

# TRI-COUNTY CONNECTOR

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## Montgomery Co. BOE designates SPLOST funds for capital outlay



Montgomery County Board of Education Chairman Henry Price, Superintendent Dr. Ronda Hightower and Board Member Susan Beard attend a called meeting to discuss SPLOST and grant funds on Jan. 27 in the Montgomery County Board of Education Office in Mount Vernon/LOGAN REYNOLDS

By LOGAN REYNOLDS  
Staff Reporter

The Montgomery County Board of Education voted to transfer \$500,000 in SPLOST funds into a separate line item for capital outlay during their called session on Jan. 27 in the Montgomery County Board of Education Office in Mount Vernon.

“Essentially, what that does is it earmarks that \$500,000 for capital outlay projects,” said Montgomery County Superintendent Dr. Ronda Hightower. “It budgets that as a line item.”

Capital outlay refers to funds allocated for expenditures typically related to construction or the purchase of assets such as land or equipment. For the Montgomery County School System, these funds will be put towards the renovations of the schools’ baseball field, and any leftover funds in the line item may be rolled over

into the schools’ next project.

The funds must be used for capital outlay, and cannot be used to pay personnel.

“You are not allowed to spend a dime of this money on personnel,” said Dr. Hightower.

The recommendation to transfer the funds was spurred by the health of the SPLOST fund, which “just tipped \$1 million” according to Dr. Hightower. The funds will be moved into a new line item within the schools’ budget, though the money will remain in the same bank with the same interest rate.

Board Member John O’Conner offered a motion to approve the transfer, which passed unanimously.

The board also considered a resolution which, according to Dr. Hightower, “approves and au-

**MOCO BOE**  
Continued on page 6

## Alamo City Hall hosts public hearing for the CDBG grant on Jan. 30

By LOGAN REYNOLDS  
Staff Reporter

Alamo city officials and representatives from the Heart of Georgia Alatomaha Regional Commission (HOGRAAC) hosted a federally required public hearing for an upcoming Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) application on Jan. 30 in the Alamo City Hall.

“I think it’s a great thing, and it’s gonna be a great look as far as for the EPD as well, and just sanitation and safety for the future, and infrastructure for our community,” said Floyd.

According to City Manager Jeffery Floyd, the city is pursuing the grant to fund extensions to its sewer service. The project aims to provide sewer service to approximately 30 customers who already receive city water, including customers on East Railroad Street, Old Glenwood Road, North Broad Street and Snow Hill Road.

**ALAMO CITY HALL**  
Continued on page 6

## Treutlen BOC announces first public hearing date for comprehensive plan

By LOGAN REYNOLDS  
Staff Reporter

The Treutlen County Board of Commissioners announced the first public hearing regarding the joint comprehensive plan with the city of Soperton will be held on Thursday, Feb. 19, at 5 p.m. in the Treutlen County Public Library.

During the hearing, Treutlen County residents will have the opportunity to speak to members of the First Steering Committee, featuring members of both the Treutlen County and Soperton City governments, and offer suggestions or concerns which can be implemented into the comprehensive plan.

“We really do hope there will be a lot of public participation,” said County Clerk Angie Hooks. “We

**TREUTLEN BOC**  
Continued on page 6



**SNAPSHOTS:**  
COUSINS MAINE  
LOBSTER VISITS  
ALAMO AND  
MT. VERNON

The Jacksonville-based food truck Cousins Maine Lobster, operated by Gracie Craig and Carmen Rodriguez, visited Alamo on Jan. 27 and Mount Vernon on Jan. 28. The truck serves as one of a fleet of food trucks which visit towns in both Georgia and Florida /LOGAN REYNOLDS



## Southeastern Technical College announces 2026 award winners



Southeastern Technical College announces Linda Hairr, cosmetology instructor, as its Rick Perkins Instructor of the Year and Jessica Martinez-Ramos, an associate of science in nursing bridge pathway student, as the college’s Georgia Occupational Award of Leadership (GOAL) winner /SPECIAL PHOTO, courtesy of Southeastern Technical College

**SPECIAL TO TRI-COUNTY CONNECTOR**

Southeastern Technical College (STC) announces Linda Hairr, cosmetology instructor, as its Rick Perkins Instructor of the Year and Jessica Martinez-Ramos, an Associate of Science in Nursing Bridge Pathway student from Toombs County, as the College’s Georgia Occupational Award of Leadership (GOAL) winner.

The winners were announced by President Larry Calhoun at Southeastern Tech’s 2026 Rick Perkins and GOAL Awards Ceremony on Jan. 20, in Vidalia’s Tattnall Auditorium.

“There’s no higher honor than being nominated by peers. We have an exceptional facility and student body. Rick Perkins and GOAL are among the highest honors our college bestows. Mrs. Hairr and Ms. Martinez-Ramos will represent

Southeastern Tech with excellence,” said President Calhoun.

The Rick Perkins Award honors faculty for significant contributions to technical education through innovation and leadership in their fields. Associate of Science in Nursing Instructor Jennifer Gunter and Air Conditioning Instructor Vince Scott were finalists for instructor of the year.

“We are extremely proud of each of our nominees. We have amazing faculty. Each nominee is deserving, and each was chosen for that reason. Our faculty changes lives, one life at a time,” said Teresa Coleman, vice president for academic affairs.

“For those who found me worthy, thank you. I’m humbled. At Tech colleges, we teach skills that matter to-

**STC**  
Continued on page 6



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**OBITUARIES**



**Jerry Bird**

Funeral services for Mr. Jerry Bird of Soperton were held Tuesday, Jan. 27, 2026 at 11 a.m. in the chapel of Higgs Funeral with Rev. Gaynor Ridgill officiating. Burial was in the Beasley Cemetery in Treutlen County. Mr. Bird died Friday, Jan. 23.

Mr. Bird, 66, was born in Winter Haven, Fla. on Sept. 1, 1959 to David Bird and Clarsia Coleman Bird. He was a graduate of Vidalia High School and a retired electrician from Plant Scherer. He was extremely proud of his American Indian heritage and he served in the Georgia Army National Guard at Fort Stewart for 12 years. He was a longtime resident of Treutlen County, loved to hunt and fish and was a Christian by faith. His father, David Bird, preceded him in death.

He is survived by his life partner of over 30 years, Evie Maddox Beasley of Soperton; his mother, Clarsia C. Gillis of Soperton; three step-daughters, Rachel (Edward) Bridges, Barbara (Chris) Tyner and Melissa Patrick, all of Soperton; brother, Douglas Gillis of Vidalia; three sisters, Carol McCumbers, Tammy Vaughn and Sharon Palmer, all of Vidalia; seven step-grandchildren, one step-great-grandchild and several nieces and nephews.

Higgs Funeral Home (higgsfuneralhomeandflorist.com and facebook) of Soperton had charge of arrangements.

most of life in numerous Huddle House restaurants because she loved to serve people and was loved by everyone. She was also a housewife and homemaker for her family whom she loved very much and was Christian by faith.

She is survived by her husband, Justin King of

Kennesaw; three sons, Alex and Lucas Hutcheson of Alamo and Michael Eugene King of Kennesaw; daughter, Madison Nichole Hutcheson of Kennesaw; her parents, John Wayne and Carol Mercer; three brothers, Michael and Stevie Mercer and Jonathan Waters; five sisters, Court-

ney, Christian and Jessica Mercer, Haley Waters and Rachel Bennett; two grandchildren, Levi and Kayden Hutcheson and several nieces and nephews.

Higgs Funeral Home (higgsfuneralhomeandflorist.com and facebook) of Soperton had charge of arrangements.

# Weeks two and three under the Gold Dome

## STATE SEN. BLAKE TILLERY UNDER THE GOLD DOME

The 2026 Legislative Session is picking up steam. Even with winter weather causing a few delays, we have remained focused on delivering results for Georgians.

Governor Brian Kemp's budget proposals for both the current and FY 2027 years are now before both chambers. Thanks to years of careful, conservative budgeting, Georgia remains on strong financial footing. That discipline allows us to make strategic investments while respecting taxpayer dollars and avoiding the kind of reckless spending seen elsewhere. We have remained focused on policies that help families, grow our economy, and keep Georgia a great place to live and work. That means lowering costs, supporting teachers and ensuring state government lives within its means, just like Georgia families do every day.

This week, the Senate passed SB 148, which supports teachers and students by expanding hands-on and outdoor learning opportunities while making common-sense updates to teacher leave policies. This legislation gives them greater flexibility and support so they can continue helping students succeed. I was proud to support this bill and appreciate my colleagues for working together to move it forward.

We also advanced one of our top priorities for protecting homeowners and reducing property taxes. Senate Bill 382 passed out of the Senate Committee on Finance and would require a statewide base-year homestead exemption for all local governments, while streamlining the process for calling referendums on

local sales taxes. This bill restores fairness and consistency and helped homeowners know what to expect in property taxes.

While some remain focused on political distractions, I have remained committed to passing meaningful legislation and delivering real solutions. My priorities this session are affordability, accountability and opportunity for hardworking Georgians. From keeping property taxes in check, reducing income taxes and making government work for its citizens- these issues guide my work every day under the Gold Dome.

I am also pleased to share that my legislation, Senate Bill 402, passed out of the Senate Committee on Children and Families. This bill establishes a pilot program to screen and evaluate children with autism in the foster care system and provide specialized training for foster parents. Children in foster care with autism deserve the right resources, and this legislation helps ensure foster families have the tools they need to provide the best possible care.

As always, I value hearing from you and appreciate your input as the legislative session continues. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions, concerns, or ideas. It is an honor to represent you and to work on behalf of Georgia's future.

*Sen. Blake Tillery serves as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Appropriations. He represents the 19th Senate District, which includes Appling, Bacon, Jeff Davis, Long, Montgomery, Tattnall, Telfair, Toombs, Wayne and Wheeler counties, as well as a portion of Coffee County. He may be reached by phone at (404) 656-5038 or by email at Blake.Tillery@senate.ga.gov.*



**Casie Lee Mercer King**

Funeral services for Mrs. Casie Lee Mercer King were held Sunday, Jan. 25, 2026 at 5 p.m. in the chapel of Higgs Funeral Home in Soperton with Brother Ray Ray Peeples officiating. Mrs. King died Thursday, Jan. 22.

Mrs. King, 38, was born on Dec. 31, 1987 to John Wayne Mercer and Carol Dochterman Mercer in Waycross, Ga. She lived most of her life in Treutlen County where she attended Treutlen High School. She worked

# SWCD accepting entries for annual poster contest

## SPECIAL TO TRI-COUNTY CONNECTOR

The Ohoopsee River Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), a local agency dedicated to the conservation and stewardship of the area's natural resources, is now accepting entries for their Poster Contest for students located within the District's service area. The service area includes Emanuel, Montgomery, Toombs, Treutlen and Wheeler Counties. Education is a critical element of the conservation effort at the local, state and national levels. Educating young people about the benefits of conservation helps to ensure the next generation will be wise stewards of America's natural resources.

The annual Poster Contest provides

public, private and homeschooled students in Kindergarten thru 12th grades the chance to have their art selected to advance on to the state contest. Prizes will be awarded for the top three winners in each age category. Each year, the poster topic reflects National Association of Conservation District's annual Stewardship theme and highlights the work of Conservation Districts to protect and enhance natural resources. This year's theme is "Soil. Where it all begins" highlights the essential role of both natural and managed habitats in our conservation efforts. The deadline to enter the contest is March 27th.

Find more details at Ohoopsee River Conservation District — Georgia Association of Conservation Districts

# Progressive prophecy

*'Now therefore, O' Lord God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him, saying, there shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit upon the throne of Israel; yet so that thy children take heed to their way to walk in my law, as thou hast walked before me.'*

— 2 Chronicles 6:16-17

By ALBERT WHITE

In I Chronicles, chapter 22, there is a story of David as he wanted to build the temple for the Lord. We know that he was not allowed to build the temple for reasons disclosed in the text. There was a prophesy that was given to David by God. The word said a son would be born to him who would build the temple. The amazing thing to me is that Solomon wasn't born yet. The word told him that he would have a child born to him who would carry out the plan.

Then we read the text that says he did. He was not only born but has grown into a man. David had died, and Solomon was king. The prophesy had been a long time coming. I told the church last evening that just because a prophesy has been waiting a long time does not mean it is dead. God's words have no expiration date, and they don't spoil. In God's time it happens, and it happens in God's way.

I can only imagine there were some who grew weary of waiting, pronouncing death to the dream. People sometimes give up long before God finishes preparing them. Solomon, living in prophetic moment, found himself doing what his father planted in his heart. He did it; he built the temple. The prophesy was fulfilled. Solomon then began to ask for the next stage of the promise. For Solomon, it was to remain on the throne and keep the condition that God had set out for David. As long as he stayed in the will of the Lord, Solomon realized he had the ability to hinder his prophetic progress. Should he remain in the law of the Lord, he would remain in prophetic covenant. If he did not, it was very possible things could change.

My, what a lesson: to realize our response to God could affect the people following us. What does the next chapter look like for you? Did you expect there would be a next chapter? As long as there is life in your body there will be. We move from glory to glory. We live and watch God verify his word throughout our lifespan. There are promises that we have from the prayers of saints that we are awaiting. Waiting on time, you or God. They are waiting. They are not dead. Solomon began to pray for the progress. Maybe we too should begin or continue praying for the progress of the prophetic promises that are resting in and upon us.

## PASTOR'S VIEWPOINT

*'And it came to pass in those days, there went forth a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world be enrolled — this enrollment first came to pass when Cyrenius was governor of Syria — and all were going to be enrolled, each to his proper city, and Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, that is called Bethlehem, because of his being of the house and family of David, to enroll himself with Mary his betrothed wife, being with child.'*

— Luke 2:1-7

By CHARLES "BUDDY" WHATLEY

Luke says they were living in Nazareth and had to travel back to their home in Bethlehem to enroll in the census, but why did they move from Bethlehem to Nazareth in the first place? Maybe they moved to avoid the questions about Mary's pregnancy and maybe they were sent to the stable for the same reason.

*'And it came to pass, in their being there, the days were fulfilled for her bringing forth, and she brought forth her son — the first-born, and wrapped him up, and laid him down in the manger, because there was not for them a place in the guest-chamber.'*

Most versions have Mary and Joseph turned away from an inn, and we've always assumed it was a local motel. But there is a problem. The Greek word for a commercial inn or motel is "pandocheion." That's the word used in the story of the Good Samaritan. But the word in this verse is "katalyma" meaning "a guest room" or "a spare room in a home."

Remember that Mary and Joseph have traveled back to their hometown to enroll in the census, so it's safe to assume they have family in the area. Imagine a Thanksgiving Day gathering with all the family members pouring into town for the census. People were sleeping everywhere in the house, so all the beds and sofas are already taken. There are likely people sleeping on mats on the floor. Also remember Mary is about to give birth, so privacy is critical!

But Luke lets us know Jesus was not born in the parking garage of a local motel surrounded by animals and strangers but in a family-home surrounded by family members. In Matthew, Jesus is building his Kingdom of Heaven, but in Luke, Jesus is gathering a family around him. First the twelve disciples, then the 5,000 men eating supper together in Luke 9 and finally the family of God sitting around a table for the "marriage supper of the Lamb" in Revelation 19.

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**DID YOU KNOW...?**



**Is a famous painting of the Founding Fathers incorrect?**

By JACK BAGLEY  
Georgia Trust For Local News

If you will indulge me, I want to use this week's column introduction to wish my little brother a very happy 66th birthday. The day the column appears in its home newspapers is my brother Mark's birthday, so I want to wish many happy returns of the day to my childhood tormentor, protector, and friend.

Mark and I are as opposite as peas and avocados. He's an outdoorsy type, who enjoys hunting and fishing... I am a bookworm, happiest indoors and not a big fan of the elements. I never learned to hunt and haven't fished in more years than I care to think. We both retired as teachers, working for many years in the same system - but often, we had to show papers to prove we were related. We're that different.

Happy 66th, Mark. Have 66 more! Now, on to what you came here for... the trivia. Enjoy!

*Did you know...*

... law allows a "right to light" in buildings? Under English law, the right states that the owner of a building whose windows have received natural daylight for 20 years or more is allowed to prevent any nearby construction that would deprive him or her of that natural illumination. (I'll bet that goes over big at planning commission meetings.)

... Coca-Cola™ saved a town from the Great Depression? During the Depression, the town of Quincy, Florida, had a banker who suggested that anyone who could should invest in Coca-Cola, which at that time was selling for \$19 a share. The banker said the stock would boom - and brother, did it ever. At least 67 people in the town of only 7,000 became millionaires when Coke stock skyrocketed, and that made Quincy, Florida, the richest American city per capita. (They had a Coke and really smiled.)

... your "funny bone" is actually a nerve? When you bump your elbow just right, you feel that unpleasant tingling sensation - but it's not because you hit a bone. What you've done is made the humerus bone in your upper arm come in contact with the ulnar nerve. The minor compression sends the tingling sensation. Additional trivia note: the name "funny bone" comes from the name of the upper arm bone, humerus. (Here I always thought it was because the reaction made people laugh.)

... a popular representation of our Founding Fathers is incorrect? The iconic painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, by John Trumbull (1756-1843) is so well known it is even depicted on the obverse of the \$2 bill. There are two things wrong with the painting, however. One is that it isn't of the signing of the Declaration, it's of the presentation of the first draft by Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826). And two ... what is depicted never happened in the first place. Historians note that there was never any time in which all of the delegates to the Continental Convention were together in Philadelphia, as shown in the portrait. (But it looks so cool on the two-dollar bill!)

... a classic auto in a 1980s television show wasn't what it appeared to be? From 1984 to 1989, Miami Vice was one of the top-rated television series in America, and one of the classic features was the Ferrari driven by Sonny Crockett, played by Don Johnson (born 1949). But for the first couple of seasons, the car was not a Ferrari. It was a Corvette, which was doctored by the crew to look like a Ferrari. Eventually, a Ferrari Testarossa was given to the show to use. (Proving once again... you can do just about anything with the right makeup.)

... why saffron is so expensive? One of the world's most expensive spices, saffron is a very labor-intensive spice to harvest. Each saffron flower produces only three slender threads which must be harvested by hand, just after sunrise. Add to that the fact that saffron has a brief growing season, and you can see why it's so expensive. (Not that I would know, or anything.)

... at one time, the U.S. government required car speedometers to show nothing higher than 85 miles per hour? In 1979, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration instituted a rule that auto, truck and motorcycle speedometers could not show anything higher than 85 mph. The idea, of course, was to slow cars down and save gasoline. One of the problems with that rule was the fact that automakers had a stockpile of speedometer dials that went up to 120 mph and higher. To comply with the silly rule, they simply covered over the numbers above 85 and colored the hash marks differently. This, too, was a violation of the law, but the NHTSA never bothered to prosecute. The ridiculous rule had almost no effect on speed or fuel consumption and was repealed in 1982.

*Now... you know!*

**Sharing past experiences with my son**

"What other interesting stories do you have?" my son asked me while we were riding home one recent evening.

I have never considered myself an interesting person. My life, as good as it is, is pretty routine and mundane, especially since becoming a parent. So, to answer his question, I had to think fast and dig deep in my memory to a time before school schedules and extracurricular activities dominated my calendar.

This conversation was prefaced by telling him about an encounter with a friendly neighborhood Spider-Man. Not a costumed superhero, but a literal man climbing around the roof of the building that holds the windowless dungeon that is my cubicle. A few of us confronted the stranger, who seemed innocent enough and was quite friendly as he talked while collecting debris and muck from the roof.

"I'm drawn to clogs. I can feel them," he said.

And sure enough, there was a clog in the gutter. When we stopped him from entering the building's attic, he shimmied down the wall and swung to the sidewalk via a gas line. He disappeared down the street, never to be seen again.

He was some kind of guru for sure, and we just let him walk away.

Back in the car with my son, I asked, "Have I ever told you about the Tibetan monks?"

I hadn't. So, I shared this tale: About 15 years ago, a group of Tibetan monks visited Atlanta, which is home to the North American Drepung Loseling Monas-



**THE NEW SOUTHERN DAD**

By KYLE DOMINY

tery, sister Buddhist center of the monastery of the same name in India that houses the famed Dalai Lama and other monks, exiled from their homeland when Tibet was claimed by China. The monks brought along an exhibition of sacred relics, bone fragments, beads and scraps of cloth, remnants of past Lamas, some a thousand years old.

I covered the visit and exhibition for the newspaper I worked for. I met the monks and talked, via an interpreter, about their experiences and the effort to keep their culture alive. During the visit to the monastery to view the relics, I was given a container of holy water, water tinted yellow with saffron and blessed by the monks. I did not intend to participate in a religious ceremony outside of my own customs, but I certainly didn't want to offend my hosts, so I accepted the vial and slipped it in my pocket. Later, back in my small apartment,

I fed the sacred liquid to my pet bearded dragon.

To cut a long story short, that lizard defied conventions for captive bred reptiles and lived an extra-long life of about 17 years, two more than the high end of their life expectancy. I think it was the holy water. The lizard is buried on my property, at the edge of the woods under a sweetgum tree. My son said he remembers the funeral we had for it. I don't doubt him.

"Did the holy water really make the lizard live longer?" he asked. He's 12 years old now, and there is still a sliver of magic left in the world.

"I have no reason not to think that," I answered, pulling the car under the garage.

Then the day went back to the regular and mundane, but for a brief moment I was able to relive a past experience with someone I hope has a lot of adventures to come.

**COUCH THEATER**



Timothee Chalamet stars in "Marty Supreme"/ Courtesy of MovieStillsDB

By DEMI TAVERAS  
King Features

**Marty Supreme (R)**

A24 scored another success, both critically and financially, with this sports comedy-drama film led by Timothee Chalamet ("A Complete Unknown"). Loosely based on table tennis player Marty Reisman's 1974 memoir, the film picks up in 1952 when a young Marty Mauser (Chalamet) is working as a shoe salesman while competing in table tennis professionally. Marty is determined to be great and make his dream of winning the British Open come true, even if he has to cut a few corners and step on some toes to get there. Meanwhile, Marty's a messy romantic whose eyes bounce between retired actress Kay Stone (Gwyneth Paltrow) and his married childhood friend Rachel Mizler (Odessa A'zion). So far, "Marty Supreme" has earned Chalamet a Golden Globe and a Critics' Choice Award for Best Actor; his sights are now on nabbing that Oscar statuette. Out to rent on Feb. 3. (Apple TV+)

**NOTICE FOR HEART OF GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION BOARD APPOINTMENT**

The Montgomery County Board of Commissioners is seeking applications for an appointment to the Heart of Georgia Regional Commission Board. This appointment will be for a one-year term beginning January 1, 2026. Applicants must be in senior management or executive holding key decision-making position in a for profit enterprise. Interested applicants can obtain an application online at [www.montcoga.gov](http://www.montcoga.gov) or at the Montgomery County Commissioner's Office, located 310 West Broad Street, Mount Vernon, Georgia between the hours of 8:30 am and 4:30 pm. Deadline for applications is 3:00 pm Monday, February 9, 2026. Applications should be mailed to or dropped off to:

Heather Scott, County Manager  
Montgomery County Board of Commissioners  
P.O. Box 295 - 310 West Broad Street Mt Vernon, GA 30445  
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## Skiing out west

Recently I called a friend who lives in Vail, Colorado, which is one of the great places to take a cruise down the slopes of the beautiful Gore Mountain Range. Colorado is a great skilling refuge.

I never had the temerity to tackle Ajax Mountain at Aspen, preferring the long, lingering, and uneventful slopes at Snowmass. You can rent a condo at Snowmass and ski from your temporary quarters down to the ski lift and begin a journey of outdoor wonderment that is unparalleled.

You don't need the skills of Jean-Claude Killy to enjoy a day on the mountain which offers spectacular views that are worth the lift ride up to the mountain top. Doesn't matter where you

go — California, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming or Montana—spectacular images never leave your mind's eye.

My favorite is the Wasatch Range at Park City, once a silver mining town.

The landscape is varied. It is rugged and relentless as far as the eye can see. This area of our country long ago attracted trappers, pioneers, miners, and Indiana agents; opportunists and those who learned how to live off the land.

There have been many times when I skied the slopes of Park City and hummed the lyrics of "Home on the Range," a song I first heard over the air waves on a country music station out of Swainsboro in Middle Georgia — long before I ever saw a mountain range.

Nonetheless, the author's inspiring words have always made me pine for the Western experience.

"Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam, Where the deer and the antelope play, Where seldom is heard a discouraging word, And the skies are not cloudy all day."

The author of those lyrics was Brewster M. Higley who organized his thoughts in verse in the late 1870's. Historians have never determined whether it was 1872 or 1873. Doesn't matter, those words resonate with anybody who appreciates the majesty of the Rocky Mountains.

It makes you want to go there and see where the buffalo roams, where the deer and the antelope play



LORAN SMITH

and look up to an endless uncloudy sky. Even today when I fly out to any of our western states, I get goose bumps when I take a window seat and view the expanse of the western part of our country. I just can't get enough of that scene.

Having an opportunity to ski in the aforementioned states, always brings feel-

ings of fulfillment when you scale a beautiful mountain and count your blessings.

One of the things that accompanies that stage in life when you are getting long in the tooth, you lose your rambunctiousness, you are no longer fearless and you know how debilitating an awkward movement can be for senior citizens.

But there is another reason that I would pass on a ski vacation today.

I can't believe that the daily lift ticket on the slopes these days, costs one from \$250 to \$300 dollars.

I remember that lift tickets were less than \$10 for a day in the 1970s at most of the resorts I frequented. If you were to ask me if I would pay the larger amount to ride up to the top of the mountain and view the acreage where the buffalo roam and the deer and

antelope play, that would be a different matter.

That certainly would not be injurious to my health. In fact, it might be healthy to breathe that clean air and get an emotional lift from nature's great outdoors.

Longtime CBS announcer Verne Lundquist makes his home in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. From his spacious den of his home, he can see the skiers slide down the mountain while resting in his easy chair.

A couple of years ago, I watched him look wistfully out to the landscape where he once was a regular on the magnificent runs at Steamboat.

He remembered how it once was and he, too, rues the fact that his skiing jaunts are a thing of the past. He enjoys other engagements now, like a six month cruise around the world.

## In weather as well as politics, preparation will affect perception

Politics is a lot like the weather. Everyone likes to complain about it. Few are willing to do anything about it.

Perhaps that's an unfair comparison, but weather has been on many Georgians' minds for the past couple of weeks. The temperatures have been a bit on the cold side even for winter.

Add in some precipitation and some wild and perhaps over-hyped forecasts of ice and snowfall and you get most everyone obsessing over the same thing at the same time.

Outcomes differed widely. Much like politics, the perception of those outcomes also varied from household to household.

What happens after a weather event has a lot to do with what actions happen in the days — or even years — that precede it. We focus a lot on whether we can get roads covered in salt and brine before precipitation has the chance to turn to ice.

Georgians have a bit of tolerance for short storms that are cured by the sun within a day or two. Our northern friends do not. They get a lot more snow, and the temperatures in winter regularly stay below freezing for weeks. If the snow isn't removed immediately, it can block roads and sidewalks for months.

Our friends in Washington D.C. are questioning their Mayor about new ice formations and their inability to navigate the nation's capital right now. They Mayor has responded for citizens to come and pick up salt and be part of the solution. Good luck with that, I guess.

Thankfully, at least in Georgia, we don't have to worry too much like our friends in Texas do that we have sufficient base load power generation to account for peak electric demand for heating. It took several ice storms for the body that loosely regulates Texas' independent power grid to notice that the averages they use to predict

wind power don't work when there is a high correlation between deep freezing temperatures and a lack of wind.

Redundant backup power requires investment. In a crisis, that pays off. When skies are sunny and the wind is blowing as normal, people complain about their electric bills.

Our friends in Texas have invested in backup generation and dodged most of the last two weeks' worth of weather. Much of Nashville Tennessee, however, has been without power for over a week with full restoration not expected until this weekend.

Their problem is not the same as Mississippi, where a generational ice storm took out most of the above ground infrastructure over a wide and disparate area. There is only so much humans with limited capital can do to prepare for natural events.

Nashville's grid operator is facing outages much more severe than their more rural neighbors. There are open



CHARLIE HARPER  
GEORGIA POLITICS

questions if their management turned their preparation and training away from restoration and into political reorganization. Time will tell if their system was more focused on HR than critical operations.

The perception of these events has a lot to do with the folks that often are disassociated with the preparation nor responsible for the aftermath. "Official" weather watches and warnings come from the National Weather Service. Many of us still use local broadcast

stations to provide advance cautions leading up to these warnings.

The TV folks are now competing for the same online views and the ad dollars that follow them with "independent" weather sources. Some are very reliable. Some aren't weather sites at all — just hype machines that invest heavily in deception to generate clicks. Sounds a lot like politics too, doesn't it?

When the storm comes, some of us get relative calm and quiet. Those of us who got snow and were lucky enough where preparation kept our power on, our streets cleared, our pantry's full got to enjoy a day inside where it was warm and we were well fed.

Not everyone was this lucky, even here in Georgia. But a lot of hard work by a lot of different people in the public and private sector went into most of us getting this good luck.

The aftermath, too, is often telling. There are those who claim the storm was overhyped. Some feel they

were promised a different outcome — especially those who live on the western side of the state.

The thing about weather is that we all know it's unpredictable. We've seen enough snow (and non-snow) that we know we're almost always on the line of where it happens and where it doesn't. This weekend a 20 mile difference in metro Atlanta determined whether you got no snow or 6 inches of it.

Sometimes we just like to complain. It's easier to blame someone else than to look at readily available data, understand that there is always uncertainty, and plan then act for a variety of outcomes.

The media can bring us some data. The utilities can invest in what they can control. The government will make decisions based on their own models plus a risk-averse set of decisions of what might happen. But we ultimately remain responsible for our own preparations — be it for weather or anything else.

## Georgia residents now subsidizing an uneven data center boom

For years, Georgia leaders have boasted that a major reason the state became a hot spot for artificial intelligence data centers was a generous tax break passed in 2018.

However, a new state audit tells a different story — most of those data centers would have come here, anyway. According to the report, only about 30% of Georgia's data centers can be traced to the tax break. The other 70% were already likely to be built, drawn by cheap land, access to relatively inexpensive power and Georgia's geographic location. Even so, taxpayers are losing nearly half a billion dollars a year to keep the unnecessary, ineffective incentive in place.

In other words, we're overpaying, and it will cost us. Data centers offer a complicated financial calculus. During the construction phase, those in the building trades are the big winners. However, once the massive edifices are built, employment opportunities evaporate.

Buildings dedicated to towers of computer servers and the transfer of electronic information require only a skeleton crew to maintain. Instead of people, what data centers do need — forever — are enormous amounts of electricity and water.

Because of their need for so much power, Georgia is now planning for thousands of megawatts of new demand largely to serve these



facilities. Instead of funding tax breaks to create jobs, everyday Georgians are instead footing the bill through higher power bills, dramatically increased water rates, louder neighborhoods, fewer trees and more strain on aging water systems — but the burden will not be shared evenly.

As those along the I-20 corridor can attest, many of the fastest-growing data center projects are being built in Black communities and in rural areas. Those who know Georgia's history surrounding land-use decisions know several of these places have historically dealt with the effects of toxic landfills, warehouses and other heavy industries.

Residents often learn about new projects late in the process, when decisions are already made. The limited jobs promised rarely meet the pledges — but the impacts linger.

Democracy is not simply found in the act of voting. Voting is a mechanism through which we demand representative leadership

make good decisions on our behalf — and invest our resources wisely. The reflexive tendency to spend billions for headlines and yield little for communities is not right.

It violates the intention of an effective democracy. We cannot justify bad deals under the vague, unproven promise of growth. If the state is giving away hundreds of millions of dollars in corporate welfare, the public should see and feel the benefits.

Technology has been an

economic engine for Georgia — from financial tech founded in Columbus to startups powering metro Atlanta. As a legislator, I supported both, and as an author, I have explored the promise and challenges of AI in my books.

I know we don't have to be anti-tech to be pro-accountability.

During my time under the Gold Dome, I supported tax incentives tied to real prosperity and voted against boondoggles that benefited the wealthy and powerful. Using its authority to protect Georgians, the General Assembly must tighten these tax breaks, require proof of real job creation, demand transparency about water and power use, and give communities a real voice in the process before projects are approved.

Right now, too many Georgians are paying the costs of the AI boom, but

they're not reaping much benefit.

We don't need ChatGPT or Gemini to tell us that the math doesn't add up. Old-fashioned calculators work just as well — and also consider the bipartisan rebuke to the state's Public Service Commission last November.

Affordable choices for constituents make up the "real stuff" of democracy. As

the legislative session heats up and politicians start jockeying for a return trip this coming election season, remember to tell those who speak for you to listen up.

*Stacey Abrams is a best-selling author, entrepreneur and host of the podcast "Assembly Required." She previously served as minority leader in the Georgia House of Representatives.*



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# Brewton-Parker's Barons stun Firehawks at Buzzer

By RYAN FEASTER  
Brewton-Parker Christian University

MOUNT VERNON – Gil Gonzalez drilled a jumper at the buzzer after a midcourt steal to lift Brewton-Parker Christian University Barons to a 75-73 comeback win over the University of Tennessee Southern Firehawks on January 29, 2026, capping a second-half rally that erased a double-digit deficit at Gillis Gymnasium.

The Barons trailed by as many as 15 points and were down 46-35 at half-time before methodically chipping away after the break. Gonzalez and Tommy J. Tisdale III sparked the turnaround from the perimeter, while Jadon Melvin's late 3-pointer pulled the Barons even at 73-73 with 2:35 remaining. The Firehawks came up empty on their final possession, setting the stage for Gonzalez to jump a passing lane, sprint the other way, and knock down the game-winning shot as time expired.

Gonzalez finished with 20 points, eight rebounds, and three steals, leading a Brewton-Parker offense that outscored the University of Tennessee Southern 40-27 in the second half.

Brewton-Parker's defense tightened as the game wore on, forcing 12 turnovers and coming up with eight steals, including the decisive swipe from Gonzalez at the horn. Tisdale's 3-pointer at 18:21 of the second half signaled the start of the Barons' push, trimming the gap to 49-41. Abraham Garjah supplied 11 points, going 7-for-7 from the foul line while adding four rebounds and three assists to balance the Barons' attack.

Head Coach Leonard Epps reflected on the team's performance following the game, saying, "We escaped a tough, well-coached Southern (University of Tennessee Southern) team that shot the lights out tonight. It took every bit of 40 minutes to come back and pull that one out, but it's always fun when you get a game-winner. Loved the fight from our guys and never giving up, good way to get back into the win column."

The Barons' win moves them to 15-6 and 7-4 in conference. The Barons' next game was scheduled to be against the Toppers of Blue Mountain University, but due to the weather, it has been postponed. Check with Barons Athletics for follow-up information on when the Barons will compete next.

# Barons sweep opening day of softball season

By RYAN FEASTER  
Brewton-Parker Christian University

MOUNT VERNON – Brewton-Parker Christian University Barons opened up the softball season with a sweep of the Koalas of Columbia College, S.C., taking game one 6-3 and following it up with a 5-2 victory in game two.

In Game 1, the Barons broke open a 1-1 game with a four-run fourth inning, then added insurance in the sixth to pull away. Kaylee Odum delivered the pivotal blow, ripping a two-run double as part of the fourth-inning outburst that pushed Brewton-Parker in front for good. The Barons finished with nine hits and no errors in the opener, capitalizing on their best scoring chance and stretching the lead to 6-1 on a two-RBI single by Destiny Lucas in the sixth.

Odum also set the tone in the circle, earning the Game 1 win with 6.0 innings of work. The right-hander limited Columbia to five hits and struck out four, navigating traffic while working with the lead after the fourth. Brewton-Parker's defense backed Odum cleanly, playing error-free behind her, while Columbia's lone miscue and three walks helped extend innings for the Barons' offense.

Columbia mounted late pressure, scoring once in the sixth and again in the seventh. A double helped the Koalas cut into the deficit in the sixth, but they were unable to overcome the Barons' lead and dropped the opener 6-3.

Game 2 followed a similar script, with the Koalas striking first before the Barons answered and controlled the middle innings. Wolff doubled and

scored at the top of the first to give Columbia a 1-0 edge, but the Barons immediately responded in the bottom half. Tori Wright doubled to tie the game 1-1, and a single by Destiny Lucas helped push more pressure on Columbia's starter. Brewton-Parker then moved in front with a multi-run fourth that made it 3-1, and the Barons tacked on single runs in the fifth and sixth to build a 5-2 cushion.

Wright and Lucas again sparked the lineup in the nightcap. Wright posted a two-hit game with two doubles and an RBI, consistently setting the table in the heart of the order. Lucas added two hits, two RBIs, and a walk across the doubleheader, driving in key runs and extending innings in both contests. Brewton-Parker finished Game 2 with six hits and drew six walks, steadily wearing down Columbia's pitching while overcoming a pair of defensive miscues of its own.

In the circle, Sammantha Mathews anchored the Game 2 win with 5.0 effective innings, allowing just three hits while striking out five to earn the decision. Mathews kept Columbia off balance after the first-inning run and worked around limited traffic until turning the game over to the bullpen with a lead. The Barons' staff combined for seven strikeouts and just three hits allowed in the finale, holding Columbia to two runs despite five walks.

Head Coach Madison Herrin reflected on the day, saying, "Today was a great day for our team. Pitchers did a great job keeping us in both games. We had great performances from some key freshmen as well as our veteran players!"

## Legals

### Treutlen Co. Legals

**S26-008**  
STATE OF GEORGIA  
COUNTY OF TREUTLEN  
IN RE: ESTATE OF BOBBY RAY PHILLIPS, DECEASED.

All creditors of the estate of Bobby Ray Phillips, deceased, late of Treutlen County, are hereby notified to render their demands to Richard M. McNeely, attorney for Barbara V. Phillips, Executor of the Bobby Ray Phillips Estate, at P. O. Box 767, Swainsboro, Georgia 30401, according to law, and all persons indebted to said estate are required to make immediate payment of any indebtedness due the estate.

This 22nd day of January, 2026.  
RICHARD M. MCNEELY,  
Attorney for Barbara V. Phillips,  
Executor of the Bobby Ray Phillips Estate  
Richard M. McNeely, P.C.  
P. O. Box 767  
Swainsboro, Georgia 30401  
(478) 237-4225

February 5, 12, 19, 26, 2026

**S26-006**  
NOTICE OF ELECTION OF OHOOPEE RIVER SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT SUPERVISOR  
February 1, 2026

To all qualified voters in Treutlen County: Notice is hereby given that on November 3, 2026, a non-partisan election will be held to elect 1 supervisor(s) for Treutlen County in the Ohooppee River Soil and Water Conservation District. District Supervisors serve as unpaid state officials who represent their counties in support of soil and water conservation activities.

March 6, 2026, is the last day on which nominations for candidates for the election will be accepted. The signatures of at least 25 qualified electors of the county are required to nominate a candidate. Candidates must also be qualified electors of the county. Nominating petitions must be received in the office of the Treutlen County Election Superintendent at 650 Second Street South Ste. 104 Soperton, Ga 30457, no later than 12:00 noon on March 6, 2026. Petitions may be obtained from the Conservation Commission at the address below, from the Commission's website at <https://www.gaswcc.org/> or from the Election Superintendent of Treutlen County. GEORGIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Mitch Attaway, Executive Director  
4310 Lexington Road  
Athens, GA 30605  
January 29, 2026, February 5, 2026

**S26-004**  
STATE OF GEORGIA,  
COUNTY OF TREUTLEN.  
NOTICE TO DEBTORS AND CREDITORS

IN RE: The Estate of William J. Peterson, III, deceased.  
All debtors or creditors of the Estate of William J. Peterson, III, deceased, late of Treutlen County, are hereby notified to render their demands to the undersigned according to law, and all persons indebted to said estate are to make immediate payment to me.

This 14th day of January 2026  
Paul W. Calhoun, III  
Attorney for Executrix, Melinda P. Jones  
Calhoun Law Firm  
P. O. Box 557  
Soperton, GA 30457  
January 22, 29, 2026, February 5, 12, 2026

**S26-005**  
IN THE PROBATE COURT OF TREUTLEN COUNTY  
STATE OF GEORGIA

IN RE: ESTATE OF Linda Jane Beard, DECEASED  
ESTATE NO: 26-P-3  
PETITION FOR LETTERS OF ADMINISTRATION NOTICE

TO: Whom it may concern:  
Laura Ivy Lico has petitioned for Laura Ivy Lico to be appointed administrators of the estate of Linda Jane Beard, deceased, of said county. (The Petitioner has also applied for waiver of bond, waiver of reports, waiver of statements, and/or grant of certain powers contained in O.C.G.A. 53-12-261.) All interested persons are hereby notified to show cause why said petition should not be granted. All objections to the petition must be in writing, setting forth the grounds of any such objections, and must be filed with the Court on or before March 4, 2026.  
**BE NOTIFIED FURTHER:** All objections to the petition must be in writing, setting forth the grounds of any such objections. All objections should be sworn to before a notary public or before a probate court clerk, and filing fees must be tendered with your objections, unless you qualify to file as an indigent party. Contact probate court personnel for the required amount of filing fees, if any objections are filed, a hearing will be scheduled at a later date. If no objections are filed, the petition may be granted without a hearing.

Tiffany W. McLendon  
Judge of the Probate Court  
650 Second Street South, Suite 101  
Soperton, GA 30457  
912-529-4320  
February 5, 12, 19, 26, 2026

**S26-007**  
State of Georgia  
County of Treutlen.

**Notice to Debtors and Creditors**  
All creditors of the Estate of Linda Ricks, late of Treutlen County, Georgia, deceased, are hereby notified to render in their demands to the undersigned according to law; and all persons indebted to said estate are required to make immediate payment. This 28th day of January, 2026.

Estate of Linda Ricks  
Blakely Sutton Dennard, Executor  
1748 Florida Avenue  
Soperton, GA 30457  
Margaret Greer Evans  
Attorney at Law  
State Bar No. 488189  
(478) 272-2885  
February 5, 12, 19, 26, 2026

### Montgomery Co. Legals

**M26-001**  
IN THE SUPERIOR COURT OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY  
STATE OF GEORGIA

In Re: CANDACE MARIE CLARK, Petitioner.  
CIVIL ACTION NO.:  
NOTICE OF PETITION TO CHANGE NAME - ADULT

Notice is hereby given that Susan S. Shook, the attorney for Candace Marie Clark, filed a Petition in the Superior Court of Montgomery County, Georgia, on January 6, 2026, praying for a change in the name of Petitioner from Candace Marie Clark to Cane William Clark. Notice is hereby given pursuant to law to any interested or affected party to appear in said Court and to file objections to such name change. Objections must be filed with said Court within 30 days of the filing of said petition. This 13th day of January, 2026.

Susan S. Shook  
Attorney for Petitioner  
State Bar No. 643870  
Post Office Box 1040  
Vidalia, Georgia 30475  
Telephone: (912) 537-2666  
Facsimile: (912) 538-0970  
susanshook@bellsouth.net  
January 22, 29, 2026, February 5, 12, 2026

## NOW HERE'S A TIP!

\* Keep cats indoors during very cold weather. They are particularly vulnerable to freezing. If you can leave the curtains drawn on a window where Kitty can look outside and sunbathe, she probably will be happy.

\* This is some good advice given to me by my grandmother if you have lots of outdoor or feral cats in your area: Start your car with a bang – on the hood, that is. When the overnight temperature dips, cats know to find someplace that is wind-shielded and off the ground, and sometimes, that means they will climb up into your engine area to hunker down. If your car starts, they can be hurt or even killed. Give the hood a knock to

let a cat know to get out quick.  
\* Pet paws need extra care in the cold months, especially dogs that must be walked in icy and snowy conditions. I keep a small towel with me on my daily dog walks, but I also wash off my dog's paws with a warm washcloth when we return. Another thing I do is to rub petroleum jelly into her pads once a day. They really take a beating having to go out three times a day.

\* Spread a teaspoon of peanut butter thinly on a paper plate, then when the dog is busy with his treat, you can trim his nails. Or sometimes just having it nearby as a promised treat can do the trick to distract your pet. Good luck!

LOCAL MATTERS

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**MOCO BOE**

Continued from page 1

thorizes the Montgomery County Board of Education's participation in the USDA Rural Utilities Service Distance Learning and Telemedicine grant."

The board announced it had received the grant totaling \$927,000 during its regular meeting on Dec.

16. The funds will be used to support student learning as well as provide teachers and staff with telehealth and telecounseling services.

The grant funds will also be used to replace various technologies around the schools which are at or near end-of-life, such as all smart panels and staff laptops. The resolution, if passed, would grant Dr. Hightower the authority as superintendent to

"execute and deliver everything noted in that grant agreement."

Board Member Susan Beard offered a motion to approve the resolution, which passed unanimously.

The board also approved one resignation and one employee transfer following motions from Beard and O'Conner respectively. Both motions passed unanimously.

**ALAMO CITY HALL**

Continued from page 1

The project will also see the construction of a new lift station to accommodate the sewer extensions.

"I personally think anytime that we can upgrade any kind of infrastructure, we'll increase the value of our community, and especially the safety of this and the environmental aspect of it is a major plus," said Floyd.

The sewer extensions will also add to the city's environmental efforts, such as water conservation and watershed programs. Residents currently unserved by the city sewer system utilize septic tanks, which can con-

taminate groundwater should they develop a leak.

"I think this will be a plus, instead of something leeching into the ground," said Floyd. "It'll be going to our waste plant and be taken care of."

The project has an estimated cost of just under \$900,000, with no extra cost for residents. The CDBG grant's maximum award is \$1 million, and the city will be required to pay \$50,000 out of its water and sewer fund.

The city of Alamo applied for the same CDBG grant in 2025, but complications regarding internal documentation forced the city to reapply.

During the hearing, HOGARC's

Director of Economic and Community Development Rich Bennett recited many federal regulations the project would follow should the grant be received, including job postings targeting low to moderate income residents, equal consideration for disabled applicants, environmental assessments and relocation assistance for residents if needed.

The grant application will be written and submitted in April, and the grant recipients will be announced in October. Construction is then estimated to begin following one year to one year and six months of preparation work and bidding.

**TREUTLEN BOC**

Continued from page 1

want that. We want the public's input because we are doing it for our public."

Comprehensive plans are guides created by county and city officials outlining the strengths, weaknesses and goals of a community for a five-year period.

"We have a 20 year goal," said Hooks. "It's where we want to be in 20 years, but every five years, we try to update it, or make changes or whatever, and it's just a way to see what are the needs of the county and the city to help us grow and flourish."

Strengths for Treutlen County, Hooks said, include access to the Oconee River and Interstate 16, while weaknesses include political support. Goals include economic development and community safety.

After the end of the five-year period, officials must reconvene and develop a new plan for the next five

years. If any goals were not met during the five-year period, they may be rolled over into the next comprehensive plan.

County and city governments do not necessarily need to agree on every concern nor desire all the same outcomes to form a comprehensive plan. However, according to Soperton Mayor John Koon, "almost 90% of the ideas" presented during the steering committee's first meeting on Jan. 22 were in agreement.

Major areas of agreement include a focus on infrastructure, particularly water and sewer lines; development towards the nearby interstate and support for emergency services. One proposed project will see the construction of a joint municipal building to house local police, fire, EMA and ambulance services.

The county aims to provide the local fire department with a new fire-fighting vehicle each year. County officials will also seek to renovate and maintain the local airport, which has

been a topic of discussion in several Board of Commissioner meetings.

The city will pursue affordable housing and vet incoming industry, alongside currently ongoing projects such as the renovations of the recreation department.

"It was good before," said Koon in reference to the recreation department project. "We're going to make it better."

The first public hearing will follow the steering committee's second meeting held the same day at 2 p.m. According to the proposed timetable, the committee will have at least two more meetings on March 19 and April 16, along with a community drop-in session on March 19.

The comprehensive plan will enter the drafting phase between April and July, with a final steering committee meeting and public hearing to be held in July or August. No dates have been set for these meetings, but they will be held in the Treutlen County Public Library.

**STC**

Continued from page 1

day and will matter tomorrow, from cosmetology to cybersecurity, to early childcare education, to healthcare. When asked why I chose to teach at a technical college, my answer is straightforward. Technical college changes lives. It changed my life. It changes the lives of my students and it strengthens our communities and the industries that keep Georgia progressive. My own career is rooted in technical education. My journey began as a high school student in what we now know as dual enrollment. That experience gave me a skill set, but it also gave me confidence, direction, and a true understanding that technical education is powerful – and it's transformative. Technical education also strengthens Georgia's economic future. Our state has become a hub for aerospace, automotive manufacturing, and film production. Those industries thrive because technical colleges supply a pipeline of highly skilled workers. When a student receives a technical certificate or diploma, it isn't just a personal win. It's an economic win for Georgia. It's a privilege for me to play a small part in that and witness students moving towards a better future," said Hairr.

GOAL, a statewide program of the Technical College System of Georgia, honors excellence in academics and leadership among the state's technical college students. GOAL winners are selected at each of the state's 22 technical colleges.

To be nominated, a student must have completed 12 credit hours, have at least a B average, and be in good standing at the college. Additionally, the student must recognize the impact of technical education on Georgia's economic health and be willing to serve as an ambassador for technical education.

"The GOAL program spotlights the outstanding achievements of students in Georgia's technical colleges. A screening committee of administrators at Southeastern Tech reviewed each nomination and conducted interviews with the students. After nom-

inees were ranked, four finalists took part in another round of interviews and evaluations by a selection committee of representatives from local businesses and industry to compete to be Southeastern Tech's GOAL winner," according to Rebecca Ethredge, coordinator for the College's GOAL program. "That panel considered the students' academic achievement, personal character, leadership abilities, and enthusiasm for technical education."

Martinez-Ramos is a Licensed Practical Nurse who works as a charge nurse at Oxley Park Health and Rehabilitation and also works at Community Hospice. She is pursuing an Associate of Science in Nursing Degree through the Bridge Pathway and was nominated by Ginny Ennis. Martinez-Ramos stated that, "Attending STC hasn't just shaped my career, but it has also expanded my worldview by allowing me to visit multiple countries and build connections with people from different backgrounds," saying that those experiences made her more open-minded, adaptable, and ready for the workforce. "Many thanks and much appreciation to everyone involved. I'd like to thank the judges who gave of their time to invest in students and wish all the nominees a successful future."

Southeastern Tech's other GOAL finalists were:

- Kelsey Adams, healthcare professional, from Wheeler County, nominated by Brad Hart Adams has earned induction into two honor societies and says, "I chose technical education because it gives me a great education at an extremely affordable cost." Outside the classroom, Kelsey's interests include crocheting, singing, painting, bowling, reading and spending time with family – activities that highlight her creativity and appreciation for balance in life.

- Katie Bell, dental hygiene, from Jenkins County, nominated by Lori DeFore Bell has been an STC student since the tenth grade at Jenkins County High School. She said, "I took advantage of the opportunity afforded to high school students to participate in STC's Dual Enrollment Program,

and that enabled me to pursue my educational dreams and goals in a relatively short amount of time. Without the Dual Enrollment classes, I would not be 19 years old and enrolled in the Dental Hygiene Program." Outside of her academic life, Bell enjoys reading, coaching softball, painting and helping on the family farm.

- Jasmine Holmes, Associate of Science in Nursing, from Appling County, nominated by Rachel Sikes Holmes said, "My career goals are grounded in helping others and providing assistance to newborn babies with special needs. Obtaining a nursing degree is not just about getting a job; it is about being able to serve others." While in high school, Holmes took Dual Enrollment classes, which allowed her to begin her declared major earlier than usual. She also earned a phlebotomy certification, which helped her get her current job. She enjoys reading, baking, and running.

Each TCSG (Technical College of Georgia) college representative will compete at the regional level in February, where three finalists from each of TCSG's three regions move to the state-level competition in Atlanta in April. State winners will serve as ambassadors for technical education in Georgia and as a voice of technical colleges, making many public appearances throughout the year. To make travel easier, the State GOAL Winner receives a grand prize of a new car provided by Kia Georgia, a statewide corporate sponsor of Georgia's GOAL program.

Chosen for GOAL recognition by their instructors were Olivia Barnes - dental hygiene student, Jaycee Bratcher - dental hygiene student, Melanie Garcia - dental hygiene student, Whitney Griffin - Associate of Science in Nursing student, Dylan Joyner - welding and joining Technology student, Rebecca Kirkland - Paramedicine student, Kathleen Perkins - business management student, Michele Turner - health care management student and Brooklyn Willis - business management student.

For more information on STC, visit [www.southeasterntech.edu](http://www.southeasterntech.edu) or call (912) 538-3100 or (478) 289-2200.



**GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY**

**Ryan Rogers of Soperton added to President's List 2025 at Georgia Southern**

SPECIAL TO THE TRI-COUNTY CONNECTOR

STATESBORO – Georgia Southern University recently recognized approximately 2,630 students for excellence in academics on the Fall 2025 President's List. To be eligible for the President's List, a student must have at least a 4.0 grade point average and carry a minimum of 12 hours for the semester.

Ryan Rogers of Soperton (30457)

**Local students added to Fall 2025 Dean's List at Georgia Southern**

SPECIAL TO THE TRI-COUNTY CONNECTOR

STATESBORO – Georgia Southern University recently recognized approximately 4,400 students for excellence in academics on the Fall 2025 Dean's List. To be eligible for the Dean's List, a student must have at least a 3.5 grade point average and carry a minimum of 12 hours for the semester.

Aidyn Driggers of Tarrytown (30470)  
Christopher Harden of Soperton (30457)  
Ana Walker of Soperton (30457)

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/R2 with a Carnegie Community Engagement classification, offers approximately 149 different degree programs serving nearly 31,600 students through 11 colleges on four campuses in Savannah, Hinesville, Statesboro, Swainsboro and online instruction. Founded in 1906, Georgia Southern is a leader in higher education in southeast Georgia with expert faculty and a focus on public impact research and engaging learning opportunities through knowledge and know-how that prepare our students to soar beyond and take ownership of their lives, careers and communities. Visit [GeorgiaSouthern.edu](http://GeorgiaSouthern.edu).



**FREED-HARDEMAN UNIVERSITY**

**Hannah Richardson of Soperton listed to FHU President's List**

SPECIAL TO THE TRI-COUNTY CONNECTOR

HENDERSON, TENN. – Freed-Hardeman University has released the names of students who made the President's and Dean's Lists for the Fall 2025 semester. To be on the President's List, a student must be full-time and have a 4.0 grade point average. Students on the Dean's List have earned a minimum 3.4 grade point average for the semester.

The following student from your coverage area has received this academic honor:

Hannah Richardson, of Soperton, Ga., has been named to the President's List. Hannah, a sophomore level student, is earning a degree in Physical Therapist Assistant.

The mission of Freed-Hardeman University is to help students develop their God-given talents for His glory by empowering them with an education that integrates Christian faith, scholarship and service. With locations in Henderson and Memphis, FHU offers associate, bachelor's, master's, specialist and doctoral degrees. More information is available at [fhu.edu](http://fhu.edu).



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