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August 2019

The Rant

Monthly

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ABOUT THE COVER

The Rant's Billy Liggett and Gordon Anderson got an early look of Sanford's newest school, W.B. Wicker Elementary, which opens this fall. The school's new technology, its history, its curriculum and even its controversy made it an ideal cover story as our students return to school later this month. The cover photo and photos inside were the result of our tour of the school in mid July. Cover photo by Billy Liggett.

STORY: PAGE 12

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A better understanding of the Wicker School's history

My first choice of major when I entered East Carolina University in the fall of 1998 was history. I can't really say why other than that I must have been sort of good at it in high school — I remember doing well on a final one year and having my teacher exasperatedly tell me that if I'd worked that hard all year, I could have made an A (sorry Mrs. Hodges; but I really was fine with the B minus). I also always liked pirates. I dunno.

I don't even think I was ever made to formally declare history as my major, and I eventually ended up earning a degree in psychology, which, yes, means I can read your mind. I can't believe what you really think about The Rant.

I probably wouldn't have made a great historian anyway, because I'm more likely to pull up Wikipedia for the broad strokes of how General Sherman pulled off his upset defeat of Socrates at Lillehammer than I am to engage in any kind of research-based scholarship or whatever. But something about dropping history has



"My biggest takeaway from talking to people who attended as children during the segregation era was the pride they took in their school."

nagged at me as I've gotten older.

I think part of it comes from a career working in news and politics. It's hard to be any good at either if you don't really get what made a place come to be to begin with and what continues to make it tick.

And while I had known for a long time that the W.B. Wicker School had a deep history and significance to Lee County that I was somewhat familiar with, I had a lot of fun diving into that topic for the cover story of this here publication you're holding (or reading digitally, but that's less fun to say).

I grew up a world away in California and

didn't even live in the south until 1994, and it wasn't for a couple more years that I would move to Sanford. So when I learned about the Wicker School back in the mid 2000s, when it was being renovated for use by Central Carolina Community College, it was one of the first times I can remember looking at a building and realizing what a concrete example it was of some of our country's uglier history.

I'd of course known in theory that people were so openly discriminated against based on skin color up through the late 60s, and by government no less, but that was from textbooks. Here was brick and mortar proof.

There was a lot to dig through regarding

Wicker's past, and I wasn't able to squeeze everything I learned into the story. But my biggest takeaway from talking to people who attended as children during the segregation era was the pride they took in their school — and that they still do. Everyone I spoke to was basically jubilant about the fact that it's going to reopen and serve as a place for educating anyone who attends.

I guess you don't need a degree in history to appreciate an example of recognizing the past and using it to inform your view of the future as it unfolds before you.

I know a lot of the people reading this already got it, but writing and researching this piece gave me a better understanding of a city I've lived in for the past 20-plus years. It would be cool if that happened every day.

□

Gordon Anderson is co-founder of The Rant. Reach him at gordon@rantnc.com.

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THE RANT

LOCAL MATTERS

BUSINESS

Upcoming openings, closings in Sanford

There's been some fluctuation in the local business community, with several businesses closing or announcing plans to, and some others opening their doors.

Sources tell the Rant that the new State Employees Credit Union branch at 1764 Bragg Street has been open for business since June. It's Sanford's second SECU branch.

Meanwhile, reports indicate that the Yamato Japanese steakhouse at 2610 S. Horner Blvd. has closed its doors. Yamato had been offering hibachi meals as well as sushi since the early 2000s.

Two other businesses have announced plans to close in September.

The Petsense store at 2414 S. Horner Blvd. has announced it will shut its doors on Sept. 16, and the downtown branch of Capital Bank will close on Sept. 25. Capital's South Horner Boulevard branch will remain open.

BUSINESS

Downtown's Added Accents has new ownership

Ashley Whitaker, who has been managing the Added Accents store at 124 S. Steele St. in downtown Sanford for several years, has purchased the business.

Whitaker told the Rant the sale became official on July 31.

Whitaker doesn't anticipate making any major changes other than a new logo, and said the business' offerings and hours should remain the same.

Contact Added Accents at (919) 774-5030.

SPLISH SPLASH



The new splashpad at Kiwanis Park in Sanford is expected to open later this month. City officials say the play area can fit up to 177 children and adults at one time. Photos by Billy Liggett

Splash pad to open this month



The Sanford logo adorns the piece that will get kids the wettest — a giant bucket that tips over and dumps gallons of water when it fills up.

Kiwanis Park also sees upgrades to playground, walking trails and shelters

By Jonathan Owens

Sanford residents will soon have a new spot to cool off — better late than never during this particularly hot summer — as the city plans to open its first splash pad at Kiwanis Family Park off Wicker Street later this month.

Opening a new water attraction in late August is not ideal, according to Sanford Parks Administrator Don Reuter. But the short inaugural run for the pad has done little to tamp down the city's excitement.

“The enthusiasm for this project is overwhelming,” said Reuter, adding that he fields daily calls asking when it will open. “It’s unlike anything I’ve ever experienced.”

Reuter was unable to provide a definite opening date for the park other than saying it would open “later in August.” The only items left to check off as of late July were permit reviews and repaving the parking lot.

“If you look at it from afar, it looks ready,” he said. “But the devil is in the details. We don’t want to open without everything ready.”

The City of Sanford broke ground on the splash pad and other park upgrades and additions on Nov. 28 of last year. The project is a collaborative effort by Sanford and Lee County Government, which donated 14 acres of land at Kiwanis Park for redevelopment, and was funded with the \$2 million Parks and Recreational bonds approved by voters in the 2013 bond referendum. An additional \$350,000 was provided by a Parks and Recreation Trust Fund grant.

The splash pad is rated for a capacity of 177 people. And if it seems like a huge waste of water, don’t worry. It isn’t. The system is



The splashpad isn't the only "new" coming to Kiwanis Park. A dramatic upgrade in playground equipment is also planned to be ready when the play area opens this month.

completely self-contained. Water recycles constantly through a filter system much like a swimming pool.

In addition to the splash pad, parkgoers will find an upgraded walking trail, two new shelters, all new restroom facilities with showers and a universal playground that kids of all abilities will be able to enjoy.

“Certainly, the splash pad is the 'wow' factor,” Reuter said, “but there’s so much more

to it than just that. The splash pad will be the attraction in the summer months, but this park will be a year-round attraction.”

Reuter said an investment in parks such as this “is a key part of the city’s strategy to bring value to our community.”

“Parks like this are a source of city pride,” Reuter said. “Parks belong to everyone. People will ride by it and say, ‘that’s my park.’”



BUSINESS

Farm at Oakland to hold open house on Aug. 22

Wedding and event venue Oakland Farm, which has been in business at 3355 Rosser Road in Bear Creek since 2015 just past the Lee-Chatham county line, will hold its first open house from 6 to 9 p.m. on Aug. 22.

Oakland Farm Manager Kaitlyn Hockaday told the Rant that the event will include several area vendors including the Chocolate Cellar, Chef Hamm of Cafe 121, Queen Bee Rentals, Vision Events, Heather Gunter Photography, and more.

The event is open to the public. Learn more about Oakland Farm at www.oaklandfarmvenue.com or www.facebook.com/farmvenueuc.

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THE RANT

OPINIONS

Help North Carolina save the unprocessed hemp flower

On July 17, SB315 — The North Carolina Farm Act of 2019 — passed the House Finance Committee with a hemp flower ban effective in December. Under the leadership of State Rep. Jimmy Dixon (R-Warsaw), the ban went forward.

Dixon pulled in law enforcement to testify that hundreds of canines trained to sniff out marijuana would lose their jobs if “smokable hemp” was not banned. Previously, testimony had been heard from hemp farmers and stakeholders who will lose property, new businesses, file bankruptcy and lose generational farms should the legal hemp flower be banned.

SB315 next goes to Judiciary, to Rules Committee, then to a full House vote and back to the Senate for finalization. Dixon also presented SB 352 to redefine “smokable hemp” as marijuana in the N.C. Controlled Substances Act. The large benefactors from this ban will be the processing companies. Hemp flowers are used by families across America in homemade tinctures, as any other herb, like chamomile. It is eaten raw over salads, eggs and in citrus-free smoothies. It is only defined as “smokable hemp” due to ignorance.

A suggestion was made to improve the term to “unprocessed flower” on the senate floor but was not heeded. Should the ban pass finalization, investors, farmers and consumers will lose. What will replace this natural flower? Please, contact Rep. Jimmy Dixon and share your concerns on how he is going to destroy this industry. North Carolina is poised to be a leader with its strong farming history but will be ruined should Dixon win his ignorant ban.

Jimmy.Dixon@ncleg.net (919) 715-3021.

Stephanie Sellers

Running is terrible, and this simply isn't up for debate

I hate running. If I could just fill the rest of this column with those three words, over and over again, it still would not fully illustrate my complete disdain for running.

In fact, I avoided this vile act for nearly 25 wonderful years of my life — the last time I did it over a long distance (say, more than a lap) was my senior year of high school. And the only reason I did it then was my sadistic football coach who thought competing in a two-miler would keep me in shape and build character.



My high school district meet was an 8 a.m. race in 45-degree temperatures. My legs were cramping on the second lap. My shoe became untied on the fifth lap. I was lapped by the eventual winner on the seventh. When I crossed the finish line, collapsed on the cold, wet grass and laid there until my breath and my reasoning returned to me; I vowed to never purposely run long distances ever again.

Until this year, for some reason. It started harmlessly enough as afternoon walks with co-workers — something that not only got us away from our desks and into some fresh air, but also felt like we were exercising, if only a little. A brisk, 20-minute walk ... a little sweat ... some good conversation. Nothing wrong with that.

Somehow, running got tossed into the equation. Even more shockingly, I agreed — I blame it on my dying metabolism. The truth is, another thing I hate almost as much as running is sit-ups and push-ups and anything core-related. In fact, let's just toss any type of exercise into the equation. I hate it all.

This is what makes the last few months for me all the more remarkable.

Thanks to the trusty, never-let-me-down internet, I discovered a “Couch to 5K” — made for adults who can't jog to the mailbox without stopping for air. You start with a 20-minute workout that involves 60 seconds of jogging, 90 seconds of walking, and repeat for 20 minutes. By Week 6, when the jogging portion starts hitting 12 and 15 minute intervals, and the

walking gets shorter. The goal — which comes around Week 9 or 10 — is the 5K (or three miles, for those of you who prefer the American equivalent).

And that's where I am today.

Last week, on pleasantly cool Tuesday afternoon in late July, I ran my first-ever 5K. The third mile was run in a torrential downpour, but it wasn't enough to stop me. From start to finish, I ran for about 27 minutes. I suppose that's terrible. I hated every second of it.

If you thought this column was going to end with a reveal that I've converted to a man ready to train for a half marathon (slapping a fat 13.1 sticker on my car), you're wrong. Running sucks, and nothing you can say will change my mind. When I run, all I can think about is not running. My legs hurt, my side hurts, my lungs hurt. My soul hurts. I'm thirsty, but drinking water while running (which is difficult) just makes the water slosh around in my belly. My breathing sounds like a man drowning, gasping for air. All of it is terrible.

So why am I putting myself through this hell? Sadly, it works.

After three months of it, I've lost some weight. I feel like I'm in better shape. I feel a little healthier. I'm in a good state of mind — and all of this is a positive for a 43-year-old man about to head to Texas for a 25-year high school reunion.

I told myself I'd do this until I hit the 5K and then throw away the running shoes forever. But I suppose I'll stick with it, if only to avoid sit-ups. My second attempt at a 5K two days after the first one was far less successful — I quit about two-thirds of the way through it, because it was hot, my sides hurt and I didn't have a coach threatening me the whole time.

I still hate running, and I will never (I repeat, never) be a marathon or half-marathon guy. But it beats dying early, I think.

Actually, I've got a lot to think about here. I'll get back to you.



Billy Liggett is a writer and co-founder of The Rant. He'll gladly accept an invitation to your next 5K as long as the temperature is below 75 degrees, there are no hills and there's a nice, comfortable mattress waiting for him beyond the finish line.

Numbers are good; the future is bright

This spot in our monthly publication is typically saved for our opinion on an issue we're writing about or an issue you're talking about.

But this month, we'd rather share some numbers and talk about the future of The Rant.

This year has been an exciting one for your friendly neighborhood journalists, and not just because 2019 saw the launch of The Rant Monthly. While that alone is reason for celebration back at our secret lair, what really has us optimistic moving forward is our website.

That site — rantnc.com — has been around since 2014. But it wasn't until 2017 when we dedicated ourselves to consistent coverage of local news. While those first three years never saw more than 130,000 page views in a single year, we came close to hitting 500,000 views in 2017. Last year saw us eclipse that half-million milestone by year's end.

But this year has been our best yet, and it's not even close. The Rant surpassed last year's page view count in early July, and we're on pace to get anywhere between 800,000 and 900,000 views before the ball drops on 2020.

If there was concern that a printed product would hurt our online numbers — or keeping our site free to visitors and login-free would kill our readers' desire to pick up an actual paper — those fears have been unfounded. In other words, so far, so good.

So thank you, kind readers, for keeping us relevant. Your clicks, your comments, your kind words and your critiques allow us to do this. In the coming months, The Rant will add podcasting to its media repertoire — harkening back to our radio days, the podcast will be monthly, and it will allow us to go deeper with interesting local guests and talk candidly about the news and issues important to our area.

Enough with the self promotion. Back to the news.

YOUR RANT

If we're anything, we're pretty good listeners. Each month, we'll reserve this space in our little publication for your opinions on anything and everything. All we ask is that you keep it clean, don't get personal with your fellow citizens and keep it short. Email us (addresses on Page 3) or send a message to our Facebook page. We'll do our best to get you in the next Rant Monthly.

READER RESPONSE



Editor's Note: The July edition of The Rant touted Sanford's currently hot real estate market and the success of local house flippers. The following are some of your views on last month's cover story and other stories we've published since:

I moved to Sanford a year and a half ago. The Northeast is emptying out because of the out-of-control cost of living and the insanity of their politicians and local governments. Expect the boom to continue unabated. The blue state refugees will continue to roll in.

This place is a gem. The gem may need some polishing in places, but Sanford has a lot of charm and history. One of the reasons we chose this town is because the housing stock is unique, and you have organic neighborhoods. Finding houses without an HOA these days can be nearly impossible.

Well centered, Sanford will continue to benefit and prosper. For newcomers, just do not continue voting for politicians and policies that ruined the places you are coming from.

J.D.

Sanford is a small, sweet Southern city with a big heart illuminated by generosity. Its virtues are not always evident at first glance. It's a wonderful place to live.

Irene Smith

I love that people are investing in older homes rather than tearing down or building new. We purchased our home here in January and so far are very happy with our decision.

Erin Bisson

Just realize as you incorporate these external amenities, housing will probably become less affordable. If density doesn't change, it definitely will be.

Van Groce Jr.

Re: Deputy injured in chase. I just wanted to give y'all a shout out for the reporting on the chase that ended in my neighborhood [on July 14]. From the beginning, your article reported the most comprehensive coverage I have seen about the events that unfolded — even compared to multiple major news outlets combined. Thank you so much for keeping us all up to date. I know my husband and I greatly appreciate the service you provide for our community.

Kate Harbison

Re: Sanford's eateries. As a died-in-the-wool lover of local restaurants, I applaud your promotion of all things "Sanford." My daughter-in-law and I spent three hours shopping and eating in Downtown Sanford recently when she was visiting from New Jersey.

She loves noodling around in our local shops and taking the time to chat with the shipowners. Forget Walmart, and support our Sanford treasures.

Tana Boerger

Re: New Dollar General coming to Sanford. I mean, I'm all for community, but can someone explain to me in a logical, fact-based way, why we need another Dollar General?

In no way do I want to sound negative, at all. I'm just trying to understand the need for another one of this particular retailer?

Jennifer Stuart McFadden

Re: Sanford's eateries. You can't forget about dinner at Jeff and Lisa's Brickhouse Grill on Fridays or there brunches on Sunday. Lee County has amazing food available outside of the usual chain restaurants.

Ryan Crawford

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COVER STORY

OLD ^{New} SCHOOL

A first look (and a look back) at the historic W.B. Wicker School, which has undergone a facelift and will become Lee County's ninth elementary school this month.

Story by Gordon Anderson | Photography by Billy Liggett

When students walk through the doors of Lee County's newest school late this month, they'll also be entering a place that's been home to nearly a century's-worth of educational history, ranging from a time when public schooling was little more than a shadow of what it's come to be, to an era of forward progress in race relations, and even the evolution of how community colleges educate people beyond high school.

It may sound like a paradox, but Lee County's ninth public elementary school — the W.B. Wicker Elementary School on South Vance Street near downtown Sanford — is also one of its oldest and most significant.

Wicker began its life in 1927 as the Lee County Training Center, a school for black students that had been funded at least in part by Chicago-based philanthropist Julius Rosenwald during a time when he was contributing to the progress of education for black students across the country. The Rosenwald fund helped establish more than 5,000 black schools across the south, including at least 800 in North Carolina

Even in 1927, and certainly before, educational opportunities for African Americans — who constituted sizable portions of Sanford and Lee County's populations in their early days — were severely limited.

"The first well-documented black school was the South Sanford Graded School, an unpainted two-story frame building constructed in the early twentieth century on Washington Street," reads a nomination for the Wicker property to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.



When William Bartelle Wicker, who eventually became the Lee County Training School's namesake, took over as principal of the South Sanford Graded School in 1924, the school had just nine students. Nine. But a testament to Wicker's effectiveness as a principal is visible in a review of history. According to the National Register nomination, by the time the Lee County Training School opened its doors three years later, that number had tripled.

It would only continue to grow.

The drop-off lane and entrance for the "new" side of W.B. Wicker Elementary School. The oldest part of the campus has been refitted for classrooms, a media center, offices and a history museum. That section is connected to the school's new buildings by hallways that keep kids inside unless they're on a playground or in the school's outdoor learning lab.



Superintendent Andy Bryan, flanked by District Maintenance Director Chris McNeil and LCS Public Information Officer Sharon Spence, prepares for a tour of the construction site of W.B. Wicker Elementary School in mid July, just over a month before the school's opening.

By the late 60s, at the end of the segregation era, the school — renamed after its founding principal by the 1950s — was graduating classes of more than 100 kids.

After desegregation was implemented in 1969, the campus served for another two decades as one of Lee County's middle and

elementary schools before closing altogether in 1990. It fell into disrepair fairly quickly, but found new life in 2006 after Central Carolina Community College renovated the original classroom building for use as an auxiliary campus.

On Sept. 8, 2015, the Lee County Board of Education selected the W.B. Wicker campus as its “preferred site” for the county's next elementary school, which would be its first since 1998.

What's followed in the nearly four years since has been both boringly procedural (votes by the school board and the county board of commissioners to purchase the site, to secure financing, to choose an architect, to approve site plans and so on) and frustratingly political (some opponents of the school made misleading claims about the level of crime in the neighborhood, calling it a “known threat” to students, and made use of a decades-old sexual assault against a student to cast doubt on the location as a viable choice for a new school in 2019).

But for the most part, things have gone according to plan. Ground broke in 2018. Wendy Carlyle, a former school board member and then-employee at the district's Central Office, was named the next principal in January of this year. Construction has proceeded without any major hiccups, and as of this writing, not only has the entirety of the original campus been restored and repurposed, but new buildings have been added, creating a striking contrast that uniquely captures the project's spirit.

One minute, you'll be walking through a hallway that even the most casual observer could tell you had been built nearly a century ago. The next, you're in an area that boasts an almost futuristic, glass-walled dance studio or maker space where students will experience the full benefit of the STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) approach the school will use.

“That's why it's such a cool project,” said Andy Bryan, Lee County Schools' superintendent. “It celebrates the history



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and the future at the same time. None of the buildings on the original campus were demolished. It's all either new, or part of the original construction."

Ruby Maxwell is one of many, many African American graduates of the W.B. Wicker School who recalls her years at the school with not just fondness, but pride.

"The school was fine. The school was wonderful," Maxwell told the Rant recently. "It was our home away from home. We realized what was happening with segregation and it upset us, but Mr. Wicker taught us to be humble. It was a place for our community."

Maxwell, who had graduated in the 1950s, knew Wicker as a child — "back in those days, we shared phone lines, and we had a phone line with him, so I knew him ever since I could remember," she said — and was glad to accept his offer to return to the school as its librarian in 1962, shortly before his retirement.

W.B. Wicker — who died just two years later in 1964 — remains moderately well known in Sanford, and more so since the completion of a mural on a South Horner Boulevard building dedicated to him and A.L. Boykin, a local black builder who helped build the school, which which was added to in 1934 and



Parts of the "old" W.B. Wicker School have been updated to match the new side. Above, the entrance to the auditorium, which when finished will become one of the larger auditoriums (and stages) in the county. Left, a hallway leading to classrooms on the upper level of the old school includes refurbished wooden floors. Below, the old building meets the new as construction crews continue to landscape the courtyard.



Proud to see Wicker's return



I received my elementary education at Lee Elementary School in Jonesboro because my residence was in the Deep River community. After completing the eighth grade in 1963, I started my high school education at W.B. Wicker High School in the fall of 1963 and graduated in 1967.

I am very proud of and grateful for the education that I received at W.B. Wicker. Our teachers were some of the finest that ever taught at Wicker School. They all had the best interest of their students in mind throughout our classroom experience. They cut you no slack, and if we needed to be disciplined, they did it without any repercussions from our parents. They treated us like they were our parents while at the same time preparing us for the future from the classroom.

Our principal, Mr. W.B. Wicker, was one of the greatest. He was a short, stocky man with a voice that carried from one end of the hall to the next. It was in your best interest to be on your best behavior at all times, because you never knew where Mr. Wicker might be. He and the pastor of my church were very good friends, and Mr. Wicker had an open line to him. He did not hesitate to call Rev. Ward if any of us got in trouble. He knew us personally and would many times refer to us as "Rev. Ward's boys." If it became necessary for him to make that phone call, the outcome was not good.

Mr. Wicker treated all the students like we were his children, because he cared about our future.

I was proud of the efforts Brick Capital made to bring things back to life at the school location. I am very appreciative of the foresight and wisdom that came from our school board and county commissioners at the time the decision was made to renovate and rebuild W.B. Wicker School.

All the future students who are given the opportunity to attend this school can look forward to a quality education. I am sure that Mr. Wicker is looking at this beautiful structure with a big happy smile.



James French is a Sanford native who graduated from W.B. Wicker High School in 1967. He has served as warden of Central Prison in Raleigh and as director of the North Carolina Division of Prisons, and is currently a member of the CCCC Board of Trustees.

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1949. The National Register application indicates that Wicker was raised on Washington Avenue (Washington Street at the time) and was the son of a laundress and an oil mill foreman. He even worked as a laborer for Boykin, among other jobs, before earning a degree from the Virginia Seminary and Normal School in Lynchburg in the early 1920s.

“Mr. Wicker was known all over. He had connections all over the state,” Maxwell said. “He was a disciplinarian, but I always liked him. Everything we were taught then helped us represent the school and the community well.”

The pride Maxwell holds for her school is evident in much of its alumni. In the years since the old Wicker School closed its doors, the former students have organized regular reunions and even included students who began their schooling at Wicker but finished at Lee County High School after 1969 (as an employee, Maxwell made the same transition herself and served as the integrated high school’s librarian for another 21 years).

“The class of 1970 graduated from (Lee

Senior), but they still consider themselves McIver kids,” she said.

As far as the idea to repurpose the campus for use by a new generation of students - of all races - Maxwell says she and many other alumni are thrilled.

“I think it’s an excellent idea. The school was a beacon for our whole community,” she said, noting that she will help maintain a museum on campus that showcases the school’s long history. “I am so happy they’ve decided to remodel it.”

While Kelli and James Laudate of Sanford have two children who are already in middle school, a third daughter, Carsen, opted to leave Tramway Elementary — the only school she’s ever known — to start third grade at Wicker in the fall.

“We made the decision together to ask her how she felt about going to a new school,” Kelli told the Rant recently. “A big part of the decision to give her this opportunity was that we had one child on a year round schedule and two others on a traditional schedule. But she made the

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decision on her own, and she's excited. She thinks she's going to be a pioneer."

Carsen and her parents are both particularly excited about the STEAM model — for Carsen, it's the opportunity to be involved with the arts, particularly dance, and for Kelli and James, it's the opportunity to expose their daughter to things like coding, which James has taught in schools as a volunteer from time to time.

"That's where everything is going these days," Kelli said. "The only thing (Carsen) said was 'I wish I could take all of my friends with me. But I definitely want to go.'"

As far as the political concerns about the safety of the surrounding neighborhood, Kelli says she's not worried at all, and that she hopes the community as a whole will see what a benefit the new campus will be.

"If we live in a bubble, then nobody will ever get to experience anything new," she said. "I just want to see people take a positive approach to this school and look at all the positives it's going to bring."

A dream job and a chance to make a difference



For Lexie Anne Brown, the role of dance teacher at the new W.B. Wicker Elementary School is a dream come true. The Lee County High School and Meredith College graduate got

her experience teaching dance at Jordan High School in Durham and, most recently, B.T. Bullock Elementary School. She sees the opportunity at Wicker as her chance to make a difference in children's lives at a school designed to nurture their talents.

"When I think of things that mean a lot to me, children, Sanford and public education are pretty high on my list," says Brown. "So I feel extremely lucky that I get to go to work everyday and work at something that I am truly passionate about. I'm ready to get started."

Brown grew up in Sanford and started dancing at the age of 2. She said her friends always told her "dance teacher" was in her future, but it wasn't until her time at Meredith that she found out it

was a possible career in public education. She observed dance classes in Wake County elementary, middle and high schools, and came away feeling that her hometown was being cheated.

"I witnessed first hand through those observations what a difference dance could make for students' everyday life in school and started dreaming about the possibility of having dance in Lee County Schools," she says. "The position at Wicker was a no-brainer for me."

She says the most rewarding thing about teaching dance in a public school is seeing the way dance can build a child's confidence and change his or her whole outlook on school. She says during her time at B.T. Bullock, she witnessed children who would stand in a corner and refuse to participate blossom to become the "star of the show."

"Seeing the pride kids have for themselves and the excitement in their eyes over being a part of something bigger than themselves after a performance is probably my favorite thing in the world."

She thinks Wicker will be a unique

school for students because of the A+ model teachers like her will follow. She says grade level teachers and specialist teachers will work together to plan lessons that integrate subjects like math, science, social studies and ELA with arts classes like hers.

"While students are in classes like dance, art, music and theatre, they will also be meeting standards from their core classes," she says. "The arts aren't going to be looked at as an 'extra.' I think that the strong connection between arts and other content areas will highly increase student engagement, student participation, student understanding and student discipline."

She also thinks the staff at Wicker will become its own community, because it will work closely together to meet the needs of their students.

"I get chills thinking about all of the learning experiences and opportunities the children at Wicker are going to have," she says, "and the talents they will be able to discover that otherwise may have never been realized."



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“The school was a beacon for our whole community. I am so happy they've decided to remodel it.”

— Ruby Maxwell, graduate of the old
W.B. Wicker High School

District leaders took *The Rant* on a walk through of the campus in mid July, and while progress remained to be made — there are outdoor concrete walkways to be poured and landscaping to be done, for example — the campus is largely complete, and it's easy to envision the property teeming with children and teachers going about a typical school day.

The historic auditorium — “it was just a shell,” district Maintenance Director Chris McNeill said — has been completely redone, with new tinted windows,

a new roof, new duct work, and a new concrete floor. The original gymnasium has also been redone, and now includes heating and air, amenities prior generations didn't enjoy.

The oldest part of the campus, which Bryan calls “W.B. Wicker proper,” has been refitted for classrooms, a media center, offices, and the aforementioned history museum. That section is connected to the school's new buildings by hallways that keep kids inside unless they're on a playground or in the school's outdoor learning lab, which has tables

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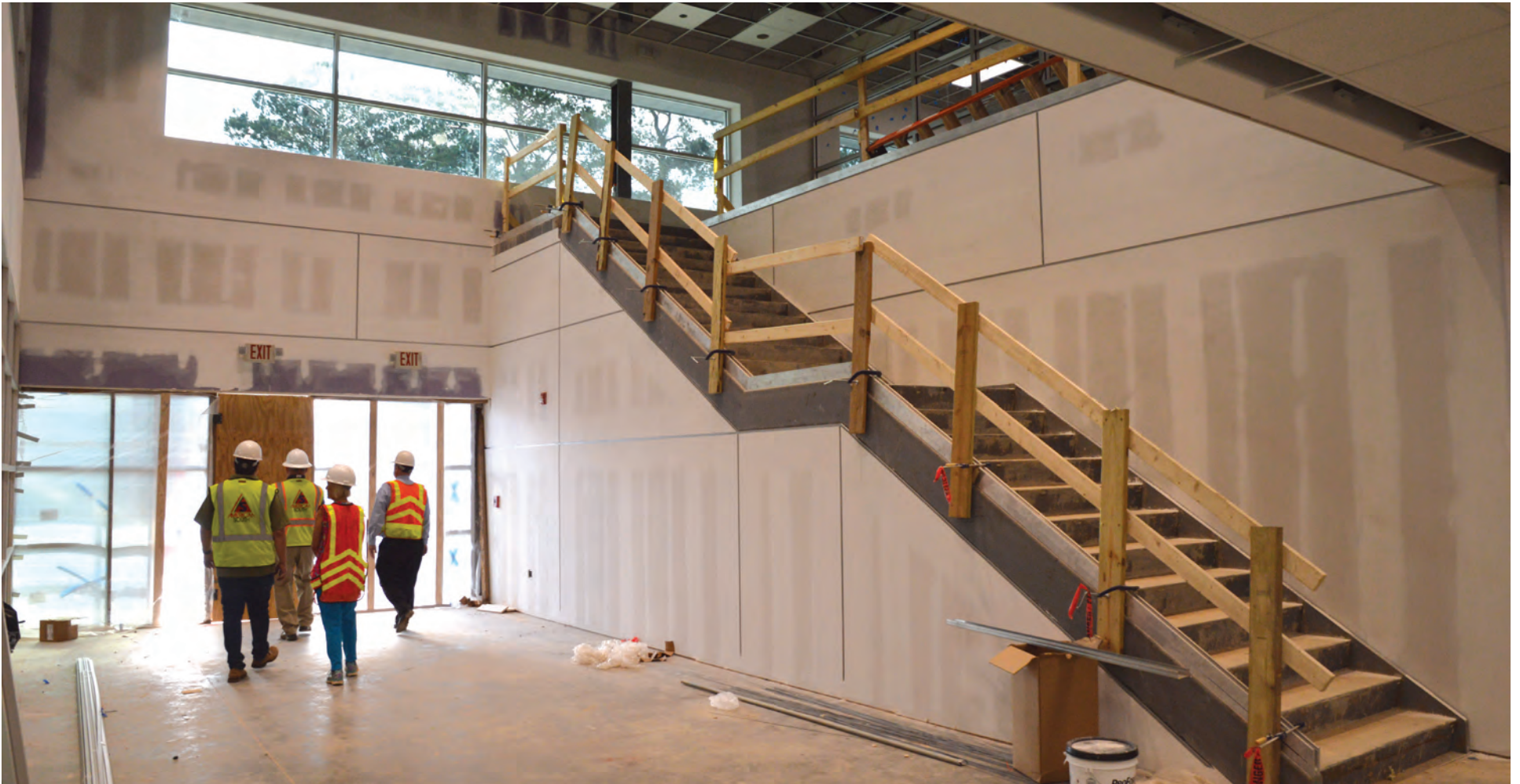
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The "new" side of W.B. Wicker includes a staircase at the entrance that leads up to a dance studio (pictured below) and a makerspace lab. The school will house about 700 students, all of whom will be enjoying a new cafeteria (right) and refurbished gymnasium.



A passion for integrating arts into everyday life



Wendy Bryant joins W.B. Wicker Elementary after 20 years of experience teaching art in Lee County — five at Lee County High School and the last 15 at Broadway Elementary.

She will be completing a 10-month, full-time clinical administrative internship through the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Principal Preparation of Excellence and Equity in Rural Schools program. Next spring, she'll receive her Master of School Administration in Educational Leadership and Culture Foundations degree.

She was the 2018 North Carolina Art Educators Association's Teacher of the Year, and she represented the state at the NAE Conference in Seattle. Outside of the classroom, she's been active in incorporating the arts into the Sanford community. In 2014, she created the Arts Ambassadors program to bring art students into assisted living facilities, and in 2017, she became involved in

Downtown Sanford's Art in the Alley program at StreetFest. She's also been heavily involved the Brick City Bees Initiative to increase the number of beehives in the city.

Bryant says she's excited to be a part of the Wicker staff, calling their recent week of A+ Schools Institute training in Raleigh "phenomenal."

"The energy and excitement among the staff was contagious," she says. "We started off as strangers; but over the course of the week, true lifetime friendships were formed. Relationships are the key to a happy and joyful life — when you have genuine, trusting relationships, everything else falls into place."

She says the students at W.B. Wicker will be entering a school where the staff and administration have the love, passion and dedication it takes to change a student's life. The school's integration of art into every content area will "focus on meeting students' multiple intelligences," she says.

"Arts integration is a research-based approach that has proven results,"

Bryant says. "The arts empower, build critical thinking skills and afford equity. Multiple learning pathways will allow students to take ownership of their own learning and discover talents they never knew they possessed. That's powerful and unique. Additionally, Wicker will create opportunities at multiple levels for family and community involvement."

She says being part of an A+/STEAM school in Lee County is a dream come true, professionally. Bryant says her passion lies in arts integration, and she's excited to share that passion with like-minded educators.

"I am excited to see the smiling faces of our students as they enter their beautiful new school for the first time," she says. "I am excited about serving the teachers, staff and students at Wicker. But most importantly, I am excited about the lives that will be transformed and changed forever because of the opportunities that W.B. Wicker Elementary School will offer students, families and staff."

and raised beds for plants.

Those new parts of the campus even include a "third floor" that's something of a trademark by architect Jimmy Hite. This third floor contains all of the building's mechanical elements, making for easier access by repairmen needing to perform maintenance (SanLee Middle School is built the same way).

There's a safety fence around the entire property, and access to the buildings by visitors, like at the district's other schools, is gained via a secure buzzer system.

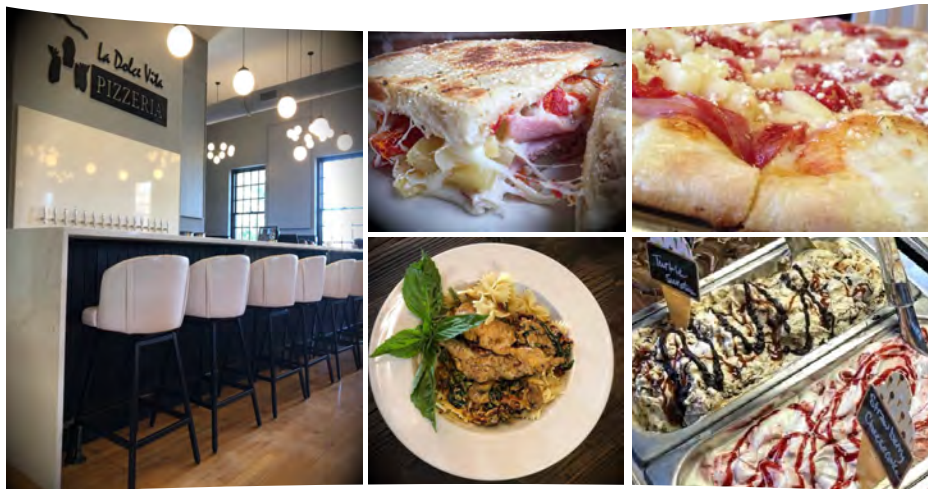
While the school can fit up to 969 students, making it something of a "school and a half," it will open on Aug. 26 with about 700 kids.

"We wanted to make sure as the year started out that we had functional capacity and room to grow," Bryan explained. "We'll assess next spring to see where we are and check growth in the county and make adjustments if necessary."

The STEAM approach isn't necessarily new to the district — Bryan says STEM is already present in most of Lee



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The gymnasium at W.B. Wicker Elementary School isn't new, but the floor and goals will be. One of the final touches to the refurbished school will be the flooring in the gym, which might be one of the few things not quite ready for use when school starts later this month, according to school officials.

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County's public schools, as are multiple opportunities for exposure to the arts — but he called the Wicker example “a more focused approach to integrating all of these disciplines.”

“A number of schools across the country have used a STEM approach, and there's plenty of research showing a focus on STEM plus the arts helps students learn at a higher level,” he said. “There's a great need for STEM skills across the state, and we think that by putting those things together in an elementary setting, we can continue to support our community and our entire state. It's an opportunity to enhance how students will use those foundational skills as they are being taught.”

Further, in a time when “school choice” is a term used to apply to an ever-growing list of options for families that include private schools, charter schools, and even home-schooling, Bryan said the approach at Wicker — termed a “magnet school” which will host a mix of kids who applied via lottery (as in the case of Carsen Laudate) and others who will attend based on

redistricting — is part of the district's broader approach to offering that school choice in a public setting.

“We've always taken the approach that we offer a great deal of school choice, between the (application-based) year round model at Tramway, Lee Early College, and the various programs that offer choice within the schools themselves,” he said. “This felt like a logical extension. I think it's something that's been driven just by the evolution of schooling.”

Bryan said he's heard far more positive feedback about the project than anything else.

“I've gotten a lot of comments from individuals who went to Wicker and who are proud we're restoring the school,” he said. “I think it's important from a historical perspective to pay tribute to what it's meant to this community, but also to show how we're moving forward.”



See video of the inside of the unfinished W.B. Wicker School at our website, rantnc.com

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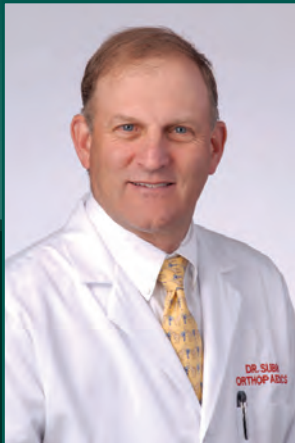
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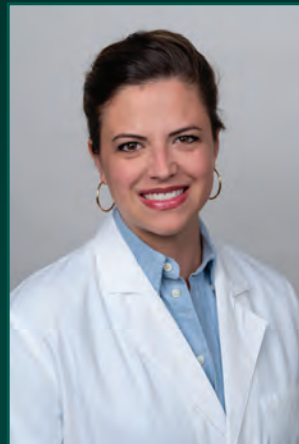
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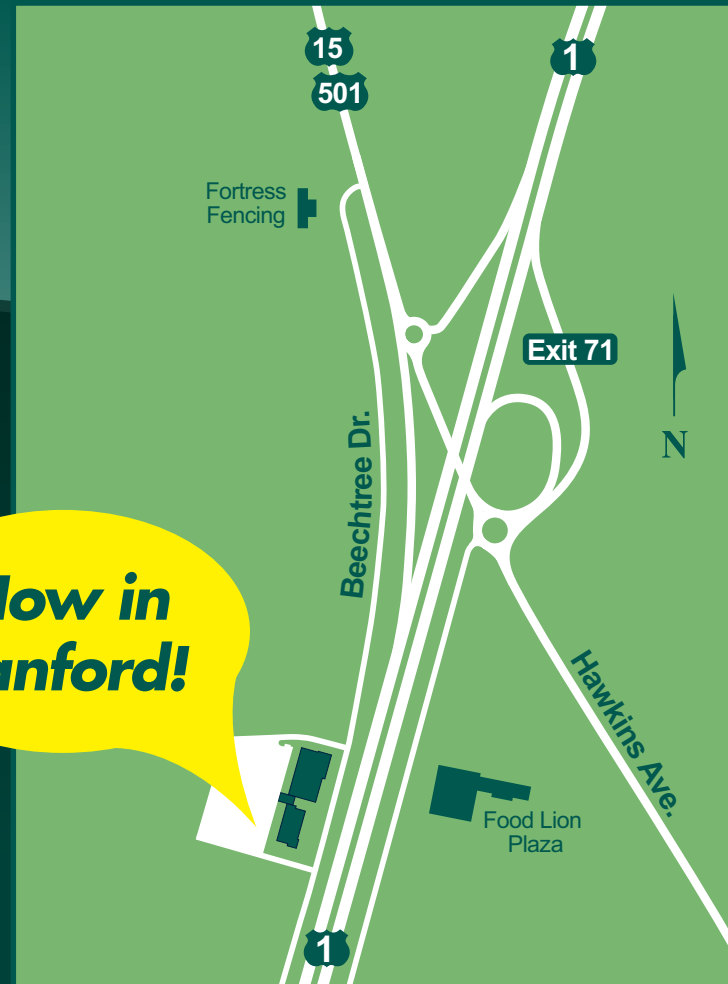
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FOR A GOOD COS

Characters are formed and friendships are made in Sanford's growing cosplay community



Stefanie Twist spent three months on her Stoick costume from *How to Train Your Dragon*, which she debuted at the recent GalaxyCon in Raleigh. She credits her newfound love of cosplay to friends like May Hemmer (above) and Sanford's growing cosplay community.

By Billy Liggett

Stefanie Twist is somewhat new to cosplay. Or she was, that is, before last October's first Brick City Phenomicon in Sanford — an event strategically scheduled around Halloween but geared more toward lovers of sci-fi, comic books and pop culture who celebrate that love by way of costumes.

Twist dressed as Ladybug from the French animated series *Miraculous: The Tales of Ladybug and Cat Noir* (her son played the latter role), and from there it was, to quote the show, “spots on!”

“I just love all the work that goes into putting a costume together — and then getting into that character's mindset ... there's a bit of role playing to it and goofing off all at once,” says Twist. “I can be a serious person, especially at work, but it's nice to cut loose and have that opportunity to just have fun for a day. I loved it.”

Her Ladybug made another appearance a Fayetteville comic conference — preparing Twist for the daddy of all cons (the North Carolina ones, anyway), Raleigh's Galaxy-Con, held at its convention center during the last weekend of July. For this one, Twist went all out and spent months putting together an impressive likeness of Stoick, the heavily bearded father figure from the animated movies and series *How to Train Your Dragon*.

The costume got a lot of attention in an arena full of top-notch cosplay creations. As she was leaving the venue and walking to her car, she let out a loud, “Drink to Valhalla!” to a group of passengers on a Bicycle Beer Trolley in downtown Raleigh.

“Everyone lifted their glasses and cheered,” she says. “It was an awesome moment.”

As was evident at last year's Brick City Phenomicon, there's a small but quickly growing community of cosplay enthusiasts in Sanford. The brainchild of Huger Muger Brewing owner Tim Emmert, the event introduced cosplay to Downtown Sanford, along with art and film discussion panels and other events geared at wonderfully nerdy topics.

Through it, Twist met May Hemmer, a New Orleans native who moved to Sanford not long after Hurricane Katrina and became one of the few local "voices" when it comes to cosplay. In fact, she hosted a Cosplay 101 class for adults and children at Lee County Library a month before the Brick City Phenomicon. Hemmer is a cosplay veteran. As a child, her family was stationed in Japan, and it was there where Hemmer developed a love for sewing and watching Japanese anime. Living in New Orleans — a city where dressing up is the norm — only nurtured her passion for cosplay.

As an adult, she's dressed up as nearly everything. Her favorites are Disney's Princess Tiana, Lady Deadpool, Cersei Lannister from *Game of Thrones*, Rosalia from



LEFT: Stefanie Twist and her son Zach at July's GalaxyCon in Raleigh. RIGHT: May Hemmer from the 2018 Carolina Games Summit in Goldsboro.

Pokemon, a steampunk version of Sleeping Beauty and "Gwenage," a hybrid character from Spider-Man.

Hemmer was a guest at the July GalaxyCon — she took hundreds of photos with guests throughout the four-day event and



geeked out after meeting some of her pop icons from shows like *Doctor Who*, *Star Trek* and shows and movies she grew up with. She loves what she does, because she loves the joy her costumes bring to others.

"One of my best reactions was as Princess

Tiana — a little girl saw me from an escalator a few floors up, screamed, came down the escalator and tackled me and wouldn't get off my lap," she says. "She went on and on about how much she loved New Orleans, and when I told her I'm from New Orleans, it made her day."

The other perk both Hemmer and Twist have experienced from this close-knit community is the friendships that have formed from it. The two didn't know each other before Brick City, and today they're great friends with a common love — it's not out of the ordinary for them to text the other well past midnight while working on a costume.

Twist's Stoick costume was the definition of homemade. The beard alone took weeks of crocheting thread, and she was busy making the coverings for her shoes just hours before the start of the conference.

"Making it is half the fun — having it all come to fruition and seeing it for the first time. It gives you goosebumps," Twist says. "It's just fun to pick a character I can relate to and make that character come to life."

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"We're not telling anybody that CBD is a cure for all of their problems, and we always tell people to talk to their doctor and get that advice," Davis said recently. "But we're seeing such great results and benefits for the people who are taking our products."

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But with Your CBD Store Sanford being a new presence in the area, Davis is eager to spread the word about the company, which is committed to creating a comfortable environment, offering the highest quality products and helping educate customers so they can find the relief they need.

She said the Tampa, Florida-based company sources its hemp from Colorado (where it is certified by that state's Department of Agriculture) and uses it to make water-soluble products, edibles, tinctures, soft gels, vaping e-liquids, and even topical applications. The company even offers tinctures and CBD treats for pets. Each product comes with a QR code and lot number that provides a full lab report so customers know exactly what they're taking.

For Davis, who grew up in the Carthage/Cameron area, the decision to leave nursing



Sherrie Davis left the nursing industry to run Your CBD Store in Sanford, one of more than 400 locations nationwide. Your CBD Store is located at 2821 S. Horner Boulevard.

was a tough one, but she's still gratified that she can offer people options for their medical problems.

"I stepped out of a 22 year nursing career, but I still feel like I'm able to help people and see results when they come in," she said.

All of Your CBD Store Sanford's products are manufactured by SunMed/Sunflora Inc. and come in various forms and dosages that will meet each customer's needs and

preferences. Your CBD Store Sanford was the company's 239th store in the country when it opened in April; today there are more than 400, and the company anticipates having between 750 and 1,000 by the end of 2019.

Your CBD Store Sanford is located at 2821 S. Horner Boulevard — between AllState Insurance Metro PCS — and can be reached at (919) 292-0800.



Sanford actress Aryn Wright-Thompson, who stars in the newest film from Christian filmmakers the Kendrick Brothers — titled “Overcomer” — will be at a pre-release viewing which will also include a Q&A at 7 p.m. on Aug. 9 at Spring Lane Cinemas in Sanford before leaving for a tour with the movie the following day. Tickets can be purchased on www.eventbrite.com by searching “Overcomer movie pre-release viewing.”

SANFORD

City to consider two new housing developments, 1,000+ homes

The Sanford City Council will soon consider applications for two new residential developments on opposite sides of town that will add more than 1,000 homes to the city’s housing stock.

Plans for the Laurel Oaks subdivision submitted to the city’s planning department show 624 units (214 townhomes and 410 single family dwellings) on 224 acres off Commerce Drive along N.C. 87 on the south side of town.

The proposal includes a clubhouse, dog park, playground for children, and greenway trails.

Meanwhile, plans for the Galvin’s Ridge subdivision indicate another several hundred homes, again a mix of single family units and smaller townhomes, on 426 acres north of Colon Road near the U.S. 1 exit and the Lee County Industrial Park in the Deep River area. The plan is

described as a “mixed use neighborhood with both residential and commercial uses.”

Both sets of plans, which show homes on smaller lots than are typical in many other Sanford and Lee County neighborhoods, are under review by staff and will be subject to a number of votes before they can become reality. It’s unclear when any such action will take place, but wheels are likely to begin turning soon.

But with quality homes in Sanford and Lee County rapidly selling once they’re placed on the market — agent John Ramsperger of Sanford Real Estate wrote in a Rant guest column in July that “more people are moving to the area than the existing housing inventory can handle” — a large number of new homes should be welcome to prospective home buyers in the area and beyond.

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CLOSEUPS AND WIDE SHOTS

The Monologue Bombs' Scott Phillips takes on autobiographical songwriting in new album

By Corbie Hill

Scott Phillips remembers the last party he threw.

He means a specific type of party — the kind that keeps raging until some unholy hour and is fueled by prodigious amounts of alcohol. This years-ago throwdown, when Phillips was in his early 30s, was a coming-of-age moment. He woke up the next day and realized that phase of his life was over. Not everyone, Phillips says, but most people can answer the question “what was the night you realized 'I'm too old to be like this anymore?’” For him, that night in Raleigh was it.

“I remember two days later I called [Wake County Public Schools] to ask about being a substitute teacher,” Phillips says.

As the songwriter behind solo project the Monologue Bombs, this is the exact kind of experience Phillips explores — coming-of-age moments that are equal parts personal



Scott Phillips' The Monologue Bombs is set to release a new album, "Orchard & Reaves," and will perform at Hugger Mugger in Downtown Sanford on Aug. 2. Photo courtesy of Scott Phillips

and universal.

Accordingly, his upcoming album *Orchard & Reaves* is named for two streets: the former, Orchard, was the site of his

childhood home in Fairview Park, Ohio; the latter, Reaves, was the location of Phillips' last party. On Friday, Aug. 2, the Monologue Bombs play Hugger Mugger, with the multi-instrumentalist's accordion

MONOLOGUE BOMBS

*Aug. 2 | Hugger Mugger |
Music starts at 9 p.m.*

(one of his preferred instruments) and Michael Stipe-like voice creating a distinctive backdrop for story-driven songwriting that owes as much to Springsteenian heartland rock as it does to quirky power pop.

For the upcoming *Orchard & Reaves*, Phillips' plan is to launch a Kickstarter campaign in August, start recording in October and release the album early next year. And though he has played music in Raleigh and elsewhere in the Triangle since moving from a Cleveland suburb in fall 1994, Phillips is trying several new approaches for *Orchard & Reaves*. For one, he's working with a slew of guest musicians (though he doubts this'll turn the Monologue Bombs into a full band permanently); for another, this au-

tobiographical album is split in two halves. Each half of the album will be recorded in a different studio with different collaborators, Phillips says. Five songs deal with his teenage years in Fairview Park, while the other five address his 20s in Raleigh.

“I have done a lot of character writing, and you try to put yourself into the characters,” he says. “For whatever reason I felt emboldened to be more autobiographical about it.”

Indeed, the autobiographical part of this kind of songwriting comes easily, Phillips says. The right details — a street name, the brand of cigarettes someone smoked, bands that were active at the time — place a song squarely within his life. Yet get too specific to the songwriter’s life, and you don’t leave much of a foothold for listeners. Phillips remembers listening to Sun Kil Moon and



Scott Phillips' multi-instrumental set includes his trusty accordion and Michael Stipe-like voice, "creating a distinctive backdrop for his story-driven songwriting."

noting with fascination that songwriter Mark Kozelek’s lyrics address real life events with incredible specificity, but in an almost artless way — or at least in a fashion that Phillips works to avoid.

“It’s tricky to write that way because you don’t want to be so specific that you’re basically excluding the listener in a way,” he says.

Making even an autobiographical song approachable to audiences requires dollyng the camera back, Phillips says, borrowing cinematic terminology. In a lot of songs, the idea is to express some kind of wider truth — something connected to the songwriter’s specific experiences, sure, but universal enough to resonate.

“In a way, the specificity of most of the song earns you the right to get broader at the chorus or at the last verse or whatever it is,” Phillips says.

One example, “Best Mistakes,” is very specifically about Phillips as a Midwestern teenager riding his bike around Fairview Park, listening to the radio station and stopping for ice cream. Phillips addresses his younger self, telling him that things he thinks are wonderful or tragic will change as he grows up and eventually leaves town.

“The chorus ... basically says, 'you think you know what regret is, but your best mistakes are in front of you,'" Phillips says “If you opened with that, it would be a problem, because it's very broad.”

But by being specific and honest in the verse of the song, he continues, he almost earns the right to speak more universally in the chorus.

Beyond that, Phillips took his time writing the upcoming Monologue Bombs album. A few years back, he made a deal with himself: each time he played a show, he would write a song. Ten gigs later and he had ten songs. To be clear, though, the Monologue Bombs isn't Phillips' only musical project. Starting in 1999, he played in rock trio Goner, which morphed into an electronica act and changed its name to GNØER in 2015. This was a healthy move, Phillips says, in that GNØER is more democratic and collaborative than Goner was. GNØER 's a lot of fun, but Phillips still needs his time in the songwriter sandbox. He needs solo time spent going from zero to full song, which is what the Monologue Bombs affords. And soon, with the ambitious Orchard & Reaves, a musician who has been immersed in the Triangle’s music scene since 1994 will once again try something new.

“I get to be a solitary songwriting and solitary gigging [musician] and I’m coming up on being able to work with some of my favorite people, some very talented people who can add different colorings to these songs I’ve been doing by myself for awhile,” Phillips says. “It’s exciting.”

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Corbie Hill is a journalist and editor who lives on three wooded acres in Pittsboro with his wife and daughters. His work has appeared in the News & Observer, No Depression, StarTrek.com, Bandcamp Daily and a host of other outlets.



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THE RANT

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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TWELFTH NIGHT

July 31 - Aug 3 | Temple Theatre |
7:30 p.m. | \$10 - \$16

William Shakespeare's classic comedy of errors completes its Temple run the first weekend of August. Tickets can be purchased by calling 919.774.4155 or visiting templeshows.com.

THE MONOLOGUE BOMBS

Aug. 2 | Hugger Mugger Brewing |
9-10:30 p.m. (free)

Seasoned Raleigh songwriter Scott Phillips brings his solo project The Monologue Bombs (and his accordion) to town just as he preps his next album. See our feature on page TK.

ANDY COATS & THE BANKWALKERS

Aug. 9 | Smoke & Barrel |
8:30-11 p.m. (free)

Blues and blues-rock, ranging from Robert Johnson to Eric Clapton, educate Andy Coats' originals and covers.

FROZEN JR.

Aug. 9 - 11 | Temple Theatre |
7:30 p.m. (Fri, Sat);
2 p.m. (Sat, Sun) | \$9 - \$15

Baby it's hot outside, and as the title (and the popular Disney film) attest, this musical is set in a very not hot locale. Tickets can be purchased by calling 919.774.4155 or visiting templeshows.com.



HOUSE IN THE HORSESHOE

Aug. 3-4 | 288 Alston House Road, Sanford

The House in the Horseshoe state historical site will celebrate the 238th anniversary of a skirmish between Tory and Whig forces there in 1781. The annual re-enactment event portrays the battle between British loyalists under the command of David Fanning and patriot militiamen under Phillip Alston's command. The battle ended with Alston's surrender to Fanning. The two-day event will feature artillery and musket demonstrations, tomahawk throwing, a church service and more, including battle re-enactments at 2 p.m. both days. For more information, visit facebook.com/houseinthehorseshoe.

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DOWNTOWN ALIVE!

SOUTHERN VOICE W/ SPECIAL GUEST FAITH BARDILL

Aug. 15 | *Steele Street, Downtown Sanford* | 5-9 p.m. (free)
Sanford country-rock mainstay Southern Voice headlines this month's Downtown Alive! accompanied by multiple Carolina Music Awards winner Faith Bardill.

HIP HOP VIOLINIST DAVID SCOTT WITH SPECIAL GUEST

Aug. 16 | *Hugger Mugger Brewing* | 8-9:30 p.m. (free)
After surviving multiple open heart surgeries at a young age and dealing with mental health issues, David Scott used his music as a catalyst for recovery, he told the Daily Tar Heel in April. Not one to be tied down by genres, don't be surprised if he goes beyond hip-hop at this show.

SATCHMO BABCOCK

Aug. 23 | *Smoke & Barrel* | 8:30-11 p.m. (free)
This outfit keeps it old-school, playing R&B, soul and blues by the likes of Chuck Berry, Big

Joe Turner and other artists at the foundations of rock 'n' roll.

SOUTHERN VOICE (ACOUSTIC)

Aug. 24 | *Camelback Brewing Company* | 7-9:30 p.m. (free)
Southern Voice returns to Camelback — minus the amps.

JIM QUICK & COASTLINE

Aug. 28 | *Mann Center* | 7:30-10:30 p.m. | \$10-\$15
Something beachy this way comes, courtesy of this hard-touring coastal outfit.

NORTH AMERICAN COMEDY BREWERY TOUR

August 30 | *Hugger Mugger Brewing* | 8 p.m. | \$15
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BEATLESQUE: A TRIBUTE TO THE BEATLES

Aug. 31 | Temple Theatre | 7:30 p.m. | \$20

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THE RANT

LOCAL MATTERS

BRIEFS

San Lee Futbol Club to host downtown scavenger hunt

The San Lee Futbol Club — a semi-pro soccer team based in Sanford — will collaborate with Hugger Muggger Brewing for a big even on Aug. 17, to raise money and awareness for the team.

The event will revolve around a scavenger hunt in Downtown Sanford for children and their families. Entry fee is \$10 a person or \$25 for an entire family — prizes will be awarded to the top participants, and following the hunt, players will offer a soccer skills session for children, providing one-on-one personal tips and tricks. According to Alexi Cooper, the San Lee Futbol Club got its start in June 2018 and is a part of the United Premier Soccer League. The club plays against other semi-pro teams in Raleigh, Southern Pines, Holly Springs, Fayetteville and Chatham County. To learn more about the club, visit facebook.com/sanleefc.



High Hopes Chorus seeking accompanist

The High Hopes Chorus, a volunteer group which has been singing to residents at nursing homes in Lee County for more than 40 years, is seeking an accompanist to play piano with them beginning in the fall.

Mary Ann Ludwick, who currently serves as president of the chorus, told the Rant that the group has about 30 active members “but can always use more.” The chorus practices on Wednesdays at Jonesboro Presbyterian Church. Anyone interested in joining can contact Ludwick at lud@windstream.net or (919) 776-4502.

MORE BRIEFS, PAGE 36

UPDATE | SGT. JEFF OLDHAM



The crash site that resulted in life-threatening injuries to Lee County Sheriff's Office Sgt. Jeff Oldham after a chase through Sanford on the night of July 14. Oldham is recovering at UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill. Two were arrested after the crash. Photo by Billy Liggett

Deputy recovering after crash

The Lee County Sheriff's deputy who was seriously injured in a crash in Downtown Sanford during a late night chase on July 13 continues to recover and has been called “a walking miracle” by family and friends.



Sgt. Jeff Oldham sustained life-threatening injuries when his patrol car slammed into the former HiLites building on Steele Street in Sanford after Oldham gave chase to Cory Fennell, 37, and Elizabeth Murphy, 34, both of Fayetteville, after a call of “suspicious activity” on Deep River Road. Oldham activated his car's red lights as he approached Fennell's red Kia on foot when Fennell allegedly tried to ram Oldham with his car

and fled the scene. According to the sheriff's office, Oldham fired his weapon at the car before getting into his own vehicle and following the couple through Sanford's historic district and eventually into downtown.

Oldham reportedly struck a median on Steele Street resulting in a crash into the business, which had been closed for several weeks. Fennell and Murphy abandoned the Kia at 319 Steele Street and fled on foot. Fennell was discovered hiding under a nearby home by Sanford Police and a K-9 unit from the Harnett County Sheriff's Office. He was arrested and charged with first degree attempted murder and felony/elude arrest in a motor vehicle.

Murphy was found and arrested by Sanford Police two days later for outstanding warrants. During her arrest, police found several illegal painkillers and a small amount

of marijuana hidden in a clear plastic bag in her underwear.

Oldham's wife, Leslie, shared images of her husband's recovery on July 28 — from a photo of him lying on his back in a neck brace supported by several tubes to more recent photos of him walking down a hospital hallway with limited help and sitting upright in a chair while smiling. She thanked Sanford Police for administering CPR until a life-support helicopter could arrive on the scene after his crash. She also thanks the doctors and nurses and UNC Hospitals and the community for its outpouring of prayers and support.

“You all are playing a role in Jeff's recovery,” Leslie Oldham wrote. “Jeff has more tests — we anticipate in-house acute rehabilitation therapy before transitioning home.”

JONESBORO

Kendale Plaza sold; plans unclear

Kendale Plaza — the two thirds of the longstanding Jonesboro area shopping center which remain open to the public, anyway — has been sold by its Georgia-based owner to a company showing a Moore County address.

A deed on file at the Lee County Register of Deeds shows the properties, described as two tracts bounded by Lee Avenue to the east, Main Street to the north, Judd Street to the south, and Cameron Drive to the west, being transferred on July 16 from Georgia-based Kendale Partners LLC to a limited liability company called Par 5 Holding with an address in West End, North Carolina.

It was unclear as of July 29 what, if any plans, Par 5 had for the shopping center, which remains open for business but has fallen into disrepair and been the subject of a large number of complaints throughout

Sanford and Lee County. Once identified as the longest continuous shopping center in the state, it was a hub for business in Lee County from its construction in the 1960s until the 1980s before losing steam amid the construction of Riverbirch Corner (which now has similar problems of its own), the opening of a Walmart on South Horner Boulevard and, recently, the revitalization of downtown Sanford.

Meanwhile, at least part of the so-called “bottom third” of Kendale has been announced by the MINA Charter School as the site for its campus slated to open in 2020. While the property is still listed on the county’s GIS map as owned by Kendale Partners, MINA’s board of directors said in January that it had signed a letter of intent to purchase the structure.



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LOCAL BRIEFS

Mathis qualifies for Edward Jones conference

Brian Mathis, an Edward Jones financial advisor working in Sanford, qualified for and attended the firm's Financial Advisor Leaders Conference.

The conference, which was held in May in St. Louis, recognizes financial advisors "who are among the leaders in the financial services firm." Mathis, whose office is located in the Simpson Building at 503 Carthage St., was among 800 of the firm's 17,000 advisors to attend. It was his 10th time attending.

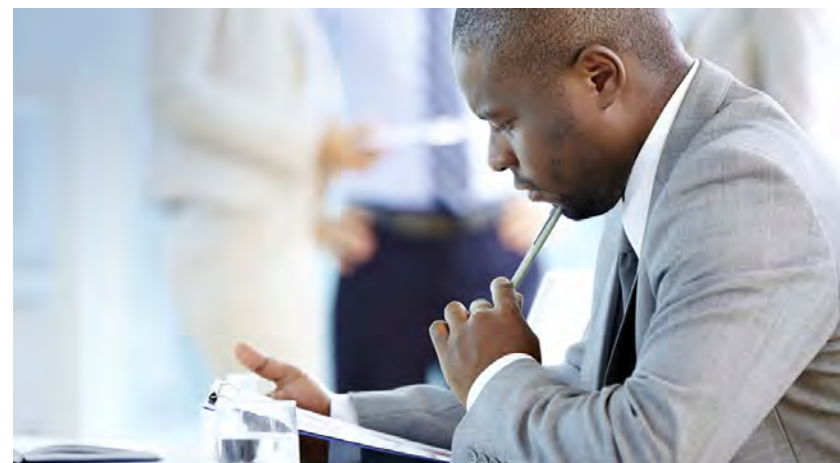
"This level of achievement only occurs when you have outstanding support," Mathis said. "Our team makes it possible for me to focus my time and attention on implementing financial solutions to our clients."

Mathis' team includes Jackie Barnes and Melissa Ansley. Reach Mathis' office at (919) 775-4443.

Work under way on U.S. 421 Dollar General

Motorists on U.S. 421 north of Sanford may have noticed construction appears to be under way on a Dollar General store at the highway's intersection with Glenwood Drive.

A sign at the site, which is just to the south of Frontier Spinning Mills, directs readers toward the company's website, which as of



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this writing doesn't yet show any information about the new location. Lee County already has four Dollar General stores, including on Hawkins Avenue, Oakwood Avenue and Lee Avenue in Sanford, as well as one in Broadway. Another store sits just past the Lee-Harnett county line on N.C. Highway 87.

Man mistakenly texts drug agent about buying drugs, is arrested

A Harnett County man was arrested on drug charges after mistakenly sending a text message about buying prescription opioid pills to a drug agent, according to the Lee County Sheriff's Office.

Vernon McAuley, 39, of Barbecue Church Road in Harnett County was charged in July

with possession with intent to sell a schedule III controlled substance.

According to the sheriff's office, McAuley is alleged to have "mid-entered a phone number when texting, and unintentionally sent a text to a Lee County Sheriff's Office Narcotics Agent requesting interest in buying dosages of suboxone," according to a press release. There are roughly 12 drug agents in Lee County, between the sheriff's office and the Sanford Police Department, or about 2 percent of Lee County's total population, making the chances of McAuley's mistake astronomically low.

"The agent that received the request replied numerous times asking questions to strengthen the validity of the text," the press release reads.

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PHOTO OF THE MONTH



Rhett McLaughlin and Link Neal — the comedy duo better known as Rhett & Link — filmed portions of an upcoming documentary on their childhoods in Lillington and Buies Creek in July. The world famous You-Tubers, comedians and musicians — their YouTube channel Good Mythical Morning alone has more than 15 million subscribers — met at Buies Creek Elementary School as children, and Harnett County has served as the backdrop for several of their videos. The two visited their old stomping grounds at Campbell University (shown in the picture atop the bronze camel on campus), where Rhett's father is a professor. Link is also the first cousin of Sanford musician and *The Voice* finalist Britton Buchanan.

Photo by Billy Liggett



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