

# The Charlotte Gazette

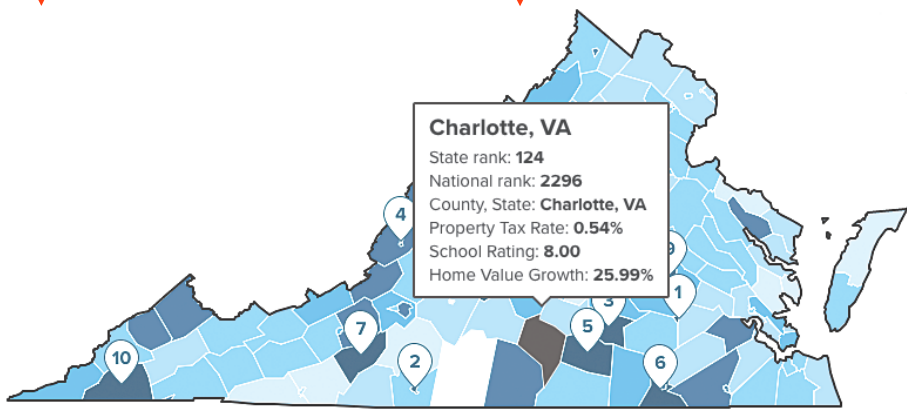
DEVOTED TO THE BEST INTERESTS OF CHARLOTTE COUNTY - FIRST, LAST AND ALWAYS

50 cents

Vol. 150 - Number 9

Wednesday, November 9, 2022

Drakes Branch, Virginia



A graphic from SmartAsset shows Charlotte ranks number 125 when it comes to home value growth however the school system ranks eight out of ten.

## County gains little in home value growth

By Crystal Vandegrift  
The Charlotte Gazette

A new study from financial technology company SmartAsset listed Charlotte County in a much lower tier of homes that have risen in value the most in a five-year period when compared to surrounding counties.

According to the study, Charlotte County home values rose by 25.99% over the past five years, ranking them number 125 in Virginia when it comes to growth rates. The home value rankings are one factor in a three-part study on the places receiving the most value for their property taxes.

Neighboring Lunenburg County ranked number five with the most home value rate growth at just over 80%. Another neighboring county, Prince Edward, ranked 54 with a

growth rate of 35%.

### A LOOK AT THE RANKING SYSTEM

According to a press release from SmartAsset, the study aims to find the places in the United States where people are getting the most value for their property tax dollars. To do this, they looked at property taxes paid, school rankings and the change in property values throughout a five-year period.

"First, we used the number of households, median home value and average property tax rate to calculate a per capita property tax amount that is collected for each county," the press releases stated. "As a way to measure the quality of schools, we analyzed the math and reading/language arts proficiencies for every school district in the

(See **GROWTH**, Page 2)

## Date set for Habitat project to start

By Brian Carlton  
The Charlotte Gazette

The affordable housing project in Charlotte County now has a location and a start date. Piedmont Habitat for Humanity plans to build three homes in Keysville in 2023. But first, they have to finish up work in Prince Edward County.

Last week, we gave an update on the operation, which is set to be completed early next year. Now, we have dates and locations in Charlotte to talk about. But first, let's explain how this came about.

### FINDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Based on a Dec. 2021 report by Virginia's Joint Legislative and Audit Review Commission (JLARC), 29% of households in the state struggle with housing costs. Nearly half of those spent more than 50% of their income on housing, both rental and owned. And as mentioned, it's a problem here locally. The study found 67% of households struggling with housing costs either lived in this region or in Northern Virginia.

So what's causing this problem? Housing prices keep rising. The median home sales price here in Virginia climbed 28% over the last five years, to \$270,000 at the end of 2021. In the last three years alone, Virginia's supply of "starter" homes has dropped by 40%, says the Virginia Realtors Association. Enter the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA).

Created in 1972 by the Virginia General Assembly, the VHDA is a self-supporting nonprofit. Their goal is to help people get into affordable housing through different programs. In July 2021, five months before the JLARC study came out, Virginia Housing launched a new program. Instead of working with individuals, they gave \$40 million total to planning districts across the state. Each one received a specific amount and a deadline, when they needed to have construction finished.

The CRC, a planning district that includes Charlotte, Prince Edward, Buckingham, Lunenburg

(See **HABITAT**, Page 3)



Douglas Randolph stands with Dawn Gaunt and Bob Woodruff at the "Stand Up for Heroes 2022" celebration sponsored by the Bob Woodruff Foundation.

## Military veteran honored

By Crystal Vandegrift  
The Charlotte Gazette

Piedmont Area Veterans Council (PAVC) Board Member Douglas Randolph attended the Bob Woodruff Stand Up for Heroes Event on Monday, Nov. 7.

The event was held in New York City at the legendary David Geffen Hall at the Lincoln Center.

Randolph was nominated and selected as one of the winners of the prestigious event.

Stand Up For Heroes is a night of hope, healing, and laughter, honoring our nation's injured veterans and their families.

As part of his selection, Randolph received two complimentary

(See **HONORED**, Page 2)

## Alger arrested following investigation

A Charlotte Court House man is one of eight that has been arrested and charged following a five-day undercover investigation by the Henrico County Police Vice Investigations Team.

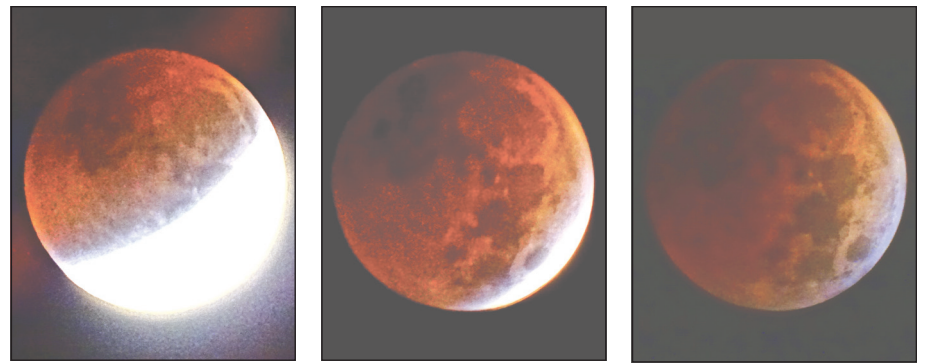
Brian Alger, 38, was arrested and charged with solicitation for prostitution during the investigation that took place from Monday, Oct.

17, to Friday, Oct. 21.

According to Henrico County Police, investigations revealed individuals soliciting women for prostitution, while others included recruiting women for the commercial sex trade.

Authorities from Chesterfield,

(See **ARREST**, Page 2)



Photos by Ronald Card

## There's a Blood Moon on the rise

If you looked outside in the extremely early hours of Tuesday morning, you might have noticed the moon looked a bit different than normal. That's because it was a "Blood Moon", a visual we won't be able to see again in full until 2025.

But first, what is a "Blood Moon"? Well, it happens when the

moon is in a total lunar eclipse. The moon sits completely in Earth's shadow, with a tiny portion of light (from Earth's sunrise and sunset) falls on its surface. Now because these light waves are spread out, they look red. But they don't always

(See **MOON**, Page 3)

Playoffs start for James River teams

Page 5

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# HONORED: 'The military really opens your eyes to what's around the world'

FROM PAGE ONE

tickets to attend the Stand Up For Heroes event as an honored guest, sitting in the front row. He was also provided a two-night stay in New York City near the Hall.

Stand Up for Heroes launched in 2007 as the brainchild of Bob and Lee Woodruff and New York Comedy Festival founders Caroline Hirsch and Andrew Fox and is one of New York's most anticipated nights of hope, healing and laughter, honoring our nation's injured veterans and their families. Since then, the event has raised more than \$65 million to create long-lasting, positive outcomes for our nation's injured veterans, service members and their families.

## MORE ABOUT RANDOLPH

Randolph, a Charlotte County resident and military veteran, has made a name for himself.

One of 15 children, he doesn't talk much about the details of his time in the military; if you were to see Randolph out and about today, you would quickly recognize him with his trademark sunglasses on and proudly wearing his Vietnam veteran coat and Bronze Star hat.

The military really opens your

eyes to what's around the world and the different types of people," Randolph said. "Everybody is not good. I've had people call me a baby killer for the time that I spent in Vietnam, but after so long, you're not going to put up with it."

Randolph spent 37 months in Vietnam, gaining a Bronze Star along the way.

"What happened to us (soldiers) shouldn't have happened to anybody, but when you sign that oath, you go where they tell you to go, or you go to jail, and I don't look good in stripes or orange," he laughed.

Randolph was born and raised in Charlotte County and, at the early age of 9, began working in the tobacco fields, followed by sawmills.

At 16, Randolph says he dropped out of school; by 19, he was living in New York.

In New York, he found his way to the recruiting office.

"They asked me what I wanted to do, and I said I wanted to be a heavy equipment operator," he explained.

In 1962 Randolph joined the United States Army. It was in the Army Randolph says he was able to see the world, get his GED, obtain two degrees, start a business and move up the ranks.

"The Army gave me a chance," he said. I was a high school dropout that was given an opportunity."

Randolph also talked about the bond he made in the Army with his fellow soldiers.

"Black or white, it did not matter," he said. "It still does not matter. We are all brothers."

## DEALING WITH LIFE'S CHANGES

When Randolph returned from his time in Vietnam, he met his wife of 42 years, Nora.

"She was a God-send," he said.

Sadly, Randolph's wife passed away in 2011.

In all, Randolph spent 26 years in the U.S. Army retiring as a Sergeant Major in August 1988.

Today, the veteran can be found volunteering his time to help other veterans in need.

"When a veteran goes off to war, they don't go by themselves," he added. "The family is involved too. When they leave home, things don't stop. So, anything I can do to better a service person's life, I do."

When it comes to helping, Randolph spends his time with the American Legion Post 260, VFW Post 8902, PAVC, Piedmont Alcohol Safety Action Program and the Adult Literacy Program in Charlotte County.

PAVC serves to assist active duty service members, veterans and their dependents/caregivers who reside in the Counties of Appomattox, Amelia, Buckingham, Charlotte, Cumberland, Lunenburg, Nottoway and Prince Edward in

the State of Virginia.

PAVC serves as a community partner by connecting veterans to services and resources they may need.



# GROWTH: Study puts school system in top rankings

FROM PAGE ONE

country. We created an average score for each district by looking at the scores for every school in that district, weighting it to account for the number of students in each school. Within each state, we assigned every county a score between 1 and 10 (with 10 being the best) based on the average

scores of the districts in each county.

## EXPLAINING LOCAL SCORES

According to SmartAsset, Charlotte County Public Schools received a score of eight for its school division. For comparison, Lunenburg Schools ranked three while Prince Edward Schools ranked a low score of one.

Second, SmartAsset calculated each county's property tax value change throughout a five-year period. Places,

where property values rose by the most significant amount indicated where consumers were motivated to buy homes and a positive return on investment for homeowners in the community.

Lastly, the study calculated a property tax index based. Counties with the highest scores were those where property tax dollars were going the furthest.

When it came to the county property tax rate SmartAsset listed it at 0.54%.

# ARREST: Comes after five day operation

FROM PAGE ONE

Hanover and Henrico Counties took part in the investigation.

Others arrested during the investigation include:

- Joshua Brooks, 35, of Henrico charged with solicitation for prostitution

- Ulysses Stovall, 34, of Henrico, charged with commercial sex trafficking

- Anastasios Paulidis, 43, of Hanover charged with solicitation for prostitution

- Lawrence Oliver Taylor III, 30, of Prince George County, charged with commercial sex trafficking

- Hiral Kumr, 34, of Henrico charged with solicitation for prostitution

- Ethan Sherry, 24, of Henrico charged with solicitation for prostitution

- Nathan Kisaakye, 34, of Richmond charged with solicitation for prostitution

According to the latest numbers from the National Human Trafficking hotline - Virginia ranks 22 for the number of calls.

In 2020, they reported almost 10,600 human trafficking cases across the country.

If you or someone you know is a victim of human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking hotline at (888) 373-7888.

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Vol. 150 - Number 7

Wednesday, October 26, 2022

Drakes Branch, Virginia

## Tax relief coming for citizens via solar payments

By Crystal Vandegrift  
The Charlotte Gazette

The Board of Supervisors (BOS) has kept good on their promise to use revenue from solar projects to help reduce the tax burden on citizens of the county.

Beginning with the December tax bill, citizens will see a solar tax credit applied to their statements.

This tax credit will appear on bills in December and June of 2023.

“Staff estimated that 1 penny in real estate tax generates about \$100K,” said County Administrator Dan Witt. “So, each person will receive a credit of 5 cents per \$100 of assessed value. Therefore, it is estimated that \$500,000 will be refunded to the taxpayers.”

Witt further gave the following example.

If a person’s real estate is appraised at \$100k, their normal taxes would be

$\$100,000 \times .62 / 100 = \$620$ . This would be paid in two equal installments of \$310, due on December 5th and June 5th. With the new solar credit, it would be calculated this:  $\$100,000 \times .57 / 100 = \$570$  with two installments of \$285 with a solar credit of \$25 each billing cycle.

The tax relief comes in a form of a \$500,000 payment the county received from Dominion Energy in regard to the Randolph Solar project.

“This credit will be given for this fiscal tax year only, and it just applies to real estate taxes,” said County Treasurer Patricia Berkeley. “Since the statements are divided into installments, the credit has been divided.”

For each qualified property, the treasurer will one-time credit the taxpayer’s real estate billing installment statements (due

(See **RELIEF**, Page 2)



Starting next year, drivers will begin to encounter construction at the intersection of Routes 15 and U.S. 360 as VDOT moves forward with a roundabout for the area.

## Roundabout construction to begin in spring

By Crystal Vandegrift  
The Charlotte Gazette

Those who travel Route 15 to and from Farmville already know how the new roundabout in Prince Edward County at the intersection of Route 15/133/692 is causing delays.

Beginning next spring, drivers will encounter construction of yet another roundabout scheduled for Route 15, this time in Keysville.

According to Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) Communica-

tions Manager Len Stevens, construction is expected to begin in late March/early April of 2023 and funding for the project includes both state and federal sources.

The project is expected to be completed by June 2024.

VDOT said due to safety concerns and accident history, the project will improve the intersection with a roundabout concept.

“The project includes grading, drainage structures, water line utility work, paving, pavement marking, and

(See **ROUNDABOUT**, Page 2)



## Town lake may be opened for recreational use

Almost two years have passed since the Town of Keysville formed a 501c under Keysville Parks and Recreations. Recently the first organizational meeting was held and plans are moving forward. According to Keysville Mayor Steven Morris, the organization will be exploring opening up the Town’s lake area for recreational use. “There are numerous possibilities, including walking trails, nature trails and even the potential for biking trails,” Morris said. “The group will also be looking at opening the lake back up as a paddle only facility.”

## County takes part in economic study

By Brian Carlton  
The Charlotte Gazette

They all said no. Over the last two years, Buckingham, Cumberland and Prince Edward counties joined a growing list pulling out of Virginia’s Growth Alliance (VGA), arguing the cost to be in the economic development group was not worth the return on investment. Now they, along

with several other counties and Longwood University, want to form a new regional economic development organization, one focusing just on this part of Central Virginia. But first, they need to see if such a project is feasible. That’s where the Commonwealth Regional Council (CRC) comes in.

The CRC is a planning organization,

(See **STUDY**, Page 3)

## Dominion proposes to acquire Courthouse Solar

By Crystal Vandegrift  
The Charlotte Gazette

In its third annual clean energy filing with the Virginia State Corporation Commission (SCC), Dominion Energy, Virginia, on Friday, Oct. 21, proposed nearly two dozen new solar and energy storage projects for Virginia customers.

One of those projects includes Courthouse Solar, a 167-megawatt facility developed and acquired from NOVI Energy.

NOVI Energy proposed to construct the solar facility on 1,354 acres just southwest of Charlotte Court House on 12 parcels owned by Blue Rock Resources, LLC, Ridgeway Farm LLC, and Robert Locke.

The project is southwest of Charlotte Court House and generally bound to the north by George Washington Highway (Rt. 40), to the west by Tollhouse Highway (Rt. 47), to the east by Eureka School Road, and to the south by Ash Camp Creek.

### BY THE NUMBERS

Courthouse Solar’s revenue projections to the county are expected to be \$15,073,226 over a 35-year span.

In addition to Courthouse Solar, Dominion Energy’s proposal includes nine other solar and energy storage projects, totaling nearly 500 MW, that will be owned and operated by Dominion Energy Virginia.

The proposal also includes power purchase agreements (PPAs) with 13 solar and energy storage projects, totaling more than 300 megawatts, that are owned by independent

(See **SOLAR**, Page 2)

Yearbook staff wins state award

Page 2

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# Randolph-Henry Yearbook Staff earns state award

Earlier this month, the 2022 yearbook staff of Randolph-Henry High School won Trophy Class from the Virginia High School League. Trophy Class yearbooks are noted for outstanding achievement in quality publications service to its school and community.

The Log 2022 was sent to VHSL for judging in June. Randolph-Henry competed with hundreds of other schools across the state of Virginia. The yearbook cover and each page of the book are carefully scored on the categories of concept, coverage, design, writ-



Pictured are, front row, Alyson Napier, Delaney Jones, Tyler Mason, LeeAnne Stembridge, Sierra Lacks, Kathryn Hamilton and Amanda Ashley. Back row, Durrnon Mosley, Anna Taylor, Lacey Steppe, Jaliyah Boyd, Samantha Donaldson, Kurtis Vogel and Shykeria Wilson. Not Pictured are Sydney Mason, Michelle McMahon, Emilee Robinette, Carley Covington, Lizzy Perez-Cruz, Raven Carrion, Hannah Lane, Jenna-Rose Patrick and Jasmine Gullixon.

ing, and photography. “The 2022 staff became a family over

the year and truly embodied what it means to be a team,” said

Alyson Napier, yearbook adviser. This the second time

Randolph-Henry has won the state award of Trophy Class. They were

previously awarded the distinction for The Log 2019.

# SOLAR: Nearly 500 MW will be owned and operated by Dominion

**FROM PAGE ONE**  
developers.

According to Dominion Energy, if approved, the projects will provide more than 800 megawatts of carbon-free electricity to power more than 200,000 Virginia homes at peak output.

“These projects are another big step in

delivering clean, affordable and reliable energy to our customers,” said Ed Baine, President of Dominion Energy Virginia. “The clean energy transition is bringing jobs and economic opportunity to communities across Virginia, and it’s reducing fuel costs for our customers. That’s a win-win for our customers and the com-

munities we serve.” Construction of the projects is projected to support nearly 4,800 clean energy jobs and will generate more than \$920 million in economic benefits across Virginia.

**WHAT ELSE IS NEEDED?**  
In addition to SCC approval, the proposed utility-owned projects

require local and state permits before construction may begin.

According to Dominion Energy, if approved, the projects are expected to be completed between 2023 and 2025 and will add approximately \$0.38 to the average residential customer’s monthly bill. Dominion Energy

said Virginia’s rates remain below the nation-

al, mid-Atlantic and east coast averages.

# ROUNDABOUT: Project will improve the intersection

**FROM PAGE ONE**  
signing,” Stevens said. “During construction, maintenance of traffic will be phased to facilitate building the majority of the roundabout with minimal traffic impacts.

In 2017 the proposed \$5.2 million roundabout at the intersection of Routes 15 and U.S. 360 made it through the second round of scoring under the new SMART

SCALE prioritization process used by the state’s Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB).

**A QUESTION OF SAFETY**  
Following a VDOT virtual public hearing in November 2020 to hear comments and concerns, a safety issue was brought into question that led VDOT engineers to redesign a portion of the roundabout.

In a 2021 interview, former VDOT Communications Manager Paula Jones said the primary issue was addressing a safety concern by eliminating a high-speed conflict point by removing the Route 15 southbound ramp onto 360 westbound. “That traffic would access 360 westbound by the Route 15 northbound ramp,” Jones said.

The new design directs traffic traveling on Route 15 South into the roundabout, then take the first exit to head west on Route 360.

According to transportation documents, the current intersection has a major road (two-way, not divided) as well

as an off-ramp and an entrance leading to an off-ramp, all connecting at a three-approach stop-sign intersection that is in a grade curve,” county leaders said in the application to state transportation officials. “Sight distance, as well as traffic flow, currently contributes to driver error. This project will replace the stop-sign intersection with a roundabout to allow for a more fluid entrance and exit to the off-ramps and take the sight-distance issue out of the equation. The Charlotte County Industrial Park is along the route of this project, and the Heartland Business Park is adjacent to the project area.”

# RELIEF: ‘This is a great option’

**FROM PAGE ONE**

December 5, 2022, and June 5, 2023) five cents per one hundred dollars (5¢ / \$100) of the assessed value of the property.

According to county documents, only one credit will be made for each qualified property, regardless of the number of persons or entities who are listed as a taxpayer(s) for the property.

The decision to return the payment to citizens was unanimously approved by the BOS during a meeting on Oct. 13.

Board members noted that this one-time credit is being done until the county begins to receive recurring payments from solar projects.

“We can’t do this permanently until we have recurring revenue from solar, so this is a great option,” said Supervisor Walt Bailey.

Chairman Gary Walker added, “I hope other monies come in so we can increase this (credit) in the future.”

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50 cents

Vol. 149 - Number 40

Wednesday, June 15, 2022

Drakes Branch, Virginia

## Supervisors table solar agreement

By Crystal Vandegrift  
The Charlotte Gazette

Following a closed session meeting on Monday afternoon, June 13, members of the Board of Supervisors (BOS) returned from closed doors to table a siting agreement between the county and solar developer SolUnesco and Dominion Energy.

SolUnesco is the developer of Randolph Solar, a proposed 800-megawatt facility set to be one of the largest in the nation if approved.

According to County Administrator Dan Witt, Randolph Solar and Dominion provided an agreement for the Board's consideration. Still, after negotiating in a closed session, the two sides came to an impasse.

Witt said county staff was directed to continue the discussion with SolUnesco and Dominion and report back to the Board at a later date.

The details of the siting agreement have not been disclosed to the public.

Witt said those details would become available once the two sides agree and a public hearing is held.

The siting agreement may include terms and conditions, including mitigation of any impacts of such solar project or energy storage project; financial compensation to the host locality to address capital needs set out in the capital improvement plan adopted by the host locality, current fiscal budget of the host locality, or fiscal fund balance policy adopted by the host locality; or assistance by the applicant in the deployment of broadband.

At the beginning of June, the BOS also took no action on the project's conditional use permit following a two-and-a-half-hour public hearing.

The Board could decide on the conditional use permit during a meeting on July 5.



The former Salem School in Red Oak is in the process of being restored.

## Group works to preserve historical school

By Crystal Vandegrift  
The Charlotte Gazette

A group of citizens has been working to restore the former Salem School into a community center.

Located in Red Oak, the former school constructed in 1924 is part of what is known as the Rosenwald Schools.

Julius Rosenwald, an early partner in Sears, Roebuck, & Co., established a fund in 1917 to improve the "well-being of mankind," particularly the black race.

According to the Museum of Charlotte County, 363 black schools in Virginia were constructed or improved with Rosenwald funding, seven of which were in Charlotte County.

Currently, the Salem School Pres-

ervation Committee is working to seek grants to help restore the school to its original form.

"A Historic Preservation Architect gave us an estimated figure of \$400,000 to \$600,000 to renovate Salem School in his findings," said committee member Veada Currin. "We will work on the project in phases as the money comes available and are seeking grant funding as well as private donations."

Sonja Ingram with Preservation Virginia said the school building is not in too bad of shape considering its age.

"It does need some roof and foundation work," Ingram said. "They will also need to upgrade the kitchen

(See SCHOOL, Page 5)



The Town of Drakes Branch has been awarded close to \$1 million to help with demolishing buildings that were damaged in 2018 during Tropical Storm Michael.

## FEMA awards town grant

By Crystal Vandegrift  
The Charlotte Gazette

### DRAKES BRANCH

After waiting almost two years, the Town of Drakes Branch has learned it has been awarded close to \$1 million to acquire and demolish nine buildings along the town's Main Street, making way for open green space.

FEMA has awarded the Town \$718,935, with VDEM providing \$191,716 in grants to fund the project.

The grant fund is through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), specifically related to damages from Tropical Storm Michael that blew through the area in October 2018.

The Town of Drakes Branch

and many of the buildings in the downtown area, including the Town Hall/Firehouse and Post Office, received significant damages from floodwaters during the storm.

Drakes Branch Vice Mayor Phillip Jackson said there is no date set as to when the demolition will commence.

"The Town will have to acquire the buildings, then have them demolished," Jackson said. "We have just received the basic paperwork and have not had the opportunity to review or develop a plan, and still have a multitude of

(See GRANT, Page 5)

## Statesmen compete in tournament play

Both the Randolph-Henry (R-H) Statesmen Varsity Baseball and Softball teams recently completed in the state tournament.

The Varsity boys were defeated in the opening round of the state tournament by Buckingham and the Lady Statesmen were defeated by Appomattox.

On Saturday, May 28, the baseball team started post season play.

The Statesmen hosted the Dukes of Windsor High School in the regional quarterfinals.

Runs would come at a premium in this game but Windsor

(See PLAY, Page 2)



Statesmen punch their ticket to state tournament with win over Nandua 9-7.

Learning center offers something for everyone

Page 10

Advertising and news deadline:

Friday at noon



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