

CELEBRATING FUZZ BUZZ

Enjoying the fruit of the moment during National Peach Month. **A10**



Va. school shooting
Mother pleads guilty to felony child neglect. **NATION & WORLD, A8**

Women's World Cup
Spain uses late goal to defeat Sweden, heads to final. **SPORTS, B1**

The News & Advance

WHERE YOUR STORY LIVES

Wednesday, August 16, 2023

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BACK TO CLASS



PAIGE DINGLER PHOTOS, THE NEWS & ADVANCE

Stuart Jones (left) and Paul Lee greet students on the first day of school at Heritage High School on Tuesday.

Students across the Lynchburg area returned to classrooms this week for the start of a new school year.

Lynchburg City Schools kicked off the year on Tuesday, while Bedford County students started on Monday. Amherst and Campbell counties start their school years today.

The return to school has local law enforcement reminding drivers to watch for school zones and to stop for buses loading and unloading children.

— Paige Dingler



ABOVE: Stuart Jones (left) hugs Timothy Jones on the first day of school.



LEFT: Members of the LCS staff greet students.



Superintendent Dr. Crystal Edwards (left) and Mayor Stephanie Reed greet students on the first day of school.

SWEET BRIAR

College's search for president on course

Process is progressing 'nicely,' institution aims to name next leader by calendar year's end

RODNEY ROBINSON JR.
The News & Advance

Sweet Briar College's search for its next president continues ahead of the upcoming academic year.

Mason Bennett Rummel, chair of Sweet Briar's board of directors, said her hope is the college will announce its next president by the end of the calendar year.

Rummel said the search committee is composed of 14 people — board members mostly from the executive committee, students, faculty, staff and alumnae.

She describes the committee and the procedure as a "very well-designed and constructed process" that's all mapped out with a clear timeline.

Management consulting firm Russell Reynolds Associates has led the search for the committee and created a presidential profile on the college's website for prospective candidates.

In the coming months, search consultants will be in conversation with candidates and after numerous interviews and deliberations, a new president will be announced.

"It's progressing very, very nicely," Rummel added.

In January, former President Meredith Woo announced she was stepping down after seven years of leadership. Woo began her tenure at Sweet Briar in 2017, two years

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CAMPBELL COUNTY

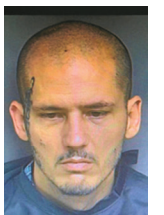
Trial continued for man facing murder charge

Judge denies a request from defense to appoint an expert to weigh in on 911 recording

JUSTIN FAULCONER
The News & Advance

RUSTBURG — A judge ruled Tuesday to continue a jury trial for a Rustburg man accused of first-degree murder in the January 2022 killing of the man who raised him.

Michael Wade Stout, 41, was set to go to trial Aug. 21 in Campbell County Circuit Court on the murder charge and another count of aggravated malicious wounding in connection with the death of Gregory Wade McGann. The 60-year-old was taken to Lynchburg General Hospital after authorities responded to the



Stout

Please see **STOUT**, Page A3

TRUMP | ELECTION INDICTMENT

Ga. case presents wide range of challenges

Obstacles vary from picking an unbiased jury to finding a courtroom that's big enough

KATE BRUMBACK
The Associated Press

ATLANTA — Putting 19 people on trial at the same time is a difficult assignment for any prosecutor — whether or not one of those defendants is a former president of the United States running to reclaim his old office.

The sprawling racketeering indictment returned this week by a grand jury in Atlanta presents a wide range of challenges. A big one is political: Finding jurors who don't have unshakeable opinions about Donald Trump and others in his orbit.

Beyond that, with so many defendants, prosecutors and defense lawyers



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

In this June 30 file photo, former President Donald Trump arrives to speak at the Moms for Liberty meeting in Philadelphia.

will labor to keep the names and conflicting stories straight for those jurors over weeks or months. There will be countless legal details and basic logistics to argue or work out — even down to finding a courtroom big enough to fit everyone.

In an early example of the lengthy litigation ahead, lawyers for former Trump chief of staff Mark Meadows filed a quick motion Tuesday to transfer the case from state to federal court. They said all the actions he took were in service to his White House role, foreshadowing an argument the Constitution makes him immune from prosecution.

Trump himself tried a similar tack in New York — to move to federal court a state case charging him with falsifying business records. That bid was denied.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis has brought 10 other state racketeering cases since taking office in January 2021. As an assistant D.A., she used the racketeering law to successfully prosecute Atlanta public school educators in a test-cheating scandal. But in one of Willis' current cases, involving

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SO CUTE, IT'S SCARY

Carve out some time for these jack-o'-lantern stuffed peppers. **A10**



Social media lawsuit
Va. among states suing Meta for harming youth mental health. **A5**

High school football
HHS quarterback Slash finding success in 1st year as starter. **B1**

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MIDDLE EAST

Israeli airstrikes surge

Health authorities in Gaza say hundreds of Palestinians are dead

NAJIB JOBAIN, SAMY MAGDY AND RAVI NESSMAN
The Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — Israel escalated airstrikes across the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, crushing families in the rubble of residential buildings, as health officials said

hundreds of Palestinians were killed in the past day and medical facilities were shut down because of bomb damage and lack of power.

The soaring death toll from the bombardment is unprecedented in the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It augurs an even greater loss of life in Gaza once Israeli forces backed by tanks and artillery launch an expected ground offensive aimed at crushing Hamas militants.

Gaza's 2.3 million people have been running out of food, water and medicine since Israel sealed off the territory following the devastating Oct. 7 attack by Hamas on towns in southern Israel.

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■ **MORE INSIDE:** Virginia Palestinian Americans speak about widening conflict. **Page A6**



ALI MOHMOUD, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Palestinians rescue a survivor of Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip in Nusseirat refugee camp Tuesday.

TRICKS AND TREATS AT PATRICK HENRY MEMORIAL LIBRARY



PAIGE DINGLER PHOTOS, THE NEWS & ADVANCE

ABOVE: A family walks through a spooky trail during the Halloween Party at the Patrick Henry Memorial Library in Brookneal on Tuesday. **RIGHT:** Families and children in costumes participate in various activities at the library Tuesday. **BELOW:** Children make crafts during the event.



AMHERST COUNTY

City man's preliminary hearing set for Jan. 3

Defendant accused of killing estranged wife

JUSTIN FAULCONER
The News & Advance

A preliminary hearing for a Lynchburg man accused of second-degree murder in connection with a city woman's death has been continued to Jan. 3 in Amherst County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court.

Lynchburg police announced Aug. 29 the arrest of Michael L. Perry III, 21, who also is charged with the unlawful disposal of a dead body in connection with the death of Avriel Hooks, 20, who was reported missing Aug. 23.



Perry

Hooks was last seen by her family on Aug. 22 at about 8 p.m., according to the Lynchburg Police Department. On Aug. 29, Lynchburg police, in partnership with the Amherst County Sheriff's Office, conducted an extensive search in Amherst County, and located a body in a wooded area off U.S. 60, according to a news release from LPD. Earlier in the day, police announced they

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ELECTION 2023

Amherst County sheriff's candidates address key topics, platforms

Four hopefuls discuss issues facing department, the law enforcement profession ahead of Nov. 7

JUSTIN FAULCONER
The News & Advance

Candidates in the four-way race for Amherst County's sheriff in the Nov. 7 election each have experience in the county sheriff's office.

Major Eric Elliott, currently the

Amherst County Sheriff's Office's second-in-command officer, is endorsed by Sheriff E.W. Viar, who is retiring at the end of the year following two four-year terms. Deputy R. Dale Meeks Jr., who has been in law enforcement the shortest period of the four can-

didates, said he believes he will bring a fresh perspective to the county's chief law enforcement position the county needs.

The other two candidates, Jimmy Ayers and Mike Robinson, each would have a homecoming if elected.

Ayers served as Amherst County Sheriff from 1996 to 2015 and prior to that had a decade of service in the department, as well

as volunteering with a county rescue squad and the sheriff's office auxiliary. From January 2016 to this past July, he served on the Amherst County Board of Supervisors' District 3 seat and in May received the Amherst County Republicans' endorsement.

Robinson worked in the sheriff's office for 23 years, starting his law enforcement career in 1992 and working his way up to field

captain. After leaving the Amherst sheriff's department in December 2015, he served three years with the Lynchburg Police Department until retiring in late 2018 and since has worked as a sales representative serving the needs of multiple law enforcement agencies. He also has been highly involved with the Monelison Fire and

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL



Player features previewing LU, Oregon's Fiesta Bowl matchup. **SPORTS, C1**



LYNCHBURG

NEARLY A CENTURY IN COMMUNITY

A look at College Lake Dam's history in the city, plans moving forward. **LOCAL, B1**

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2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

LOOKING BACK



PAIGE DINGLER, THE NEWS & ADVANCE

Kingston Campbell's dad, Chris Campbell, wears a shirt with Kingston on it during the Peacemakers and city leaders news conference on 16th and Floyd streets on June 15, 2023. Kingston was one of three children who were victims of gun violence in Lynchburg in 2023.



JUSTIN FAULCONER, THE NEWS & ADVANCE

Amherst County Public Schools Superintendent William Wells (center) speaks at a news conference Dec. 13, 2023, about an incident involving fentanyl at Central Elementary School. At left is Amherst County Public Safety Director Brad Beam. At right is Amherst County Sheriff's Office Lt. Dallas Hill.



PAIGE DINGLER, THE NEWS & ADVANCE

Community members, teachers and students hold signs during the Lynchburg City School Board meeting on Sept. 19, 2023, where school closures were discussed.



PAIGE DINGLER, THE NEWS & ADVANCE

The Matts Creek wildfire is seen from Big Island on Nov. 15, 2023. The wildfire would eventually spread through just more than 11,000 acres in Bedford and Rockbridge counties.



PAIGE DINGLER, THE NEWS & ADVANCE

A celebration of life was held for slain Wintergreen Police Officer Mark Christopher "Chris" Wagner II at the Augusta Expo Event Center in Fishersville on Monday, June 26, 2023.

Lynchburg area's top stories of 2023

FROM STAFF REPORTS

As 2023 draws to a close, the staff of The News & Advance took time to reflect on the news and events that shaped our community.

Each year, we cull through the headlines to create a list of news that in some way influenced the character of Lynchburg

and the counties of Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford and Nelson. The headlines are then narrowed to a list of 10, plus a few honorable mentions we just couldn't leave out.

In this section, you will find our top picks, including the censures that resulted from a divided Lynchburg City Council, the wildfire that burned more than 11,000

acres and Liberty University's dream season that took them all the way to the Fiesta Bowl in Arizona.

For more images and stories of the people and events that characterized 2023, visit News Advance.com.

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MORE YEAR IN REVIEW COVERAGE: A look back at 2023 in pop culture, plus the year's top books, TV shows, movies, music and video games. **THE BURG, SECTION D**
News & Advance photographer Paige Dingler curates a collection of her favorites photos of 2023. **A4** Feel-good stories from a tumultuous year. **A5.**

World saw rapid clean-power growth in 2023 despite economic roadblocks

ISABELLA O'MALLEY, JENNIFER MCDERMOTT AND ALEXA ST. JOHN
The Associated Press

Led by new solar power, the world added renewable energy at breakneck speed in 2023, a trend that if amplified will help Earth turn away from fossil fuels and prevent severe warming and its effects.

Clean energy is often now the least expensive, explaining some of the growth. Nations also adopted policies that support renewables, some citing energy security concerns, according to the International Energy Agency. These

factors countered high interest rates and persistent challenges in getting materials and components in many places.

The IEA projected that more than 440 gigawatts of renewable energy would be added in 2023, more than the entire installed power capacity of Germany and Spain together.

Here's a look at the year in solar, wind and batteries.

Another banner year for solar
China, Europe and the U.S. each set

Please see **CLEAN**, Page A10

New General Assembly seeks swift election to fill SCC judge vacancies

MICHAEL MARTZ
Richmond Times-Dispatch

RICHMOND — Is help finally coming for the Virginia State Corporation Commission?

With two of the commission's three seats vacant and Democrats now controlling both chambers at the Capitol, legislative leaders expect the General Assembly to move swiftly to elect two new judges, potentially in the week after the legislature convenes on Jan. 10.

The SCC, created as a constitutionally independent body in 1902 to regulate some of the biggest businesses in Virginia,

has been operating without a full panel of judges since early 2022 because of a political stalemate that began in 2018 after the retirement of Judge Jimmy Dimitri. Earlier this year, Dimitri came out of retirement to serve as a replacement judge to ensure that the commission would have a quorum to operate until the assembly elected judges to fill the vacancies.

"We've absolutely got to get people into those positions," said Sen. Creigh Deeds, D-Charlottesville, who will become chairman of the Senate Commerce

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