

The Charlotte Gazette

DEVOTED TO THE BEST INTERESTS OF CHARLOTTE COUNTY - FIRST, LAST AND ALWAYS

50 cents

Vol. 149 - Number 6

Wednesday, October 20, 2021

Drakes Branch, Virginia

Solar CEO says lawsuit has no merit

By Crystal Vandegrift
The Charlotte Gazette

SolUnesco, a Reston Virginia solar development company looking to construct one of the nation's most extensive solar facilities in Charlotte County, is at the center of a lawsuit filed just weeks ago but the company's CEO says no wrongdoing was done.

John Janson, a South Hill attorney, filed the lawsuit in Charlotte County Circuit Court on Sept. 28 on behalf of Faye

Trent individually and as a fiduciary of Ruth A. Hansen Wilcox, after Trent said, SolUnesco and company CEO Francis Hodsoll obtained a signed land lease option agreement dated Nov. 23, 2020, with Wilcox who was incapable of making such decisions.

In addition to SolUnesco and Hodsoll, the suit names real estate broker Sandra Ann Towne and her company Properties of Virginia LLC and landowner William Berkley Devin as defendants.

In a letter dated Oct. 5 to County Administrator Dan Witt and Monica Elder, Assistant County Administrator, Hodsoll wrote, "A single disgruntled citizen who is not participating in the Randolph Solar project has filed a frivolous lawsuit challenging the validity of another property owner's participation in this project. Let me be as clear as possible - there is no merit to this litigation, and we are confident the courts will

(See SOLAR, Page 5)



Jarrett L. Tharpe's turnout gear hangs inside the Drakes Branch Fire and Rescue Department where he last left it.

Pain at the pumps

By Crystal Vandegrift
The Charlotte Gazette

With summer ending and fall coming, consumers historically see a drop in gas prices. However, this fall, drivers may continue to feel pain at the pump when fueling up.

According to AAA, the national average price of gas has been at a seven-year high in recent days.

As of Monday morning, it was \$3.30, up from \$3.24 a week ago, \$3.18 a month ago, and \$2.18 a year ago.

(See PAIN, Page 3)



Drivers across the Commonwealth are feeling pain at the pumps as gas prices are skyrocketing.

50% of Piedmont now vaccinated

By Alexa Massey
The Charlotte Gazette

With cases continuing to slow over the last week, just over half of those eligible in the Piedmont Health District have now been vaccinated against COVID-19.

The news comes following a major announcement regarding

the future of Moderna/Johnson & Johnson booster shots in America.

The health district has continued to see slight declines in COVID-19 cases this week. According to the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), between Monday, Oct. 12, and Monday, Oct. 18, Charlotte County saw 25 new cases of the

virus. Lunenburg County was up by 30 cases.

Prince Edward County increased by 38 cases over the last week. Buckingham County saw 43 new COVID-19 cases, and Cumberland was up 11 cases as of Oct. 18.

The area did see six reported

(See VACCINATED, Page 5)

Tharpe known for work ethic

By Crystal Vandegrift
The Charlotte Gazette

Citizens and firefighters in Charlotte County are mourning the life of a 36-year-old Drakes Branch man that died following an automobile crash on Friday, Oct. 15.

Jarrett L. Tharpe was a member of the Drakes Branch Fire and Rescue Department and the Charlotte Courthouse Volunteer Fire Department.

"Jarrett worked hard to gain respect on the department which he had succeeded and became one that we depended on the most," Drakes Branch Fire and Rescue Chief Kenny Tharpe said.

"As a Chief, you realize your people are the most important asset. Nice buildings and trucks mean nothing without volunteers to put in them."

According to Virginia State Police (VSP), Tharpe lost his life following a single-vehicle crash on Kings Highway at the Route 15 North

(See THARPE, Page 5)

R-H Homecoming Court 2021

Randolph-Henry High School (R-H) held its Homecoming game on Friday, Oct. 15, against Bluestone. During halftime Marcus Goode Jr and Kaylen Doswell were crowned homecoming king and queen. The Statesmen defeated Bluestone 56-0. At right are the 2021 R-H Homecoming Court, from left, front row, Marcus Goode Jr, Isaiah Brown, Hailey Amos, Carleigh Shook, Kaylen Doswell, Tucker Webb, Colton Pillow; back row, Camden Tucker, Kaheim Dailey, Addie Gilley, Parker Cottrell, Cambrie Hanks, Austin Algeier, Chad Burton Jr., Brezuan Craighead, Ta'Myra Redd and Jaylan Gordon. Not pictured: Kaylee Buckler, Sarah Mason and Abigail Clowdis.



Bluegrass, Barbecue, & Brew festival planned
Page 10

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Friday at noon



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VACCINATED: FDA advisory committee recommends booster of Moderna, J&J

FROM PAGE ONE

COVID-related deaths last week; one in Charlotte, one in Lunenburg, three in Cumberland and one in Prince Edward.

According to VDH, all counties in the health district are currently seeing a decline in cases with the exception of Charlotte County where cases are currently categorized as fluctuating.

The state has also continued to enjoy a drop in virus cases. On Monday, Oct. 18, Virginia reported a total of 1,227 new COVID-19 cases, down dramatically from 2,012 cases reported the previous Monday. The state's seven day moving average sat at 2,039 on Oct. 18, a noticeable decrease from 2,443 cases the week prior.

Longwood University in Farmville was reporting 10 active cases among its campus population as of the latest update Oct. 17. The university has seen 98 total cases since Aug. 15.

Hampden-Sydney College was reporting three active virus cases and three individuals quarantining as of its most recent update Oct. 14. The college has had a total of eight student cases and three employee cases this semester.

As of Friday, Oct. 15, Centra Health was reporting 71 total cases of the virus in its hospitals; 63 cases at Lynchburg General and eight at Centra Southside Community Hospital in Farmville. Of those 71 patients, 15 were in the ICU, 10 of which were being ventilated. 17 of the 71 patients, including two in the ICU, were vaccinated, while the re-

maining 54 patients, 13 of which were in the ICU, were unvaccinated.

On Monday, Piedmont Health District Director Dr. Maria Almond noted 51.3% of people age 12 and older have been fully vaccinated in the Piedmont Health District.

"Every vaccination counts, and I applaud the ongoing efforts of our community to stay healthy together," Almond said.

"The Piedmont district continues to see ongoing modest declines in our case numbers," Almond noted. "However, we must continue to be vigilant in maintaining behaviors that protect the most vulnerable and those unable to be vaccinated. The single most important act we can do for our community's health is to get vaccinated. As the cooler weather drives us inside, there is a risk for increased spread of many seasonal respiratory illnesses and COVID-19. Our health care workers need your preventative efforts to keep our community healthy and our hospital beds available."

VDH recently began providing numbers regarding the percentage of booster shots administered in individual counties.

Vaccination rates in each county of the health district, as of Monday, were as follows:

Charlotte: population fully vaccinated: 46.5%, adults with booster shot: 1.8%

Lunenburg: population fully vaccinated: 46.9%, adults with booster shot: 1.2%

Prince Edward: population fully vaccinated: 40.2%, adults with booster shot: 1.4%

Buckingham: population fully vaccinated: 47%, adults with booster shot: 1.7%

Cumberland: population fully vaccinated: 43.3%, adults with booster shot: 1.4%

On Monday, Almond highlighted that while boosters are now available only for those who received an initial series of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, an advisory committee of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) voted last week in favor of recommending booster doses of the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines.

Booster shots for the FDA-approved Pfizer vaccine are currently recommended for those 65 years of age and older, those living in long-term care facilities and those 18 years of age and up who are at increased risk of COVID-19 due to underlying medical conditions or where they work or live.

"Boosters help increase the immune response, which is particularly important for those who have weakened immune systems due to age or illness or those who are continually at risk for exposure," Almond said.

Almond added the FDA's advisory committee will be discussing vaccination for children ages 5-11 on Oct. 26.

Free COVID-19 testing continues to be available at the Prince Edward Farmville Youth Association (PEFYA) recreational center at 2750 Layne Street Wednesdays from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. through Nov. 17.

THARPE: 'He was going to show up to the call ready to work'

FROM PAGE ONE

exit ramp when he failed to make the exit ramp and ran off the road and struck a tree.

"I want to thank Keysville Volunteer Fire Department, Meherrin Fire and Rescue,

Charlotte County Rescue, and Law Enforcement for everything they did last night," Tharpe said. "I know they worked hard to do everything they could as they are top-notch folks. Unfortunately, we lost a top-notch person."

Charlotte Courthouse Volun-

teer Fire Department Chief Chris Russell said Tharpe was very dependable on the fire ground.

"Jarrett had been with us for the last couple of years running calls for both departments," Russell said. "He had his fire training, and I could rely on him to get the job done quickly and safely. His full-time job was in Buckingham, which took a lot of his time, but if he was available, he was going to show up to the call ready to work."

SOLAR: 'We are confident the courts will ultimately dismiss this case'

FROM PAGE ONE

ultimately dismiss this case. Neither SolUnesco, its affiliated companies, nor any individuals sued in this frivolous lawsuit did anything wrong. SolUnesco has been in contact with the actual landowner and her caretaker throughout this process, and they support the Randolph Solar project and have raised no objections."

According to the 40-page document, the lawsuit aims to dissolve contractual agreements to build the 800-megawatt facility and recover monetary and punitive damages.

According to lawsuit documents, the defendants, individually and together, talked Wilcox, 83, who is known to have dementia, into granting an option to SolUnesco to lease her family farm for use in the Randolph Solar project.

The lease option agreement grants SolUnesco an irrevocable five-year option to lease Wilcox's entire 96.76 acres for the Randolph

Solar project.

The lawsuit claims this was done after Towne and Hodsoll were told more than once by Trent that Wilcox was not interested in providing anyone with an option to lease any real property for use in the Randolph Solar Project.

Documents show that Hodsoll signed the lease agreement on behalf of his company. The suit notes that Wilcox was given a payment of \$3,000.

The lawsuit also states that William Berkley Devin, who owns a large portion of land included in the Randolph Solar project, needed SolUnesco to obtain Wilcox's land in order for his land portions to be included.

On a third occasion, Towne and Hodsoll approached Trent about the possibility of obtaining a lease and were told by Trent "there was no need for them to get out of their car, as she was fed up with them pressuring her elderly friend to enter the option for the benefit of Devin." The lawsuit

stated.

In the August Charlotte County Board of Supervisors meeting, Trent publicly spoke out against SolUnesco, alleging its wrongdoings.

"While the lawsuit has no merit, the legal process is nonetheless slow," Hodsoll wrote. "Accordingly, while our lawyers are litigating the case, SolUnesco will have no further public comment on the litigation and will instead focus on the CUP process and bringing this vital project to fruition for the benefit of all Charlotte County's citizens."

County Administrator Dan Witt said the process for consideration of the application for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for SolUnesco will continue to move forward.

Witt said that because neither Charlotte County, nor the Charlotte County Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, nor any

Thank You

We would like to thank the
Charlotte County Sheriff's Department,
Drakes Branch, Charlotte Court House, and Keysville
Volunteer Fire Departments for their quick response
to our equipment fire on Friday, October 1st.
We are grateful for your hard work and dedication.
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NOTICE A CONTROL ORDINANCE FOR HALLOWEEN TOWN OF PHENIX, VA

It is hereby ordained by the Town of Phenix, Virginia that no juvenile older than 12 years of age may solicit the citizen of the Town of Phenix for "Trick or Treat" nor continue it beyond 9:00 p.m. on the date each year that Halloween is observed. October 31st is nationally recognized as Halloween: that dated shall be the only date in a calendar year that children may solicit citizens of the town for "Trick or Treat." This ordinance shall be effective from the date of its second reading and passage.

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The Charlotte Gazette

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Vol. 149 - Number 8

Wednesday, November 3, 2021

Drakes Branch, Virginia

BOS, commission added to lawsuit

By Crystal Vandegrift
The Charlotte Gazette

The Charlotte County Board of Supervisors (BOS) and Planning Commission have now been added to a lawsuit initially listing SolUnesco, a Reston Virginia solar development company, a real estate broker and a county citizen as defendants.

John Janson, a South Hill attorney, filed the original lawsuit in Charlotte County Circuit Court on Sept. 28 on behalf of Faye Trent individually and as a fiduciary of Ruth A. Hansen Wilcox, after Trent said SolUnesco and company CEO Frances Hodson obtained a signed land lease option agreement dated Nov. 23, 2020, with

Wilcox, who was incapable of making such decisions.

In an email from Janson on Thursday, Oct. 28, Janson confirmed that on Oct. 20, an order allowing an amended complaint to add to the BOS and planning commission was executed.

In the 50-page amended lawsuit, Janson listed the governmental defendants, i.e., the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors of Charlotte County, had actual notice of the legal deficiencies in the conditional use permit application executed by Wilcox but nevertheless wrongly recommended and approved the application.

On Friday, Oct. 29, BOS Chairman

(See LAWSUIT, Page 2)

Developer seeks dismissal of lawsuit

By Crystal Vandegrift
The Charlotte Gazette

SolUnesco, a Reston Virginia solar development company looking to construct one of the nation's most extensive solar facilities in Charlotte County at 800 megawatts, confirmed on Monday, Nov. 1, that the company is seeking a dismissal of a lawsuit naming them and others as defendants in a land lease option.

On Sept. 28, John Janson, a South Hill attorney, filed the original lawsuit in Charlotte County Circuit Court on behalf of Faye Trent individually and as a fiduciary of Ruth A. Hansen Wilcox, after Trent said SolUnesco and company CEO Frances Hodson obtained a signed land lease option agreement dated Nov. 23, 2020, with Wilcox,

(See DISMISSAL, Page 2)



Berkeley Team walks for cure

The 2021 Alzheimer's Association Walk to End Alzheimer's was held on Sunday, Oct. 31, in Farmville at the Farmville Farmer's Market. Patricia Berkeley and her team took part in the fund-raising event and raised \$1,600. Berkeley's husband Beaver was diagnosed in December 2014 with Alzheimer's. According to Berkeley, Beaver, who was 55 at the time of diagnosis, is in the later stages of the disease. Held annually in more than 600 communities nationwide, the Alzheimer's Association Walk to End Alzheimer's® is the world's largest fundraiser for Alzheimer's care, support and research.

Accident claims life of Brookneal man

Virginia State Police (VSP) is investigating a single-vehicle crash that occurred in Charlotte County on Saturday, Oct. 30, at 8:26 p.m. on Staunton Hill Road, less than a mile

north of Clarkton Bridge Road. According to VSP, a 2001 Ford Mustang driven by Eric D. Bates, 40, of Brookneal, was traveling north on Staunton Hill Road when it ran off the

left side of the highway and struck several trees.

Bates died at the scene. He was not wearing a seatbelt.

The crash remains under investigation.

Two dead after crash

Two men are dead after a crash in Pamplin Thursday, Oct. 21.

According to a press release from Virginia State Police (VSP), police responded at 2:37 p.m. Oct. 21 to a crash on Route 460 at the intersection of Pamplin Road.

A 2019 Toyota Tacoma being driven by William W. Clark, 86, of Charlotte Court House,

was traveling west on Route 460 when Clark attempted to make a left turn onto Pamplin Road and was struck by an eastbound 2007 Kenworth tractor-trailer driven by Marvin E. Baskerville, 55, of Green Bay.

The impact of the crash caused the Toyota to spin off the road and strike a sign.

A passenger in the Toyota, William Andrews Jr., 59,

of Charlotte County, died at the scene. He was wearing a seatbelt.

Clark, who was not wearing a seatbelt, was transported to an area hospital where he succumbed to his injuries on Thursday, Oct. 28.

Baskerville was uninjured in the crash.

The incident remains under investigation.

Voters elect new supervisors

By Crystal Vandegrift
The Charlotte Gazette

In unofficial poll results as of press time on Tuesday, Nov. 2, Charlotte County voters have elected a new supervisor for the Red Oak/Wylliesburg District for the Board of Supervisors.

According to the Virginia Department of Elections, absentee ballots may be accepted until noon on Nov. 5. Therefore, the results are incomplete. Results will be certified on Nov. 15.

At the polls, in Red Oak/Wylliesburg, voters chose Hazel Bowman Smith with 57.72% of the vote over opponent Larry Newcomb who received 41.54%.

There were five write-ins for the Red Oak/Wylliesburg BOS District seat.

The Red Oak/Wylliesburg seat is currently held by Kay Pierantoni, who announced that she would not seek reelection after one term earlier this year.

Current Phenix/Aspen Supervisor Donna Fore sought reelection to her board seat against Walter Bailey.

Voters in the Phenix/Aspen District chose Bailey with 61.71% of the vote to Fore's 37.77%.

There were four write-ins for the Phenix/Aspen BOS District seat.

Keysville District BOS incumbent member R.L. "Butch" Shook Jr. ran unopposed and retained his seat with 97.97% of the vote.

There were 13 write-ins for the Keysville BOS District seat.

The Charlotte County School Board also had several seats up for election this November, including seats in the districts of Red Oak/Wylliesburg, Keysville, Phenix/Aspen and County Seat.

Current appointed school board member Carmalita G. Escoto received 37.38% of the votes at the polls, while voters gave E. Ennis Jones 61.43% of the vote.

This election was to fill the unexpired term that was held by Angela Cook.

Cook resigned in 2020, and Escoto was appointed to fill her position.

In the Phenix/Aspen District seat, incumbent Robert "Bobby" Johnson sought reelection to his seat on the school board; however, voters gave his opponent Elise A. Green 58.58% of the vote.

Johnson received 40.90%.

Voters in the Red Oak/Wylliesburg and Keysville District will see no change as incumbents Teresa T. Dunaway and R.B. "Jay" George sought reelection without opposition.

Teresa T. Dunaway received 96.27% of the vote with 21 write-ins.

R.B. "Jay" George received 97.15% of the vote with nine write-ins.

The Charlotte Court House Town Council held a Special Election to fill a vacant seat. No candidate filed for the seat; however, 43 write-in votes were cast.

Relay for Life to hold Luminary Display

Page 3

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LAWSUIT: Assigned attorney will represent county

FROM PAGE ONE

Gary Walker said in an email that the Board had not met with the attorney as of the time of his email.

"I don't know any of the facts of the suit," Walker said. "So... at this time, I have no way to comment."

According to County Administrator Dan Witt, the county has insurance through VACORP, who will assign an attorney to defend both Charlotte County BOS and the Charlotte County Planning Commission.

"The assigned attorney will review the lawsuits and advise both Charlotte County BOS and the Charlotte County Planning Commission on the next steps," Witt said.

Wylliesburg/Red Oak Supervisor Kay Pierantoni, who has been outspoken over solar issues, said in an email

when asked questions, "Unfortunately, since it is a lawsuit, I do not believe it appropriate to respond."

At the heart of the lawsuit is SolUnesco, seeking to construct one of the nation's most extensive solar facilities in Charlotte County at 800 megawatts in the Randolph area of the county.

According to the original 40-page document, the lawsuit aims to dissolve contractual agreements to build the solar facility and recover monetary and punitive damages.

In the Oct. 20 edition of *The Gazette*, Hodsoll said no wrongdoing was done.

"While the lawsuit has no merit, the legal process is nonetheless slow," Hodsoll said.

In addition to SolUnesco and Hodsoll, the suit names real estate broker Sandra Ann Towne and her

company Properties of Virginia LLC and landowner William Berkley Devin as defendants.

According to lawsuit documents, the defendants, individually and together, talked Wilcox, 83, who is known to have dementia, into granting an option to SolUnesco to lease her family farm for use in the Randolph Solar project.

The lease option agreement grants SolUnesco an irrevocable five-year option to lease Wilcox's entire 96.76 acres for the Randolph Solar project.

The lawsuit claims this was done after Towne and Hodsoll were told more than once by Trent that Wilcox was not interested in providing anyone with an option to lease any real property for use in the Randolph Solar Project.

In a letter dated July 12, 2019,

Paul Buckman, M.D Wilcox's primary physician, wrote: "Based on her short-term memory impairment and poor safety awareness due to her dementia, it is my professional opinion that Ms. Wilcox is incapable of making informed decisions about her health and safety and these decisions should be made by her Power of Attorney based on her previously executed advanced directive."

The lawsuit also states that William Berkley Devin, who owns a large portion of land included in the Randolph Solar project, needed SolUnesco to obtain Wilcox's land in order for his land portions to be included.

Documents show that Hodsoll signed the lease agreement on behalf of his company. The suit notes that Wilcox was given a payment of \$3,000.

DISMISSAL: CEO says company did no wrong

FROM PAGE ONE

who was incapable of making such decisions.

Hodsoll said the company has done nothing wrong.

In an emailed statement from SolUnesco Communications Director Melody Gee, Gee wrote, "We are confident that Ms. Trent lacks legal standing, and the case will eventually be dismissed. SolUnesco's legal team at Gentry Locke has filed pleadings seeking the full dismissal of this case."

According to Gee, SolUnesco CEO Francis Hodsoll has been in contact with Wilcox, her caretaker and other participating landowners throughout this process, all of whom Gee said supports the Randolph Solar project without objections.

"While Ms. Trent is free to hold her opinions about solar development, we cannot allow a single disgruntled individual to interfere with the county's decision to evalu-

ate a project that offers major and lasting community benefits."

On Oct. 20, Janson filed for an amended lawsuit naming the Charlotte County Board of Supervisors and planning commission as defendants.

"Less than a month after filing, Mr. Janson had to amend the lawsuit in an attempt to halt the Randolph Solar project, and Ms. Trent has now sued the taxpayers and citizens of Charlotte County by adding the Charlotte County Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission to the complaint," Gee wrote. "In a terrible waste of taxpayer dollars, Janson is suing the County for doing their job: holding a scheduled meeting and approving one part of the project's zoning permit. Frustratingly, Mr. Janson is again using the courts to pursue an anti-solar agenda."

According to Gee, Janson has filed or threatened to file lawsuits against solar projects in multiple counties.

2021 Garden Gift Gala to be held

The MacCallum More Museum and Gardens will be hosting the Lake Country Artisans Guild 2021 Garden Gift Gala at the museum just in time for holiday gift purchases. The Gala will run from Nov. 4 - Nov.14 and will be open Thursdays-Saturdays from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. and Sundays 12 - 4 p.m.

Seven talented Guild Artisans will deck the gallery with beautiful and affordable paintings, leather works, decorative gourds, wire sculpture, scarves, jeweled art, wood turnings, jewelry, fiber art, holiday decor, ornaments and more. Participating artisans are Sarah Bolduc,

Linda Casey, JJ Doyle, Helen Massingill, George Reebles, Karen Sumner and Linda Watkins. With something for everyone, these one-of-a-kind artisan creations are perfect additions to your holiday gift giving and home décor.

The following COVID guidelines are in effect: masks required while in the museum; hand sanitizer is provided to be used when entering the museum; social distancing is to be practiced; and no eating or drinking while in the museum.

The MacCallum More Museum and Gardens is located at 603 Hudgins Street, Chase City. The

Walker Street entrance will be open for ease of access to the museum from on-street parking. As sales occur the artisans will be refreshing the inventory throughout the Gala event. Cash or check is preferred. A portion of sales go to the upkeep of MacCallum More Museum & Gardens.

On Saturday, Nov. 13, MacCallum More Museum & Gardens will also host a Christmas Bazaar in the Garden House from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. with local organizations and other vendors offering seasonal decorations, gift items and baked goods. Come visit the Garden Gift Gala and the Christmas Bazaar on Nov. 13.



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