

Amherst Belles, Darlings softball teams head to World Series

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Virginia expects to return \$1 billion of surplus

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AMHERST NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Amherst County's only hometown newspaper | THURSDAY, JULY 27, 2023 | NewEraProgress.com | Amherst, Va.

Board OKs permit for photography, events venue

Gladstone farmhouse gets special exemption use to hold gatherings such as weddings, tea parties

JUSTIN FAULCONER
The New Era-Progress

The owner of a Gladstone home has received the Amherst County Board of Supervisors' zoning approval to operate a photography venue and special event place for weddings, tea parties and similar uses.

The board approved a special exception permit during its July 18 meeting for Phyllis Maire, the applicant, to operate the venue at her property at 2409 Riverville Road. The site of just more than 80 acres zoned Agricultural Residential, A-1, has two single-family dwellings and the surrounding area is generally agricultural-zoned property with a single house to the southeast, a CXS yard to the east and vacant land to the north and west, according to county officials.

Maire will not have special events on the lot across from the railroad tracks, according

Please see **FARMHOUSE**, Page A3

WATCH: For video of the Amherst board's approval of the permit for the Gladstone property point your smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link. [NEWSVU](#)

Ayers resigns as District 3 Supervisor to focus on sheriff's bid

JUSTIN FAULCONER
The New Era-Progress

After seven and half years representing District 3 on the Amherst County Board of Supervisors, Jimmy Ayers has resigned from the seat to focus on his campaign for sheriff.

Ayers has served on the board since January 2016 and seeks a second stint as sheriff — a post he held from 1996 to 2015. He retired from the position in December 2015 and has said he is running again because he feels his leadership is needed.

"We, as a community, deserve better from our local law enforcement agency than we've

Please see **AYERS**, Page A3

WATCH: For video of the Amherst County Board of Supervisors chair's announcement of Jimmy Ayers' resignation from the District 3 seat point your smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link. [NEWSVU](#)



PAIGE DINGLER PHOTOS, THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Iris Cates, left, and Ally Laub practice the Ukulele during the Ukulele Camp at Second Stage Amherst on Wednesday, July 19, 2023.

Learning the strings at Ukulele summer camp



Students play Ukulele during the Ukulele Camp at Second Stage Amherst on Wednesday, July 19, 2023.



Students practice playing the ukulele during the Ukulele Camp at Second Stage Amherst on Wednesday, July 19, 2023.

Commission backs measure for withdrawing zoning permit applications

Planners also discuss ordinance change allowing revenue sharing agreement for utility-scale solar operations

Supervisors recently directed county staff to proposed a code change that allows applicants to withdraw a special exception or rezoning proposal only after it has been advertised and all costs have been paid by the applicant. The

JUSTIN FAULCONER
The New Era-Progress

The Amherst County Planning Commission voted at its July meeting to rec-

ommend approval of a zoning ordinance change that gives a new protocol for withdrawing applications.

The Amherst County Board of

Please see **COMMISSION**, Page A3

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A look at new state laws that began July 1, B2



Lancer football schedule released, B1



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PAIGE DINGLER, NEW ERA-PROGRESS

David Proffitt, deputy county administrator, in Amherst on Thursday, June 15.

'Epitome of a public servant'

Longtime Amherst Co. purchasing agent David Proffitt retires

JUSTIN FAULCONER
The News & Advance

In the countless Amherst County Board of Supervisors meetings and other local government functions at the county administration offices over the past three decades, no face has been more familiar than David Proffitt.

The longtime purchasing agent for the county retired at the end of June, culminating a

36-year career where he also took the role of deputy county administrator. During his tenure he served as interim county administrator on four occasions and is known by co-workers as the unofficial county historian with offices in three locations: the courthouse on Taylor Street, the second floor of the fire department in Amherst and the current county administration building.

Proffitt, a native of the Arrington area in Nelson County, started in February 1987 and during a recent interview recalled the wing of the county building where his office is lo-

cated being built in 1992. He has photos of the previous school building that was torn down before the current headquarters for county government and Amherst County Public Schools was built, a process he was directly involved in as director of purchasing.

"Amherst County is a great place to work," Proffitt said. "And I really felt comfortable this was the place I'm meant to be. Not only did I find the job fulfilling, but this area has become a home and I like living here."

A 1973 graduate of Nelson County High School, Proffitt has lived in Amherst County 43

years and worked eight years as a purchasing agent for the former Craddock-Terry Shoe Company in downtown Lynchburg before starting with the county.

"The company was at one time the largest employer in Lynchburg," Proffitt said. "I was in procurement and I liked what I was doing."

The advertisement for Amherst County's procurement position, a relatively new one, caught his eye. Along with the county government, the county schools division and Amherst County Service Authority were

Please see **PROFFITT**, Page A3

Virginia to receive \$1.5B in broadband internet grants

MICHAEL MARTZ
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Virginia will submit a plan late this year to ensure that every home and business in the state can connect to broadband networks for high-speed internet service, using a \$1.5 billion federal grant that President Joe Biden announced for the state on June 26.

"We won't accept anything less," said Evan Feinman, director of the Broadband Equity Access and Development program at the National Telecommunications Information Administration.

Feinman, who was chief broadband adviser to then Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam, likened the \$42 billion national program to rural electrification of the country more than 85 years ago during the Depression.

"This is the largest investment in broadband infrastructure in the nation's history and the largest telecommunications grant the commonwealth (of Virginia) has ever gotten," he said in an interview with the Richmond Times-Dispatch. "It's going to ensure that every American has access to the same standard of living as the folks who already have access to high-speed internet."

That would mean people who live in communities where high-speed internet is unavailable won't have to travel to libraries, schools and other buildings with WiFi internet networks to perform school work or do their jobs, as many did during the COVID-19 pandemic over the past three-plus years.

Please see **BROADBAND**, Page A5

AMHERST COUNTY INVESTITURE CEREMONY

Bennett, Butler sworn in as new judges

Circuit Court gavel changes hands, area's first Black judge makes history

JUSTIN FAULCONER
The New Era-Progress

Before a packed room of family, friends and the Lynchburg area's legal community, two Amherst County judges — Jeff Bennett and Eugene Butler — were sworn into office June 30.

Bennett, a former Lynchburg prosecutor who spent the past eight years as Amherst County's Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court judge, succeeds Amherst Circuit Court Judge Michael Garrett, who presided over the

court since July 2015. Butler is now Amherst County's J&D judge and made history Friday in becoming the first Black judge to be sworn into the 24th Judicial District, which encompasses Lynchburg and the counties of Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, Campbell and Nelson.

Garrett said the changing of the guard in the Amherst County courthouse marked a significant day and recognized the many judges in the Lynchburg area, some currently serving and

others retired, who attended the ceremony.

"It's quite a legacy to live up to," Garrett told the two incoming judges. "It's a good legacy to follow."

Please see **JUDGES**, Page A6



PAIGE DINGLER, NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Jeff Bennett (left) is sworn in as the new Amherst Circuit Court judge and Eugene Butler (right) is sworn in as Amherst County's Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court judge at the Amherst County Courthouse on Friday, June 30, 2023. At center is Michael Garrett, who spent the last eight years as Circuit Court judge and prior to that served as the county's J&D judge.

WATCH: For video of the swearing-in ceremony in Amherst Circuit Court, point your smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link. **NEWSVU**

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Lady Lancers open season with big win, PAGE B1

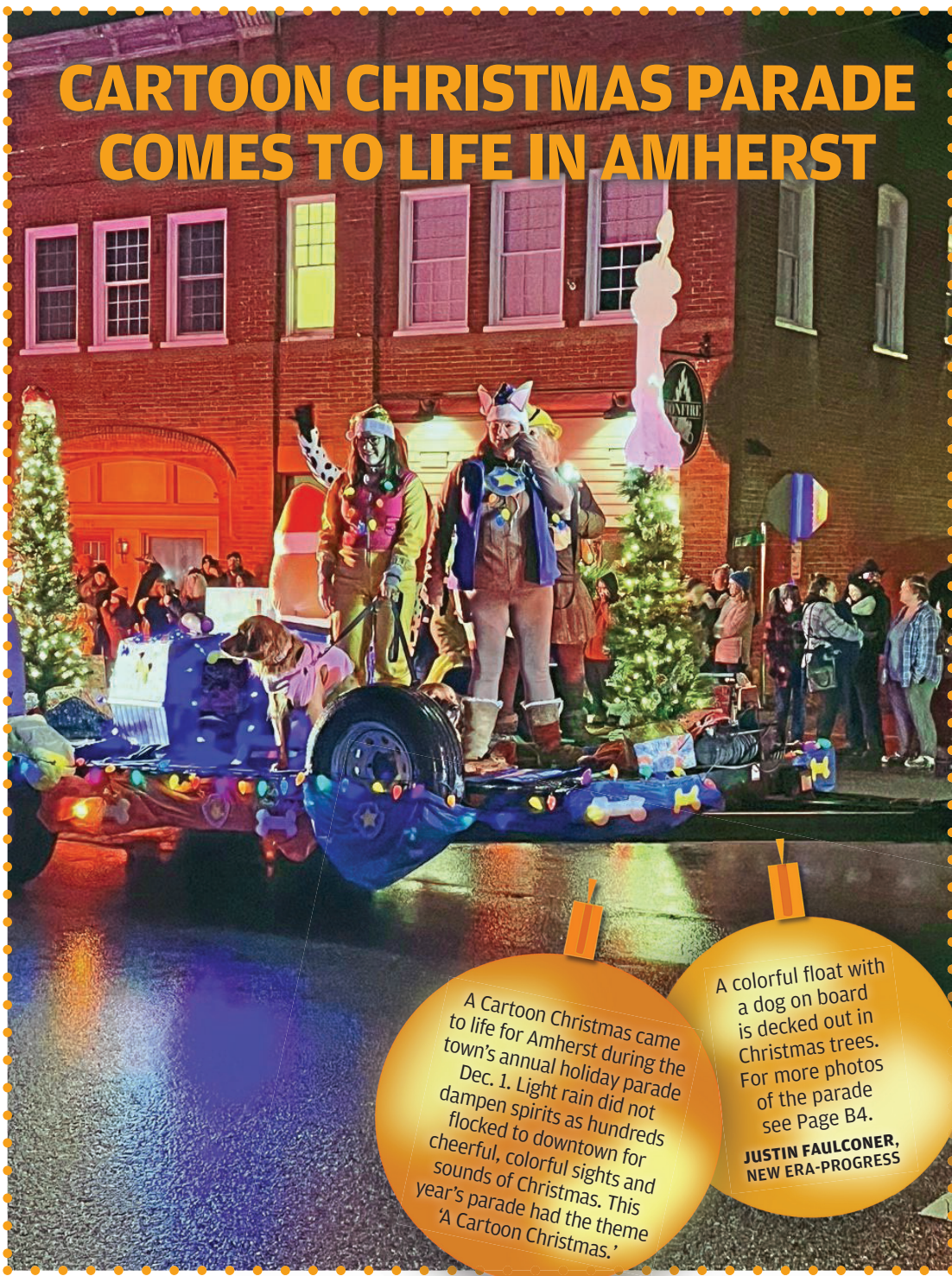


Amherst JV team dominates Nelson, PAGE B2



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CARTOON CHRISTMAS PARADE COMES TO LIFE IN AMHERST

A colorful float with a dog on board is decked out in Christmas trees. For more photos of the parade see Page B4.
JUSTIN FAULCONER, NEW ERA-PROGRESS

A Cartoon Christmas came to life for Amherst during the town's annual holiday parade Dec. 1. Light rain did not dampen spirits as hundreds flocked to downtown for cheerful, colorful sights and sounds of Christmas. This year's parade had the theme 'A Cartoon Christmas.'

Sweet Briar names new president

Interim leader Mary Pope Hutson will be college's 1st alumna to take the position



Hutson

determination to lead Sweet Briar to new heights as the leader in women's higher education," Mason added.

In January, former Sweet Briar President

RODNEY ROBINSON JR.
The New Era-Progress

Sweet Briar College announced Nov. 30 that Interim President Mary Pope Maybank Hutson has named the school's 14th president.

The Sweet Briar Board of Directors unanimously selected Hutson as the college's next leader following a national search that began in March, the college said in a news release.

Board Chair Mason Rummel said in a statement the search was a "meticulous and thorough process" led by a group of stakeholder representatives and with the guidance of Russell Reynolds Associates, an executive search firm.

"I am delighted with the Board's overwhelming and unanimous support of Mary Pope as Sweet Briar's next president. Not only does she embody the spirit and ethos of our beloved college, but she is also resolute in her

Meredith Woo announced she was stepping down after seven years of leadership with a plan to serve through the 2023-24 academic year, she explained in a January interview.

However, with the progress of the search committee and Woo's plan to tackle other scholarly projects, both sides agreed to let her step away.

Woo said in the college's release that the board has "made a shrewd choice" in selecting Hutson as president, adding she is "one of the most brilliant individuals I have worked with."

"Higher education faces so many problems that it did not know existed. I have no doubt that she will tackle them with a kind of tenacity and genius that has served Sweet Briar well since she returned to campus in

Please see **HUTSON**, Page A3

MADISON HEIGHTS

Schools brace for population growth

Division estimates the development of 2,000 added houses and says a new school needed in upcoming years

JUSTIN FAULCONER
The New Era-Progress

Development in Madison Heights is leading Amherst County Public Schools to brace for potentially needing a new elementary school in the next eight years.

Superintendent William Wells spoke about the pressing growth forecasts during a breakfast and tour of Elon Elementary School with state and local officials on Nov. 30. In attendance was Sen. Creigh Deeds, D-Charlottesville, recently elected to represent the Senate's District 11 that includes Amherst County and a

Please see **SCHOOL**, Page A6

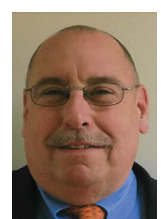


JUSTIN FAULCONER, THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Amherst County Public Schools Superintendent William Wells discusses school infrastructure needs facing the division in upcoming years at a Nov. 30 meeting with state and local officials at Elon Elementary School.

Former member Watts to rejoin town council

Retired police chief to serve at council's Dec. 13 meeting, enter his fifth term on council



Watts

According to the Virginia Department of Elections, Watts secured 331 votes over Doug Thompson, who served on council for just more than a year and

JUSTIN FAULCONER
The New Era-Progress

Amherst Town Council will welcome back a familiar face, former member Ken Watts, at its Dec. 13 meeting.

Watts, who narrowly won a special election by a 5-vote margin in the Nov. 7 election, recently was sworn in to of-

had 326 votes.

The race also drew six write-in votes. Watts, a retired Amherst town police chief, served on council from 2013 through last year when he lost the seat in an

Please see **WATTS**, Page A3

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