

# Southside Sentinel

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Serving Middlesex County and adjacent areas of the Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck since 1896

VOL. 127, No. 39

URBANA, VIRGINIA 23175 • JANUARY 12, 2023

TWO SECTIONS • \$1



## PICKUP LANDS ATOP BOAT

The Rebecca T. Ruark skipjack is on the National Historic Landmark list and was damaged on Dec. 27, 2022 when this 1997 Chevy pickup truck (above) was driven between the pilings on Tilghman Island, Md., and landed on the boat. In calmer times, the Rebecca T. Ruark rests dockside in Deltaville (below) shortly after the boat was rebuilt there in the mid-1980s. (Photos by Wade Murphy III and Larry Chowning)

## Skipjack from 1800s has Deltaville ties; owner plans to fix; driver charged with DUI

by Larry Chowning

Deltaville has long been noted for wooden boatbuilding and repair and in 1969 the oldest skipjack on the Chesapeake Bay, Rebecca T. Ruark, was completely rebuilt there. Then, in the late 1980s, the skipjack was back in town at the now closed Deagle and Son Marine Railway for major repairs. The second event was covered by the Southside Sentinel.

There are few noted historic wooden boats on Chesapeake Bay that do not have some association to Deltaville, noted for generations past as the wooden boatbuilding capital of Chesapeake Bay.

The Rebecca T. Ruark, a National

(See Pickup, Page A3)



## How much will MC sewer project need to be subsidized?

by Tom Chillemi

More than three years into planning a sewer system for Middlesex County a question remains: How will the county pay for a sewer system currently estimated at more than \$41 million, since revenues will not cover the costs?

Middlesex has applied for a total of \$18 million in grants. On Tuesday, Jan. 3, the Middlesex County Board of Supervisors approved a resolution asking the Virginia General Assembly for \$11 million in grant funding through the Direct

“The revenues are not going to be sufficient to cover the cost of (sewer) deployment.”

**Matt Walker**  
Middlesex County Administrator

Appropriations Program. At a previous meeting the board asked the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality for \$7 million.

“If we get all of this (grant money) it will be a miracle,” County Administrator Matt Walker told the board at its work session on Friday, Jan. 6.

Sewer service is being planned for Deltaville, Hartfield, Topping, Saluda, and Cooks Corner with the county paying for the collection systems.

Deltaville will cost the most to build — about \$28 million.

(See Sewer, Page A3)

## Supervisors OK vehicle tax rebate

by Larry Chowning

After a public hearing, the Middlesex County Board of Supervisors (MCBS) approved, 4-1, an ordinance on Tuesday, Jan. 3, to provide a 25% “one time” rebate to county personal property taxpayers by returning surplus tax revenues collected from qualifying vehicles.

The qualifying vehicles are automobiles, trucks of less and more than 10,000 pounds, motorcycles, business vehicles, and trailers, which include boat, cattle, horse, car, semi truck and utility trailers.

Earlier in December the board voted to extend the tax due date on

personal property taxes from Dec. 5, 2022 to Feb. 6, 2023 to give relief to taxpayers with skyrocketing personal property tax bills.

The ordinance states that “no refund will be issued after Feb. 6, 2023 for taxpayers who are making a late payment, unless that refund was incorrectly omitted or misapplied for the qualifying vehicle through no fault of the taxpayer.”

The problem arose across the state as vehicle shortages and values skyrocketed during the COVID-19 epidemic. Commissioners of the Revenue in Virginia are required

(See Rebate, Page A3)

## Kimbrough re-elected chair; Harris vice chair

by Larry Chowning

The Middlesex County Board of Supervisors (MCBS) conducted its annual organizational meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 3, and for the second year in a row the board elected Lud Kimbrough as chairman. Saluda District Supervisor Don Harris was newly elected vice chairman. He replaces 2022 Vice Chairman John Koontz. Both votes were unanimous.

The board also voted to move the meeting time from 3 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. and continue to meet on the first Tuesday of each month. Supervisors agreed to change the



Kimbrough



Harris

time to accommodate Koontz, the Hartfield representative, who has recently taken a new position at Christchurch School and has job obligations which have kept him from being able to attend at 3 p.m.

## Whiting, Broad creeks dredging plan advances

by Larry Chowning

The Middlesex County Board of Supervisors (MCBS) learned Friday, Jan. 6, at a work session, that plans to dredge Whiting Creek at Locust Hill and Broad Creek at Deltaville are moving forward.

Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission (MPPDC) Deputy Director Curt Smith reported to supervisors that the county has been awarded a \$70,000 grant from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Resources (DCR) for dredge design and planning work of Whiting Creek.

The grant requires a \$38,000

county match, which can come from the county's \$750,000 dredge fund, said County Administrator Matt Walker at that meeting. The county annually maintains a \$750,000 dredge fund so when the \$38,000 is expended, that amount can be placed back into the dredge fund from the general fund.

Whiting Creek on the Rappahannock River is advantageously located near commercial oyster and crab grounds and recreational waters in the river. The county recently expanded the parking lot and installed a bulkhead

(See Dredging, Page A8)

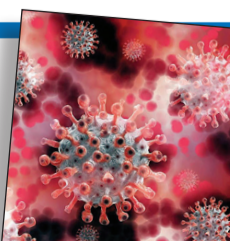


A multi-million dollar wastewater collection system and pump station is under construction at Cooks Corner. (Photo by Larry Chowning)

Inside



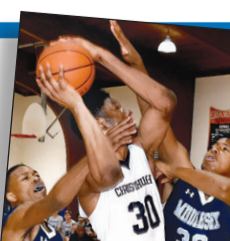
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Middlesex COVID cases take off  
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MC plumber shortage an issue  
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MHS and CCS battle it out for bragging rights  
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# Southside Sentinel

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TWO SECTIONS • \$1



## Urbanna Creek 'polar plungers' a brave bunch

Eighteen swimmers (above), including, in foreground, Deltaville sisters Nicki Roy and Sarah Roy, react to the reportedly 46-degree temperature waters of Urbanna Creek during the seventh Urbanna Polar Plunge and Chili Cook-Off Saturday. While most participants were quick to return to shore at the town marina, four (below) lingered for more than three full minutes after everyone else had exited. They are, from left, Woody Stephens of White Stone, Tiffany Garcia of Lancaster, Maria Getoff of Irvington and Christopher Smith of Bethpage Camp-Resort. Smith said staying in frigid water offers health and mental benefits. "It beats the heck out of a cup of coffee," he said. About 200 people attended a post-plunge chili cook-off in the parking lot of Something Different restaurant. The Urbanna Business Association sponsored the free fun. *More photos, pages B6 and 7.* (Photos by Don Richeson)



## MC looks for fairer ways to assess land

by Larry Chowning

During most years of Middlesex County Board of Supervisors (MCBS) budget talks, discussion on the hiring of a regional land assessor in partnership with other surrounding counties comes up.

It came up again during budget talks at an MCBS budget work session Tuesday, Feb. 7, at a meeting conducted before the supervisors regular monthly meeting at 3:30 p.m.

The county presently hires a professional firm to assess land values every four to five years. For the most part, when the work is bid out, the county ends up hiring firms from areas other than from Tidewater Virginia.

Middlesex County Administrator Matt Walker said that this has caused disparities in assessed and true value of some county waterfront properties. "When you are living on a swamp, versus living on a deepwater waterfront creek, the values should not be close. Yet, we have seen some of this."

"If we had people in-house that understand waterfront property land values and the differences in waterfront properties, the citizens might get a fairer assessment," he said.

He also said that a fairer assessment might make it more difficult for the local circuit court judge to overturn value disputes between the county and landowners.

Another side of the debate is that the county often loses real estate tax dollars because land values increase between the reassessments. Walker said the county has seen some skyrocketing prices in land values that have occurred early in the four and five year reassessment cycle — meaning lost income from those higher values. He also said that values of land sometimes can go down between reassessments which would be advantageous to the property owner.

He also noted that local Realtors have complained that it makes it difficult to sell high priced property when the county assessment is a low unfair value.

Walker encouraged the board to consider talking



Walker

(See Assess, Page A8)

## Multiple Middlesex political offices up for grabs this year

by Tom Chillemi

Several Middlesex County offices will be on the General Election ballot on Nov. 7. There will also be two General Assembly races.

Three seats on the Middlesex County Board of Supervisors will be up for grabs, as well as three seats on the Middlesex County School Board. The districts to be contested include Jamaica, Harmony Village and Pinetop.

The supervisors seats are currently

occupied by Wayne Jessie Sr., Jamaica; Reggie Williams, Harmony Village; and Lud Kimbrough, Pinetop.

The Middlesex County School Board districts are Pinetop, Jamaica, and Harmony Village. These school board seats are currently occupied by Garland Harrow, Pinetop; Elliott Reed, Jamaica; and Claudia Soucek, Harmony Village.

Constitutional offices on the ballot include those occupied by Sheriff David P. Bushey, Middlesex

Commonwealth's Attorney Michael T. Hurd, Treasurer Traci B. Wright, Commissioner of the Revenue E. Mae Diggs, and Clerk of the Circuit Court Rachel Hartenbach.

Middlesex will choose two members of the Tidewater Soil and Water Conservation District. The current members are Jason Bray and Alan Sutherland.

All terms are for four years except for the Clerk of the Circuit Clerk, which is an eight-year term.

The first person to qualify as a

local candidate for the Nov. 7 General Election is Traci B. Wright, who filed all the proper paper work and is a qualified candidate for the Treasurer of Middlesex County, reported Melissa D. Welch, Middlesex County's Director of Elections and General Registrar. Others may qualify after the Sentinel's press time.

### General Assembly

Middlesex voters will elect two representatives to the General

Assembly.

The 2021 redistricting changed boundary lines and Middlesex County is now in the 25th District of the Virginia Senate and 68th District of the Virginia House of Delegates, said Welch. This November Virginia Senator and Virginia House of Delegates will be on the ballot for the new districts. With the boundary line changes, current Senator Ryan McDougle no longer lives in the

(See Up For Grabs, Page A8)

## A third of county residents to see assistance halved

by Larry Chowning

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) released the final issuance of "emergency allotment" benefits to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) households this month for those who have been receiving the food benefits.

Middlesex County SNAP households will permanently return to pre-pandemic allowances beginning March

1 and receive their reduced SNAP benefits amounts on their usual day of issuance on the first, fourth and seventh days of the month.

Middlesex County Department of Social Services (MCDSS) Director Rebecca Morgan gave the bad news to the Middlesex County Board of Supervisors in January.

"This is not good for those who depend on SNAP

(See Halved, Page A8)



## MHS hoop boys win district crown

The Middlesex High School (MHS) varsity basketball team celebrates its 61-56 win over Carver High School in the Tidewater District championship game at MHS on Tuesday. The Chargers were paced by Mike Hammond and Ichi Layne. Hammond scored 5 points on a three pointer and two free throws in the final two minutes and Layne made two free throws in the final seconds to put the game out of reach. The Chargers will play Monday against the Mathews Blue Devils in the first round of the Region A tournament at MHS. Tip-off is 6 p.m. *For more sports, see page B1.* (Photo by Larry Chowning)

## Urbanna officials clash on who can talk and when

by Tom Chillemi

The December 2022 meeting of the Urbanna Town Council was the final meeting of Mayor Barbara Hartley's term. As part of her final message then-Mayor Hartley addressed the importance of citizen participation in their government. "Not only do you have a right to be here and speak, you have an obligation to be here and speak and hear what's going on," said Hartley, who added,

"Because anytime that you have a government where you do not feel like you have access to, you don't know what they're doing for you, then the next question is, what the heck are they doing to me."

### "Secret society"

At the Feb. 9 council meeting, Councilor Alana Courtney aired her grievances about not being able to speak at a recent pool committee

(See Secret, Page A8)

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TWO SECTIONS • \$1



Driven by powerful gusts, fire rages at Rappahannock Oyster Company in Topping on Saturday morning, destroying a dock. See related video at <https://bit.ly/ROCFire>. (Photos courtesy of Hartfield Volunteer Fire Department and Mark Walker)

## Fire claims dock; restaurant open

by Tom Chillemi

A wind-driven fire consumed part of the oyster processing section of Rappahannock Oyster Company in Topping on Saturday. However, Merroir, the company's seafood restaurant, remains open.

The emergency call went out at 7:20 a.m. as the remnants of Tropical Storm Ophelia dumped rain and blew a strong north wind across the Rappahannock River and up Locklies Creek.

Fire was visible when the first firefighters arrived on scene on Locklies Creek Road. "The wind was really driving the fire," said Kevin McNamee, chief of the Hartfield Volunteer Fire Department (HVFD). "The rain was so heavy you could not see across



the river."

Fortunately, the wind pushed flames away from the restaurant and other buildings at the complex that raises and markets oysters,

Chief McNamee explained. The damaged dock is across a parking area from the restaurant.

(See Fire, Page A8)

## A DAM MESS

Easy solution continues to elude officials responding to Healy's Millpond Dam crisis

by Larry Chowning

There was a sigh of relief from boards of supervisors all over the state of Virginia, when in 1932 the Virginia General Assembly passed the Byrd Road Act that took away responsibility of maintaining secondary roads from counties and gave it to the state.

Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), assigned with maintenance of roads in Middlesex County, looked after all those secondary roads in the county until 2006 when the state agency decided it would no longer maintain a portion of Stormont Road (Route 629) over the dam of Healy's Millpond.

VDOT said that the dam was privately owned, it was the responsibility of the owner of the dam to repair the earthen dam to secondary road standards and then, and only then, a new road bed would be installed by VDOT.

The late Gene Ruark who owned the dam in 2006 refused to fix the dam, stating VDOT had maintained the road and the dam since 1932 and he did not feel it was his responsibility. The Middlesex County Board of Supervisors (MCBS) was told by a judge

(See Dam Mess, Page A8)



Since 2006 a portion of Stormont Road (Route 629) at Healy's Millpond has been closed to through traffic because during a VDOT six-month inspection it was determined that the spillway-box culvert on the dam failed. From then and until now the dam issue has been a political fiasco as Middlesex County officials, the owners of the dam and VDOT officials all want the other to fix it and have not taken on the responsibility. This has left waterfront landowners living on the pond with a failing dam and shrinking water levels. Landowners want to fix the spillway at their own cost but as long as the county and VDOT consider putting a road back across it, the cost is unaffordable. Landowners want the road condemned for "perpetuity," which would bring the dam down to a class rating that homeowners could afford to fix. (Photo by Larry Chowning)

## Hearing on allowing manufactured homes in waterfront dist. set

by Larry Chowning

The Middlesex County Planning Commission denied an application on Sept. 13 that would have allowed manufactured homes in Waterfront Commercial districts as a special exception.

The application was initiated by Leonard H. Powell from Pinetop District. The final decision, however, will be considered by the Middlesex County Board of Supervisors at a public hearing on Tuesday, Oct. 3, at 7 p.m. in the Middlesex County Historic Courthouse in Saluda.

The planning commission denied the application on a 4-2 vote. Planning Commission members Bev Butler, R.D. Johnson, Teresa Anderson and Marilyn South voted to reject the application, while Bill Powell and Denita Hammond voted to approve.

Manufactured housing is not permitted by right or with special exception approval, in Village Community, Residential, Cluster Development, Waterfront Commercial, General Business and Light Industrial zoning districts. Manufactured homes are allowed in Low Density Rural and Resource Husbandry zoning, which is 83% of the land in the county.



Leonard Powell



Countless hours of work are reflected in Mike Oien's 1968 Pontiac Firebird, above, painted "Hot Rod Red." A snapshot, left, shows the forgotten Firebird before Oien's restoration. It is just one of many vintage cars, planes and boats on display Saturday at Hummel Field in Topping during the annual Wings, Wheels & Keels festival. See related story and schedule, pages A4 and 5. (Photo by Tom Chillemi and contributed)

## Once forgotten Firebird set to shine at WW&K on Sept. 30 at Hummel

by Tom Chillemi

Anyone who appreciates vintage cars and trucks dreams of discovering a "barn find," a classic car that sat forgotten in a garage for decades.

A restored 1968 Pontiac Firebird barn find is the car featured by Memory Lane Car Club for Wings, Wheels, & Keels, set for this Saturday, Sept. 30, at Hummel Field airport in Topping. (See related items, pages A4 and 5.)

Michael W. Oien of Lancaster found his forgotten Firebird Coupe deluxe model that had been sitting in a garage for about 20 years. It was in rough shape. But, after a seven-year restoration it was transformed into an icon of the muscle car era.

Oien, a Minnesota native, was living in Minneapolis and the car was in southeast South Dakota. On weekends he would drive four hours each way to work on the car.

The car has the original 350 cubic inch engine, air conditioning, tilt steering and power windows. The sheet metal of the car is all original except the trunk pan and the roof skin.

Crash

Oien, who says he was not a mechanic, said the biggest issue he had was when he

(See Firebird, Page A8)

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