Sweet Briar president reflects on tenure,



Madison Heights tract positioned for economic development.



RA~PROGRESS

Amherst County's only hometown newspaper | THURSDAY, JANUARY 26, 2023 | NewEraProgress.com | Amherst, Va.

County budget proposal includes new position to beautify U.S. 29 corridor

JUSTIN FAULCONER

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2023-24 budget that takes effect July 1 is expected to have a 5% pay raise for county employees when it supervisors in upcoming months, according to discussion during the ing figures. board's Jan. 17 budget work session.

The board discussed potential supplemental spending line items

funded in the current county budget, if approved, during the work session. The one-time spend-Amherst County's fiscal year ing projects total just more than \$422,000 and recurring costs are at \$723,640, for a combined tally of \$1.3 million, but no final decisions is formally presented to the board of have been made as supervisors are in the preliminary stage of review-

One potential addition that generated discussion during the work session: a new staff position in that would add to what already is the maintenance department who

would enforce code on the U.S. 29 corridor and perform tasks to beautify the roadway.

Nate Young, acting co-director of community development, said the idea of the new position, which would have a recurring cost of \$43,200 and one-time expenses of \$35,000, is add more manpower for beautification efforts along U.S. 29. From picking up trash to trimming trees and cutting grass, Young said the goal is to make the corridor look better.

public works department and could serve other functions if needed in addition to the U.S. 29 beautifica-

"I'm convinced now that it is a good idea," Supervisor Claudia Tucker said. "We've got to start somewhere. What we've been doing is not working. I absolutely sup-

Interim County Administrator on the Virginia Department of Jeremy Bryant said that position, Transportation to clean the corridor if approved, would fall under the and noted staffing challenges with using inmates from the Blue Ridge Regional Jail Authority to help in those endeavors.

Please see BUDGET, Page A5



VIEW: For video of the
US 29 corridor
beatification efforts point
your smartphone at the

your smartphone at the Bryant said the county has relied QR code, then tap the link. NEWSVU



BY LEE LUTHER JR., FOR THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

LANCERS LIGHT UP THE COURT

The Lancer basketball team unveiled its light show during player introductions on Jan. 19 as Martez Andrews, right, slaps five with a teammate. For more coverage, see Sports.

Amherst schools dinner serves up connections, community camaraderie

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Before the first piece of fried chicken was served at Amherst County Public Schools' Community Connections Dinner of Jan. 19, laughter and conversations filled the building like the busy hallway of a school before the start of class.

Roughly 200 people, including schoolchildren and families, schools staff and county residents, showed up for a banquet-style evening of fellowship that ACPS Superintendent William Wells said is much needed after nearly three years of enduring a pandemic and all the challenges it brought.

"It's important for us to re-engage and reconnect with the NEWSVU

community," Wells said as people trickled into the center. "This is one way to do that. During COVID it seems to be something we have lost as a community."

Wells and other educators greeted families and children as they walked in and encouraged them to sign a large poster to mark the occasion.

"Showing up" is perhaps the most-used phrase in the Amherst schools division this school year.

Please see **DINNER**, Page A3



OFF O VIEW: News Vu QR code. For video of the Community
Connections Dinner Connections Dinner

point your smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN FAULCONER, THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Amherst County Public Schools Superintendent William Wells holds the microphone as elementary students lead the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance during the Jan. 19 dinner.

Man charged in shooting death at national forest

A Buckingham County man was charged with voluntary manslaughter after an Amherst County man was found dead in a remote area of the George Washington National Forest, the Amherst County Sheriff's Office said on Jan. 20.

Amherst County Public Safety dispatchers received a 911 call on Jan. 19 for a man suffering from a gunshot wound in the Alhambra Road area of Amherst County, according to a news release from the sheriff's office.

Sheriff's deputies were immediately dispatched and after an extensive search located Kevin D. Hartless, 49, of Amherst County. Hartless was dead when found by law enforcement, the release said.

Joseph F. Cunningham. was detained at the scene and

later charged. Cunningham is held at the Amherst County Adult Detention Center in Mad-Heights ison without bond, according to the release.



Cunningham

The investigation is ongoing, the sheriff's office said. Cunningham is scheduled for a Jan. 26 hearing in Amherst General District Court.

Authorities ask anyone with information about this investigation to contact Capt. Clay Thompson at (434) 946-9373, ext. 6; call Crime Stoppers at 1-888-798-5900; visit the Central Virginia Crime Stoppers website at www.cvcrimestoppers.org; enter a tip number online at p3tips.com; or use the P3 app on a mobile device.

- Justin Faulconer

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New high school football coach announced B2

Amherst schools mourn death of student B5

Former senior center lawsuit heads to court B5

Sports Monelison

basketball defeats Nelson B1



AMHERST FW ERA~PROGRESS

Amherst County's only hometown newspaper | THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2023 | NewEraProgress.com | Amherst, Va.

AMHERST SHOOTING DEATH INVESTIGATION

Official: Handling of case an 'injustice'

Supervisor, ex-sheriff pens post about 2019 homicide, wounding; prosecutor responds

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case was handled.

In a Jan. 30 post on his personal Facebook page, Supervisor Jimmy An Amherst County supervisor Ayers shared his thoughts at length who formerly served as the coun-regarding the June 2019 slaying of Ayers ty's sheriff recently took to social Doris Puleio and wounding of her media to criticize what he called daughter. In a subsequent intera "serious injustice" in how a view, Ayers said he made his com-2019 homicide and wounding ments as a citizen, not as a county a felony in connection with the monwealth's Attorney Lyle Carver tap the link. NEWSVU



Justin Jay Sales, who at the time of the homicide lived in Amherst, was arrested in July 2019 and accused

vated malicious said. wounding and two counts of us-

shooting death of Puleio, 92, and moved to drop the charges, citherst with gunshot wounds to her torso and left arm, while Goetz suffered two piercing gunshot of first-degree wounds to the torso and one that **OKE OF WATCH:** To see video grazed her chest, prosecutors have murder, aggra-

At a Dec. 8, 2021, hearing in ing a firearm in commission of Amherst Circuit Court, Com-

wounding of Trudy Ann Goetz, ing multiple evidentiary issues, 74. Puleio was found dead in her among them a chain-of-custody home on Bobwhite Road in Am- matter, a cyberattack that affected

Please see AYERS, Page A3



of an interview with
Jimmy Ayers on this
matter, point your

smartphone at the QR code, then



PAIGE DINGLER, NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Liberty middle schooler Colton Croft, top, wrestles David Wall of Amherst Wrestling at Amherst County High School on Jan. 28.

Wrestling Club builds talent

Amherst group trains K-5 youth to compete in middle, high school

BRYSON GORDON
ference and regional wrestling skills on display.
Craig Maddox, the K-5 coach
championship banners at AmCraig Maddox, the K-5 coach

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shadows of several district, con-

herst County High School, the for the Amherst Wrestling Club, In late January, under the future of the sport in Amherst got the opportunity to put its

Please see WRESTLING, Page A6

smartphone at the QR code,

then tap the link. **NEWS**VU

Scleroderma fundraiser walk planned March 4 at Sweet **Briar College**

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After a two-year hiatus because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the "Stepping Out to Cure Scleroderma" is returning to Sweet Briar College's Fitness Athletic Center on March 4.

The Amherst Woman's Club. Sweet Briar and the Greater Washington, D.C. chapter of the Scleroderma Foundation sponsored the first walk March 2, 2019 at the college's indoor track, the site of this year's event.

Suzanne Raine, a club member and event organizer, said the March 2019 walk marked the Washington, D.C. chapter's first walk in Virginia. A second walk was held a year later a week prior to the shutdown from COVID-19.

Scleroderma is an often life-threatening inflammatory and vascular disease in which the body's immune system attacks its own tissue. The mission of the walk is to provide support for patients with the disease, to

Please see FUNDRAISER, Page A2

Happy (future) trails: Amherst bike club eyes expansion of land, locations for use

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Nearly three years after receiving Amherst Town Council's approval to establish a trail network

on U.S. 60 East, the Amherst Mountain Biking Club has its evening of food, socializing and of Amherst and Amherst County.

sights set on expansion efforts. The club held a Jan. 27 meet-

within the L. Barnes Brockman, ing at the Amherst Fire Depart- said the goal of the gathering was to WATCH: For video of Sr. Business and Industrial Park ment's fellowship hall that drew invite the community for input on just more than 40 people for an the potential new trails in the town conversation.

Alex Motley, the club's president,

Please see TRAILS, Page A2 NEWSVU



the Amherst Mountain Biking Club's efforts point your smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link.

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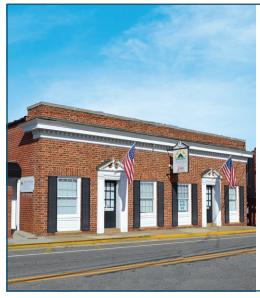




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Community events

Check out special section on Things to Do in Amherst



AMHERST FW ERA~PROGRESS

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County budget plans vehicle tax rebate

Also includes \$2.5M boost to school funding

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Amherst County's projected fiscal year 2023-24 budget has no tax increases, gives \$2.5 million more to the county's public school system and is poised to

increase.

Interim County Administrator Jeremy Bryant presented the figures to the Amherst County Board of county revenue, figures show. of Supervisors on Feb. 21. Revenue is projected at \$56.1 million and expenses are forecasted at \$55.9 million, which would result in a most recent reassessment coming surplus of \$165,539, according to in 2020, so unlike some localities Bryant's presentation.

"We've had minimal growth in for inflated real estate values. Plus, cial Services operations; and most

said. "We've been down some in and their spouses now receive a incremental growth. real estate taxes."

Real estate tax brings in 29% Bryant attributes the slight drop to two factors: the county reassesses the county has missed the bubble

100% homestead exemption and pay no real estate tax on their primary home.

Bryant said development-related permits are leveling off some real estate every six years, with the compared to recent years, which affects revenue; the county is receiving increased federal and state assistance for Department of So-

give county employees a 7% pay real estate tax revenues," Bryant permanently disabled veterans other revenue sources have seen

The budget plan, which begins July 1, also proposes a 20%

Please see BUDGET, Page A5



WATCH: For video of the county budget breakdown, point your smartphone at the OR smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link. **NEWSVU**



PHOTO BY LEE LUTHER JR., FOR THE NEW ERA-PROGRESS

Former Lancer baseball coach and three-time state champion Jim Procopio, right, shares a laugh and embrace with former Lancer player DeWayne Kitts during a Feb. 23 celebration event at Amherst County High School.

Baseball program pays homage to Coach Jim Procopio

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For more than an hour Feb. 23 during "Jim Procopio Recognihome run off the bat or a pivotal play in the field.

Lancer baseball was back in full force for a night of fellowship and

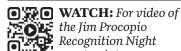
The legendary former Amherst baseball coach who led the tremely positive influence on the

old Amherst County High School onships and numerous district gym with the same thrill of a titles in baseball and football was the focus of stories, heartfelt speeches and laughter that The Procopio era that defined shined a spotlight on his memorable career.

Procopio coached the baseball team from 1968 to 1985 and over the years was an ex-

tion Night," memories filled the Lancers to three state champi- student-athletes, some of whom went on to play and coach in the

Please see PROCOPIO, Page A3



the Jim Procopio
Recognition Night
event point your

smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link. **NEWSVU**

School budget proposes 7% raise, more pay for bus drivers

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A 7% pay raise for Amherst County Public Schools employees is proposed in the division's 2023-24 fiscal year budget that Superintendent William Wells unveiled Feb. 23.

Priorities in the \$63.9 million proposal, a 1% increase from the current budget, include maintaining a competitive pay scale for staff, keeping class sizes at a level to ensure students' success and continuing to build programs that provide opportunities for children, Wells said in his first budget presentation to the Amherst County School Board since taking the division's chief role in July.

with our surrounding divisions," Wells said of the planned pay

In order to ensure all the division's 700-plus employees receive it, since the state gives funding to a portion of those workers, more local dollars are needed, which Wells said is

Please see SCHOOLS, Page A5



O∰: ○ WATCH: For video of the Amherst schools'
budget presentation,
point your smartphor point your smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link.

Amherst, Nelson supervisors discuss joint ag center project

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and Nelson counties' board of to serve both jurisdictions and inginthe Amherst County board's

supervisors described as a historic occasion, officials discussed holders is needed to further expotentially collaborating on a plore the idea. In a joint meeting of Amherst new shared agricultural complex

During the Feb. 21 joint meet-

agreed a working group of stake- meeting room, neither board was ready to commit to purchasing a property in northern Amherst

Please see AG CENTER, Page A5

WATCH: For video of the Amherst and Nelson board's joint discussion on the potential shared agricultural center point your smartphone at the QR code, then tap the link. **NEWSVU**

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