

Contry music lineup announced for Washington County Fair **A2**

Abingdon to fund 4 projects using \$8.1M in COVID-19 relief money **A2**

Housing programs remind residents about rental assistance **A3**

# Washington County News

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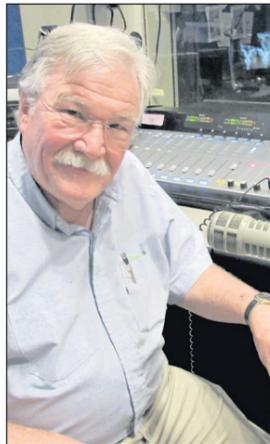
**SPORTS**



John Battle's Blanco credits parents with motivation

» **B2**

**MUSIC**



E&H radio program preserves legacy of Motown

» **B1**

**HEALTH**



Delta variant causes concern for pediatric patients

» **A6**

## Ballad officials say delta variant could be 'catastrophic' for region

**BY DAVID MCGEE**  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
JOHNSON CITY, Tenn. — Ballad Health is bracing to treat a potential flood of COVID-19 inpatients in the coming weeks due to the current surge in cases sparked by the delta variant.

Each of this region's major health indicators is rising much more rapidly than originally forecast, and somber health system leaders last week described what could be the most taxing surge yet — surpassing last winter when they were treating over 300 inpatients per day.

As of last week, Ballad was treating 125 inpa-

tients plus another 60 at home — a 171% increase in a week with 33 in intensive care units. Additionally, the region's seven-day testing positivity skyrocketed to 15% — the highest rate since February — and was substantially higher in some individual Northeast Tennessee counties.

More than 1,300 new cases were reported regionwide last week. That level of cases is comparable to April when the region was in the grips of the U.K. variant.

"Not only has there been a significant increase in hospitalizations, but we are seeing more pediatric patients

with COVID-19," said Jamie Swift, Ballad's chief infection prevention officer. "We are facing a situation that is worse than our worst-case predictions from last year.

"I am not speaking lightly when I say this is catastrophic," Swift said. "I know it's easy to avoid these warnings, to remove your mask and carry on as though it does not affect you until it does. This virus, this variant, has the potential to do serious, long-term damage to our community if the virus continues to circulate at the rate we're allowing it to circulate



Ballad Health Chief Operating Officer Eric Deaton discusses the rising COVID rates in the region.

See **BALLAD**, Page A6

### WHITESIDES SWEET CORN



Jonathan Whitesides (left) hands Archie Smith of Glade Spring some produce. Whitesides is starting a new delivery service that will bring bushels of sweet corn to customers' workplace for their convenience.

## Corn on the job

Delivery service will bring market produce to the workplace

**BY CAROLYN R. WILSON**  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
MEADOWVIEW, Va. — A Washington County produce farmer may be changing the way people shop this summer.

Jonathan Whitesides, 28, is taking his bountiful corn crop on the road again this year, selling bushels of sweet corn at roadside stands throughout the area.

But this season, Whitesides, who has a reputation for growing "the best corn

around," is expanding his farm business to offer the vegetable to buyers who can't always come to him.

"I often hear from customers who don't have the time or opportunities to leave their workplaces to come shop with me," Whitesides said.

Now, the freshly picked corn can come to them, he said.

Whitesides said his new delivery service will not replace selling at roadside stands. He will continue to take his sweet crop to roadside loca-

tions in Glade Spring across from Pizza Plus; Lee Highway in Abingdon across the road from English Meadows Retirement and Assisted Living; Exit 10 at Skyland Coin and Jewelry; Marion Walmart; and farmers markets in Abingdon, Chilhowie and Lebanon.

He plans to open a Bristol, Tennessee, location this summer, as well as a market where customers can pick up produce straight from the farm located on the Middle

See **DELIVERY**, Page A6

## New agriculture commissioner, a Washington County native, visits Abingdon Farmers Market

**BY CAROLYN R. WILSON**  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — The new commissioner of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, a Washington County, Virginia, native, visited the Abingdon Farmers Market on Saturday to present a proclamation on behalf of Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam.

Brad Copenhaver, who was born and raised in Meadowview, made the Abingdon market his last stop while recognizing farmers markets around the state and officially proclaiming Aug. 1 through 7 as Virginia Farmers Market Week.

During market hours, Copenhaver presented Abingdon Farmers Market Manager David McLeish with a plaque bearing a certificate of recognition from the governor.

The proclamation recognizes farmers markets in the commonwealth and encourages Virginians to purchase fresh farm products directly from local producers.

McLeish said the recognition couldn't come at a better time, when the market is in full swing, overflowing with a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables.

"Our vendors and I appreciate the governor recognizing Virginia Farmers Market Week, and we're honored Brad chose to pay a visit to the Abingdon market. We work really hard to keep everything going smoothly for the local people," said McLeish.

See **FARMERS**, Page A5

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# Farmers

From Page A1

Fork of the Holston River in Meadowview.

Beginning Tuesday, Aug. 17, Whitesides will deliver corn to customers at their workplaces, such as banks, doctor's offices, hair salons and local restaurants. Deliveries will be made each Tuesday and Thursday, as requested. Customers can pay using Venmo or PayPal systems or by delegating an office person to collect payments.

The pilot program initially will concentrate on delivering to businesses around the Abingdon area, said the farmer, who plans to include more delivery service areas in the future.

Whitesides anticipates his two delivery drivers will make as many as 20 to 40 stops on each of the two delivery days.

A live spreadsheet on Google Sheets will allow customers at each business to record their orders for corn, usually two days in advance of delivery.

## Acres of corn

Whitesides uses succession planting by staggering the planting of the crop in order to have a continual harvest of corn.

He anticipates having corn to sell throughout most of October. New this year is the sale of his homegrown half-runner green beans, a crop he hopes to add to his produce business.

Whitesides planted more corn than ever this year, increasing the acreage from 28 to 42 acres.

"So far, these have been some of the best crops I've ever had," said Whitesides. "Dry weather has hurt some of the late crops, but dry weather also has a tendency to make corn sweeter."

He credits improved soil and pest control for giving him a bumper crop this summer.

"The pandemic created a higher demand for sweet corn last year because more people were preserving corn due to fears of food shortages," he said. "Sales have slowed down this year, but business is still really good."

## Feeling blessed

The farmer, who earned a business management degree at Virginia Tech in 2015, has wanted to farm since he was a youngster. "I feel very blessed and appreciative of how the community has supported me these past eight years."

To show his appreciation, he is planning a charity dinner at Middle Fork Barn at 30099 Rivermont Drive in Meadowview on Saturday, Jan. 29, 2022. Donations from participants will be used to support their choice among two local charities or St. Jude Children Research Hospital.

In addition, Whitesides will donate 5% of his produce sales this season to furnish the dinner and band.

"It's my way of thanking the community for all they do for me."

For more information on the delivery service, contact Whitesides at jonthantwhitesides@gmail.com, or call 276-356-9061.

Check out "Whitesides Sweet Corn" on Facebook for up-to-date posts about deliveries and roadside market days.

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

# Ballad

From Page A1

right now — especially for our children."

Health system officials repeatedly called on residents to get the vaccine to help curb this spread, noting that the stage is set for the next six weeks since it requires a one-month wait between vaccine doses.

"We could see an inpatient census of 400 to 500 patients within the next few weeks," said Eric Deaton, Ballad's chief operating officer. "This is worse than what we anticipated. It's very different than before. Last year we were working very closely together as a community to social distance, to wear

masks and to do everything we could to stop the spread of the coronavirus, and that was before we had a vaccine."

The current spread is occurring because around half the region's population is vaccinated against the virus, and more than 95% of hospitalized patients are unvaccinated.

Deaton said it is "demoralizing" to many caregivers because this "doesn't have to be happening."

"This past summer, we made a very significant investment to our frontline caregivers to pay higher rates to reduce turnover numbers," Deaton said. "Simply put, there are not enough caregivers across the region or across the United

States today to take care of all the patients we're seeing with COVID. Many hospitals across the country are in the same crisis we're in today.

"When we get full, what we have to do is transfer to facilities outside our region. When we're all full, we have the inability to transfer patients. The consequences of this pandemic can be very grim," Deaton said.

They are currently trying to contact retired or former health care workers to bolster staffing.

COVID-19 patients require extra attention, Deaton said, which can strain the nursing staff.

"The care of a [patient with] COVID is more intensive; they need more intervention, and it does

put a greater strain on our team to take care of them," Chief Nursing Executive Dr. Lisa Smithgall said in response to a question. "When you have to take more care of specific patients, and you have the same number of team members, it pulls nurses potentially from other patients. We tend to stretch ratios in those other areas because we only have so much staff. Our team has more workload, and we put stricter guidance on them with goggles and face shields, so they have the burden of all that PPE on everybody who works in those environments."

Smithgall also addressed the emotional aspects of facing down another surge.

"Our team is discouraged. They're very frustrated," Smithgall said. "They thought we were getting better as well, and they feel their community is not supporting them. We ask our community to support us in this."

In response to increased cases, combined with a shortage of nursing staff, Ballad will this week require everyone entering any Ballad facility to wear a mask regardless of vaccination status, there will be limitations on visitors to non-COVID patients, and they expect to stop nonemergency testing and surgeries, Deaton said.

They also expect to finalize a decision about imposing a hold on elective procedures.

# Delta variant's impact on kids prompts alarm

BY DAVID MCGEE  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

The delta variant impacts children much more than the traditional COVID-19 strain, which is prompting alarm among local health leaders.

Two medical administrators from Niswonger Children's Hospital this week urged parents to have all children who are 12 and older vaccinated while calling for mask-wearing as schools reopen.

Dr. Patricia Chambers, chief medical officer, said this week the hospital had four pediatric COVID-19 patients. Three are currently hospitalized, and two are on ventilators.

"We have hospitalized children younger than 3, and we have hospitalized teenagers," Chambers said. "In fact, 22% of positive cases in our region have been patients under the age of 18. This is astounding because this is not what we all hoped and thought for our children. ... Across our state, we have had increased numbers of hospitalized patients with COVID-19 in pediatric hospitals, and, unfortunately, many of them are critically ill, and we've had numerous deaths across the state."

Chambers urged parents to get vaccinated and get their children ages 12 and up vaccinated immediately.

"This is real, and this is happening, and we have to move, as a community, to do something to protect our children. The vaccine is approved, it's safe and effective for age 12 and up," Chambers said. "Go get your vaccine, go get your adolescent's vaccine, and do it today. We have to do



DAVID MCGEE/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Niswonger's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Patricia Chambers talks about the COVID cases in the children's hospital.

something to protect the kids who cannot get the vaccine yet because they are under 12. They are being infected with the virus; they are spreading the virus. They are getting sick and critically ill from the virus."

Dr. Josh Henry, medical director of Niswonger Children's Hospital's pediatric intensive care unit, reiterated that message.

"We've had more pediatric hospitalizations this week than during any other previous week during this pandemic," Henry said. "Unfortunately, the children who are becoming critically ill and needing my services are the unvaccinated. There is a misconception this virus does not cause life-threatening illness in children, and, unfortunately, that is no longer

holding true."

Henry said the two children currently in the ICU are "critically ill, fighting for their lives," and it will be a "long struggle."

Henry said intubating a child and putting them on life support is the start of a long process.

"The scariest part of all of this is that these children are requiring a ventilator. For a parent to watch a child be intubated, it can be incredibly traumatizing," Henry said. "On average, a child when intubated — regardless of the reason — is intubated for five to seven days. It is not a quick fix. I have to buy your body time to fight the virus and get better."

Henry said he thinks about his own child in situations like that.

"My son is 11. I am eagerly awaiting the day

that he can be vaccinated when he turns 12. In the meantime, I am doing everything I can as a parent to protect my child. As a parent, I am scared. I never want to see my own child roll into my unit."

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, told a Senate committee last month that research is ongoing into vaccination safety and efficacy for children, and he expects the minimum age to be lowered sometime this fall or winter.

Ballad officials also came out strongly in support of children wearing masks when they return to school, where the potential spread of COVID-19 is "incalculable," given nothing is known about long-term impacts to children, Chambers

said.

"If your child is going back to school this week, they need to wear a mask. Ballad Health unequivocally supports universal masking for children going back to school," Chambers said. "We support vaccinations for every child and every adult, 12 and over, unless there is some reason you have complications with the vaccine."

She also urged people to avoid large gatherings.

Ballad Health Chief Operating Officer Eric Deaton echoed that position in response to a question.

"We do support children wearing masks in schools. We feel it's the best way to protect children. Masking is the best thing we can do right now for them; we do support the CDC guidelines," Deaton said.

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## WANDERING AROUND WASHINGTON

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.

# Town Creek still poses problem for town pipes

WALLACE, Va. — So there I was, slumbering on the outskirts of Wallace, Virginia. And my son John and his friend Larry awoke me around 2:30 a.m.

It was a dark and stormy night.

We heard howling wind, lightning, thunder, rain and the rat-tat-tat of hail landing on the roof.

And then a car came up our driveway, at nearly 3 a.m.

Strangers are not exactly what you want to see in the middle of the night.

But they didn't stop.

The car came up to turn around.

As it turned out, a tree landed across the road, and that obstructed the traffic flow right near our driveway.

All this was happening in the wee hours of Sunday morning.

Hail was falling across Washington County, landing in Bristol at 2:35 a.m. and coming up to Abingdon at 2:45 a.m., according to the National Weather Service.

On Sunday, I talked to Theresa Kingsley-Varble. She's the county's emergency management coordinator. And she was busy tracking traffic traps caused by flooded roads in Benhams, Mendota, High Point and Greendale.

I didn't tell her about the tree on the street in Wallace.

It was no longer a problem.

John and Larry had taken care of it.

But, wait — I'll get to that.

Up in Abingdon, you could not drive U.S. Highway 11 in the 300 block of East Main Street. It was closed due to high water flooding on Town Creek.

What a mess!

Folks, this is the main alternate route for I-81, just in case the interstate gets clogged. And, for more than 24 hours, you had to follow a detour in Abingdon.

On Monday, I talked to John Dew, the town's director of public works. And he told me more about how town officials were going to study Town Creek.

Even so, it will take years to get this mess fixed, he advised me.

And why's that?

Because the road is so low and there is so much water going through such small pipes.

Once upon a time, Dew said, people would actually drive right through the creek on Main Street — just like you still do on Deadmore Street between Main and Valley streets in Abingdon.

Deadmore Street has a concrete ford. But, during the floods of the weekend, it was closed — like the 300 block of East Main Street.

Why in the world in the year 2021 are we still driving through creeks?

Driving through water can be a real dumb thing to do. You just never know how deep the water is or if the roadway might be falling apart beneath all of that water.

You don't want to drive through water in a storm.

And you don't want to run over trees.

As for the tree in the road at Wallace, I have to applaud John and Larry for saving the night as these teenagers picked up that small tree and moved it over to the side of the road so the traffic would no longer be blocked.

They considered themselves heroes.

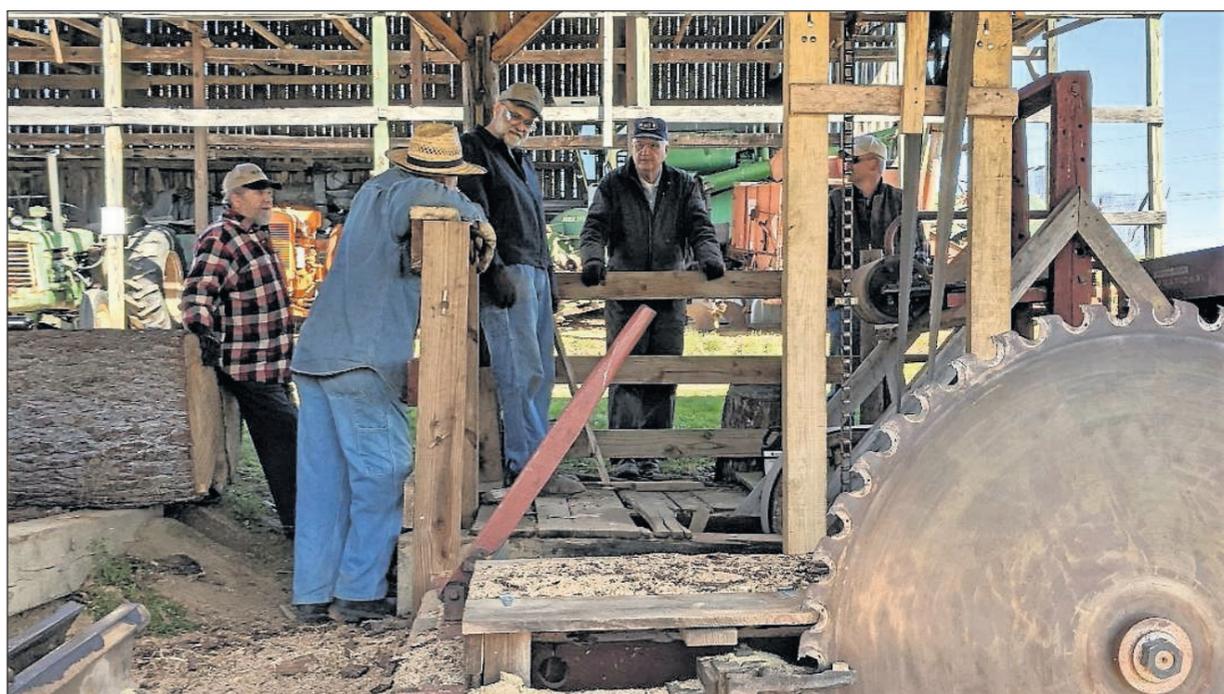
And they really were.

If there ever was a dark and stormy night, then surely that's what we had as Saturday turned into Sunday in Washington County.



Joe Tennis

## OLD GLADE ANTIQUE TRACTOR ASSOCIATION



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/WALTER JENNY

Members of the Old Glade Antique Tractor Association recently gathered to fire up a century-old sawmill they had reassembled and restored years ago.

# Creating buzz

## Farming history comes to life with restored sawmill

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

ABINGDON, Va. — Members of the Old Glade Antique Tractor Association found a cure for their cabin fever recently when they fired up an antique saw that had been reassembled and restored by the group nearly a decade ago.

Ron Stevenson, president of the association, said regulations from COVID-19 have kept members from hosting their antique farm equipment shows at Fairview Historic Homestead in Abingdon during the past year.

A group of six members jumped at the chance to socialize with their friends and put the old A.B. Farquhar sawmill to work, cutting about 15 logs that were donated to them last winter.

According to Stevenson, much of the lumber donated to the nonprofit organization is cut with the antique circular sawmill and used for projects at the living history museum.

Using the 1867 sawmill, the group earlier constructed a fire pit for the purpose of processing sorghum syrup for one of their fundraising events in the fall.

Lumber also fashioned from the saw was used to build a tool room at Fairview.

The sawmill was donated to the tractor association in 2014 from the Briscoe family of Abingdon. According to Stevenson, a foundation for the sawmill was donated by the town of Abingdon from the same wood recovered from a Virginia Creeper Trail trestle damaged in the 2011 tornado.

Stevenson said the sound of the old sawmill is unique because the teeth are in a constant up-and-down motion, earning it the nickname "buzz saw."

"The operator of the sawmill has to listen to the sound of the engine to determine how fast he can run the blade through the log."

The sawmill turns out lumber that is rough cut

and textured, giving it a rustic appearance.

Stevenson explained the circular sawmill, which is obsolete now, has been replaced by more sophisticated band mills that operate more efficiently. Nowadays, band mill operators ride in air-conditioned cabs with push button controls.

"The circular saw we have takes about six people to operate. In the modern mills today, one man can do it all."

Historically, the donated sawmill was powered by a tractor. Stevenson said they received the tractor as part of the donation, but skills to repair the old tractor are nearly a lost art. The tractor is used for display only.

Members had to rely on their own knowledge and skills to help them learn how to operate the antique sawmill.

The engine of the circular saw, run by a Farmall power unit, moves a series of flat belts and pulleys. A rail-mounted carriage directs the logs into the spinning saw blade. An edger smooths the rough edges and creates a four-sided board.

The sawmill is just one of more than 60 pieces of farm equipment that have been donated to the tractor association since it formed in 1981. Through a partnership with Fairview, the tractor association is able to store their farm equipment at the museum and conduct

### If You Go

» **What:** Old Glade Antique Tractor Annual Show

» **When:** 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on June 17, 18 and 19

» **Where:** Fairview Historic Homestead, 908 Hillman Highway, Abingdon.

» **Info:** Outdoor event includes display of antique sawmill, tractors, vehicles, the Fairview cabin and other farm equipment

educational programs for the community.

"Our mission is to show people what farming was like in the late 1800s and early 1900s," said Stevenson.

Cathy Hagy of Abingdon, whose ancestors

See **TRACTOR**, Page A4



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/CAROL STEVENSON

The end result is a four-sided board.

# Tractor

From Page B1  
 owned the estate as far back as the 1700s, credits the Old Glade Antique Tractor Association for playing an important role in preserving the history of the region.  
 "I'm excited they are providing our youth and families an education of how life was lived back then. It's so important for our history to be remembered," she said.  
 Just last week, the association got approval to hold their annual outdoor show from 9

a.m. to 4 p.m. on June 17, 18 and 19 at Fairview Historic Homestead. The show will include the display of antique tractors, vehicles, the sawmill, the Fairview cabin and other farm equipment.  
 Admission is free, but donations are appreciated, said Stevenson.  
 The association operates solely on donations but still manages to give back to the community. Each year, members raise 3,000 pounds of potatoes at Fairview and donate them to a local food bank.  
 Members also prepare the soil for the Community

Gardens project sponsored by Sustain Abingdon. Residents of Washington County and Bristol, Virginia, are eligible to lease the garden spaces, each measuring 20 by 20 feet. Rent for each plot is \$25 for the spring and summer growing season. Garden plots are already plowed and marked off for the convenience of gardeners.  
 Old Glade Antique Tractor Association is located at 908 Hillman Highway in Abingdon.  
 Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at news@washconews.com.



The A.B. Farquhar sawmill dates back to 1867.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/WALTER JENNY

# FAITH & WORSHIP

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## EASTER

Salvation is ours because of Christ's crucifixion upon the cross. He died so that we could be forgiven. Salvation is God's gift to us; in return we can grow in wisdom and in the Spirit and spread God's love to others. In 1 John 4:16-17, we read, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way love is made complete among us." This Easter, accept God's gift of love and share it with joy!

**Daily Bible Readings**

|               |               |              |              |              |              |               |
|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Luke 24:13-35 | Luke 24:36-53 | Jonah 1:1-17 | Jonah 2:1-10 | Jonah 3:1-10 | Jonah 4:1-11 | Hosea 1:1-2:1 |
|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|

Scriptures Selected by the American Bible Society X Daily Devotional at [DailyBible.AmericanBible.org](http://DailyBible.AmericanBible.org)  
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# Washington County News

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## THEATER



Barter keeps afloat with continuing Moonlite Drive-In shows

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## BUSINESS



Father, son duo are new owners of Mojo's Restaurant

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## SPORTS



Holston falls short in Class 1 semifinals against Galax

» B2

# Judge accepts insanity plea

Appalachian Trail murder suspect found not guilty by reason of insanity



Jordan

**BY ROBERT SORRELL**  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
A federal judge has accepted a not guilty plea by reason of insanity made by the man accused of slashing an Appalachian Trail hiker to death in the summer of 2019 in Southwest Virginia, according to court records.

James Louis Jordan, 31, was charged in connection with the May 2019 death of Ronald S. Sanchez Jr., 43, of Oklahoma,

and the stabbing of a Canadian woman near the Wythe and Smyth county line. Since then, he's undergone multiple mental health examinations to determine whether he is competent to stand trial.

In July 2019, Magistrate Judge Pamela Sargent first found Jordan, of West Yarmouth, Massachusetts, not competent to stand trial.

"He suffers from a mental disease or defect," Sargent said during a 2019 hearing.

After additional examinations,

See **TRAIL**, Page A5

Victims' statements reveal physical and emotional toll of 2019 attacks

**BY ROBERT SORRELL**  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

A judge considered several emotional victim impact statements when deciding whether to accept a not guilty plea by reason of insanity in the Appalachian Trail murder case in Southwest Virginia.

Judge James Jones accepted a plea made by James Jordan, 31, on murder and assault charges. Jordan will remain in custody and receive mental health treatment. Jordan was charged in connection with the May 2019 death of Ronald S. Sanchez Jr.,

43, of Oklahoma, and the stabbing of Kirby Morrill of Canada, near the Wythe and Smyth county line.

"Mr. Jordan is mentally ill, I understand," Morrill wrote in a victim impact statement. "And while I have some compassion for mental illness in general, I am sure you'll forgive me for saying that I can find none for him. Many mentally ill people are not violent, nor cruel. Mr. Jordan is a murderer. It is anguishing to have him labeled not guilty in

See **VICTIMS**, Page A5

# Built to last

After 10 years, Wallberg Construction Co. isn't slowing down

**BY CAROLYN R. WILSON**  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
ABINGDON, Va. — An Abingdon-based business built on the value of philanthropy is becoming one of the regions fastest-growing commercial general contractors.

Wallberg Construction, owned and operated by Jeff Wallace and brothers David and Nathan Berg, isn't slowing down a bit, despite the pandemic this past year.

In just 10 years, the company has expanded from one employee to 40 workers, increasing revenue almost 70-fold during that time.

As impressive as the numbers are, their mission is simple.

"We are a company that seeks to improve the lives of people who work for us. To achieve that goal, we have to be a successful, profitable general contracting company that provides creative and high-quality solutions for our clients," said Nathan.

Licensed contractors in 20 states, the owners perform work throughout the eastern United States.

They just finished a project in Springfield, Vermont, and they are currently working on projects in Garland and Tyler, Texas. They'll be in Danville, Kentucky, later this summer.

But among their top 10 projects is the restoration of the Summers building, a century-old brick structure on the corner of Main and Court Street in Abingdon.



From left, Jeff Wallace, Nathan Berg and David Berg of Wallberg Construction stand in front of the Summers building in Abingdon, one of their current projects.

The massive structure will feature a glass penthouse on the top floor where a restaurant and bar will operate. The second and third floors will offer office and retail spaces. The basement will serve as a kitchen and a cellar for wine storage.

"We're taking painstaking measures to put the building back to the original form," said David. "We're restoring original trim, wood floors and as much of the plaster walls as possible."

According to the brothers, the rooftop restaurant will of-

fer customers a full panoramic view of Abingdon, highlighting beautiful elements of architecture that can't be enjoyed from the ground.

Other local projects include the restorations of historical sites, such as the Meadowview depot, Smyth Chapel at Emory and many of the buildings on the campus of Emory & Henry College, including the exterior renovation of the depot, painting the train bridge at the entrance of the college and repairing the steeple at Memorial Chapel.

They renovated the exterior of the Preston House, which stands outside the Bristol, Virginia, city limits. The house is believed to be one of the oldest frame houses in Washington County, Virginia.

Wallberg Construction also recently built the Damascus Trail Center, a resource to help empower new visitors and stewards of the Appalachian Trail.

Their commercial work often takes them out of the region to work for large

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Ronald S. Sanchez Jr., 43, was hiking on the Appalachian Trail when he was attacked in 2019. Authorities say he was stabbed to death by James L. Jordan.

## Victims

From Page A1

any fashion, though I accept the legal ramifications of those words are very different from the effect they have on me.”

If Jordan is unable to recognize his actions harmed people, Morrill asked Jones to use his power to “keep that man under lock and key. Keep him from harming anyone else. He has demonstrated that he is an unwavering danger to those around him, and I cannot bear the thought of him inflicting upon anyone else what he has on me. And on Ron.”

Morrill said it was her lifelong dream to complete a thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail. The attack in 2019 and COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has kept her from completing that goal, she wrote.

Morrill was stabbed multiple times and had to run 3 miles to safety after seeing Sanchez stabbed to death.

“I am haunted by Mr. Jordan’s actions in May 2019,” she wrote. “And, as a direct consequence of his actions, I am also haunted by my own decisions.”

Morrill said she watched and listened in “helpless near-disbelief” as she said Jordan “transformed before my eyes from a bewildered, confused man into a violent animal. I saw him attack and murder a good, kind man. And I remember his eyes when I tried to run, and when I looked back over my shoulder. They are burned into my mind.”

Morrill said she will never forgive herself for not trying to help Sanchez, a military veteran, who was also hiking the Appalachian Trail.

The woman said she used to find solace in forests. “I no longer find solace

there,” she wrote. “The last time I tried, I was overcome with anxiety and had to call for someone to come get me. When I have managed to set up camp, I sit in my sleeping bag and I remember a man breathing heavily outside my tent, threatening to burn me in my sleep. Every noise in the night wakes me from restless near-sleep. It’s gotten worse with time, rather than better. Mr. Jordan seems to have unwittingly deprived me of one of my deepest comforts.”

Sanchez’s girlfriend also submitted a victim impact statement.

“The killer didn’t just take Ron’s life, he took my future, my security, my joy,” Brenda Kelley wrote. “My capacity for joy is so limited now. It was torn away, violated, destroyed. Murdered. How do you recover from that? You don’t. It is death of joy.”

Kelley said she hopes Jordan is never released from custody.

“I would never want anyone else to have to go through the living hell of pain and heartache that I have been put in because of this person,” Kelley wrote. “The risk is too high. It can be avoided altogether and others can be kept safe by keeping him locked up.”

Kelley has been working to pick up where Sanchez’s hike ended in Southwest Virginia. She hopes to reach Pennsylvania by summer.

“One thing that allows me to do this is knowing that Ron’s killer is locked up,” she wrote. “If he is freed, I will never feel safe again on the trail and that will be one more thing the killer has taken from me.”

## Trail

From Page A1

in 2020, Sargent then found Jordan competent to stand trial and ruled that the case could proceed. A trial date was planned for this year but has been delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions put in place in federal court.

Last year, Jordan’s attorneys filed a motion saying they planned to use an insanity defense in the case.

On Thursday, Judge James P. Jones agreed to a plea of not guilty solely by reason of insanity, court records show. Jones considered government exhibits, victim impact statements and an apology from Jordan, as well as psychiatric reports and criminal complaints filed following the 2019 attacks.

Authorities said Jordan stabbed two hikers multiple times after first threatening them while they were resting in their tents at a campsite along the trail in Southwest Virginia. Multiple people contacted law enforcement that night to report that Jordan, who went by the trail name “Sovereign,” was terrorizing hikers. Officers eventually located Sanchez’s body, the female hiker and Jordan.

The female hiker, who suffered multiple wounds, ran about 3 miles from the site of the attack and was finally rescued by first responders.

Law enforcement in Bristol and Unicoi County in Tennessee previously encountered Jordan after receiving 911 calls from hikers on the Appalachian Trail and a business owner regarding the man’s behavior.

When he approached the hikers in Southwest Virginia, he was acting disturbed and unstable, playing his guitar and singing, a federal complaint states.

Jordan will remain in federal custody.

## Wallberg

From Page A1

companies like Hibbitt and Claire’s.

### Berg brothers

The brothers credit much of their success to learning bedrock principles from Wallace, their mentor since they were teenagers.

Their complementary strengths have worked together to build a flourishing business.

A business management graduate from King University, Nathan has created a top-notch accounting system, offering his expertise in financial management skills to effectively understand and manage the company’s financial needs. Nathan also holds a master’s degree from the London School of Economics.

David is the detail-oriented, hands-on member of the team, working with employees to help them reach their full potentials.

The brothers grew up in Meadowview, learning a lot about craftsmanship from their father, Charlie Berg.

“He also taught us a lot about a good work ethic,” said Nathan. The brothers were responsible for helping heat a wood stove in their old farmhouse when growing up.

David’s first job in construction was at age 16. When Nathan was only 14, he was on-site helping at a demolition job.

Wallace’s start in the construction business began in 1978 when he graduated from Patrick Henry High School, setting out with his brother Andy to make a living at their trades. Jeff was a plumber, and Andy’s expertise was in electricity. Together they created Wallace Brothers Construction, a small business that concentrated on area remodeling and building projects. Jeff plumbed his first

house while still a student at what was formerly the Washington County Regional Trade Center in Abingdon.

Throughout his early career, Wallace gained a reputation for embracing the spirit of giving. He often donated his serves to local people in the community who couldn’t pay for work — a practice that’s still alive after the owners became business partners in 2011, later meshing their names to form Wallberg Construction Co.

### Building communities

Not only does Wallberg Construction build lasting structures, they also seek to build strong communities.

After working on hundreds of projects in the Washington County area for the past 40 years, Wallace has slowed down on construction jobs and put his Christian faith into action. He was instrumental in starting The Church of New Beginnings in 1990, where he was pastor until last year. The church that was built on 17 acres in Glade Spring includes a

pool, amphitheater and campground for annual youth camps.

Wallberg Construction is in the process of constructing a vocational school on the property as a way to help people who are unable to find steady jobs after incarceration.

“The school also will benefit us,” said David. “We are investing in our workforce, providing vocational training and assisting in career development.”

“The average age for construction and skilled tradesmen is in the 50s. They are aging out of the profession, and fewer young people are replacing them. With this training, we may be able to hire many of them for our company.”

In addition to teaching such skills as plumbing, electrical, carpentry, masonry and auto mechanics, the school will focus on teaching basic life skills.

“We want to teach people how to do life and do it well,” said Wallace.

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

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