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# Washington County News

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## SPORTS



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## COMMUNITY



Vintage base ball leagues have begun popping up in region

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Wildlife agency asks bird feeders be taken down due to illness

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# Warner, local leaders discuss bringing tech hub to SW Va.

**BY DAVID MCGEE**  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
BRISTOL, Va. — U.S. Sen. Mark Warner met with Southwest Virginia leaders Friday afternoon to marshal interest in capitalizing on new federal legislation designed to spawn U.S. competition with China.

More than 40 city, county, education and business leaders learned details about the U.S. Innovation and Competition Act, a \$250 billion bill to fund research and manufacturing to compete with China in high-tech areas like semiconductor manufacturing. The bill was passed

by the U.S. Senate and is awaiting a vote by the House.

Among its provisions, the legislation would establish 18 federally funded "tech hubs" around the country aimed at growing new industries to compete with China. Under a Warner-authored provision, at least six of these hubs would be required to be established in small or rural communities.

"I think at least one of those should be in Southwest Virginia," Warner said. "We've got a great workforce, we've got smart people, and I've got to see if I can convince the ad-

ministration to bring one of those tech hubs here."

The other part of the bill centers specifically on U.S. manufacturing semiconductors.

"We also made an investment to say we need to build more semiconductors — these chips that go into any kind of electronic device from your car to your washing machine to your cellphone," Warner said. "We need to build seven to 10 new fabrication facilities — these are \$10 million-plus manufacturing facilities — and I'd like one of them to be in Virginia as well."

Warner praised the turn-

out for a Friday prior to Independence Day weekend.

"To have this kind of turnout shows this community is still very interested in making sure we make Southwest Virginia a good place to work and raise your family, and it could be on the cutting edge of 21st-century technology."

State Sen. Todd Pillion, R-Abingdon, said the region will compete.

"We absolutely have a shot," Pillion said after the meeting. "It's all hands on deck, as usual, and we have a senator that's on the Senate Intelligence

Committee that's committed to bringing some of those dollars back to Southwest Virginia, and we're going to take advantage of that."

Asked how he would make the case for Southwest Virginia, Warner noted that information technology firm CGI has operated in Russell County for many years.

"CGI, the company I brought in when I was governor, how they will testify about the high quality of worker; the fact that we've got UVa-Wise, East Tennessee [State], Emory &

See **TECH**, Page A5

## VIRGINIA HIGHLANDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE



**MaKayla Blevins (left), simulation lab instructor, and Bethaney Hilt (right), simulation lab coordinator, test out the responses of a new manikin. Manikins can be controlled remotely by instructors, prompting them to bleed, breathe, cry and even give birth, while nursing students practice critical skills for patient care.**

# Safe simulation

### New manikins bring more lifelike scenarios to nursing students

**BY CAROLYN R. WILSON**  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
ABINGDON, Va. — When nursing students return to campus at Virginia Highlands Community College this fall, they'll have a few new patients to treat in the classroom.

But these patients are not real. They are manikins — with all the bells and whistles that simulate real-life scenarios — that create a safe environment for students to learn without the risk of harming real patients.

They look and act so real that they can simulate a variety of symptoms and scenarios. Amaz-

ing technology allows the simulation manikins to bleed, breathe, cry, urinate and even give birth.

A simulation lab with high-tech equipment is nothing new for the Abingdon community college; however, the nursing department has upgraded with four new state-of-the-art nursing manikins made by Gaumard Scientific that are so innovative they are blowing students away.

The new equipment with advanced technology replaces outdated manikins in the lab, offering

See **MANIKINS**, Page A5

# CTB budget includes \$90M for Southwest projects

**BY DAVID MCGEE**  
WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS  
The Commonwealth Transportation Board recently approved state transportation budgets for fiscal 2021-22 and a six-year improvement plan that includes \$90.2 million for 17 projects in Southwest Virginia.

Included on that list are the city of Bristol's \$13.6 million next phase of widening U.S. Route 11 and \$16.8 million for climbing lanes on a portion of Interstate 77 on the eastern edge of the Mount Rogers Planning District.

The new six-year improvement program allocates \$24 billion to highway, rail and public transportation projects through 2027.

"The budgets and six-year program approved will advance our Commonwealth's commitment to improving and maintaining infrastructure through the most critically needed projects," Secretary of Transportation Shannon Valentine said in a written statement. "The range of projects included will allow us to build and sustain economic opportunity for all Virginians."

The package includes \$1.38 billion for 167 total projects under Virginia's fourth round of Smart Scale. A total of \$3.3 billion is dedicated to those projects over the six-year window, which extends to 2027.

The Bristol district, which

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# Manikins

From Page A1  
 students better hands-on experiences.  
 “The manikin purchases were part of our ongoing commitment to investing in the very best of educational technology,” said Kellie Crowe, coordinator of public relations and marketing at the college. Crowe said cost of the manikins hovered around \$327,000.

According to Bethaney Hilt, assistant professor of nursing and simulation lab coordinator, the simulation lab at the community college is the only facility in the area with an advanced pediatric manikin named Pediatric Hal. The closest facility is the University of Virginia, she said.

The college also received two adult manikins and a birthing mom and baby manikins.

Hilt worked with a Gaumard trainer for three days in June to lean about the new equipment and to set up the software. A small group of students from the college was invited to try out the two adult manikins earlier last month.

“The simulation lab is such a great learning experience, especially with our new manikins,” said nursing student Jadelyn Leonard. “The manikins are so realistic, and they bring the clinical experience to you. They can do almost everything. This has helped me prepare for the real world of nursing and has made me more confident in my skills.”

Hilt said the upgrade will make the college’s nursing program even stronger, answering the call to provide qualified nurses at facilities in the area and throughout the country.

“We’re dealing with a huge need for nurses in our local facilities right now,” said the lab simulation coordinator.

Hilt said she and her assistant, MaKayla Blevins, a simulation lab instructor, will run simulations for nearly 300 students in the fall.

She’s also excited that students will be allowed to count their time in the simulation lab as required clinical work that is traditionally available only in hospitals.

“A lot of my students say the simulation lab is their favorite part of nursing, and they’re able to see things in the lab that they don’t get to see in clinical settings off campus. Research shows that students learn just as much this way,” said Hilt.

“Research shows that students are learning a



CAROLYN R. WILSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

**The manikins, purchased by Virginia Highlands Community College, include a pregnant manikin who can give birth to a smaller baby manikin inside. Nursing students learn to watch for physical and emotional signs from the manikin mothers to prep them for their future careers.**

lot more by being interactive and having hands-on experiences,” said Hilt.

Nursing student Sarah Houck agreed the simulation lab provides a safe place for nursing students to learn without the possibility of making life-altering mistakes.

“The scenarios are real and lifelike, but someone’s life isn’t at stake. I feel much more confident in my abilities and knowledge after participating in the simulation lab,” Houck said.

## Simulation manikins

The top of the line pediatric manikin not only has heart, breath and bowel sounds like other manikins, but he also has active facial expressions, and his neck turns, allowing him to follow students as they walk around the room.

“He bleeds when his finger is stuck to check blood sugar. He can cry and look happy, excited and scared. He talks to students. He can even urinate,” said Hilt.

A newer birthing manikin named Victoria features replaceable bellies, one of which contains a baby that actually descends to simulate a birth.

“The students can monitor how the mother is progressing and appropriately address her pain needs. That’s something we couldn’t do with the older model we had,” said Hilt. “They also can make full assessments once the baby is born.”

Students learn to do chest compressions on adult manikins simulating patients who are unresponsive. They also learn other skills such as insert-

ing catheters.

The pandemic has lessened opportunities for students to see pediatric patients or births during their clinical experiences, Hilt said. “This simulation lab gives them those opportunities they’ve been missing out on.”

## Control room

Scenarios with each manikin are controlled by Hilt and Blevins in a control room outside the simulation lab.

Students are assigned manikins and patient charts, allowing them to prepare a care plan for their patients.

“We are not in the room with the students. They are the nurses in the lab making the judgment calls,” said Hilt.

Because the manikins are totally wireless, operating on Bluetooth, a staff member can move a manikin from the hallway into the simulation lab to create an emergency scenario.

“The students are training to treat the simulation lab like it’s an actual hospital and trained to treat the manikin like it’s a real patient,” Hilt said.

“One rule I always tell my students is we do not pretend in here. When you step foot in the simulation lab, you get to make the nursing decisions.

“There won’t be an instructor telling you every move to make on the job, so you have to start getting prepared for that now.”

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

# CTB

From Page A1  
 covers 12 counties and two cities in far Southwest Virginia, will receive \$90.2 million.

“That is more money than we’ve received previously,” Bristol district VDOT spokesperson Michelle Earl said. “This time we received monies from a high-priority funding mechanism we had not previously been eligible for.”

The district has historically received about \$20 million.

The district will receive \$16.8 million in high-priority funding to be used for a 1-mile northbound climbing lane to improve safety along Interstate 77 north of Wytheville. The project is near Exit 32 in Wythe County. Funding is programmed to be available in fiscal year 2024-25, and construction is expected to begin in fiscal 2028-29, Earl said.

The next phase of Bristol’s plans to continue

widening U.S. Route 11 is included in the regular Smart Scale funding. The project would expand the roadway beginning at Alexis Drive near Pal’s Sudden Service to just west of Dominion Place near Walmart. Plans call for four travel lanes, pedestrian crosswalks and a 6-foot-wide sidewalk on the north side. Southbound lanes would remain open, with all work occurring on the northbound side, according to the project scorecard.

“We have not established the schedule on this project. Right now VDOT has the construction funding available in fiscal 2024. That could change,” McCulloch said.

Another proposed segment — ending near Old Airport Road — was not approved in this round of funding.

The city is poised to begin work this summer on another U.S. Route 11 widening project at Interstate 81’s Exit 5.

Other newly approved projects include a \$9.3 mil-

lion intersection improvement in Tazewell County, \$5 million roundabouts in Abingdon, Smyth County and Dickenson County and \$5 million in safety improvements for a section of U.S. Route 23 in Wise County.

The Bristol VDOT district also is to receive \$5.5 million for paving work in the upcoming fiscal year — out of a total \$52.5 million state allocation and \$22.3 million to repair two state-maintained bridges. The statewide allocation to repair 17 bridges was \$164.1 million.

VDOT’s approved \$17.2 billion highway construction program provides funding to 3,700 projects and is supported by \$4.1 billion in funding provided by others.

The Virginia Department of Transportation’s fiscal 2021-22 budget is \$7.2 billion and includes \$6.5 billion net of regional programs.

The Department of Rail and Public Transportation’s budget is \$860.3 million.

# Tech

From Page A1

Henry, Virginia Tech up the road,” Warner said. “And if we’re talking about a semiconductor plant, one of the things you need is lots of water, and we’ve got excess water from abandoned mine assets around Southwest Virginia.”

Some \$52 billion of the bill could be available soon to address the semiconductor emergency, Warner said, assuming the House approves it and it’s signed by the president.

“What I worry is Taiwan has become the world’s leading manufacturer of semiconductor chips — even more than the rest of China,” Warner said. “It would become a horrible national security concern if those facilities fell into the hands of the Communist Party of China.” The Communist Chinese government claims Taiwan is a part of China, but Taiwan op-

erates independently as a constitutional republic.

Among Friday’s other topics was the need to access rare earth minerals, which are required in the creation of semiconductors.

“I know sometimes people don’t want to mine them because there are environmental challenges, but now everything that deals with electronics has some rare earth minerals — tiny traces. But if we don’t have that, we can’t make that stuff,” the senator said. “If there is an opportunity to environmentally, safely take the mining expertise here in Southwest Virginia and go after those assets, I think that would be great. They’ve got to convince me we’ve got that and can do it smartly.”

Mike Quillen, chairman of the GO Virginia Region One council, said the region would compete for the job opportunities Warner described.

“We have good attributes — quality of life, cost of living — but we’ve got challenges. We’ve got topography [issues]; people

we’ve got to keep and bring back into the region for the workforce. We’re not as good as some, but we’ve probably got the heart more than anybody else,” Quillen said.

The former mining executive said it would be difficult to compete economically with China since they have no environmental restrictions and pay their workers far less than other countries.

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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.

## Taking stock of Abingdon's tourism

Abingdon Town Council wants to find its way through the budget process this year.

Town Council members are also hoping tourists find their way to town.

Regarding the budget: That's never an easy thing to do, as council members will say.

Especially in the on-going days of the coronavirus, with the pandemic keeping the Barter Theatre closed on Main Street.

Fact is, the Virginia Creeper Trail may be the biggest tourist draw in town.

But the Barter is quite a big deal — with sometimes as many as 140,000 show tickets sold each year.

As for the Virginia Creeper Trail, well, the money — yeah, the cash — goes to Damascus, where the bike shuttles make money shuttling folks along the trail, zigzagging up to Whitetop along U.S. Highway 58.

Much fewer bike businesses are going to be found around Abingdon, although, yeah, the folks who are traveling on the trail would likely be staying at an Abingdon hotel and eating at an Abingdon restaurant.

So, even though the Barter is closed in town, the Creeper is making wheels turn.

About the Barter: The producing artistic director, Katy Brown, indicated to me recently that surveys say folks are eating at Abingdon restaurants and then going out to see a Barter Theatre show at the Moonlite Theatre, a mile or two outside of the Abingdon town limits.

This is actually all good news. This is not as dismal, for sure, as it was this time last year.

Remember that spring when the Creeper was closed?

News item: Small business, hotels and restaurants have been reduced in their business but "not to the extent that was originally anticipated," said Steve Trotman, the town's financial director, at the May 3 Abingdon Town Council meeting.

What that means: Tourism is not as bad off in Abingdon as was originally feared.

As many as 20,000 a year are going to the Moonlite to see Barter Theatre shows.

And the Virginia Creeper is rocking with thousands more.

Life for Abingdon's tourism economy may be really looking up — even without out a tourism department and with no truly dedicated visitor center in town at this time.

Who would have guessed?



Joe Tennis

## POWERHEAD SUPERFOODS



From left, James Sitton II, Eric Fields and William Rehfluss are growing microgreens for their new business, Powerhead SuperFoods.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

# Micro meals

Family farm growing nutrient-rich microgreens in new startup

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

**B**RISTOL, Va. — A local farm family is having to think small in order to grow big plans for an innovative startup in Southwest Virginia.

Eric Fields and family members have repurposed an old tobacco farm in Washington County into a sustainable business growing microgreens, one of the hottest new health trends in farming.

Microgreens are leafy vegetables that are harvested at a very early stage — just a couple of weeks old and about 1 to 2 inches tall.

The baby plants are a few days older than sprouts but younger than baby greens.

Fields hopes to offer the microgreens year round, selling to local restaurants and individuals, especially during winter months when fresh produce is scarce.

The newly revamped farm in Bristol, Virginia, will be similar to an online grocer with options for customers to pick them up or have them delivered.

They hope to be in full production with the microgreens by June.

They may be tiny, but microgreens pack a punch when it comes to nutrition, said Fields.

"According to studies, microgreens are at least six times more nutrient-packed than greens that have been harvested when mature," said Fields.

The business, appropriately named Powerhead SuperFoods, received second place in the category for startup businesses in the eighth annual Washington County Business Challenge held earlier this year.

Money awarded to the family business will be used to help grow their operation.

In the coming months, the growers will set up a delivery service for customers, such as restaurant chefs and nutritionists. Visits to the farm will be available by appointment once the farm is fully operational.

Fields, who has been interested in gardening since he was 14, relocated from Florida last year to start the business with his mother-in-law, Christine Clark Rehfluss, and her sons William Rehfluss and James Evan Sitton II.

After facing a challenging year due to COVID-19, Fields decided it was a good time to "start the rural life."

"I see Southwest Virginia as a gem of a farming community — a place where high-quality produce is



Eric Fields (left) and William Rehfluss are introducing a new strain of Saskatraz bees to their Powerhead SuperFoods business. The bees are better able to withstand harmful mite attacks that have impacted other honeybee populations.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



grown," he said.

Fields, a former mathematics and physics major at Florida Institute of Technology, believes their microgreens business may be unique to the area, introducing a new growing method that's being called "vegani-cally grown."

Their adopted veganic growing style will ensure they harvest a 100% clean product, he said.

Eventually, the family hopes to offer as many as 40 varieties of microgreens, but for now they are focusing on 28 different varieties, including mustard, lettuce, turnips, white Russian kale, red Russian kale, broccoli, sunflowers and a spicy salad mix.

Most of the microgreens will be produced hydroponically — growing plants without soil. Microgreens that are not grown in water will be grown organically.

"We are taking organic garden-ing a step farther by eliminating the use of animal products and animal

byproducts in the production of our microgreens. The benefit is there is less nutrient salt buildup, which basically means better tasting greens," Fields said.

In addition to the microgreens business, the family is growing lavender in hopes of having four acres of the fragrant perennial by next fall. They will sell dried bouquets, teas, essential oils, soaps and lotions, all made with the flowering plant.

Another venture for the family is raising bees.

Powerhead SuperFoods is introducing Saskatraz, a new strain of honeybee that is bred to increase resistance to the harmful mites that have endangered the lives of bees for years. These bees will enhance the growth of the lavender and will provide other marketable products.

"We hope Powerhead SuperFoods will become synonymous with health and food and be advanced by health care professionals, chefs and grocers," said Fields.

"We want our products to help consumers increase their health and improve the quality of their lives."

Check out Powerhead SuperFoods on Facebook and at their webpage at [www.powerheadsuperfoods.com](http://www.powerheadsuperfoods.com).

Carolyn R. Wilson is a freelance writer in Glade Spring, Virginia. Contact her at [news@washconews.com](mailto:news@washconews.com).



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## A regular rodeo at meeting of Planning Commission

ABINGDON, Va. — Monday's public hearing, presentation and deliberations at the Washington County Planning Commission spanned about the length of a rodeo.

It lasted roughly three hours, including a brief break.

And it got about as tense as a bull-riding competition, wondering what the commission would do.

Three motions to do something went nowhere.

There were not enough votes to approve nor deny the permit.

At first, nobody but one commissioner wanted to table it.

But, in the end, that's what happened.

And simply "tabling" the issue meant there was virtually no decision made on whether or not to grant a special exception permit to hold the "Rodeo in the Valley" on Reedy Creek Road, slated for May 28-29.

That permit is needed to hold the rodeo in an agriculture and residential area.

Producer Brad Nelms said this was "agriculture."

It's a rodeo with barn animals, after all, he said.

But others contested that this was just as much a business as an agriculture event.

And that's because it's slated to feature vendors and food.

It's been roughly 20 years since rodeos were held on this property.

Likewise, roughly 20 people spoke either for or against the rodeo at Monday's planning commission meeting.

Randy Morris said the rodeo location's entrance is near "a bad curve," and the event's presence would devalue property.

Debbie Reynolds also said the rodeo would hurt real estate property values.

Ken Trent said Reedy Creek Road is "a very curvy road," and more traffic could be a problem.

"The traffic, yes, is a big concern," Nelms said Monday.

So was dust, the neighbors said.

To that, Nelms said he plans to use a water truck to keep down dust at the planned rodeo. "I'd just as soon walk in the mud as breathe dust," Nelms said.

"I've been working on this for a while," said Nelms. "The people who are opposed, I'd like to change their minds if I could."



**Joe Tennis**



DAVID CRIGGER/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

The site of "Rodeo in the Valley" on Reedy Creek Road had yet to receive a special exception permit before the Board of Supervisors meeting on Tuesday.

## WASHINGTON COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

# Seed savers

### Library helps preserve and grow heirloom seeds



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Dillon Scott browses through the Seed Saver Library at the Washington County Public Library in Abingdon, Virginia.

BY CAROLYN R. WILSON  
FOR THE WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

MENDOTA, Va. — Margie Dean looks forward to this time of year when she can attend to her flower and vegetable gardens at her Mendota, Virginia, home.

This year, she's planting Sadie's Horse Runner Beans, a rare bean seed that produces red and white flowers that attract hummingbirds.

If she's successful at growing the heirloom runner beans, Dean will save the seeds from the beans she grows and include them in a Seed Saver Library program offered by the Washington County Public Library.

Dean, who is manager of the Mendota library branch, is also in charge of the local Seed Saver Library, a community service program growing in popularity among many libraries throughout the country.

The local seed-saver program is taking root again this spring, and Dean is eager to let more people know library patrons can save and swap seeds free of charge.

By harvesting the next generation of seeds, patrons can return the biggest and best seeds so the library can lend them out to others.

The seed library is open to everyone, which makes a library the perfect home for the program, she said. The seeds are returned in a variety of packages from tins and jars to envelopes.

The concept is simple. Patrons actually can check out seeds from the library to

plant in their own gardens. At the end of the season, the seeds are saved and returned to the library for the next gardener to plant and enjoy.

"It's a lot like checking out a book, but it's on the honor system," said Dean. "All you have to do is grow the seeds, save the seeds and return the seeds for someone else to plant," said Dean. "It's a good way to keep family heirlooms alive."

Patrons ask for assistance at the front desk of the main library in Abingdon and are directed to the Virginia Room, where the seed library is kept. Guests who register their names are limited to six packets of seeds per visit.

Anyone can browse the Seed Saver Library at the Abingdon library, but curbside service also allows patrons to pick up seeds at any of the library's branches in Damascus, Glade Spring, Hayter's Gap and Mendota.

#### Why save seeds?

There's nothing new about saving seeds, said Dean.

"For generations, people have saved seeds. Immigrants even sewed seeds into their clothing to bring with them to America from their homeland."

A big shift in agriculture decades ago accounts for many seeds becoming mass-produced and hybridized.

"Hybrids will not reproduce the same product you initially grew, and also you

have to purchase those seeds every year from the same company," she explained. "As much as 81% of the world seeds are owned by five or six different corporations, and three or more of these are overseas companies."

Dean said saving heirloom open-pollinated seeds is a "movement towards independence and self-sufficiency."

The seed program at the Washington County Public Library focuses on saving heirloom seeds, especially those that are open-pollinated, which means the seeds can replicate themselves exactly year after year as long as there is only one variety of that plant in the vicinity. Open-pollinated seeds are pollinated naturally by wind, birds and insects. They can and will cross-pollinate if other varieties are within the area.

"And that's not necessarily a bad thing," she said. "Most of the seeds today are actually crosses. But if you want to save a certain strain, to keep it pure, you must isolate it from any other varieties of the same plant family."

Heirloom seeds are from plants that have been passed from one generation to another. Many heirloom seeds are saved because their flavors and hardiness are valuable to gardeners.

#### Repurposed card catalogs

Card catalogs no longer

used at the library were colorfully painted and repurposed to hold the vegetable, herb and flower seeds.

"We have local seeds that been saved in families for generations. They are real treasures," said Dean.

According to her, some of the most intriguing seeds at the library are beans.

The local seed library contains a bean called Anasazi, an ancient heirloom bean similar to a pinto bean in size and shape.

The seed library also has unusual seeds for a shrub called a chaste tree.

The Washington County Seed Savers Library is funded by a grant from the Raymon Grace Foundation, which donates money to purchase heirloom seeds each spring. Since the seed library began, people have caught on to donating back to the seed library. As much as 50% of the library's inventory is made up of seeds that have been returned. The other half is ordered from seed companies that specialize in heirloom varieties.

The Washington County Public Library in Abingdon is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday; 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Tuesday; 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday; and is closed on Sunday.

Visit the library's website at [www.wcpl.net](http://www.wcpl.net) or call 276-676-6233 to learn more.

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