

## “We will never forget”

### Sept. 11, 2001



SUBMITTED | DAN EGGLESTON

This is the group of Franklin-area firefighters in New York City, serving in whatever way they could in the days following Sept. 11, 2001. Pictured are, from left, front row, Michael D. Williams, Michael Green, Don Wilson, Frank Puccini, Richard Grizzard; back row, Travis Preau, Kaplin, Joshua Goyet, Danny Bolton, Nick Vaughan and Dan Eggleston.

### A 9/11 reflection from Franklin to New York City

BY TITUS MOHLER  
STAFF WRITER

Twenty years have passed since a 31-year-old Don Wilson went from hearing, in Franklin, about the Sept. 11 terror attacks to assisting with the recovery operations in New York City shortly thereafter.



Capt. Wilson

Wilson, now a captain in the Navy who lives in Ivor, is one of 12 area firefighters for whom the sights, sounds and smells of ground zero are still fresh in his mind.

He highlighted the importance of reflecting on 9/11 since a younger generation of Americans now exists that had not been born when almost 3,000 people were killed after 19 militants associated with the Islamic extremist group al Qaeda hijacked four airplanes and carried out suicide attacks against targets within the U.S.

“I’m originally from Jersey City, New Jersey, right across from New York City,” Wilson said.

He noted that he grew up watching construction of the World Trade Center and seeing the World Trade Center

SEE FRANKLIN, A5



COURTESY

On September 11, 2001, four commercial airplanes were hijacked and sent to various targets in the United States. Two planes crashed into the towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, one plane crashed into the U.S. Pentagon Building near Washington, D.C., and a fourth plane was intercepted from the hijackers and crash-landed in rural Pennsylvania.

### A timeline of the morning of September 11, 2001

On the morning of September 11, 2001, 19 terrorists hijacked four commercial airplanes bound for California. The planes departed from airports in Boston; Newark, NJ; and Washington, D.C. September 11 would become an infamous date in American and world history, and the events of that day would forever change the world. As the world commemorates the 20th anniversary of 9/11, the following timeline, courtesy of the National September 11 Memorial & Museum, can help people fully understand how events unfolded on that late-summer morning two decades ago.

• **5:45 a.m.:** Two of the hijackers pass through security

at Portland International Airport in Maine. The men will take a short flight to Boston Logan International Airport, where they will join three other hijackers and board American Airlines Flight 11.

• **6:00 a.m.:** Two of the hijacked planes, American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175, will eventually crash into the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center complex in New York City. The day was a significant one on the New York City political calendar, as polling stations opened at 6 a.m. for primary elections.

• **7:59 a.m.:** American Air-

SEE TIMELINE, A8

### Where were you?

The Tidewater News asked people for their memories of where they were, what they were doing and what they were thinking on Sept. 11, 2001. These responses were solicited in the newspaper, on Facebook and on our website, inviting people to respond via the website, Facebook or email. Below are some of the responses we received. Responses have been edited for spelling, grammar, style and length.

In the timeframe around 2001, I instructed a class at Paul D. Camp Community

College as an introduction for beginners to the use of computers. Over the course of several weeks, a group of about a dozen students learned how computers work and about how to use a computer’s operating system, word processing, email and Internet browsing capabilities.

Sept. 11, 2001, was the last day of class for one of my groups. We had completed the final topic of study (which was Internet browsing), and for the time remaining in class that

SEE WHERE, A6

### IW teachers remember 9/11

BY STEPHEN FALESKI  
STAFF WRITER

When al-Qaida terrorists hijacked American Airlines Flight 11 and forced it to collide with the north tower of the World Trade Center, Windsor Elementary School teacher Rebecca Smith was teaching fifth grade.

The time was 8:46 a.m., Sept. 11, 2001 — a Tuesday. Seventeen minutes later, United Airlines Flight 175, also under the control of al-Qaida terrorists, struck the

south tower.

The attacks coincided with Smith’s planning period, so no students were in her classroom at the time. But her son was in a nearby kindergarten classroom.

“When I heard what had happened, I immediately walked down to his room just to take a peek at him through the door,” Smith said.

But the rest of the school day, she recalls, went on as normal — at least for the chil-

SEE TEACHERS, A5

The Tidewater News  
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editor@TheTidewaterNews.com  
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INSIDE	
OPINION	A2
OBITUARIES	A3
IT'S HAPPENING HERE	A4
COMMUNITY NEWS	B1
FAITH & WORSHIP	B2
KID'S PAGE	B6
CLASSIFIEDS	B7-B8

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**Adult craft programs:** Adult craft programs are held on the second Wednesday each month at 5:30 p.m. The craft for Sept. 8 will be DIY fishing lures.

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# FRANKLIN:

FROM PAGE A1

basically every day of his life when he was a young child and a teenager. He could see it from his room, from his high school, Saint Peter's Prep, and from where he practiced football at Liberty State Park.

"And when I left Jersey City in 1987 to join the Navy, I traveled all around the world," he said. "The Navy brought me to Franklin in August of 1996. I lived on Norfleet Street."

It was 1996 that he also became a volunteer member of the Franklin Fire & Rescue Department.

Later, the Navy took him aboard.

"For almost two years, I had been in the western Pacific, and my last tour at that time was in Japan, and I had transferred back to the United States," he said. "I was moving back into my house in Franklin, and this is right at the end of August of 2001."

He had 30 days leave, and the weekend of Sept. 7-9, he visited New Jersey and New York City with his two oldest sons, and they all even went to the base of the World Trade Center.

"That's just something I always think about is that, timing-wise, if it would have been a couple days later, I might have been up there if school wasn't in session, because at the time I had family up there," Wilson said.

However, his kids were back in school come Tuesday, Sept. 11, and with nothing to do in the day-time while on leave, he opted to serve a volunteer shift for Franklin Fire & Rescue.

He remembered washing Engine 5 that morning, a fire truck that he said is still in service with the city.

"I'm washing that truck, and at the time, the shift captain, Ronny Griffin, comes outside and says, 'Hey, Don, you grew up right across from New York City, right?'" Wilson recalled. "I said, 'Yeah, I did.' He goes, 'You should come in here. A plane hit the World Trade Center'."

"And I'm like, 'Yeah, let me finish this, and I'll be in.' And in my mind, I'm thinking it was like a small aircraft or like a helicopter, right? Just not thinking it's that big of a deal, maybe it's foggy up there, whatever."

He ended up finishing his task outside.

"And then I walk into the day room, and that's a big screen in there, and I was in shock at what I saw on the screen," Wilson said.

"Here's a building, and there's a big hole in it, and there's fire and smoke. I'm like, 'Holy cow, right? And as I'm trying to process all these things in my mind, the second jet hit. And I mean, just completely shell shocked, all of us."

He said he and his fellow Franklin firefighters were glued to the TV.

"Over a period of time, more people start coming in that are members of the fire department," he said.

"And we're watching this, and at the same time, we're getting the reports of what's going on in Washington, D.C., we're getting the reports of possibly additional hijackings, things like that."

He said everyone at the fire station could not move.

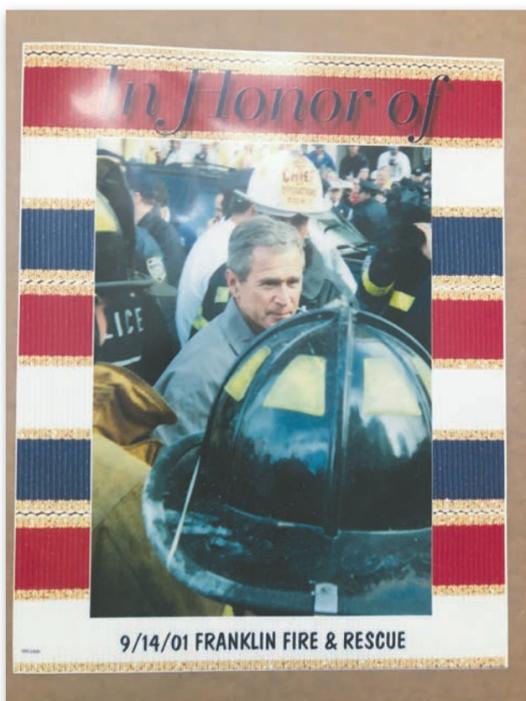
"We can't really say much except we're full of questions that have no answers," he said.

The first World Trade Center tower fell and then the second.

"None of us had ever seen anything like that live before, you know what I'm saying?" he said. "How do you process something like that?"

He said that if he remembers correctly, "I don't think there was a call at all that day for us. I don't remember ever leaving the station and going on an EMS call or on a fire rescue call."

An ensign in the Navy at the time, Wilson said, "I'm calling back to the people who move us around going, 'Do you need me some-



SUBMITTED | RICHARD GRIZZARD

**Richard Grizzard, one of the Franklin-area firefighters to go to New York City and offer aid in the days following 9/11, took this photo of President George W. Bush during his visit at ground zero.**

place?' And they're like, 'Stay put. Just stay on leave.'"

He said he tried to call family and friends up in New York.

"This is well before social media," he said. "We had email, but we didn't have Facebook. So I'm trying to call people to find out, because I knew people that worked in lower Manhattan, that worked in the trade center, guys I went to high school with. And again, nobody's got any information."

He explained that Franklin Fire & Rescue had already had an exchange program with the New York City Fire Department, and Franklin's fire chief at the time, Dan Eggleston, had ties to the New York City Fire Department.

"That evening, Dan Eggleston had called us all together and said, 'Hey, I want to send a team up north, and I want to send about 12 people up north, various firefighters with rescue experience from Franklin and from the surrounding county fire stations,'" Wilson recalled. "And he looked at me, and he said, 'Don,' he said, 'Can you get us in there?' Because I'm from there, so I know all the roads, I know all the ways in, because lower Manhattan's completely shut down, the Holland Tunnel is shut down. So he goes, 'Can you drive one of the vehicles, and can you get us in there?' And I'm like, 'Yeah.'"

"I was kind of in shock that he asked me, because like I said, I had just come back from being gone for almost two years, and I felt that there were other deserving firefighters that probably should have went ahead of me, but call it resident knowledge, whatever."

On Sept. 12, the group of area firefighters outfitted two vehicles — a Suburban and a van — with gear and started the drive up in the late afternoon. Wilson drove the lead vehicle on the trip.

"We had a police escort for a good portion of it," he said. "People were getting out of our way, and then there were other emergency vehicles headed north too."

"So we get up there, and I get us over into Manhattan, and there's a blockade for the West Side (Highway) going down into lower Manhattan," he continued. "We have emergency vehicles, we've got lights, sirens, they let us through, just go, go, go, everybody's pushing us through."

He said the further they got south into Manhattan, there was no power in the area because all of it had been shut off.

"So it's very dark," he said. "The other thing we noticed is it looked like it was snowing. So windows are still up, we've got the AC on."

He said there were vehicles all over the place.

"You've got to remember, they evacuated lower Manhattan, so in the middle of the street, there's still cars that have been abandoned, trucks, things like that, buses," he said.

He noted they parked probably five or six blocks away from the World Trade Center on a side street where a pizza place was located.

"Then when we got out of the vehicle, there was the ash coming down," he said.

"There was this eerie silence, and there was this scent or this smell in the air that I cannot describe to you. I can remember the smell, but I can't describe it to you. It was like a nuclear winter. It was something out of the apocalypse, out of a movie, it was unbelievable."

The Franklin-area firefighters put on their backpacks, grabbed their gear and started walking.

"As we get closer, you can see the glare of the lights, because down at ground zero, there's floodlights all over the place," Wilson said. "World Trade Center Building No. 7 was still on fire. There were other fires that were still going on."

He said they finally came around a block to where the familiar sight of the World Trade Center towers had greeted him for so many trips into the city throughout his childhood and teenage years.

"There's nothing there," he said, recalling the scene in the early morning hours of Sept. 13, 2001. "It's just smoke, it's still 'snowing,' it's just sounds of equipment and alarms going off. It was crazy."

And operations at ground zero were completely disorganized as well, he recalled.

"We didn't know where to go," he said. "Remember, we didn't do a formal request that said, 'Hey, we're coming' or anything like that. We just showed up."

"And then it starts raining," he continued. "And then something else happened where this big alarm went off, and they ordered everyone to stop on the pile and just break away. I don't remember if it was they were afraid it was going to collapse or if it was a gas

leak or what."

On a street corner, the Franklin-area firefighters ran into colleagues from, of all places, a Chesapeake fire department that had also sent a team.

By this time, it was probably 1 or 2 a.m., Wilson said, so the area firefighters took a catnap right there on the sidewalk underneath a covering.

Early that morning, Wilson and a few others walked around the perimeter of ground zero.

"There were food trucks set up that were providing hot meals for all the rescue workers and stuff like that," he said. "We go grab something to eat, and we continue walking around the perimeter and (see) just the total devastation. Everybody is just looking like they're in shock. Everybody has just got these wide eyes (that say,) 'What is going on?'"

"You could see some New York City firefighters, and you could just tell the pain that they had, and you know, you didn't say anything to them. Everything was just, 'Hey, brother,' 'Hey, brother,' that kind of stuff, but you could just see the devastation in their faces, the loss on their faces."

Wilson also recalled a key feature from his many visits to the World Trade Center.

"There was a courtyard between the two towers where there was a cafe, and there was this big, bronze, globe-looking thing," he said, noting it historically had music that was playing over loudspeakers there, kind of like elevator music. "Really strange, but that music was still playing. ... How it was still playing I don't know because there wasn't any power. I just remember there wasn't any power except for the generators."

Wilson said that after returning to the street corner where he had slept, Chief Eggleston had found out where the New York City command post was.

"We reported in, we told them who we were, and the first thing they assigned us

to do was to help set up a supply depot," Wilson said, which included things like gloves, helmets, masks for ventilation, shovels, picks and bottled water.

After completing that task, the local firefighters

received an assignment to go over to West Street near where there was a telecommunications building.

"I think it was the AT&T building, and we were

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# TIMELINE:

FROM PAGE A1

lines Flight 11 takes off from Boston with 11 crew members, 76 passengers and five hijackers on board. The plane, which will eventually crash into the North tower at the World Trade Center, is filled with more than 76,000 pounds of fuel.

**• 8:15 a.m.:** United Airlines Flight 175 takes off from Boston with nine crew members, 51 passengers, and five hijackers on board. This flight also is loaded with 76,000 pounds of fuel.

**• 8:19 a.m.:** American Airlines ground personnel are alerted by flight attendant Betty Ann Ong that Flight 11 is being hijacked. This call lasts roughly 25 minutes and Ong reports that the cockpit is unreachable. In the moments before Ong's call, one of the hijackers stabbed Daniel M. Lewin, who was sitting in front of him in first class. Lewin is likely the first person killed in the 9/11 attacks.

**• 8:20 a.m.:** American Airlines Flight 77 takes off from Washington Dulles International Airport. The flight has 49,900 pounds of fuel and is carrying six crew members, 53 passengers and five hijackers.

**• 8:21 a.m.:** The transponder on Flight 11 is turned off. This device is meant to allow air traffic controllers to identify and monitor the flight path of a plane.

**• 8:24 a.m.:** One of the hijackers of Flight 11 unwittingly broadcasts a message to air traffic controllers alerting them to the attacks. The hijacker was attempting to communicate with passengers and crew within the cabin.

**• 8:30 a.m.:** Around this time, roughly 80 people have already begun gathering on the 106th floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center for a financial technology conference. The conference is one of many events on the Trade Center schedule that day.

**• 8:37 a.m.:** The Boston Air Traffic Control Center alerts the military that a hijacking is under way.

**• 8:42 a.m.:** United Airlines Flight 93 takes off from Newark International Airport. The flight was due to take off at roughly the same time as the other hijacked planes, but was delayed due to routine traffic. Seven crew members, 33 passengers and four hijackers are on board. The flight is filled with 48,700 pounds of fuel.

**• 8:46 a.m.:** Five hijackers crash Flight 11 into floors 93 through 99 of the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Hundreds, including everyone on board the flight, are killed instantly. The crash severs all three emergency stairwells, trapping hundreds of people above the 91st floor.

**• 8:46 a.m.:** Police, paramedics and firefighters are sent to the North Tower.

**• 8:50 a.m.:** While visiting an elementary school in Florida, U.S. President George W. Bush is notified that a small plane has hit the North Tower.



COURTESY

**• 8:52 a.m.:** A flight attendant aboard Flight 175 reaches a United Airlines operator in San Francisco and reports the flight is being hijacked. By 9 a.m., various passengers on Flight 175 have called family members.

**• 8:55 a.m.:** The Port Authority informs people inside the South Tower via a public address system that the building is secure and there is no need to evacuate.

**• 8:59 a.m.:** The Port Authority Police Department orders both towers evacuated. One minute later Captain Anthony Whitaker expands the order to include all civilians in the entire World Trade Center complex.

**• 9:02 a.m.:** An evacuation

order is broadcast in the South Tower.

**• 9:03 a.m.:** Five hijackers crash Flight 175 into floors 77 through 85 of the South Tower. All onboard the flight are killed, as are an unknown number of people inside the building. Two of the three emergency stairwells are impassable and most elevator cables are severed, trapping many people above the impact zone and inside elevator cars.

**• 9:03 a.m.:** A second call for mobilization brings the total number of New York City Police Department officers responding to the scene to roughly 2,000. In addition, the FDNY issues a fifth alarm and deploys several hundred additional

firefighters to the scene.

**• 9:05 a.m.:** President Bush is informed that a second plane has crashed into the World Trade Center.

**• 9:12 a.m.:** Flight attendant Renée A. May calls her mother and tells her that hijackers have seized control of Flight 77. When May's call is disconnected, she calls American Airlines.

**• 9:30 a.m.:** Amidst reports of additional hijacked planes, the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management at 7 World Trade Center is evacuated.

**• 9:37 a.m.:** Hijackers crash Flight 77 into the Pentagon. All 53 passengers and six crew members perish, and 125 military and civilian personnel on the ground are killed in the fire

caused by the crash.

**• 9:42 a.m.:** The Federal Aviation Administration grounds all flights, ordering all civilian planes in United States airspace to land. Departures also are prohibited.

**• 9:45 a.m.:** Evacuations at the White House and the U.S. Capitol begin. Both the House of Representatives and Senate are in session at the time the evacuation begins.

**• 9:58 a.m.:** Flight 93 is flying so low to the ground that passenger Edward P. Felt is able to reach an emergency 911 operator in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania.

**• 9:59 a.m.:** The South Tower collapses after burning for 56 minutes. The tower collapses in just 10 seconds.

**• 9:59 a.m.:** Continuity-of-government procedures are implemented for the first known time in American history.

**• 10:03 a.m.:** Four hijackers crash Flight 93 into a field near the town of Shanksville, Pennsylvania. All 33 passengers and seven crew members on board perish. Passengers and crew had stormed the cockpit, and the plane ultimately

crashes just 20 minutes' flying time from Washington, D.C.

**• 10:15 a.m.:** The E Ring of the Pentagon collapses.

**• 10:28 a.m.:** The North Tower collapses after burning for 102 minutes. More than 1,600 people are killed as a result of the attack on the North Tower.

**• 11:02 a.m.:** New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani urges the evacuation of lower Manhattan.

**• 12:16 p.m.:** The last flight still in the air above the continental United States lands. Within two and a half hours, U.S. airspace has been cleared of roughly 4,500 commercial and general aviation planes.

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# FRANKLIN:

FROM PAGE A5

asked to start clearing out the debris from that area and the surrounding area there — because portions of this building had collapsed there — and to help get down to where the fiber-optic cables were," Wilson said. "One of the priorities they wanted to do was get the financial district back online.

"So we started digging, we started removing stuff, and we had to do this by hand and with rope and pulleys that we had, because there was no heavy equipment there."

They were right next to where part of one of the towers had come down.

"There was a crew from the New York City Fire Department working nearby," Wilson said. "They were in that rubble, and I remember that every time around us that they had pulled out a fire truck or they had found remains, especially remains of a first responder, we had all stopped.

"And the New York City

Fire Department pulled out their own, and we formed an attention line with a salute as they went by, as they recovered the remains. And then we kept going."

Wilson said the Franklin-area team never did find any remains, though after finding a woman's shoe while digging, they were afraid they might.

Other hazards made their task difficult, including broken water lines and suspected broken gas lines.

"We had been working for almost two days, and it was time to get some sleep, and I remember they directed us over to the Embassy Suites," Wilson said. "Somebody just told us to go find a bed. There's no power in this building. There's no power, there's no running water, and the majority of the doors were open and spray painted because somebody, probably New York City Fire Department or somebody else, had gone through to make sure everybody had gotten out.

"I just remember going in this room that somebody had occupied and just crashing on a bed."

He said he got up in the morning and went back out into the pile, and eventually everybody was ordered to stop what they were doing. They were wondering what was going on.

"Well, that's because President (George W.) Bush showed up," he said.

Wilson noted Bush was coming to ground zero with Gov. George Pataki, Mayor Rudy Giuliani and U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton.

Completely exhausted, Wilson was sitting on a yellow crane.

"I remember fighter jets flying over New York City, and I'm just sitting there, and I see this guy, he's next to me, and he's wearing a Bayonne, New Jersey, fire-fighting jacket, and that's the city right next to Jersey City I grew up in," Wilson said.

He struck up a conversation with the man and found out they both went to Saint Peter's Prep.

"And then come to find out, this is a guy I played football with in high

school," Wilson said. "Yeah, Kevin Fitzhenry, played football with him in high school. He's a year older than me."

That was not the last "small world" element to Wilson's time in New York City over those days following 9/11.

"My best friend that I grew up with was operating a block away," Wilson said, referring to Joel Skursky. "He was a firefighter in Pennsylvania."

From the crane, Wilson ended up having a great view of Bush's famous bull-horn speech.

When someone said they could not hear Bush, the president replied, "I can hear you! I can hear you, the rest of the world hears you, and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon."

Wilson said the crowd roared so loudly at that line that it reminded him of being at a raucous pro wrestling event.

"It just lifted everybody's spirits up," he said. "I was too tired to try to walk down and shake his hand or shake any of their hands."

After Bush and the elected officials left, digging and debris removal operations resumed.

"Then I want to say it was another day, and then all of a sudden, we were told to leave," Wilson said. "All the fire departments that were not from that area, a New York City Fire Department representative had gone around and just about basically ordered us all to leave. Something about it being a crime scene. They wanted construction guys to come in.

"I kind of think it was the union taking over. I think at that point, they had probably figured out, 'Hey, we're not going to find anybody else at this point. It was just recovery.' And they wanted some kind of control over the area."

The Franklin-area firefighters packed up their gear after about 96 hours of operations and drove back toward home.

"We were filthy, we were absolutely filthy, and I

know we all stunk," Wilson said. "We stopped at a rest stop on the New Jersey Turnpike, and we walked in to just use the bathroom and to get food to eat. We walked in and all these people stood up and just started clapping for us.

"And that was really hard for me and for the others," Wilson continued. "It was kind of like, we're nobody, we tried to do something, and we didn't rescue anybody, you know what I'm saying? The manager paid for all of our food, just gave us food, we couldn't pay for anything. People were giving us money for the fire department. It was really weird. I told Chief, 'I'm not taking anybody's stuff. Here.'"

When Wilson got back home Sept. 17, he said he finally showered, probably staying in the bath for a long time, with big questions running through his head.

"What did we just witness?" he said. "What were we just a part of?"

"Just the sights of the destruction, the smell, the eeriness, the sounds, man, that's stuff I'll take to my grave," he said. "For me personally, to just be a part of that because of where I grew up and what I saw, it was kind of surreal."

In 2007 with the Navy, he had his first combat deployment to Afghanistan, and then he went back in 2010, helping to take the fight to the soil of those who engineered the 9/11 attack.

He noted that in 2009, he was fortunate enough to be assigned to the U.S.S. New York, a Navy warship built with World Trade Center steel.

He went to New York City for the commissioning ceremony in November 2009.

"That was just very powerful, that, 'Hey, OK, you took something from us, and guess what? We rebuilt. We're rebuilding this big, giant tower and this complex tower, and we've built this warship that's got seven-and-a-half tons of World Trade Center steel on it,'" Wilson said. "So that was pretty intense and pretty special."

# Bringing ministry to your home

**BY TITUS MOHLER  
STAFF WRITER**

The COVID-19 pandemic created an abundance of obstacles for many, but Paul and Marguerite Leathers, who had a local ministry of singing at nursing homes, found an impactful way to continue sharing the message of God's grace remotely.

"We got the idea that we could use the cellphone and record a video of ourselves singing a hymn every day, and then we could send it out in an email," Marguerite said. "Some of the people that we send to share that with other people, friends and family members, and so we don't really know how many (hear us) altogether."

But Marguerite mentioned she has a mailing list of nearly 100 people. Some are family scattered about and some are local people in Southampton County, but their songs reach people across the country.

"We do send to all of the activities directors in the nursing homes, and at times they have been able to share those with the residents, even one-on-one," Marguerite said. "We had really gotten to know and love a lot of the residents and knew which hymns they liked the best, and so we were able to provide hymns that we knew were

special to certain people."

The Leathers, who have adopted the nickname Team Leathers, began recording songs on April 26, 2020.

"And we haven't missed a day since we started," Marguerite said.

Paul noted they have done some secular folk music but stick primarily to hymns and spiritual songs in their daily emails. Marguerite said they do not know 300-plus songs, so there have been some they have done more than once, but they do have about 175 to 180 songs in their repertoire.

"And we're steadily trying to learn new ones, and if anyone ever requests a certain hymn or song, we'll do our best to learn it and sing it for that person," she said.

The primary accompaniment for each song is the guitar, and the kazoo will occasionally make a cameo for an instrumental.

"My husband and I both sing, and I play the guitar," Marguerite said. "And we sometimes will put in a little interlude with our kazoos, and people either love it or hate it."

She said she and Paul always try to sing in harmony.

"We can switch around," she said. "Sometimes I do the melody, he does harmony, sometimes the other way around — depends on



SUBMITTED | TEAM LEATHERS

**Paul and Marguerite Leathers, now known in growing circles as Team Leathers, have been recording hymns and spiritual songs for more than a year and sending them out via email every day as a means of continuing their music ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

the song and how we think it sounds better."

Paul said, "Since she plays the guitar, she can pitch it wherever she wants to, so she'll pitch it a little lower than it's written, so that she can sing soprano and I sing alto. You have closer harmony if you have

the soprano and the alto combination."

Every day, the Leathers, who are both retired, spend about an hour-and-a-half on their music, generally recording that day's song and preparing for future songs.

"We get some pretty good feedback from people that seem to enjoy it, and that's what keeps us doing it," Marguerite said.

While Team Leathers has not sought any publicity, the people enjoying their music have not been able to keep from spreading the word, including Eunice Vick.

"The Leathers took it upon themselves to minister to others even during the pandemic by sending meaningful videos of them-

selves singing hymns," Vick said. "As a receiver of these musical tidbits, it makes a great way to start the day."

She noted the Leathers also take flowers, particularly daffodils, to people who are shut in.

"I'm sure that means so much to the people who receive them," Vick said.

Denise Wlodyka knows the Leathers through the tight-knit Southampton community and as a fellow member of the Southampton Agriculture and Forestry Museum, and she said she is the self-appointed president of the Team Leathers fan club.

"I'm their biggest cheerleader, I think," she said. "I just love getting their songs."

Wlodyka said she has always worked from home and spends a lot of time on her computer.

"So I'm always in front of my email, and their little email pops up every day, and it always just brightens up my afternoon with some little song, and they do a lot of hymns, and then they throw in some fun stuff, and they're always coordinating their outfits and having little props," she said. "My favorite ones are when they add the kazoos in, and they add a little piece at the end of the song with the kazoo. So they always get a comment back from me if the song of the day has a kazoo part."

Despite the distance between people that COVID-19 has created, Wlodyka said her friendship with the Leathers has really been strengthened, in part, through their songs.

Marguerite said there are some members of their audience that they hear from every day. They have heard that some use the music as part of their daily devotions.

"Our pastor at our

church, which is Newsoms United Methodist, has put in a big screen in the sanctuary, and since they're not able to do any congregational singing and all that, she will play one of our songs," Marguerite said.

She said she and her husband have not been going to church because they have been trying to be very careful with regard to the pandemic.

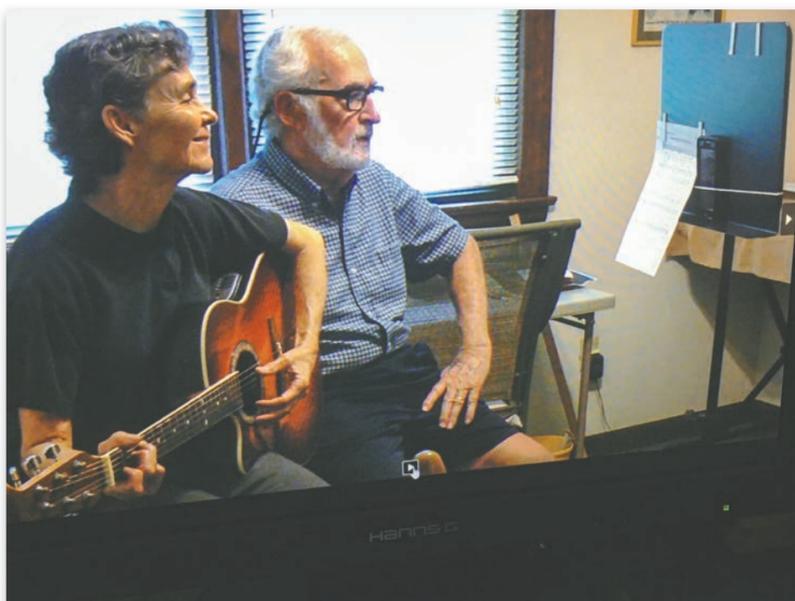
"We just stay at home, mostly, but this is something that we feel like is kind of like our ministry that's something that we can do from home and share with people so we can sort of stay connected on some kind of level with the people that we send our songs to," Marguerite said.

Among Team Leathers' fans is the Rev. Darwin Edwards, who is pastor of Grace Memorial United Methodist Church in Sedley.

"The ministry of Team Leathers has been a blessing to their church and many others, plus retirement homes, nursing homes, rehab centers, various senior groups and many of us who happen to know Paul and Marguerite," he said. "The offering of their time and talent gives glory to God and brightens the spirits of all who are blessed to hear their voices."

"I enjoy their hymns as part of my devotional time each day," he continued. "Their videos are an example of the creativity many of us have had to imagine and implement during the restrictions of the pandemic. The message of the Gospel in song cannot be allowed to die by reason of the virus. It must continue as an antidote."

"Paul and Marguerite are feeding the cravings of those of us who want to hear the Word put to music and sung."



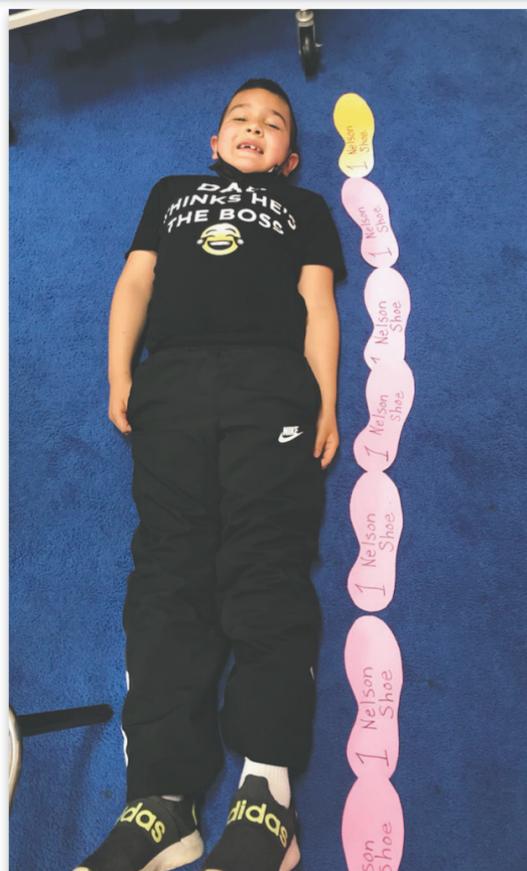
This photo offers a behind-the-scenes look at the setup Marguerite and Paul Leathers use to record their songs each day, with the cellphone on the lectern recording video.



SUBMITTED

## Capron students learn units of measurement

First grade students in Mrs. Butler's class have been learning about using non-standard units of measurement. The children used a shoe as the non-standard unit to measure themselves in class. Nelson Rios-Macias is being measured by cut-out copies of his own shoe. The students then used the shoe to measure their teacher Mrs. Butler.









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# LOVE:

FROM PAGE A1

and it was not long after they met that they got together. "He asked me, 'Hey, you want to go out sometime?'" Michelle said, noting this took place sometime when they were at the school's gymnasium.

She credits John's best friend from high school, Tony Taylor, for helping get them together.

"We were together until I graduated in 1987," John said.

The relationship informed a significant part of their high school-era experiences, as they went to prom together, worked at Winn-Dixie together in Franklin, and Michelle even got a personalized license plate for her car that highlighted their status as a couple.

"You know how things go when you're in high school — you always want to be different," John said. "My name was always J-o-h-n, but I was like, 'Ah, I want to be different. I'm spelling it J-o-n.' And so she picked up on that, and she never let that go."

"I spell it — and always have for 36 years — J-o-n," Michelle said.

Her license plate in high school read, "ME-NJON." John was older than Michelle, and after he graduated, he joined the U.S. Air Force. As they became separated geographically, it initiated the part of their lives where their paths went in separate directions.

"You know how things go," John said. "You have long-distance relationships that don't work, so she started to date some other folks and things like that."

He recalled with a laugh that one day during that time, when Michelle was at work, Taylor went and took the personalized license plate off her car and mailed it to him when he was in California.

John was in the Air Force for four years, getting out in 1991.

Michelle graduated from Windsor in 1989, and she recalled that she and John interacted a few times after he came back from the Air Force, the last time being in 1992.

She then moved to Greenville, North Carolina, where she lived and worked for about 30 years.

"I spent the rest of the '90s basically trying to find myself," John said. "I bartended a little bit, I did some other things. I opened up my own business in Florida, and then I finally got serious about school."

That is when he went to Old Dominion University and finished his engineering degree.

"Then I came into the Navy in 2001, and I've been in the Navy ever since," he said.

From 1992, 25 years passed with no communication between John and Michelle, but "out of contact" did not necessarily translate to "out of mind."

"He was thinking about me



BRITTANY COPELAND | BRITTANY ANNE PHOTOGRAPHY

**The Brown wedding at Windsor High School on Aug. 14 was simple and to the point, by design. In addition to the photographer, it featured, from left, Jeannie Weaver Blough, the matron of honor; Michelle Brown, the bride; Rich Lee, the chaplain; John Brown, the groom; and Tony Taylor, the best man.**

for some reason a couple years prior to finding me," Michelle said.

"It was probably 2015 or so," John said. "For whatever reason, she kept popping in to my head. I hadn't spoken to the girl in years and years, and she just kept popping in to my head, and I don't know why."

In September 2017, their connection was renewed through a long-distance interaction online.

"I'm stationed in Poland at the time, overseas," John said, "and I'm looking at Facebook one night, and you know how it goes — you see a post, you look at comments from the post, and I see a Michelle," John said. "I pop it open, I look at the picture, and I'm like, 'Holy cow! There she is!'"

"And so I was like, 'You know what, let me just try.' I didn't know anything about what her life was like or anything. I just said, 'Hey, how you doing? Remember me?'"

He said she immediately got back to him.

"And that's how it all started up," he said.

They kept talking back and forth, and then the opportunity arrived to reunite in person.

"I told her that I was coming into the States for some leave, and I think that was in late October (2017)," John said. "So we decided that we would meet for lunch in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. And so we did, and it was amazing. It was almost like we had never been apart."

"It just seemed like no time had passed between us," Michelle said. "We picked up right where we left off."

"I know the waitress was so mad at us because it took us about two hours to actually order lunch because all we wanted to do was sit there and talk and catch up," John said.

After that, John and Michelle's paths separated again for a while, but they stayed in contact.

"I had to go back to Poland to finish out my assignment out there, and then June of '18, I came back to the States and went to the Pentagon for two years," John said. "But we kept in touch, and I'd go down to see her occasionally for a weekend or something like that. And so it just kept

building from that point on until now."

John worked at the Pentagon until August 2020 and then received orders to come down to the Naval Special Warfare group in Virginia Beach. He let Michelle know.

"When everything changed is when he said, 'I'm moving to Virginia. My next assignment will be Virginia Beach,'" Michelle said. "And I was like, 'Wow, that's home.'"

"It just seemed like that was perfect, because that made me closer to her," John said. "She was in Greenville, North Carolina, at the time, and that just got me closer to her, and we just started to develop things, and it just picked up and picked up and picked up."

He noted that Michelle was working at Wells Fargo Bank at the time and was looking for another opportunity.

"One weekend she came up to see me, and she just went and applied at a local bank here, TowneBank in Virginia Beach," he said.

"They almost immediately hired her, and it was just like it was perfect. It fell into place like it was meant to be."

Michelle moved to Virginia Beach in April 2021.

"I moved back because this was just part of the plan," she said. "He's stationed here for the next few years, and so yeah, it was no question about it. I was coming back. Full circle — I was coming back home to Virginia where I was born."

John said he and Michelle grew even closer at this point, and it was not long before thoughts of marriage began to take shape.

Michelle explained that John had come up with a plan to propose to her at the site of their first meeting — Windsor High School.

However, something came up with his family that required him to go out of town, preventing his plan from coming to pass, but he told Michelle about it.

"He goes, 'This is how I was going to do it,'" she said. "And I was like, 'Well, there's our answer. That's where we're going to get married.'"

As they pondered the circle of their love story, she said they decided "that would complete the circle right there."

In the years since they had attended Windsor High School, it had been torn down and rebuilt, so John went about trying to pinpoint where the old gymnasium had been located.

He decided that the gym had occupied the space that is now left field of the school's baseball field.

"So we actually made a little tent, decorated it, and got married in left field on the baseball field where the old gymnasium sat," she said.

It was a moment 36 years in the making as Michelle wed John, who was her very first boyfriend.

Forming part of the tent's decorations was a license plate that read, "ME-NJON." It was the very same one she had on her car in high school that Taylor had removed.

"For whatever reason, I held onto it, and so that became part of our wedding," John said.

Taylor served as John's best man, and Jeannie Weaver Blough, Michelle's best friend from high school, was the matron of honor.

A chaplain from John's command, Rich Lee, and a local photographer, Brittany Copeland, rounded out those present for the Aug. 14 wedding.

"It was perfect," Michelle said of the wedding. "There was a little bit of weather, so we were able to get through the ceremony, which was at 6, and it lasted for about 20 minutes. And then we went over and took pictures."

Michelle said as soon as Copeland shot the last picture, "it started raining and thundering and lightning, so we got done just in time."

John said he thought it was amazing to be back on the grounds where he and Michelle first met, and he was quite pleased with the wedding itself.

"It was very small, very quaint, but it was pretty awesome," he said.

"We just wanted to keep it simple, to the point and make that moment matter," Michelle said, "because it's just a fairytale in itself, if you will — 36 years later, finding each other."

"Full circle," John said. "We met at Windsor High School, and we came back to Windsor High School to get married."

# STATUE:

FROM PAGE A1

moved."

As *The Tidewater News* has previously reported, the Confederate monument was erected in 1911 by the Agnes Lee Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, it depicts a stone carving of the Confederate battle flag and bears the inscription, "Love makes memory eternal, to our Confederate dead." It was originally located at the intersection of Second Avenue and High Street and was moved to Memorial Park, between Clay Street and Meadow Lane, in the 1940s after the Camp family donated the land to the city.

The City Council voted 6-1 on Sept. 14, 2020, to relocate the Confederate monument from its spot in the park to the cemetery.

The lone dissenting vote came from Ward 1 Councilman Mark Kitchen, who said he had spoken with

more than 80 Ward 1 residents, most of whom had indicated they wanted the statue to remain where it was.

"I won't vote based solely on my heart ... or heritage — what my ancestors did or didn't do — but by the overwhelming majority of my constituents," Kitchen said in the September 2020 meeting. "The overwhelming majority of residents I've spoken to said if the monument has to be moved, city funds should not be used to fund it."

The City Council ultimately allocated \$60,000 as a budget for the relocation project, and Hampton Roads Crane & Rigging Company's winning bid was approximately \$35,000.

After delivering the latest update on the monument relocation Aug. 23, Jarratt said, "I wanted to see if there were any questions or comments about that," and Kitchen offered comment.

"I think it was handled in a very commendable way, very professional," he said of the relocation. "Special-

ly whoever decided and whoever took down the tree did an excellent job."

He said he thought the contractor, Hampton Roads Crane & Rigging Company, and especially the city crew executed the relocation project in an honorable way.

"It was very well taken care of," he said.

"Thank you," Jarrett said. "And after 11 months, I hope this is the last we hear about it," Kitchen added.

Included in Ward 4 Councilman Linwood Johnson's motion to relocate the Confederate monument was a stipulation that a new monument honoring veterans of all wars will be erected in its place at the center of Memorial Park.

**This Aug. 23 photo shows Frank's 23 Confederate monument reassembled at its new home in Poplar Spring Cemetery. The reassembly had occurred the previous week. It was removed from Memorial Park on July 31.**



TITUS MOHLER | THE TIDEWATER NEWS

# The Tidewater News

115TH YEAR, NO. 44

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 25, 2021

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## International Paper wins tax lawsuit Isle of Wight County ordered to repay \$5.4 million

BY STEPHEN FALESKI  
STAFF WRITER

A judge, on Aug. 4, ordered Isle of Wight County to repay \$5.4 million to International Paper after ruling the locality's efforts to recoup a previous court-ordered machinery and tools tax refund to the company unconstitutional.

In February 2017, Isle of Wight's Circuit Court had ordered the county to repay International Pa-

per \$2.4 million in machinery and tools taxes it had collected from the company after ruling in IP's favor when the company had argued the county, over the past several fiscal years, had not been taking the depreciation of the Franklin paper mill's equipment into account.

About three months after the 2017 ruling, Isle of Wight's Board of Supervisors voted to hike the county's machinery and tools rate

142% for a single fiscal year — raising it from \$1.75 per \$100 of assessed value to \$4.24 per \$100.

Then, in the summer of 2017, the Board voted to set aside funds for what it termed an "economic development retention grant" program, which provided International Paper with the exact amount needed to ensure the company owed the entirety of the \$2.4 million refund, plus what it would have owed for the 2017-

2018 fiscal year had the county's machinery and tools rate remained flat.

IP then sued Isle of Wight again, arguing the county had effectively defied the 2017 court-ordered refund by raising its machinery and tools taxes. In October 2018, Isle of Wight's Circuit Court, this time, sided with the county, ruling that Isle of Wight had acted legally in raising taxes to cover a general fund shortfall that had resulted

from the prior court-ordered refund.

In 2019, IP appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court of Virginia, which resulted in the high court

SEE LAWSUIT, A8

## Board asks commission to look into solar moratorium

BY TITUS MOHLER  
STAFF WRITER

After a discussion on solar facilities that took place amongst members of the Southampton County community, its Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission and a Dominion Energy representative, the board gave direction to the Planning Commission on some things to investigate, including the possibility of a moratorium on solar installations in the county.

The solar discussion, which lasted almost two hours, was the focus of an Aug. 5 joint meeting between the board and commission that was open to the public and



Edwards

SEE BOARD, A7

## Confederate statue reassembled in cemetery

BY TITUS MOHLER  
STAFF WRITER

The City of Franklin's Confederate monument relocation is largely complete now as it has been reassembled at its new location in Poplar Spring Cemetery after having been removed from Memorial Park on July 31.

City Manager Amanda C. Jarratt shared news of the reassembly at the Franklin City Council meeting Aug. 23.

"I did want to let everybody know that the Confederate statue was relocated to Poplar Spring Cemetery last week and that there's additional work that needs to be done to grout the statue but that it was moved and the cedar tree was cut down," she said.

Explaining the cedar tree reference in an Aug. 24 email, Jarratt said, "There was a deformed cedar tree in Poplar Spring Cemetery that was dying and was re-

SEE STATUE, A6

## High school love story comes full circle

BY TITUS MOHLER  
STAFF WRITER

John and Michelle Brown found marital bliss in a familiar place after rekindling a love first ignited in high school.

It was at Windsor High School in 1985 that John and Michelle first met, as students, and became a couple. And after going their separate ways and then reconnecting in 2017, it was at Windsor High School on Aug. 14 that they became husband and wife.

"It's just a fairytale in itself, if you will — 36 years later, finding each other," Michelle said.

"It's been quite the story," John added.

Michelle recalled that back in '85, John had transferred to Windsor High from Isle of Wight Academy, so he was the new kid on the block.

They had natural chemistry,

SEE LOVE, A6



BRITTANY COPELAND | BRITTANY ANNE PHOTOGRAPHY

Michelle and John Brown smile for a photo on their wedding day Aug. 14. As high school sweethearts who went their separate ways for a time, they reconnected years later and decided to hold their wedding at the site of their first meeting in 1985 — Windsor High School. Inset: Pictured here in 1986 are John Brown and Michelle Francis when they were Windsor High School students and sweethearts, attending the prom together. Thirty-five years later, after reconnecting in 2017, they were married at the school in an Aug. 14 wedding.

## Council approves financing for new police vehicles

BY TITUS MOHLER  
STAFF WRITER

### WINDSOR

The Windsor Town Council voted unanimously Aug. 10 to approve the financing for two new police vehicles, which have already been delivered.

In a memo to the mayor and Town Council, Windsor Town Manager William Saunders shared details on the acquisition of the vehicles through a lease-purchase agreement.

"As has been recent practice, lease-purchase agreements have been utilized in order to acquire multiple police vehicles in a single year, while spreading the cost over multiple years," he stated. "In this case, \$45,000 has been allocated in the Capital Improvement Plan for police vehicles for (fiscal year 2022) and an additional \$45,000 for FY23."

He indicated that the lease-



FILE PHOTO

Councilmember William Saunders, left and Windsor Police Chief R.D. "Dan" Riddle.

purchase agreement would enable the immediate acquisition of two vehicles, while paying up to \$45,000 for each of the next two budget years.

Saunders shared at the Aug. 10 council meeting that the two vehicles are Ford Police

Interceptor Utility vehicles, which he said are effectively Ford Explorers.

The estimated combined cost of the two improved vehicles is \$87,686, he wrote in the

SEE COUNCIL, A8

## Boykins considers ways to use ARPA funds

BY TITUS MOHLER  
STAFF WRITER

The Boykins Town Council passed an election ordinance at its Aug. 10 meeting, gave further consideration to a collections policy, allowed a public hearing to be set for a dog ordinance and heard a list of project proposals that could move forward with American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 funds.

Boykins Town Clerk and Treasurer Victoria Edwards added that the Town Council decided to vote on one item on the ARPA project list immediately but was otherwise not ready to vote on any proposed purchases/programs.

"By unanimous vote, council

SEE FUNDS, A8

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### INSIDE

OPINION	A2
OBITUARIES	A3
IT'S HAPPENING HERE	A4
FAITH & WORSHIP	A5
COMMUNITY NEWS	A6
HOW TO GUIDE	B1-B4
KID'S PAGE	B6
CLASSIFIEDS	B7-B8

### DEATHS

Edith C. Cobb  
Anne S. Copenhaver  
Kay F. Johnson  
Katie C. Knight  
Ethel M. Lee

Eunice M. Ridley  
Dorothy L. Urquhart  
Sandra Lee Walker  
Walter Lee Warren

### BEST BET

**School supplies distribution:** On Saturday, Aug. 28, the American Legion, The American Legion Auxiliary and Smithfield Volunteer Fire Department will be distributing school supplies to all school age children in Isle of Wight County while supplies last. This event will be held at Smithfield Fire Station No. 50 at 1804 South Church Street between 9 and 11 a.m.

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