

# LEE

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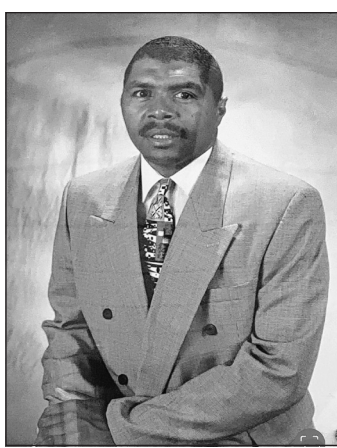
fourth Super Bowl in six years that season. There were a whopping 12 future NFL Hall of Famers on that '79 team, including Noll.

"I was there with all of those guys — Joe Greene, Jack Lambert, Jack Ham, Donnie Shell, Mel Blount ... and that's just the defense," Lee said. "There was also Franco Harris, Terry Bradshaw, Lynn Swann and John Stallworth ... (and Mike Webster)."

And there was another one.

"There was this other guy who was a defensive back (who'd played with Pittsburgh the prior two seasons but would eventually be cut in '79 before hooking up with the 49ers), and he went on to the Hall of Fame, too. One time I'd run a pass pattern, and as I jogged back to the huddle, I overheard the defensive back coach tell the line-backer coach, 'That kid is going to be a great coach one day,' and it was Tony Dungy they were talking about. They hit it right on the nose."

Lee did more than just rub elbows with the stars.



CONTRIBUTED

**Carlos Lee now works as Virginia High's head golf coach and an assistant on multiple sports teams and is a library media specialist for Bristol Virginia Public Schools.**

He made an impression and stuck around for a while and might have caught on for good had Swann won a lawsuit that summer.

The lawsuit stemmed from a vicious, blindside cheapshot Oakland Raiders defensive back George Atkinson had given Swann during a prior season.

"When I got there, Swann was going through a lawsuit in San Francisco," Lee said. "And word we got was that he wouldn't be back to play if he won that thing. That's why they were taking a hard look at us because

they were maybe needing another receiver.

"So when we had the mini-camp, my friend from Pittsburgh told me he'd read an article in the newspaper where they asked Bradshaw if anybody had caught his eye, and Bradshaw had said there was one receiver who caught about every pass thrown his way. And my friend asked me how I did catching the ball, and I said I had caught about everything thrown to me, so he suggested that maybe Bradshaw was talking about me."

Ultimately, however, Swann returned to the Steelers, and the ax finally fell on Lee.

"I was there until the next-to-the-last cut," Lee said. "I was there for about a week after Swann came back, but after an exhibition game, I was told that the general manager wanted to see me and for me to bring my playbook, so I kind of figured what was coming."

"When they released me, they asked if I would like to go to Canada and play, but that I'd have to be an under-the-table player because they were well into their season by then, and they were only allowed to have so many Americans on their roster.

Plus, I'd hurt my back when I was in camp, so I figured I'd just come back home and finish my degree and go from there."

Lee, the nephew of famed VHS coach Ballard Lee, returned to Concord to complete his double major (physical education and library science) degree and has never looked back, unless someone brings up his outstanding playing days.

And there is a lot to recall, like scoring four touchdowns as a junior in a 53-27 rout of Marion, a win that thrust Virginia High on to the 1973 championship of the 10-team Southwest District and eventually the Region IV title and a rare trip to the Group AA semifinals.

"Maybe my best memory from that year came down at Gate City," Lee said. "Raphael (Cansler) and Mike Worrell were our captains, and when we were in the locker room before the game, (Gate City) brought that steam whistle right past where we were."

"Well, those two jumped up and said, 'We better not hear that again!' And they were our leaders who we looked up to, so we made sure we got it done, and we beat them (19-12) that night."

But it was at Concord

where Lee, who'd also been a star baseball outfielder and a 15-point-per-game scorer in basketball while at VHS, really blossomed after moving from running back to wide receiver following his freshman season.

By the time Lee finished with the Mountain Lions, he was either first or second on their career list for receptions, reception yards, touchdown receptions and yards per catch, in addition to being among the all-time leaders as a kick returner and especially a punt returner.

Lee, now 66 years old, was inducted into the Concord Hall of Fame in 1996.

"I'd always run north-south as a running back, but when I started returning punts in college, I realized I had to use my moves and my instincts," Lee said. "And I had some guys who were very excited to block for me and took a lot of pride in it. "So my first season as a wide out, every day after practice, our quarterback, Jeff Broyles, would ask me to stay and get in extra work — and I think that's what developed me into a pretty good receiver. Funny thing was, by the time we finished, the cafeteria would be closed, and

I'd have no way to get dinner. So I trained myself to just go on to sleep and get up early for breakfast."

These days, Lee is Virginia High's head golf coach and an assistant with both the baseball and girls basketball programs, as well as the media specialist at Van Pelt Elementary.

His son, C.J., who played three years of professional baseball in the Braves organization, has given him two grandsons, one a promising 6-4 basketball player at Virginia Middle School and the other a third grader at Van Pelt, right under Lee's passionate eye.

The former Bearcat great doesn't know exactly when he'll give up teaching — he wants to continue to coach even after he retires from the classroom — but when he does, maybe he'll spend more time thinking back on his moment with the Pittsburgh Steelers.

"It was a great experience, I must say," Lee said. "I have fond memories, and I learned a lot.

"But for me right now, what I love is these kids. I have bus duty every morning where I welcome them, and most of 'em will give me a hug. That's pretty special and hard to beat, it really is."

# DISTRICT

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Bree Adams, who totaled 35 assists, and libero Syndee Pendland with 11 digs. It was extra sweet for the Lady Vikings after East had beaten them last year in both the district and region championships. Johns commented, "It was kind of like a payback thing."

She and Blair certainly took over in the final set with their powerful play at the net.

"It was very competitive, and we knew it was going to be a hard-fought match," Blair said. "The revenge factor played a lot into tonight. We lost twice last year, so we held on to that. I'm proud of us that we used that as fuel. We came out and killed it and got the victory."

# WINNERS

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University and major in media and communications with a focus in radio, TV and film.

Holman attends the University of Northwestern Ohio (UNOH). As a kid, she remembers always wanting to be a crew chief for her race car driver father and now helps him with social media and live timing. She also had the opportunity to work at Indianapolis Motor Speedway for the "Month of May," a full month of events at the revered track leading up to the prestigious Indianapolis 500. Her plan for the future is to move over to the marketing and public relations side of motor sports and

help drivers find sponsorships and money to continue their racing careers.

Created by Bristol Motor Speedway in 2017 as a retirement gift to Earnhardt Jr., the annual scholarship awards the winning student a one-time payment of \$2,088 to assist with all college costs, including tuition, housing, books and supplies. Past winners of the BMS Dale Earnhardt Jr. Scholarship are Jaicee Weaver (2018) and Jace Ketron (2019), both of Tennessee High School in Bristol, Tennessee, and Knoxville, Tennessee, student Caleb James Cate (2021), who attends UNOH.

In order to be eligible, students must be a senior at one of the 21 designated high schools or attend one of the eight designated colleges and universities in the Appalachian

Highlands region surrounding Bristol Motor Speedway, or a student at the speedway's official partnering institution, UNOH in Lima, Ohio.

The 21 designated high schools are Abingdon High School; Chuckey-Doak High School; Cloudland High School; Daniel Boone High School; David Crockett High School; Dobyms-Bennett High School; Elizabethton High School; Greeneville High School; Hampton High School; Happy Valley High School; Holston High School; John S. Battle High School; North Greene High School; Patrick Henry High School; Tennessee High School; Science Hill High School; South Greene High School; Sullivan East High School; Virginia High School; West Greene High School and West

Ridge High School.

The nine designated higher educational institutions are East Tennessee State University; Emory & Henry College; King University; Milligan University; Northeast State Technical Community College; Tennessee College of Applied Technology, Elizabethton; Tusculum University; the University of Virginia's College at Wise and the University of Northwestern Ohio.

One of the most iconic race car drivers of all time, Earnhardt Jr. serves as an analyst for NBC Sports' NASCAR Cup and Xfinity Series race coverage and contributes to additional motor sports programming across NBC Sports. In addition to race coverage, Earnhardt hosts "The Dale Jr. Download," a weekly

interview program focused on motor sports, and "Lost Speedways," a Peacock Original, that visits abandoned speedways. Voted by fans as NASCAR's Most Popular Driver for an unprecedented 15 consecutive years (2003-17), Earnhardt, a 26-time winner in the NASCAR Cup Series, including two Daytona 500s, is a third-generation driver who followed his legendary father Dale Earnhardt Sr. and his grandfather, Ralph Earnhardt, into the sport. As a team owner, Earnhardt founded and manages JR Motorsports, which fields four full-time entries in the NASCAR Xfinity Series. In the summer of 2020, Earnhardt was selected to the NASCAR Hall of Fame Class of 2021.

# Region's 53rd Fall Bird Count tallies one-day total of 125

By **BRYAN STEVENS** FOR BRISTOL NOW

The 53rd consecutive Elizabethton Fall Count was held Saturday, Sept. 24, and conducted by 26



**Bryan Stevens**

observers in nine parties. The weather was cool and cloudy, with scattered light showers in most areas. Counters covered parts of Carter County and territory in the adjacent counties of Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi and Washington.

According to longtime count compiler Rick Knight, participants tallied 125 species, which is exactly the average of the last 30 years.

The all-time high for the count was 137 species in 1993. Conversely, the lowest total in the last 30 years was 102 species in 1999.

Along with Rob Armistead, I counted birds around Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park and the linear walking trail along the Watauga River in Elizabethton.

The highlights of our morning included good looks at a male prairie warbler and some common mergansers on the river.

## THE LIST

Canada goose, 881; wood duck, 50; blue-winged teal, 3; mallard, 195; American black duck, 1; and common merganser, 6. Northern bobwhite, 6; wild turkey, 50; and pied-billed grebe, 1. Rock pigeon, 477; Eurasian collared-dove, 8; mourning dove, 248; yellow-billed cuckoo, 3; common nighthawk, 1;

chimney swift, 91; and ruby-throated hummingbird; 18.

Virginia rail, 2; sora, 1; killdeer, 12; semipalmated sandpiper, 1; and wilson's snipe, 1.

Double-crested cormorant, 30; great blue heron, 25; great egret, 5; and green heron, 4.

Black vulture, 43; turkey vulture, 82; osprey, 8; Northern harrier, 1; sharp-shinned hawk, 1; Cooper's hawk, 5; bald eagle, 4; red-shouldered hawk, 7; and red-tailed hawk, 9.

Eastern screech-owl, 19; great horned owl, 7; barred owl, 4; belted kingfisher, 25; red-headed woodpecker, 8; Red-bellied woodpecker, 69; yellow-bellied sapsucker, 2; downy woodpecker, 32; hairy woodpecker, 24; Northern flicker, 50; and pileated woodpecker, 29.

American kestrel, 24; merlin, 1; and peregrine falcon, 2.

Great crested flycatcher, 1; Eastern wood-pewee, 12; Acadian flycatcher, 1; Empidonax species, 1; Eastern phoebe, 93; White-eyed vireo, 4; yellow-throated vireo, 3; blue-headed vireo, 15; and red-eyed vireo 11.

Blue jay, 415; American crow, 436; fish crow, 2; common raven, 11; tree swallow, 130; and barn swallow, 6.

Carolina chickadee, 167; tufted titmouse, 136; red-breasted nuthatch, 7; white-breasted nuthatch, 51; house wren, 9; winter wren, 1; marsh wren, 1; Carolina wren, 157; blue-gray gnatcatcher, 1; golden-crowned kinglet, 4; and ruby-crowned kinglet, 3.

Veery, 2; gray-cheeked thrush, 5; Swainson's thrush, 85; American robin, 271; gray catbird, 37; brown thrasher, 9;

Northern mockingbird, 69; and European starling, 453. Cedar waxwing, 225; house sparrow, 28; house finch, 52; red crossbill, 2; and American goldfinch, 145.

Chipping sparrow, 72; field sparrow, 19; dark-eyed junco, 17; song sparrow, 83; Eastern towhee, 59; Eastern meadowlark, 17; and red-winged blackbird, 67.

Ovenbird, 4; worm-eating warbler, 1; Northern waterthrush, 2; black-and-white warbler,

13; Tennessee warbler, 57; Orange-crowned warbler, 1; Nashville warbler, 3; Common yellowthroat, 15; hooded warbler, 4; American redstart, 34; Cape May warbler, 18; Northern parula, 10; Magnolia warbler, 25; bay-breasted warbler, 16; Blackburnian warbler, 11; chestnut-sided warbler, 5; black-throated blue warbler, 15; palm warbler, 96; pine warbler, 6; Yellow-rumped warbler, 5; yellow-throated warbler, 1; Prairie warbler, 2; black-throated green warbler, 17; and Canada warbler, 1.

Summer tanager, 1; scarlet tanager, 14; rose-breasted grosbeak, 65; blue grosbeak, 2; and indigo bunting, 5.

Some notable misses, according to Knight, were ruffed grouse, broad-



SIMARDFRANCOIS/PIXABAY

**A single great crested flycatcher was tallied during this year's Fall Bird Count conducted by members and friends of the Elizabethton Bird Club.**

winged hawk, brown creeper, common grackle and brown-headed cowbird.

"Many thanks to all par-

ticipants for another good count," Knight remarked when posting the summary of the 2022 Fall Bird Count.

