

Community News

Ahoy, me hearties! To the library!

STAFF REPORT

Al Chewning, of Histories and Haunts LLC, recently presented a program on pirates during the Summer Reading Program at the Courtland branch of the Blackwater Regional Library.

A library news release stated that attendees learned about the life and times of a pirate, pirate talk, stories and songs.

As noted at HistoriesandHaunts.com, in 2003, after 27 years in the Virginia Beach



Fire Department, Chewning started Histories and Haunts LLC as a way to share his love of history and his interest in the paranormal. He has created a unique, first-person educational experience that brings living history into the classroom, and in his personas, he uses museum-quality reproduction items to enhance his presentations.

For more information on all programs at the Blackwater Regional Library, visit its website, www.blackwaterlib.org, or its Facebook page, www.facebook.com/blackwaterlib.



One can virtually hear an "Aaarrggghhh!" accompanying this photo of Banner Cassidy, left, and Al Chewning. SUBMITTED | DONNA POPE



Aaliyah Kindred, left, and Jerrell Kindred are on hand to learn about the life and times of pirates.



Aveon Matos gets into the spirit of the program with a pirate hat and parrot.



Striking a pirate pose are, from left, Al Chewning and Hayden Whitley, the latter of which is holding Brynlee Whitley.



Children show engagement in the pirate program as they offer up responses to Al Chewning's presentation.



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OUR VIEW

Sales tax is fair way to help fund new schools

We're pleased to see progress on legislation that would give local voters the option to adopt a one-cent sales tax to help fund school construction. A bill by Sen. Tommy Norment, R-Williamsburg, would make Isle of Wight the 10th locality statewide to have such permission from Richmond. A similar bill didn't make it out of a House committee a year ago after passing the Senate. This year's version already was approved 27-12 by the Senate and now awaits consideration by the House of Delegates.

We commend Norment and Sen. Louise Lucas, D-Portsmouth, for supporting the bill and regret that Sen. John Cosgrove, R-Chesapeake, didn't make it unanimous for Isle of Wight's

Senate delegation. Cosgrove was among the dozen "no" votes in the Senate.

Appropriately, the tax hike would have to be approved by county voters in a referendum, giving opponents of the sales tax the chance to have the ultimate say. What could be fairer?

If adopted, the additional sales tax would generate more than \$2 million annually to support new buildings for Hardy Elementary and perhaps Westside Elementary eventually, though the latter has been postponed indefinitely. Construction estimates for Hardy have ballooned since the county in 2020 borrowed \$34 million, including \$27 million earmarked for Hardy. The cost of that school is now over \$40 mil-

lion, counting higher-than-expected expense to supply water to the building.

Without the sales tax increase to help fund the debt service, the burden will fall entirely on property owners. A sales tax allows renters, who make up a substantial part of Isle of Wight's population and many of whom send their children to public schools, to contribute to the cost of excellent school buildings.

A separate bill would give every locality in the state the option of a sales tax for school construction, but we're less optimistic about its chances of passage than the Isle of Wight-specific bill, which has the full support of county elected leaders.

A cooperative mindset for our children's mental health

Since the mid-70s, I have, in my opinion, witnessed national declines in public education—in academics, in values development, and in a foresightful preparation of our children for a future of success, happiness, ...and contribution back to community and to our national interests.



YOUR TURN

Guest Column by Howie Soucek

And in recent years, there have been rapidly increasing concerns about our children's mental health, with rising rates of depression even preceding the rigors of Covid-19. The worst of this is that this plague and its manifestations are largely avoidable—and include declining academic achievement, bullying behaviors (including "cyber"), anxiety, delinquency, and even crime ...and suicide— all serious problems for our children, for their families, and for our entire community, ...and its future. (The operative word was "avoidable.")

In October of last year, I delivered an open letter about this to our Franklin City Council, School Board, and school system administration, followed by numerous specific suggestions that could be considered just as a starting place, hopefully, to accelerate efforts to help our children. And now, I am making an appeal to our Wellness Coalition.

What I am proposing is more of an operational method than it is a definition of specific things that could be done—hence, the term "cooperative mindset" that appears in the title of this appeal.

A good example of this kind of approach is to be found here in Franklin with its "Student Wellness Program," in which the high school guidance office is engaged in a partnership with the executive directors of the YMCA and the United Way organizations, with each of these three garnering resources that exist under their influence as needed. Because the purpose of the activity is focused on students at the high school, the guidance office plays the primary role regarding the needs of and arrangements for the students.

However, this is less a structured organization with a certain, single leader—and more a flexible network of leaders with their own resources in different parts of the community who, around a specific, common purpose, collaborate and cooperate to get things done. Such a model as this should be multiplied and expanded upon—all across our community, ...through the Wellness Coalition machine.

Thus, rather than a big, one-shot project with one person or organization "in charge," this should be an ongoing effort, such that the mental health of our children would be a regular "update" agenda item at Wellness Coalition meetings, to see if any person or organization has a "brainstorming" kind of idea which may be new, ...or perhaps a variation of—or developmental of—an activity already underway.

Further, everyone would need to have the mindset that the mental health needs of our children are inextricably linked to their education—AND, that the entire community is responsible for contributing to this education—not just the school system, but also the business community, parents organized with teachers, law enforcement, local governance, nonprofit organizations, and our churches, too—collaboratively.

Why not consider some kind of class or mini-series for our pre-adolescents and adolescents to help them to recognize and to resist the harmful content of social media that they are constantly exposed to and which is proven to be causing serious problems with their mental health? This should be done by our school systems, perhaps in collaboration with other entities across the community, and through some R&D with experts, such as the Psychology Department at Regent University, ...which has a Community Outreach Program.

And as to a different kind of idea, a Middlesex County Supervisor (a member of local government)

SEE SOUCEK, A4

Unlikely Longwood has hoops world buzzing

With the Hokies and 'Hoos scrambling just to get on the bubble for next month's NCAA Tournament, we hoops fans should begin thinking about our rooting options in March Madness.

Don't look now, but it might just be Longwood, two hours west in Farmville, that carries the banner for Virginia in the Big Dance.

The surprising Lancers sit atop the Big South Conference with two weeks to go in the regular season and, barring an unexpected slump, will go into the conference tournament in Charlotte as the favorite to claim the Big South's automatic bid to March Madness.

I was back in my old stomping grounds of Farmville last week when Longwood hosted its first-ever live telecast on ESPN, a raucous 85-72 win over conference foe South Carolina-Upstate. Not an empty seat could be found 15 minutes before tipoff.

A rowdy student section that would have made Cam-

eron's Crazies proud willed Longwood to the win, setting off a joyous celebration.

Even the cerebral Taylor Reveley IV, Longwood's president, was giving high-fives and hugs courtside.

It was quite the scene for this scribe. While crawling over Farmville Mayor David Whitus to find my seat, I half-joked that the last time I attended a Longwood game circa 2015, it was me, him and the pep band in the stands. I'm pretty sure the Lancers had more suspended players than wins that year.

Now, Longwood is playing to sellout crowds and grabbing national attention. Broadcasting great Dick Vitale, battling cancer, tweet-



GUEST COLUMNIST

Steve Stewart

ed a shout-out to Coach Griff Aldrich and his squad after the game.

The basketball team's success is the latest symbol of Longwood's ascension under Reveley, a rare third-generation college president. His grandfather was president of Hampden-Sydney from 1963 to 1977, his dad the president of William & Mary for a decade ending in 2018.

Hampden-Sydney men of a certain age are apt to remember Longwood, then an all-female teachers college about 10 minutes away, as the place to find a cute date. Ladies of a certain taste have known Farmville mostly as the home of Green Front Furniture.

Since Reveley's arrival in 2013, Longwood steadily has risen in regional and national prominence, hosting the 2016 vice presidential debate as a feather in its cap. Farmville has been the beneficiary of Longwood's success, its invigorated downtown a focal point of Reveley's vision of a thriving town-gown relationship.

Five years ago, I'd have had a couple of choices for a pregame burger and beer. Last week, I counted six in downtown Farmville alone.

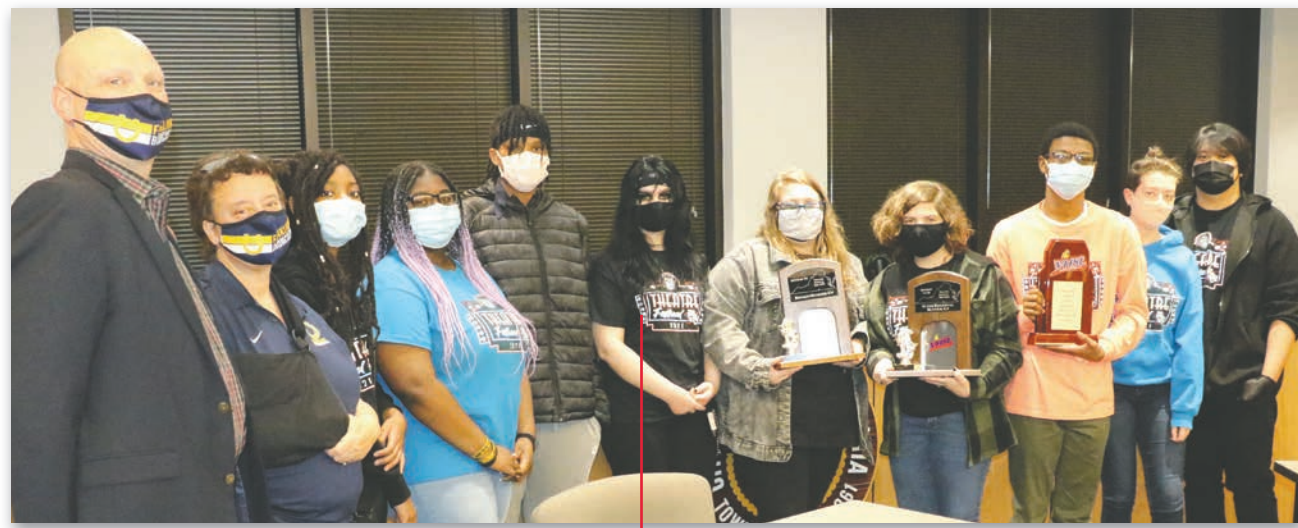
Sports will never take priority over academics under Reveley's watch, but they sure can lift a campus' spirits and raise its national profile, as Aldrich's squad is proving.

Aldrich's story itself is inspirational, a lawyer who walked away from a lucrative career in oil and gas and private equity to scratch a coaching itch that began during his own playing days at Hampden-Sydney. He's not only winning but has restored integrity to a program that had largely lost it under his predecessor.

In just his fourth season, he's got the Lancers on the verge of the school's first-ever NCAA Tournament bid—and giving hoops fans throughout Virginia something to cheer about.

STEVE STEWART is the former publisher of The Tidewater News. His email address is steve.stewart@smithfieldtimes.com.

WAY TO GO!



TITUS MOHLER | THE TIDEWATER NEWS

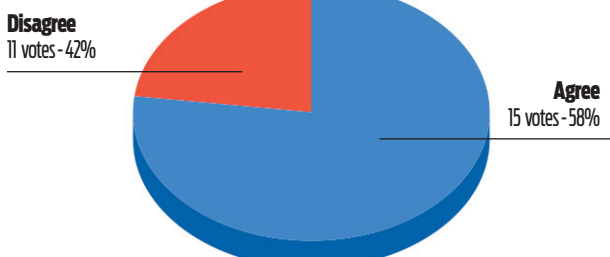
A thrilling final act to the season

2 of 3

The 2021 Franklin High School theatre troupe was recently recognized by the Franklin City School Board for placing second at the Virginia High School League Class 1 State Theatre Festival. This state runner-up denouement is the best finish in the history of the school's program. We commend the troupe for its hard work and celebrate the unprecedented fruit of that labor. Pictured at the school board meeting are, from left, FHS Principal Travis Felts and FHS Theatre Coach/Director Teri Zurfluh with troupe members Serenity Everette, Rha'Zia Dawson, Roshanda Hoskie, Summer Hill, Skylar Bunn, Laney Phillips, Anthony White, Lana Kopacki and Jusdes Turner. (Send "Way to Go!" photos with a description and names to editor@TheTidewaterNews.com.)

ONLINE POLL

We asked: Do you agree with local schools maintaining the mask mandates?



Visit www.TheTidewaterNews.com to cast your vote. To suggest a poll topic, e-mail editor@TheTidewaterNews.com.

The Tidewater News

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SHARE YOUR VIEWS

The Tidewater News values the opinions of its readers. Submissions should not be defamatory or in poor taste. We prefer opinions on issues rather than personalities. We also discourage submissions about individual, consumer-oriented disputes with businesses or organizations.

Letters to the editor should be 250 words or less. Letters must be signed and must include a phone number and mailing address; only the writer's name and hometown will appear in print. More in-depth opinions of up to 750 words are encouraged for "Your Turn." "Your Turn" submissions should be accompanied by a photograph of the author and a one- or two-sentence biographical sketch.

We prefer to receive your opinion articles by e-mail at editor@TheTidewaterNews.com.

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Helping Hand Cemetery requests helping hands for cleanup

**BY TITUS MOHLER
STAFF WRITER**

The Helping Hand Cemetery in Courtland will be the site of a volunteer cleanup March 25-26 in preparation for a May 28 event that will be held recognizing the cemetery's 125th anniversary.

The cemetery is owned and managed by the Helping Hand Club, which has produced a brief history of the property.

The history states that in 1897, Trustees Jenkins, Darden, Epps, Hardy and Blount appealed to Joseph B. Prince to sell them a parcel of his land "situated on the left side of the public road leading from Courtland." Prince was a wealthy landowner, a judge and the clerk of Southampton County Court. Ac-



SUBMITTED | MAURICE DARDEN

The Helping Hand Cemetery in Courtland has been in existence for 125 years, and to prepare for a May 28 event commemorating that anniversary, the property's owner and manager is asking for volunteers to help clean up the cemetery March 25-26.

cording to the deed, this land was for the "sole purpose of burying colored people," and no one could be buried there without the permission of these trustees.

In 1913 an ex-slave, who

had escaped his bondage to become a Union soldier in the Civil War, returned to Courtland and bought property next to the cemetery, the history states. He sold to Helping Hand Trustees Scott,

Darden, Brown, Ricks, Taylor and Harrison a parcel of his land for \$5 to extend the cemetery space. This Civil War veteran, Solomon Stevens, was also a member of the Helping Hand Club and is now buried in the cemetery.

Around this time, the cemetery was renamed The Helping Hand Cemetery and continued, from that time to today, to be owned and managed by the Helping Hand Club, the history states. Additional land was purchased throughout the years as well as an HHC clubhouse in which meetings were held and records kept until the building was destroyed by fire.

The history notes that the cemetery, now with more than 450 interred, is currently managed by a new Board of

Trustees under the leadership of President Alton Darden. The trustees have initiated long-term cleanup, landscaping and documentation projects.

The cleanup project set for Friday, March 25, and Saturday, March 26, will run from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. each day, and a continental breakfast and lunch will be provided to volunteers.

Alton Darden said the cemetery needs all the help it can get from volunteers.

"We've got leaves and branches, we've got signs to put up to identify different things and so forth, so we need any support," Darden said.

HHC Trustee Maurice Darden, who is organizing the cleanup project, said volunteers are encouraged to

bring their own tools with them, including rakes, shovels, wheelbarrows and definitely gloves.

"Just the general things that you would use for cleanup," he said.

Alton emphasized that the purpose of this cleanup project "is to get the cemetery ready for our program that's going to be May the 28th — our 125th-year celebration."

Maurice said Alton has put together an outline of what the club wants to accomplish during that 125th anniversary, but for now, the focus is on completing the cleanup to make the celebration possible.

For more information, call or text Maurice at 919-632-3166 or email him at modarden@aol.com.

ORDINANCE: Plans will be made to make incoming admin aware

FROM PAGE A1

added details on how "the current ratios" will be determined, changing the end of the regulation to read "with the current ratios between farm and forested land being used as determined by information from the Virginia Farm Service Agency and the Virginia Department of Forestry at the time of application."

The other amendment the commission made was to the ordinance's "Additional Requirements" section.

Entering the meeting, one of the requirements stated, "No utility-scale solar energy project shall be located within three (3) miles of another major solar energy project as measured at the nearest

exterior boundary of each project."

The commission changed this requirement from three to five miles.

The governing body representative on the Planning Commission is Dr. Alan W. Edwards, who is chairman of the Board of Supervisors, and he said he does not think the board's mindset on solar facilities in the county is any different than the commission's mindset.

Predicting how the board will react to the proposed ordinance, Edwards said, "I just don't think there's going to be a whole lot of problems."

Boykins-Branchville District Representative J. Michael Mann said that sharing the ordinance with the supervisors "just adds another

layer of eyes and minds on this to get some input so that we've got a very strong document by the time we go to the public hearing. That's kind of what I'm looking for, because when we go to the public hearing, a lot of times, there's people that bring some good ideas, so I try not to be locked in on an issue, because there's a lot of smart people in this county, and it amazes me sometimes; they come up with ideas, and I'm thinking, "Why didn't we think of that in the first place?"

Community Development Director Beth Lewis said, "That's why it's nice to have the cushion to have the public hearing one month and make your decision the next month. If you've listened to an hour or a couple hours of

comments, it's hard to digest it all."

"And a lot of times it's good to go back and read the minutes," Commission Chairman and Newsoms District Representative Michael G. Drake said, "It refreshes you."

Mann added, "And I want to keep our new county administrator on board, but I don't want to run out of time either for this ordinance."

The Board of Supervisors, which intends to have the ordinance adopted prior to the end of the moratorium in September, is in the process of looking for a new county administrator after current County Administrator Michael W. Johnson announced last year that he will retire from the position June 30 of this year.

Edwards said the county

can plan it out so that whoever is hired will be aware of the ordinance being developed.

"I don't think it would be good to do this (ordinance),

and then he or she or whoever is out of the loop when this comes through," he said. "This is one of the biggest things that's come down the pike in a long time."

PROJECT: Construction could be completed this summer

FROM PAGE A1

miles east of the Courtland town line, between Jenkins Drive and Ward Lane. In addition to shoulder widening, improvements also include the regrading of side slopes and the installation of guardrail and traffic

warning signs.

Throughout the duration of the project, motorists can expect mostly daytime single-lane closures on Route 646 in this area with flagging operations in place. Access will be maintained to all existing property entrances within this corridor.

Motorists will be advised of additional closures and detour information that may develop during the project. Construction is estimated to be complete in summer 2022. All construction work is dependent upon weather conditions.

Motorists are encouraged

to visit www.511virginia.org, call 511 or download Virginia's free 511 mobile app for current traffic and travel information. To learn about other VDOT Hampton Roads projects, visit www.virginiadot.org/projects/hampton%20roads/default.asp.

MEETING: 'It's possible, but we don't have a date'

FROM PAGE A1

contradict the social, moral and religious beliefs of the parent's child in direct violation of §1-240.1 of the 1950 Code of Virginia, as amended.

In reference to cultural competency training, Virginia law currently states, "Each school board shall adopt and implement policies that require each teacher and any other school board employee holding a license issued by the Board (of Education) to complete cultural competency training, in accordance with guidance issued by the Board, at least every two years."

Near the conclusion of the Board of Supervisors' draft resolution on parental rights, it states that the Board of Supervisors is "fundamentally opposed to the offering of taxpayer's dollars to Southampton County Public Schools if it will not adhere to §1-240.1 of said code and all of its practices," and the resolution adds that the Board of Supervisors "hereby places the Southampton County Public Schools on notice and demands that the Southampton County Public Schools cease its violation of the law of this commonwealth and adhere to §1-240.1 of the code and all of its practices."

The Board of Supervisors invited the Southampton County School Board to its Dec. 14 meeting to offer its input on the draft resolution, and the school board declined, instead proposing a joint work session to discuss the resolution. The BOS tabled the resolution and agreed to meet.

In planning the meeting, disagreements arose between the boards over the facilitator and what subjects would be up for discussion.

The BOS asked to have, prior to the larger joint meeting, a smaller meeting of just the county administrator, superintendent and the chairs and vice chairs of each board to answer unanswered questions initially posed by the Board of Supervisors in the latter half of 2021.

A smaller meeting involving these same individuals had taken place July 14, and BOS Chair Dr. Alan W. Edwards and Vice Chair William Hart Gillette had indicated it was agreed that this smaller meeting would continue to happen quarterly, but they said the county received no response from the school system to an invitation for another smaller meeting in October.

At the Feb. 14 school board meeting, Goodwyn indicated that she did not think the smaller meetings were or would be productive, and a new proposal for a joint meeting between the boards was made.

At the March 14 school board meeting, Goodwyn said, "If you remember, at our last meeting, we selected three possible dates to have the joint meeting with the Southampton County Board of Supervisors. We asked (Superintendent) Dr. (Gwendolyn P.) Shannon to communicate those available dates to the Southampton County Board of Supervisors, and we do have a response from (County Administrator) Mike Johnson."

In his March 2 letter, Johnson wrote, "At its regular session on Feb. 22, after

discussing your suggestions, the board moved to postpone this joint meeting until such time as the legislature has acted on (House Bill) 1093, and if adopted, after the Southampton County School Board expresses its intentions with regard to a cultural competency training requirement for teachers or other licensed school board employees.

"As you may be aware," he continued, "this legislation conditions the requirement of such training upon action by the local school board, but only after providing 30 days' advanced written notice of and holding a public hearing regarding the adoption and implementation of such policies."

The summary of HB 1093 from Virginia's Legislative Information System states that current law requires such cultural competency training and makes no provision for such notice and public hearing.

In a March 15 email to The Tidewater News, Johnson noted that much of the content of his letter is now a moot point as the Senate Committee on Education and Health passed by the bill indefinitely.

The March 3 vote for HB 1093 to be passed by indefinitely was 9-6, along party lines, with Democrats holding the majority.

After reading Johnson's letter during the March 14 school board meeting, Goodwyn said, "So we do not have a date to have a joint meeting with the Board of Supervisors, and we will await information from them concerning when and if they choose to meet with us."

School board member William Worsham asked for clarification on what "postpone" meant in the letter, wondering if it might be indefinite.

"I think it's postponed until they get back in touch with us again concerning a joint meeting," Goodwyn said.

"OK," Worsham said. "So the possibility is we will have (the meeting), is that correct?"

Goodwyn replied, "It's possible, but we don't have a date, and we'll wait to hear from the Board of Supervisors before we make any additional plans."

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