holiday.

The gift-giving idea started when the school's second grade teachers asked their Facebook friends to donate new board games for their students to take home for Christmas.

The project has gotten such an overwhelming response that every student in the school may get a board game for the holiday, according to special education teacher Victoria Sullins, who became involved in the project when she, along with teachers Nicky Buckley and Samantha Kiser, helped to share the Facebook messages.

"A simple request for board games on Facebook has snowballed into a project much bigger than ever anticipated," said Sullins, who had an epiphany to extend the program to all students



As much as \$400 donated in the last week has allowed teachers to purchase 50 new games.

2.6-magnitude earthquake hits Abingdon on Sunday

BY JOE TENNIS
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — Adam Woodson woke up to a boom from an earthquake in Washington County, Virginia, on Sunday morning.

"By my watch, it was 6:05 a.m.," Woodson said. "It was really loud. It sounded like a real big thunderclap."

"There was a big crack and a big boom like a big thunder rumble."

Woodson, 42, lives in Green Spring Road near South Holston Lake — about a mile from Creamery Drive, which was determined by the United State Geological Survey to be the epicenter of a 2.6-magnitude earthquake that occurred at 6:04 a.m. in rural Abingdon.

"Nothing broke. Nothing moved," said Woodson, the owner of The Damascus Brewery in Damascus, Virginia.

The earthquake occurred 2.8 miles below the earth's surface, according to the USGS, said Theresa Kingsley-Varble, the emergency management coordinator for Washington County.

"We had a few calls this morning just when it was actually happening," said Kingsley-Varble. "As of now, we haven't had any reports of damage."

In that same area, there were reports of sonic booms a couple of years ago, said Kingsley-Varble. "It was right after the Dollar General opened, and it actually cracked their floor there on Cleveland Road."

Crews from the Green Spring Volunteer Fire and Rescue responded to a call at 6:07 a.m. Sunday after a report of a loud noise, said Bill Nunley, 52, the squad's captain.

"A lady felt like there was an explosion sound near her residence on Green Spring Road," Nunley said.

Crews were dispatched at daybreak but found nothing — and then heard word of the earthquake, Nunley said.

"We had two units patrolling the area after the initial call," Nunley said. "And we had engines and tankers standing by at the station. But, of course, nothing was found."

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PHOTOS BY DAVID CRIGGER/WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

For the second year in a row, the Santa Train made adjustments to their annual trip through the coalfields of Southwest Virginia. Due to COVID-19, four local Food City stores hosted drive-thru events. At the St. Paul, Virginia, Food City, employees and volunteers passed out gift bags and wrapping paper to a steady stream of cars as they drove through on Saturday morning.

Santa Train brings gifts at Food City drive-thrus

WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

The Santa Train didn't run through Southwest Virginia on Saturday, but area children still had the opportunity to receive gifts in a COVID-19 safe manner.

For the second consecutive year, the Santa Train held drive-thru gift distribution events at Food City locations throughout the coalfields, just as it did last year in response to the pandemic.

Prior to 2020, the train ran for nearly 80 years between near Pikeville, Kentucky, and Kingsport, Tennessee, bringing some Christmas cheer to the region.

Last year, however, with the COVID-19 pandemic affecting events around the world, the Santa Train switched plans. Out of an abundance of caution for



all attendees, volunteers and employees, Team Santa Train decided to hold a drive-thru gift distribution event on Saturday from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m.

The events were held at Food City stores in Pikeville, plus Clintwood, St. Paul and Weber City in Virginia.

Guests were advised to stay in their vehicles and receive gifts from the staff members. Santa's elves distributed 500 gift backpacks for children ages 2 to

12 and wrapping paper at each of the four locations.

"Santa wants to send a big thank you to Food City for allowing us to use its stores as this year's Santa Train 2021 stops," Team Santa Train wrote on social media Saturday. "We couldn't have held this event safely without each of our sponsors."

The sponsors included the Kingsport Chamber, CSX, Food City, Appalachian Power and Soles4Souls.

Games

From Page A1

in every grade at the school. Organizers of the project said they will consider sharing the games with other schools in the county if there is a surplus.

Monetary donations for the use of purchasing new board games also have been pouring in, said Sullins. As much as \$400 donated last week has allowed teachers to purchase about 50 new games.

"A friend I was in the Army with in the 1990s has sent me \$50 for the project. Another friend from high school who lives in Arizona mailed several games to the school."

While the teachers are limiting the project to only new board games, any gently used board games donated to the school will be sanitized and used in the classrooms. One of the most interesting games that has been donated is a Disney Princess version of Candyland.

Board games can be a big benefit to the development of young learners, Sullins said. People of all generations are fans of the games because of the fun and entertainment they bring.

"I'm so excited for our kids because I hope board games never go out of style. Kids don't realize when they're playing the games how good they are for their brains. They just think they're having fun," she said.

According to the teacher, playing board games builds cognitive skills like memory, processing speed and spatial reasoning. It's also good for developing fine motor and social skills.

"Board games help students learn how to follow rules, take turns, and they learn to lose gracefully and win graciously. These are skills our children need to learn. These are skills that can't be learned in front of a television or an electronic game, but they can be learned by playing Clue, Monopoly or Yahtzee."

Teachers at the elementary school hope the project will become a tradition for the school every year.

New board games as well as monetary donations to purchase board games can be brought to Meadowview Elementary during school hours before Monday, Dec. 13.

For more information about the donations, write to Victoria Sullins at vsullins@wcs.k12.va.us.

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.

2021 Thanksgiving Holiday Deadlines

**Wytheville Enterprise
Bland County Messenger
Smyth County News & Messenger
Richlands News-Press
Clinch Valley News**

- Wednesday, Nov. 24th editions

Deadline
Wednesday, Nov. 17th at 1:30pm

**Wytheville Enterprise
Smyth County News & Messenger**

- Saturday, Nov. 27th editions

Deadline
Monday, Nov. 22nd at 1:30 pm

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carhartt Sand Stone Duck Work Pants Assorted Colors 30 - 50 Reg. \$50.00 Sale \$39.99	carhartt Hooded Sweatshirt, Assorted Colors, S-2X, Tall & 3x More, Reg. price \$42.99 Sale \$39.99	carhartt Stone Washed Jeans 30 - 50 Stk#B17 Reg. \$40.00 Sale \$34.99
carhartt Active Jacket S-2X Assorted Colors Tall & 3X More Thermal Lining Reg. \$89.99 Sale \$84.99 Stk#J131	carhartt Hooded Duck Jacket S-2X, Tall & 3X More Quilted Flannel Lined, Reg. \$109.99 Sale \$99.99 Stk#J140	carhartt Insulated Bib Overalls Quilt Lined, Black & Brown 32-50, 52-58 extra, Reg. \$110.00 Sale \$94.99 Stk#R02

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