

The Charlotte Gazette

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

50 cents

Vol. 150 - Number 10

Wednesday, November 16, 2022

Drakes Branch, Virginia

Flu numbers spike in region

By Rachel Austin
The Charlotte Gazette

Take precautions. That was the warning Monday for Charlotte County and the surrounding region. The Virginia Department of Health's Piedmont District issued a statement, saying the hospitalization rate for flu in the region is the highest it's been since 2010-2011 for this time of year.

Piedmont District Health Director Dr. Maria Almond said the VDH reported a steep rise for the week of Nov. 5 as 9% of emergency department and urgent care center visits were for influenza-like illnesses with the highest in the state recorded at 10%. Charlotte, Lunenburg, Cumberland and the rest of the Central region recorded 8% of ER visits were linked to the flu.

This percentage is a large jump

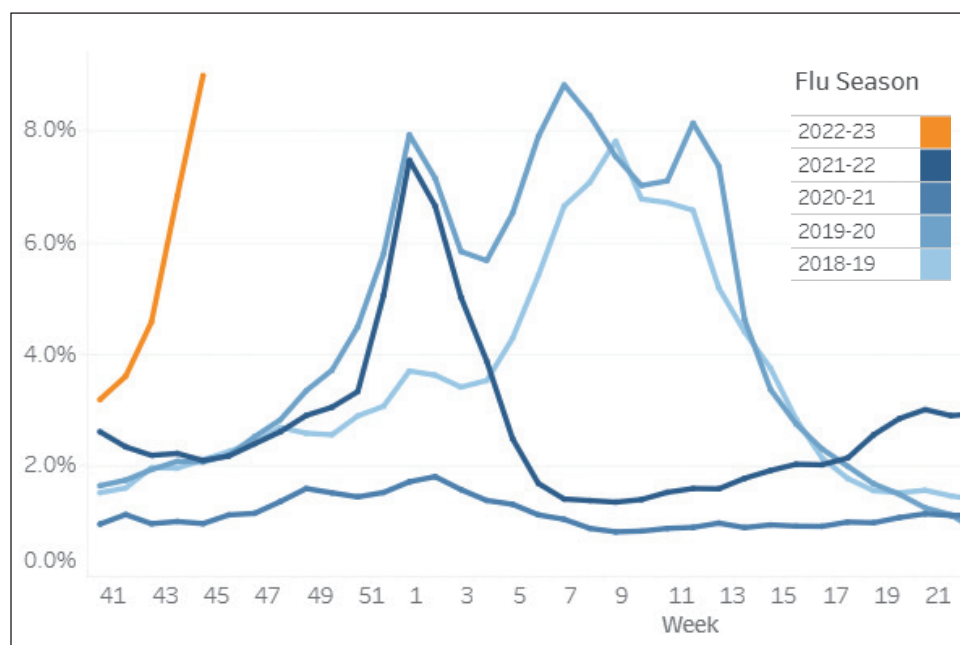
as previous years between 2018 and 2021 saw numbers this week in the 0.5% to 2% range.

The VDH also reported that the largest proportion of visits for age groups was those ages zero to four years old, making up 21.4% of the visits. This can be seen in the spike in suspected or confirmed outbreaks for daycare and pre-kindergarten to about 28% compared to the previous week when it was the same as kindergarten through 12th grade at around 19%.

These high numbers are believed to be a result of the COVID-19 pandemic as many folks have lost their immunity to the flu as they took extra precautions and traveled less due to the lockdowns.

"During the pandemic, a lot of

(See FLU, Page 2)



The number of flu-related hospital visits in Central Virginia is on the rise. State health officials say we're seeing numbers higher than they've been in a decade.



People from around Charlotte County crowded the sidewalks in Drakes Branch, to pay respect and celebrate Veterans Day.

A tribute to veterans

On Saturday, Nov. 12, Drakes Branch VFW Post 8902 hosted what is believed to be the very first Veterans Day parade in Drakes Branch and possibly Charlotte Court House. The idea for the event originated with Julie Hamlett, wife of VFW Post 8902's Garland H. 'Butch' Hamlett who is also a member of the Charlotte County Board of Supervisors. Twenty-eight groups took part in the event, including the VFW and Randolph-Henry High School.



Body discovered believed to be that of missing teen

By Crystal Vandegrift
The Charlotte Gazette

A body found in a shallow grave in Lunenburg County is believed to be that of a Kenbridge teen who was reported missing on Nov. 2.

According to a release from the Virginia State Police (VSP), at approximately 9 p.m. Friday, Nov. 11, the Lunenburg County Sheriff's Office was alerted to a shallow grave

discovered in the 200 block of Seay Way in Lunenburg County.

Human remains were recovered from the grave and transported to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Richmond for examination, autopsy and positive identification.

"Based on evidence collected at the scene and the condition of the body, the death is being investigated as a homicide," said VSP

(See DISCOVERED, Page 2)

CCPS awarded funds for electric buses

By Crystal Vandegrift
The Charlotte Gazette

Charlotte County Public School (CCPS) has been awarded close to \$1.2 million to be used for three electric school buses and charging infrastructure, but according to school officials, this does not mean CCPS plans to implement

electric buses throughout its fleet fully.

"Even if we only utilize these buses for short routes, there is an opportunity for significant fuel savings over the course of the school year," said CCPS Superintendent Dr. Robbie Mason. "The

(See FUNDS, Page 2)



Three departments respond to house fire

A smoke detector is being credited for alerting a Wylliesburg man that his home was on fire. Bacon District Volunteer Fires Chief Will Stembridge said fire crews were dispatched to the scene at Hall Lane in Wylliesburg around 5:30 a.m. Friday, Nov. 11. Drakes Branch and Chase City Fire Departments were dispatched simultaneously. "Assistant Chief Vaughan and another firefighter made entry and were able to get the fire knocked down despite the high heat they faced," Stembridge said. "As more firefighters arrived, they assisted in the efforts in extinguishing the fire and salvage and overhaul efforts. Stembridge said the fire is believed to have started due to electrical issues.

Saturday food bank returns

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DISCOVERED: Death is being investigated as a homicide

FROM PAGE ONE

Public Relations Director Corinne Geller.

According to the AWARE Foundation, Inc., the body is believed to be that of 17-year-old Cion 'CC' Carroll. Carroll was reported missing on Nov. 2, around 10 p.m., from his residence near Poorhouse Road in Kenbridge.

"His phone was last pinged at a location of a home belonging to a registered sex offender," the AWARE Foundation said in a statement. "After that ping, his phone went dead."

The Roanoke-based AWARE Foundation helps

families find missing loved ones, especially children and teens. The group partners with law enforcement agencies to make that happen, assisting in cases like this one.

On Tuesday morning, Geller said officials couldn't say for certain yet that the body found belonged to Carroll. She added that VSP was still awaiting confirmation of positive identification from the medical examiner.

"The investigation remains ongoing at this time with the assistance of the Lunenburg County Sheriff's Office and Kenbridge Police Department," Geller said.

State police are pursuing various leads and are still encouraging anyone with information to please contact us at (434) 352-7128 or by emailing questions@vsp.virginia.gov.

Geller gave no further details.

A Tuesday afternoon call to the Kenbridge Police Department provided no further information either.

Police Chief Ben Barnes said he had no comment until the identification of the body was positively identified, which could take several more days.

FUNDS: 'There is an opportunity for significant fuel savings'

FROM PAGE ONE

purchasing of school buses is an expensive venture for the county and we are very fortunate to have been awarded this extremely competitive grant to offset the cost of three new buses.

Mason said the school division is currently examining the details of the grant to identify potential costs and ensure that they are equipped to meet all of its requirements.

According to Mason, if the division accepts the grant funds, they will order the three

buses, which will likely take one year to receive. "Since there are no requirements for how we utilize these buses, we will have our bus mechanics familiarize themselves with the buses and test them on our routes to see if and how they can be implemented," Mason said.

Nearly 400 school divisions across the country were awarded funds for new school buses, but only 12 school divisions were selected in Virginia, many of which were in rural locations.

Mason said grant recipients were chosen from a vast pool of

applicants through a national lottery system, with preference given to rural school divisions in high-poverty areas.

The funds awarded come from nearly \$1 billion in funding from the Infrastructure Law to help school divisions purchase zero-emission vehicles. As part of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Clean School Bus Program rebate competition.

The EPA selected 389 applications, totaling \$913 million in requests, to support the purchase of more than 2,400 buses. Of those buses, 95 percent will be electric.

Other school divisions in the Commonwealth receiving funds include Carroll County, Floyd County, Franklin County,

Galax County, Goochland County, Grayson County, Lee County, Lynchburg, Powhatan County and Wise County.

FLU: The numbers keep climbing

FROM PAGE ONE

people became aware of the COVID-19 virus and many didn't get the flu vaccine or encounter the flu as we didn't really see much activity," said Lisa Sollot, VDH respiratory disease coordinator in the division of surveillance and investigation.

Fortunately, even with the high numbers, as of Nov. 10, the VDH has reported no influenza-associated pediatric deaths or pneumonia, influenza or COVID-19 associated deaths for the 2022-2023 flu season.

HOW TO PREVENT THE SPREAD

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the first way to protect people can protect themselves is by getting their yearly flu vaccine. The CDC now recommends that everyone ages 6 months and older to get their annual shot.

"An annual flu vaccine is the best way to protect against flu," said Almond. "Vaccination helps prevent infection and can also prevent serious outcomes in people who get vaccinated but still get sick with flu."

Unlike COVID-19, the flu is much easier to slow and prevent the spread. Routinely cleaning surfaces is an easy and effective way for people to prevent themselves and others from catching and spreading the virus.

"Flu viruses are fragile, so standard practices, such as cleaning with soap and water, can help remove and kill them," said Almond. "Studies have shown that the flu virus can live and potentially infect a person for only two to eight hours after being deposited on a surface. Therefore, special sanitizing processes beyond routine cleaning, including closing schools to clean every surface in the building, are not necessary or recommended to slow the spread of flu, even during a flu outbreak."

An easy way to prevent infection is to make sure to wash hands often for at least 20 seconds with soap and water. Also, refrain from touching eyes, nose and mouth as this is an easy way for germs to spread. A great way to protect others is to stay home when showing symptoms. The CDC recommends staying home at least 24 hours after a fever is gone.

These practices can help slow the spread of the flu and other illnesses making their rounds this flu season.

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CHARLOTTE COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT FOR A MULTI-FAMILY DWELLING

The Charlotte County Planning Commission will conduct a public hearing on Tuesday, November 22, 2022, at 7:00 pm, or as soon thereafter as possible, at the Charlotte County Administration Office, 250 LeGrande Avenue, Suite A, Charlotte Court House. The purpose of this hearing is to receive public comment regarding Tina Morgan's application for a conditional use permit to establish a multi-family dwelling in an existing structure on property identified as Tax Parcel #90-A-44 and located at 125 Garden Road, Red Oak, Virginia. The Planning Commission may provide a recommendation on the application at their meeting following the hearing, or at a subsequent public meeting.

Persons affected may present their views at the hearing or may provide comments in writing. Written comments can be delivered to the Administration Office; mailed to PO Box 608, Charlotte Court House, VA, 23923; or emailed to publiccomments@charlottecountyva.gov and should identify the subject and commenter's name & address.

Application details and livestream access information can be obtained in the County Administration Office at the above address during business hours or by calling (434) 542-5117.

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Wednesday, November 2, 2022

Drakes Branch, Virginia

Voter registration changes delayed by state error

By Crystal Vandegrift and Brian Carlton
The Charlotte Gazette

On Monday, Oct. 31, the Virginia Department of Elections announced that 149,000 voter registration transactions hadn't been properly processed this year. Out of those, 121 were in Charlotte County, according to Charlotte Registrar Jenni Booth.

"We did receive 121 applications from the state that were included in the 'drop'," Booth said. "This was a glitch in the state system and not anything that was missed or not processed by each locality."

A voter registration transaction is when a resident changes things like their address, registers in a new county for the first time or requests any other adjustment

to their record. This is done through visits to the Department of Motor Vehicles. As your driver's license and other information are updated there, the data is supposed to be sent to registrars in local cities and counties for processing. Due to a computer error in the statewide voter registration system, that didn't happen for these 149,000 people.

That's in the process of being corrected, both state and Charlotte County officials say. As soon as the mistake was discovered, officials with the Department of Elections notified registrars and sent the information over.

"Myself and my staff confirmed the applications from the state and started immediately to process the information, to

(See DELAYED, Page 2)



Several Bacon District Volunteer Fire Department members stand behind one of the departments engines following a fire call.

Fire department asks for funds

By Crystal Vandegrift
The Charlotte Gazette

The Bacon District Volunteer Fire Department is working on several projects to benefit the community and hopes citizens will support their efforts.

Fire Chief Will Stembidge said that, as with all things, the cost of equipment and materialistic items continue to rise.

"Now is the time we need your help to provide the quality of service that citizens and our community deserve," Stembidge said. "We endlessly thank everyone for all their previous contributions, but we again ask for donations."

Stembidge said over the past year, the department has seen growth in membership along with new equipment purchases to better serve the community.

Several projects the fire department is working on include: purchasing a Chevrolet Tahoe, which will be necessary to transport personnel to and from instructional classes and/or emergency response calls. A Ford Pickup is another vehicle that will be extremely useful for pulling the department's fire and rescue UTV and HAZ-MAT trailer.

Stembidge said the department's Brush Truck has also been equipped with a new skid unit to better fight brush fires.

"Lastly, Bacon District is still saving money for our fire station remodeling needs, which will hopefully start soon," Stembidge said.

Donations to the fire department can be sent to Bacon District Volunteer Fire Department, P.O. Box 45 Wylliesburg, VA 23976.

Health District urges caution for flu season

By Rachel Austin
The Charlotte Gazette

With the COVID-19 pandemic mellowing out, folks need to still be cautious as flu season is already here.

According to the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), this year's flu season is showing early signs of being worse than in recent years. Case numbers have started out strong and early this year showing that the seasonal flu has returned stronger.

According to Lisa Sollot, VDH respiratory disease coordinator in the division

of surveillance and investigation, the flu is very unpredictable and the health department does its best to look at data and use various tools to prepare for what may come. The reason this flu season could be worse is due to the COVID-19 pandemic the past two years.

"During the pandemic, a lot of people became aware of the COVID-19 virus and many didn't get the flu vaccine or encounter the flu as we didn't really see much activity," said Sollot.

Due to the flu numbers

(See FLU, Page 2)



Event raises funds for children in need

While the turnout was small, the Christmas Parents Committee Car Show on Saturday, Oct. 29, was a fun time for all who came, according to committee member Kay Pierantoni.

The event was a fundraiser for the Christmas Parents Organization and raised close to \$4,000.

According to Pierantoni, the funds will be used to purchase Christmas parents and other items for almost 300 children who are in need.

"Prior to the event, a

little over \$4,000 had been raised with the annual letter writing campaign," Pierantoni said. "The distribution date is only 6 weeks away, so the Committee is hoping others will want to be a part of this mission to ensure a joyful Christmas morning for all."

The event included a collection of cars, trucks and motorcycles to view and the Charlotte Lions Club served up good food to help the mission.

"The Committee is

grateful to the Heartland Board for letting us use the park and to Administrator Dan Witt for his assistance," Pierantoni said.

Morgan Motorsports had two race cars on hand, and Stacy Rice was drawn as the winner of the upcoming fast, 30-minute ride at Virginia International Raceway.

To help the Christmas Parents continue to provide for children in need, donations can be sent to P.O. Box 168, Drakes Branch, Va 23937.

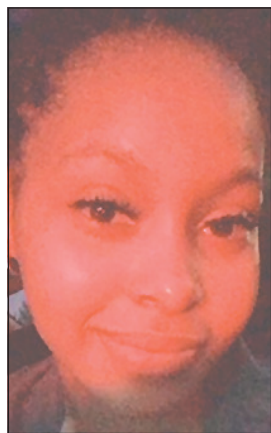
Police still searching for Anatesha Moore

Have you seen Anatesha Moore? The Charlotte County Sheriff's Office put out a notice on Thursday, Oct. 27, asking residents if they had seen the 21-year-old. Anatesha Jada'kisse Moore is wanted in connection with Reckless Handling of a Firearm, Use of a Firearm in Commission of a Felony, Aggravated Malicious Wounding and Filing a False

Police Report.

If you know the whereabouts of Moore you are asked to contact Investigator J.B. Tuck with the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office at (434) 542-5141.

Moore is known to frequent the areas of Charlotte County, Lunenburg County, Dinwiddie County and the Richmond area.



Anatesha Moore

Big night for Bacon District
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Assessment shows drop in Virginia's reading and math scores

By Nathaniel Cline
Virginia Mercury

With the results of a national educational assessment showing significant declines in both reading and math, Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin is directing the Virginia Board of Education to raise Virginia's testing standards.

On Monday, the National Center for Education Statistics released the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a nationwide look at fourth- and eighth-grade student achievement. The results showed declines in Virginia in both reading and math between 2019 and 2022, and continuous drops in fourth graders' proficiency since 2017.

"Today, every Virginian clearly sees that our children need us now more than ever," said Youngkin. "Achievement gaps in critical fields of math and reading could seriously dim the bright futures of a generation of Virginia students, and that's why we must and are doubling down our commitment to Virginians, and specifically, our commitment to Virginia's children."

Assessment officials said average scores in math and reading for both fourth and eighth grade students declined nationally.

In August, results from Virginia's Standards of Learning tests also showed achievement drops over the course of the pandemic.

State Secretary of Education

Aimee Rogstad Guidera said the NAEP results offer a "clear and heart-wrenching" statement that Virginia is failing students and called the "catastrophic decline" a "predictable outcome of the decade-long systemic dismantling of a foundational commitment to excellence in education."

Superintendent of Public Instruction Jillian Balow also accused the prior two Democratic administrations of "systemically" lowering school standards and expectations and downplaying assessment data showing drops.

"Using the SOL scores, we report that two-thirds of fourth graders are doing well, and that's just not true," Balow said. "Parents and teachers cannot take action unless they all know that we are nowhere near two-

thirds proficient with our students."

Senate Democrats pushed back against the Republican administration's assertions.

In a joint statement, Sens. Mamie Locke, D-Hampton, Louise Lucas, D-Portsmouth, and Ghazala Hashmi, D-Chesterfield, disputed the idea that their party had lowered educational standards.

"We have staffing shortages in schools across Virginia, students aren't receiving the proper resources to set every child up for success, and many schools need funding for structural improvements to increase the quality of education," said Lucas. "Now is not the time to point fingers at those who are no longer in leadership."

FLU: Get vaccinated, officials say

FROM PAGE ONE

being low the past two years, many people have lost some of their immunity to it. According to Sollot, many people will have to refamiliarize their immune systems with this season's strand of flu and recommends getting the flu shot to help fight it.

As of Oct. 15, the highest influenza-like illness intensity level observed in any region was a four which is low with only 3.6% of emergency department and urgent care center visits.

According to the VDH weekly influenza report, Central Virginia has risen from approximately 2.5% to 3% of those seeking care for influenza-like illnesses. This is the lowest in Virginia, almost tying with the Southwest and right below Eastern and Northwest regions.

The best way to reduce the risk of the flu and the complications that can come with it is to get vaccinated each year. As the flu strand mutates every year, Sollot recommends getting the vaccine each year to fight the new one.

"I can't state this enough, the best thing to do for you and your family is to get the seasonal vaccine," said Sollot.

According to the VDH, the 2022-2023 flu vaccine is designed to protect against what is believed to be the most common influenza viruses. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is safe to get the flu vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time if eligible and the timing lines up. The new COVID-19 provides protection from the original strain and the Omicron subvariants.

Along with the flu, COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses like respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) are out there. The best practices to prevent contracting these viruses are to stay home when feeling sick, using your elbow to cover coughs and sneezes and frequently washing your hands.

DELAYED: Voters can still register in Charlotte

FROM PAGE ONE

ensure each application was updated in the system," Booth said.

To be clear, all of the affected people will be able to vote on Election Day. The changes will all be processed before then. Both state and local officials confirmed that. Also, any of the affected people who voted early, their vote will also count. And if your information still doesn't show up at your polling place, that's being addressed too.

"With same day registration being offered now, if a new voter comes in to vote either on Early Voting Days or at the polls and they do not show up in the pollbooks, but did register through the DMV, they can register at that point and do a provisional vote," Booth said.

WHO DISCOVERED THE PROBLEM?

Department of Elections officials say the problem was flagged after several residents came in to vote early, but their information wasn't updated. In each case, the voter's information was just updated on site by the registrar and then the resident went to cast their ballot. According to state and local officials, there were no reported problems like this in Charlotte County.

"With information from local officials,

ELECT's IT professionals were able to scour the election system data to identify the additional transactions for processing," said Virginia Elections Commissioner Susan Beals in a statement. "I'm pleased that all affected voters are able to vote and that anyone with questions or concerns can reach out to us directly so that we may assist them as we near Election Day."

Beals went on to say her staff has reached out and offered help to any registrar who needs additional support to get all of the changes processed before Election Day.

This will be one of the last elections done using the state's current system, which was first put in place in 2007. A new voter registration system will be built over the next few months. Then the department plans to work with local registrars to help implement it over the next two years.

WHAT'S VIRGINIA'S REGISTRATION LAW SAY?

If you need to register to vote or update your information, there's still time. If you look on the state election website or go to the registrar's page for Charlotte County, the deadline to register to vote is Oct. 17. But starting this year, there's a second option, but one that makes things slightly more complicated.

Same day voter registration is now allowed across the Commonwealth. That means, if you missed the traditional deadline, which this year was Monday, Oct. 17, you can still go to the registrar's office or even register at your polling place on Election Day.

"Yes, beginning with the 2022 General Election, the General Assembly approved legislation that provides the ability to register at any time, up to and including Election Day," Beals said. Her staff also directed Gazette staff to the same language on the Elections website.

That change went into effect due to a law that was passed in the 2020 session of the General Assembly. To give cities and counties time to adjust, the Assembly pushed back the plan for a two-year period, writing in the final version that it would take effect Oct. 1, 2022. And the wording on the law, HB 201, is pretty clear.

"Any person who is qualified to register to vote shall be entitled to register in person up to and including the day of the election at the office of the general registrar in the locality in which such person resides or at the polling place for the precinct in which

such person resides," the law states.

EARLY VOTING CONTINUES

For any Charlotte County residents who want to vote early, you can still do that too. The registrar's office, located at 420 Thomas Jefferson Highway in Charlotte Court House, will be open for early voting through this Friday, Nov. 4 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Then on Saturday, Nov. 5, it'll be open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

What changes are coming for Medicare users?

By Rachel Austin
The Charlotte Gazette

The Inflation Reduction Act was signed into law in August and caught the attention of many due to its sections on clean energy and climate change. However, the bill also contains changes regarding health care that will go into effect next month.

Starting Jan. 1, Virginians under Medicare and the Affordable Care Act will see some relief in their medical costs. Here is what to know about the new law.

For those under the Affordable Care Act, the enhanced subsidies placed by Congress due to the pandemic will extend for three years

through 2025. This will keep health care premiums low for the 300,000 Virginians under the Affordable Care Act. If this had not been extended, the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services predicted that Virginians under the Affordable Care Act would have seen a \$71 increase in their premiums next year.

“I am very happy about expanding the enhanced subsidies for the Affordable Care Act,” said Sen. Tim Kaine. “I’ve always been a strong supporter of the Affordable Care Act. Back in August 2017, I cast my vote and it was decided by one. We didn’t know a pandemic was right around the corner and Covid could have been worse than it already was if

so many people had lost their health coverage. We never know what’s right around the corner.”

The Inflation Reduction Act also provides numerous benefits for seniors on Medicare. One of the most notable is that this will cap insulin prices at \$35 a month. As Kaine’s fellow Virginia senator Mark Warner points out, in past years seniors have paid thousands of dollars out of pocket just for insulin.

“The cost of diabetes is huge,” said Warner. “I see this in my personal life as my daughter has type 1 diabetes and the price has gone up four times in the past 20 years. Luckily we are able to afford it but many can’t. This only helps those on Medi-

care, but it’s a step in the right direction.”

Even though this is a highly debated topic, those on Medicare will receive free coverage for vaccines. This includes the shingles vaccine along with others in hopes to prevent serious illnesses.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS

The Inflation Reduction Act also establishes a \$2,000 cap on out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs. Looking forward, the bill also allows Medicare to negotiate drug prices for seniors and people with disabilities. This won’t be something seniors will see right away, but will start seeing it in years to come.

“This is something I have fought for for years,” said

Kaine. “There should be negotiations rather than just accepting the prices given to us. It’s taken a while to get here, but I feel it will be very beneficial.”

Along with the \$2,000 cap on out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs, the bill expands the Low-Income Subsidy program that currently helps cover prescription drug costs for over 11,000 low-income Virginians with Medicare.

“Health care cost is still too high and with overall inflation, we need something to help Virginians,” said Warner. “There are too many people who have to choose between food and medicine and that should never be a problem.”



Students hold winter band concert

On, Wednesday, Dec. 14, a winter concert was held in the Randolph-Henry auditorium to showcase the Central Middle School and Randolph-Henry High School band students. Randolph-Henry welcomed a large audience as they enjoyed an evening of beautiful holiday music.



OPINION

HIS THOUGHTS

An unexpected guest

Back when our girls were small, my teaching schedule at Hampden-Sydney College allowed us to make a grand sweep of the eastern U.S. during summer vacations. We had eager relatives spread from New Jersey to Chicago to Memphis to Parsons, so we usually loaded up the station wagon (remember those?) and struck out from Southside Virginia to visit all of them in about a one-month period. Long car trips with small children can be trying at times, but looking back now I can see that they were veritable cakewalks compared to a more recent attempt to replicate those voyages with the “Chocolate Baby.”

We’re in Chicago at my in-laws’ great condo overlooking the Chicago River. Whenever we are outdoors, the prevailing breeze is filling the whole district with the delicious

aroma of chocolate. I learned that not too far away is an old and revered chocolate processing plant, Brommer’s, which actually roasts cacao but also has a retail shop.

We enter the store for the first time and are dazzled by the astounding selection of chocolate delicacies. We each have our own tastes, and we won’t be back again very soon, so before long we find our cart laden with chocolate-pecan turtles; dark and milk chocolate bars; chocolate-covered blueberries, cherries, and raisins; giant malted milk balls; peppermint patties; and other items I have probably forgotten. If you had suggested before we entered that I would expend a three-digit sum on chocolate candy, I would have laughed heartily, but the fact is I cheerfully lay my card on the counter and take possession of a very heavy bag –



Mike Wilson
Guest columnist

filled with carefully weighed smaller individual bags, much to the annoyance of those behind us in line—with the ominous fine-print warning, “Store at 70 degrees.”

It is when we get back to the condo that we realize that our loot most definitely can’t be left in the car, so we take it inside and leave it near the door. So far, so good...

We leave early the next day for the eight-hour trip to

Memphis, and when we stop for lunch it suddenly occurs to me that we again cannot leave the chocolate in the car for very long because of the temperature. We all know by now thanks to public service announcements how the temperature inside a car can spike in a very short time in direct sunlight. We take the “Chocolate Baby” inside the restaurant and it sits in the booth with us; someone jokes about asking for a high chair. After one more similar stop, we make it to Memphis. We are pleased to share some of our haul with all the kinfolk there, but I estimate it still weighs about 20 pounds — a pretty hefty baby! — when we start the 12-hour trip to North Carolina.

We already know we will have to take it in at rest stops, but when we arrive at a motel for the night, the temperature is still an issue,

so the “Chocolate Baby” has to come inside and sleep with us, too. I refuse to read it a story at bedtime, and I will not rent a port-a-crib! We finally make it home without any untoward incidents, and we slowly dispatch the contents of that bag. In the end, it is worth it!

Now, whenever we are transporting anything apt to suffer from heat — flowers, cupcakes, fresh strawberries, etc. — to us it is a “baby.” We are lucky our Chicago folks have moved up to a northern suburb; in my old age, I am not sure I can take so much pressure any more. I sure do miss that aroma in their old neighborhood, though.

Mike Wilson is a former Hampden-Sydney Spanish professor, who now calls North Carolina home. He can be reached at jmwilson@catawba.edu.



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