

PROPERTY OF LUMON

MARCH 2025

The Rant

SANFORD, NORTH CAROLINA

Monthly

SANFORD'S
LATINO
COMMUNITY
SPEAKS OUT

PAGE 12



ALSO INSIDE: SPORTS COMPLEX UPDATE | ANOTHER SOUTHERN LEE BASEBALL STAR | EVENT CALENDAR



Love Where You Live



304 N. Horner Blvd. • Downtown Sanford

919.708.5100

www.yoursanfordrealestate.com

The Rant *Monthly*

March 2025 | Sanford, North Carolina
A product of LPH Media, LLC
Vol. 7 | Issue 3 | No. 72

Editorial

Gordon Anderson | gordon@rantnc.com
Billy Liggett | billy@rantnc.com
Jonathan Owens | jonathan@rantnc.com
Richard Sullins | richard@rantnc.com

Advertising

Nate Ewing | advertising@rantnc.com | (919) 478-0560

Contributors

Ben Brown

Editorial Board

Gil Buckman, Bobby Bowfinger, C.D. Bales, Harris Telemacher, Navin Johnson,
Dr. Michael Hfuhruhurr, Lucky Day, Neal Page and Charles-Haden Savage

Find Us Online:

www.rantnc.com
Facebook: facebook.com/therant905
Instagram: instagram.com/therantnc



The Rant Monthly is located in beautiful Sanford, North Carolina.
Please address all correspondence to LPH Media LLC, 3096 South Horner
Boulevard #126, Sanford, NC, 27332. Editorial email: billy@rantnc.com.
Advertising email: advertising@rantnc.com

The Rant Monthly is published monthly.

The Rant Monthly is wholly owned and operated by LPH Media LLC, a North Carolina corporation.
Submissions of all kinds are welcome. This publication is free. Removal of this newspaper from any
distribution point for purposes other than reading it constitutes theft, and violators are subject to a stern
talking to by our mothers. Printed by the Wilson Times Co. in Wilson, North Carolina.

Copyright 2025, LPH Media LLC, all rights reserved.

Withdrawal in disgust is not the same as apathy

Central Electric sponsoring two youth to attend basketball camp this summer

Central Electric awards two Touchstone Energy Sports Camp Scholarships annually to local students in Chatham, Harnett, Lee, Moore, or Randolph counties. A young man will be selected to attend the Carolina Basketball School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a young woman will be selected to attend the Wolfpack Women's Basketball Camp at N.C. State University in Raleigh.



To be eligible to apply, the student must be in the sixth or seventh grade during the upcoming school year, have permission from a parent or guardian to attend the overnight camp and must provide their own transportation if selected to attend.

Scan the QR code or visit CEMCPower.com for more information or to apply. The deadline for applications to both camps is March 31.



128 Wilson Rd
SANFORD, NC

CEMCPower.com

919-774-4900

800-446-7752

A cost-effective, downtown, Sanford office address can now be yours.

Schedule a tour.
919-367-3990

OfficeOurs
Make ours yours

OfficeOurs.com
Sanford@officeours.com

2025 Events

Hosted by Downtown Sanford, Inc.



MARCH:

20 - Third Thursdays Downtown

APRIL:

17 - Third Thursdays: Downtown ALIVE Concert

MAY:

10 - Strawberry Jammin'

10 - Downtown ALIVE Concert at 3pm

15 - Third Thursdays Downtown

JUNE:

19 - Third Thursdays Downtown

JULY:

17 - Third Thursdays Downtown

AUGUST:

21 - Third Thursdays: Back to School Night

SEPTEMBER:

18 - Third Thursdays: Downtown ALIVE Concert

OCTOBER:

11 - Downtown Sanford StreetFest

16 - Third Thursdays: Downtown Trick or Treating

23-25; 30-31 - Boo & Brew

NOVEMBER:

9 - Holiday Open House; noon - 4pm

20 - Third Thursdays Downtown

23 - Sunday with Santa; 3-6pm

29 - Small Business Saturday & Punch Cards

DECEMBER:

1 - Sanford Christmas Parade

18 - Third Thursdays Downtown

Other Annual Events in Downtown:

April 5 - Nov. 15: Farmers' Market

May 23 & 24: Carolina Indie Fest

June 7: Classics to Customs Car Show

June 19: Juneteenth Celebrations at W.B. Wicker Elementary



Scan to see
Partner Events
& More



COLD OPEN

Parallels between today and BLM movement in 2020

Back in June 2020 — when the pandemic was just becoming a part of our everyday lives — we covered a protest in the streets of Sanford, North Carolina, organized by members of the Black community fighting for equality in the wake of the murder of George Floyd.

The Rant Monthly was barely a year old when we published our July edition the following month, which featured a silhouette of a photo from that protest and the headline “The Movement.” We were still unsure how our readers and the community as a whole would react to the story, understanding that the Black Lives Matter movement at the time was, to put it mildly, divisive. To our pleasant surprise, our stories and that edition were met with mostly positive feedback and — even more surprisingly — healthy dialogue and debate among our readers.

A few months later, *The Rant* was featured on WRAL’s TarHeel Traveler, which spotlighted the publications that year that dealt with “heavy” issues.

We see a lot of parallels in the protests last month organized by Sanford’s Latino community against new immigration policies set forth by the Trump Administration that tout mass deportations and incarcerations and steamroll some of the legal protections that immigrants have had in our country for decades.

It’s no coincidence that we fashioned this month’s cover after that July 2020 edition. Like the Black Lives Matter movement, the immigration protests come from a marginalized group who feel like their community isn’t always treated equal in this country. And make no mistake — these immigration policies don’t just affect immigrants and undocumented citizens. They affect their families. Businesses. Churches.

The March 2025 edition of *The Rant Monthly* continues the local debate sparked by those protests (our coverage last month garnered more than 1,000 comments on



The cover of this edition of *The Rant Monthly* mirrors the cover of our July 2020 edition that covered local protests during the Black Lives Matter movement.

social media) and offers reporting on local organizations and churches that seek to help the Latino community and help all of us better understand the hurdles placed by these sweeping changes.

We know not everybody’s going to like the cover. We know not everybody’s going to like our stance on the issue. But that’s never really stopped us before.

— Billy Liggett



LIVE Your
Healthiest LIFE

Specialized heart care for a healthy life.

We put our whole heart into caring for yours. From emergency care in our chest pain center to interventional care in our cath lab, we have the skills and technology to provide a range of cardiology services. Whatever your needs, our experienced team will help you access the right care, right here in your community.

Walks in the park. Laughing with friends. These are the things that matter in life. We are here so you don't miss a beat. We're here so you can live your healthiest life.

See all we have to offer at CentralCarolinaHosp.com

CENTRAL CAROLINA
HOSPITAL

A Duke LifePoint Hospital



LEE COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Parks & Recreation

MARCH HAPPENINGS

Programs

San-Lee Park Intersession Camp

Registration closes the Friday before camp starts; \$120/week

- Ages 5-12
- Weeks of March 10, March 17 & April 14, April 21



Youth Art Classes

Registration Closes March 14, 2025; \$60

- Ages 5-15; New Projects/session
- Bob Hales Center @ 5:30PM
- Classes on M, T, W, or Th



Cupcakes & Canvas

Registration Opens: March 3, 2025; \$25

- Bob Hales
- Spring Date: April 12 @ 10am
- Summer Date: June 28 @ 1pm

Special Olympics Lee County

Track & Field

Registration Opens: March 3

- Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities
- Ages 8+
- Free



Athletics

Spring T-Ball

Registration Closes: March 7, 2025; \$30

- Boys & Girls ages 3-6 as of May 1, 2025
- OT Sloan T-Ball Complex

8U Coach Pitch Baseball & Softball

Registration Closes March 7, 2025; \$50

- Boys & Girls ages 7-8 as of May 1, 2025
- Dalrymple Park

10U, 12U, & 14U Baseball

Registration Closes March 7, 2025; \$50

- Boys ages 9-14 as of May 1, 2025
- Tramway Road Park

11U & 14U Softball

Registration Closes March 7, 2025; \$50

- Girls ages 9-14 as of January 1, 2025
- 11U @ Tramway Road Park
- 14U @ Buchanan Park

Adult Softball (16+)

Registration Closes March 7, 2025; \$625/team

- @ Lett Family Park



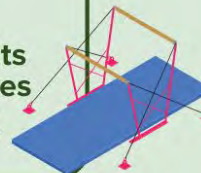
Gymnastics

Session 2: March 3 - May 3

Various Ages: Walking - Adults
Various Skill levels; All Abilities

Late Registrations Accepted

- Cost: Varies \$45 - \$180



Fees shown are for Lee County Residents.
A non-Lee County Resident Fee of +\$15 may apply



FirstHealth

**Colorectal Cancer
Awareness Month**

FirstHealth.org/Colorectal

FORMER TEACHER PLEADS GUILTY IN STUDENT SEX CASE; SENTENCED 18 YEARS

A former SanLee Middle School teacher who was accused in 2022 of sexually abusing at least two students pleaded guilty on Monday and was sentenced to 18 years in prison, according to the Lee County Sheriff's Office.

Andrew Braxton Allen, 34, had been held on \$2 million bond since his initial arrest in November 2022. He was hit with a second round of charges in March 2023.

Allen's guilty plea was to two counts each of statutory sex offense with a child by an adult, sexual act with a student, and indecent liberties with a child.

Law enforcement documents in the case file indicate that Allen purchased gifts and engaged in electronic communications with his victims, and engaged in sexual activity with them at the school. Lee County Schools learned of the allegations on the same day as the Sheriff's Office, and Allen was immediately suspended with pay pending an investigation. When that work was completed two days later, he was then suspended without pay. He resigned his position as a teacher shortly thereafter.

The school district later hired an outside attorney to conduct its own investigation and "review the school system's policies, training, and safety plans to seek improvements that would help prevent something like that from ever happening again."

The investigation found no evidence that any teacher or staff at San Lee had knowledge that Allen, who had been hired as a sixth-grade teacher of math and social studies in 2012, was allegedly abusing students. It also found no complaints or reports from students or parents regarding any abuse before the report received in November 2022 that led to his arrest.

— Gordon Anderson



Photos of the Lee County Athletic Park released in February by Sanford Contractors show the installation of two large turf soccer fields, several facilities and the outlines of more baseball, softball and soccer fields. Photo courtesy of Sanford Contractors Inc.

Turf fields added as sports complex eyes opening this year

By **Billy Liggett**
billy@rantnc.com

We're mere months away from the opening of the highly anticipated Lee County Athletic Park, and the latest photos released by Sanford Contractors Inc. in February confirm the fields and facilities have come a long way since last summer.

In a Feb. 19 post on Facebook, Sanford Contractors shared 10 photos that revealed the completed installation of two large turf soccer fields, the near completion of four baseball/softball fields, and ground leveled areas for additional grass soccer fields. The photos also show a completed parking lot and roundabout, several field houses, and the beginnings of a community playground and nearby land where a new residential/commercial development is planned.

The plan for the past year has been to open the \$27 million sports complex in July of this year. According to Joseph Keel, director for Lee County Parks and Recreation, that timeframe is still very much in play.

"Everything is still on target for opening up later this year," Keel told *The Rant* on Feb. 25. "Lee County Athletic Park is really coming together, and it's amazing to see the progress."

The complex is the result of a \$25 million county bond initiative approved by voters in 2020 with almost 59 percent of the vote. There was a pause in planning during the pandemic, when the economy ballooned cost estimates of the original plans and forced the county to retool those plans. Sanford Contractors was awarded the bid for \$26.8 million in September 2023, and ground broke three months later.

Lee County Athletic Park will feature, in all, four total baseball fields, six multi-purpose fields (for sports such as soccer and flag football), a walking trail, field houses, restroom facilities and the aforementioned \$1 million playground.

Plans have been floated and presented to the county's planning commission to locate a gas station and a new hotel near the entrance, further transforming the character of the area.

The site totals 112 acres, 90 of which are being developed in this phase of the project — meaning there's plenty of room to expand later. That would, of course, take another round of public funding most likely a number of years from now, but some of the options include more fields, more open green space and possibly even an amphitheater/stage.

Whether you're taking the next step in your education, exploring a new career, or upgrading your skills, we're here for you every step of the way.



HERE FOR YOU.

With dedicated faculty, state-of-the-art facilities, and flexible learning options, your success is our priority. From day one, you'll experience the support, resources, and opportunities that will help you thrive — because at CCCC, you're more than just a student — you're part of our community.



www.cccc.edu   

WE SUPPORT LOCAL PROTEST AGAINST NEW IMMIGRATION POLICY

When more than 100 people gathered for a peaceful protest against President Trump's immigration policies — the majority of those people Latino and some of them carrying Mexican flags — our coverage of it fueled a storm of comments (more than 1,000) both supporting and condemning the Constitutionally-protected gathering.

Sadly, many of the comments against it pointed out the inclusion of the red, white and green flags. Some insisted we “speak more English” in this country. Some questioned why a group that appeared so proud of their heritage wouldn't want to “go back home,” as it was eloquently stated numerous times.

We, like you, have strong opinions on President Trump's first month in office and his laser focus on the country's immigration policy. And while we believe this country does need to protect its borders from those who wish ill will on us, we fall into the category of “strongly against” the Republican approach to this issue. We're against halting the process of allowing migrants and asylum seekers, we're against the idea that schools and churches are no longer considered “safe spaces” against immigration raids, and we're against the inherently racist overtones of the entire policy.

A recent NPR poll that said nearly half of Americans (and three-fourths of Republicans) fear the country is “losing its identity” due to immigration. The Trump administration's policies feed off this fear.

There wouldn't be such vitriolic policies if 20 percent of our immigrants were blue-eyed Brits. There wouldn't be such outrage if those were Irish flags flying on South Horner instead of Mexican flags.

Supporting these protests isn't supporting a completely open border policy. It's supporting people who are making a life and a living and contributing greatly to our community. It's supporting their anger at a government that says a third-grade classroom or a Sunday church service are no longer off limits for an ICE agent to come in and ask questions. It's supporting a group of people who have been called rapists, thugs and “bad people” by a sitting president, and thinking that those words are un-American.

As you'll see in the following pages. We welcome the debate. And we applaud those unafraid to fight back.

OPINION

RAISES FOR SCHOOL STAFF

Concerning the effort by Lee County Schools classified employees to seek a raise through the county budget:

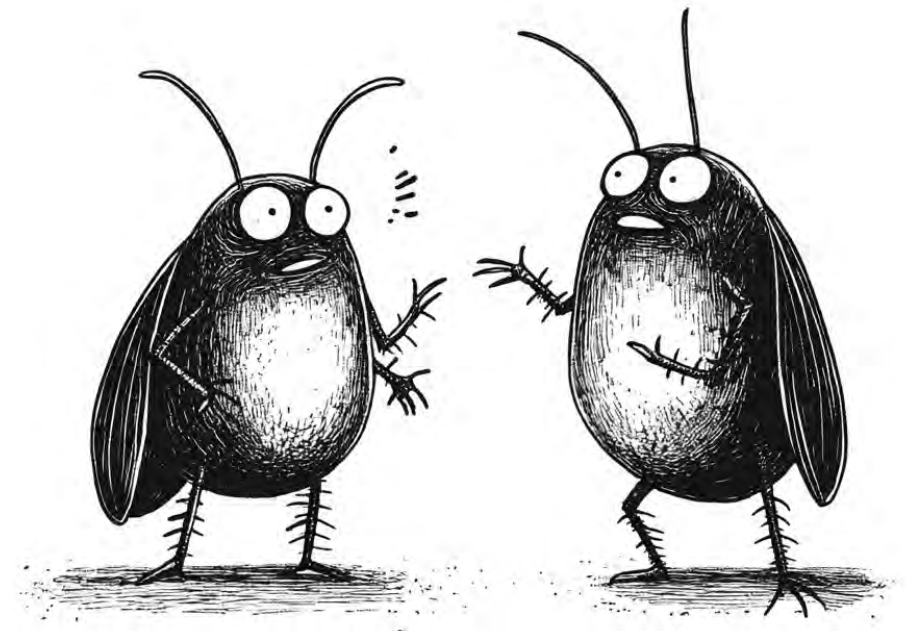
[I am a classified employee at LCS, and] the only raise I have received has been through the state, not the county. I can't believe anyone would think that is fair. Don't try to cover up the fact that this county has not been taking care of their classified staff. If the county has given me a raise, please tell me when and how much it was. I have been employed for 14 years and the only significant raise I have seen is when the state decided to raise us to \$15 an hour — and that was in recent years. Before that, I made less than \$12 an hour to work with special needs kids. Do you think that is an appropriate wage for what I do?

Nannette McCoy

GALVIN'S RIDGE COMMERCIAL PLANS

A commercial development proposal adjacent to the Galvin's Ridge subdivision would include a 46,000-plus square foot grocery store, another 12,600 square foot retailer, a sit down restaurant and two fast food restaurants, a convenience store, office space, and four more out parcels. The city-county Technical Review Committee received a presentation on the project — and four new housing developments totaling nearly 1,400 new homes — in February:

All of these new developments are being built, taxes are going up (mine has doubled in the last two to three years), houses are starting in the mid- to high-200,000's, so young couples just starting out can't afford that or anything that people are even selling today. No new schools, restaurants or places for kids and family to hang out. I myself go to Southern Pines to eat or shop most of the time unless it's grocery shopping. More selection than Sanford. Everywhere



“Why not ... I hear the shakes are great.”

I go, I see new developments, and I don't see it stopping any time soon. I live in the country and off Sheriff Watson, houses are being built all the time, not to mention the two new housing developments that are also on that road. I just wish our county would think of other things than homes. Just because people live here doesn't mean they are spending their money here.

Tonya Newell

All this growth has always been coming. When I moved here 10 years ago, part of the appeal of Sanford was knowing it would be the next major growth area. Multiple people told me this was the place to get in early. I'm glad I did, as I love it here, and I'm happy to see the growth.

Larry Laster

Growth is inevitable and it is a great thing, but it is a fine line in a “rural” town like ours. If you are interested in preserving farm or natural lands, contact your local commissioners to vote “yes” for the Lee County Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Ordinance.

A.J. Thomas

It's beyond me who is going to buy all these houses and rent all those expensive apartments. We already have too many now. I guess they didn't get the memo that the car company and the battery factory is on hold and will never get built. Turning Sanford into a shit hole.

Harold Chapman

Chess keeps my mind busy, and that's a good thing

By Billy Liggett

On Page 27 of this month's edition, you'll find a photo of a group of happy kids wearing gold medals and holding a big trophy. Standing next to them is a graying middle-aged man holding a smaller trophy, smiling because he's just happy to have been part of the moment.



That man is me, and those kids make up the chess team at B.T. Bullock Elementary School, where my youngest is a fifth grader and my wife is the librarian. The chess team is hers — I had helped coach them during the fall, and the flu knocked her out (and our son) from the big day. Without their leader and one of their better players, Bullock won their second Lee County Schools Elementary Chess Championship title in the two years that it's been an event.

My wife and I don't take a lot of credit for the win, aside from giving the kids a place to learn the game and teaching a few opening and closing moves here and there. For the most part, they've all learned the game on

their own — and watching them and the kids from all of our county's schools compete was both impressive and exciting (these tournaments can get tense).

Win or lose, I'm just happy to see a tournament like this happening. I discovered one of humanity's oldest games sometime in college, but never really studied it or got good at it. I took another stab at it during COVID thanks to the chess.com app and got hooked.

It's a game that makes you think. It's both addicting and frustrating. There are few better competitive feelings than when you land the perfect fork with your knight. There are fewer competitive lows than when your opponent traps your queen.

For all the time I've put into the game in the last three or four years, I have grown from a poor amateur player to a not-as-poor amateur player. I'm no master. I'm not even considered "good," according to my rating. I've beaten those considered good, then turned around and got my rook handed to me by a beginner.


In other words, I'm learning. Even as I near 50, I'm learning. And that's what's important.

When I took up chess, I did it because I thought it was a better use of my brain than Candy Crush or fill-in-the-blank tile game. The games you play when you can't fall asleep or you're waiting for the plane to take off. If someone handed us a sheet on our death beds that showed the amount of minutes we've spent trying to get high scores in these games, we'd all ask for that time back.

But I'm at the age now where my parents and my friends' parents are all dealing with memory issues (or worse) that come with turning 75 and older. It's a cruel part of life — earning all this knowledge and all of these experiences, just to have them slip away toward the end.

It's another reason I want to stick with chess. There are studies that show it's a game that can keep your mind sharp and stave off memory loss or dementia. Diet, exercise, social interactions and being active all go into that as well. Volunteering and coaching a bunch of smart kids also doesn't hurt.

Fellow Gen-X'ers, find your own sharpening tools. And if you want to come at a very average chess player, come find me online. I'm always game.




COMFORT FIRST
HVAC • PLUMBING • ELECTRICAL
HEATING & COOLING

EARLY BIRD

A/C TUNE-UP

Book by	Only	Save
Mar 20	\$49	\$50
Apr 20	\$59	\$40
May 20	\$69	\$30



Get ahead of the heat with our Early Bird A/C Tune-Up! Regular maintenance improves efficiency, lowers energy bills, and helps prevent breakdowns. Call to book now - before this deal flies away!

855-549-0958 | YOURCOMFORTFIRST.COM

*Call or visit website for details.

COVER STORY

IMMIGRATION AGENDA HITS HOME

LOCAL PROTESTS MARK JUST THE BEGINNING OF THE NEXT FOUR YEARS FOR SANFORD'S LARGE POPULATION OF LEGAL AND UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

BY GORDON ANDERSON AND BILLY LIGGETT

They called it “A Day Without Immigrants.” Across the country, businesses closed and people gathered for peaceful protests on Feb. 3 in response to immigration policies set forth by President Donald Trump to advance mass detention and deportation of undocumented citizens and sweeping changes to visa applications, birthright citizenship, border security and the country’s asylum and refugee programs.

There were no planned protests in Sanford that day, which compelled Allan Morales — just a junior at Lee County High School — to step up. He took to Instagram that day and called on friends and his community to gather that evening. To his surprise, up to 250 people showed up, holding signs and flags and cheering loudly to passing motorists along Horner Boulevard and Main Street.

“I wasn’t really sure if anyone would show up,” Morales said, “but I just wanted to do it to get the message out, that we came here for a better life, and to deport us is really just the same trouble we tried to escape.”



A few hundred people gathered along South Horner Boulevard and Main Street near Jonesboro Heights for two protests against President Donald Trump’s sweeping immigration policies to advance mass deportations and detention of undocumented citizens. The first protest was featured in a Facebook video posted by Bryan Viera on Feb. 5.

Two weeks earlier, just hours after his second inauguration after an election campaign that leaned heavily on tougher immigration policies, Trump declared a national emergency and issued a number of executive orders on immigration. His actions expanded the use of immigration detention, fast-tracked deportations using tools that bypass immigration judges, reduced access to legal representation and expanded the reach of immigration enforcement.

In his first month in office, the Trump administration deported 37,660 people, according to the Department of Homeland Security and reported by Reuters (a number significantly below the average of 57,000 monthly deportations during Biden's four years).

But that number is expected to rise in the coming months as Trump's plans find their footing.

That's why there is concern in communities like Sanford, where Latinos

make up roughly 22 percent of the population, according to 2023 Census figures. In North Carolina, 7.3 percent of the population are immigrants (up from 5.3 percent 25 years ago). About 3 percent of the country's undocumented immigrants — 400,000 people — live in this state, according to the North Carolina Justice Center.

Yanira Scott, executive director of El Refugio, a Sanford-based nonprofit that works to build bridges between new immigrants and established communities, called the gathering organized by Morales — and a second, larger one held a week later — a reminder that immigration is a community issue, not just a national one.

“It showed that the young people of Lee County are paying attention, that they care, and that they are asking us all to do the same,” she said. “And what's even more powerful is that these young people are so American at their core — they believe deeply in Ameri-

READER RESPONSE

A story *The Rant* published on the Feb. 3 protest of the country's new immigration policies drew more than 1,000 comments from readers. While we can't publish all of the comments, we are including remarks from both sides of the debate. Inclusion of any comment below does not indicate support from *The Rant* (see our opinion page this month to see our thoughts on the issue).

Thank you to the youth for speaking up and speaking out against policies they do not believe in — for practicing their First Amendment right to protest. For speaking out against things our parents and grandparents were not able to speak out against. Thank you for continuing to speak out against a battle people have fought for decades. — **Rocio Soto**

Mexicans Ain't Going Anywhere — that's the only MAGA abbreviation I will recognize. The “We the People” crowd are the first ones to use “freedom of speech” as an excuse for their discrimination, bigotry and hatred, yet forget they are on stolen land. They are OK with that Constitution being violated for birthrights, but they sure can't stand when others use their freedom of speech to protest their Constitutional rights being threatened. — **Jessi Hill**

Trump just wants you to come into the country legally. The moment an immigrant comes across the border without permission, they become a criminal. If you commit a crime, accept your fate when you get caught and do your time. We want people to come to America; we just want you to come the legal way. — **Michael Davis**

TEMPLE  THEATRE

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS

**100 Years Gala
Fundraiser**

MARCH 1, 6:30PM

**Roaring 20's - 20's
Revue Concert**

MARCH 6 - 9

**J.P. Coletta's
Rock 'n' Roll Piano Man**

MARCH 21-23



Sponsored by

**TIGER BARRON
FOUNDATION INC.**



North
Carolina
Arts
Council

READER RESPONSE

In America, we are a nation of laws. If you came to this country legally, you have nothing to fear. A lot of what you people are protesting, I don't understand. President Trump is doing the job that he was elected to do. Protesters are lifting up flags from different countries in protest of being deported back to those countries. Think about that. How wild is that? If you love that country so much, why don't you go back over there? — **Buck Jones**

People who are saying “just do it the right way” have never dealt with immigration. My son is adopted from Korea and was a citizen from when his plane landed in California. We had to have his social security card changed. It took over two years to get it done and \$2,000. You think the DMV is bad on appointments? Please do some research. — **Amy Hipszer**

Why is illegal immigration or deportation the only two paths? If you came illegally 20 years ago and built a life from nothing, have no criminal record, and work for your own pay instead of government funding, then you should be able to apply for citizenship based on historical acts. Why can't we focus on improving immigration instead of being for or against it? Let the ends justify the means.

— **Jennifer Rouse**

The problem is they can't get in “the legal way.” Do you folks not understand the requirements to immigrate here? Unless you are college educated or some kind of sports star or pop singer, you have next to 0 chance of immigrating here unless by marriage. These folks want the same things our ancestors wanted when they came here — a better life for their families. — **Camille Edwards Austin**

can ideals, including the right to freedom of expression and the courage to stand up against injustice. They stood together because they believe in what this country is supposed to represent, and they reminded us all that speaking out against what we feel is wrong is not only a right — it's an American responsibility.”

Scott said she hopes the broader community will pay closer attention to what the young people who put together the Feb. 3 demonstration are saying, “Young people in Lee County asked us to look beyond national news, to see the real people behind the policies, and to remember that community means standing together — not just in good times, but in difficult ones too,” she said.

EL REFUGIO EVEN MORE OF A LIFELINE

For many of Sanford and Lee County's Latino residents — as well as others in neighboring counties — El Refugio has been a lifeline. The organization, which began as a ministry out of Jonesboro Methodist United Church in 2013 and became a non-profit about two years ago, faces the public as a resource center for immigrants, connecting new arrivals with resources, providing English classes, offering child enrichment programs, and more.

And between the growing size of Lee County's immigrant population and the lack of such services in at least two neighboring counties — in addition to the more than a dozen executive actions the Trump administration set into action last month to advance mass deportations — El Refugio's presence has become even more valuable locally.

“On an annual basis, we're serving between 300 and 400 people, and that's a number that's grown,” said Yanira Scott “There aren't any services like this in Harnett or Moore counties.”

To be clear, most of El Refugio's clients are from Spanish-speaking countries — the area's demographic makeup

and immigration pattern make that obvious. But El Refugio is about far more than integrating just one type of immigrant.

“There's no criteria for accessing our services,” Scott said. “You could be an American, or somebody fresh from any country. We don't ask those questions. We've had Russians, we've had Filipinos, there was a growing population for a while of Brazilians. We had a young lady from Turkey who took our English classes, and we were able to gain her husband as an instructor. It doesn't matter who they are — they need to be able to navigate living in Lee County, and that's why we're here.”

Scott said life for an immigrant can often be fraught with stress, and recent news about Trump's approach to the immigration issue has only heightened those concerns. That news has led to protests across the nation, and Sanford has been no different.

El Refugio had no involvement in those demonstrations, but Scott said at the time that they highlighted immigration not just as a national issue, but also a local one.

“We need to show a lot more empathy to our community members,” she said, explaining that an immigrant's legal status is often far less simple than just “legal” or “illegal.”

Every immigrant's story — and situation — is unique. Scott said factors like age, marital status, income, the country of origin, who exactly is making the petition, and countless other factors all influence each case, meaning each set of circumstances leads to different legal challenges.

And even though Lee County has a large immigrant population, the legal market has yet to meet the need for immigration attorneys who provide the kind of services many need. That means they're often brought in from out of town or accessed via transport often provided by El Refugio.

“There are people here on different types of visas,” Scott said. “And then



there's permanent residency, and then there's citizenship. There are a lot of people who are stuck at one level and can't move up. There's no set way — you can't hand someone a road map and say 'this is how you're gonna do it.'"

El Refugio has worked hard to be a part of the community it serves. They've received support from local businesses, they've partnered with community and government organizations — the North Carolina Cooperative Extension, for example, has been helpful in advising recent arrivals on where they might find ingredients that aren't readily available locally — and they've made sure they're just plain visible by providing cross cultural events whenever possible.

"[Central Carolina Community College] is our biggest partner," she said. "They help bring the English courses to El Refugio, and along with the English courses, we also have a citizenship preparation course. We're also working to create a summer literacy course that will go for four weeks in July for readers who are struggling in Lee County Schools.

"We've got a lot of organizations in town that have been very open and very helpful," she said.

Those cultural events have over the years steadily become a larger part of El Refugio's presence locally, at least in terms of visibility. On March 6, the organization will host its ninth annual International Culture Night from 6 to 9 p.m. at CCC's Dennis Wicker Civic Center. The event will include food, music and exhibitions — many offered by the program's English as a Second Language students.

Other events throughout the year include "Latino Fest," which is part of Downtown Sanford Inc.'s StreetFest & Fireworks each fall, and various other smaller events at as many times and places as El Refugio is capable of.

"We try to go into as many areas as we can to get exposure," Scott said.



WEDDINGS IN SANFORD

Sanford and Lee County now a hotspot for planning the perfect ceremony

From finding the right dress to booking the picture-perfect venue, your wedding should be everything you imagine and more. Here are nine ways you can plan an "I do" that's beyond compare right here in Sanford and Lee County.

Get Married Overlooking a Golf Course | With spectacular views overlooking Lake Trace and pristine golf greens, Carolina Trace Country Club offers the perfect backdrop for the wedding of your dreams. This stately southern venue offers timeless elegance with beautifully appointed facilities and an attentive, professional staff known for going above and beyond for bridal couples and their guests.

Keep Your Nuptials Small and Intimate | At nearly a century old, the beautifully preserved Hawkins House offers modern amenities for couples and their guests without compromising its classic, southern charm. From the meticulously maintained grounds to the gorgeous interiors, Hawkins House prides itself on being a place where imaginations run wild to create smaller, intimate weddings that truly shine.

Celebrate a Shared Love of History | Looking for a spot to host an idyllic expression of love? Then Sugarneck, with its rich history nearly 150 years in the making, is for you! At this rustic venue, you'll discover The Post Office building, a historic landmark that served in that capacity from 1886-1905. Today it's the quaint location for small ceremonies, rehearsal dinners or event brunches.

Tie The Knot Down on The Farm | The Farm on Cotton is the perfect choice for couples looking for a romantic, upscale venue with a touch of southern charm. Specializing in outdoor ceremonies, this picturesque 14-acre farm features multiple ceremony locations, rolling pastures and an apple orchard amidst stunning countryside views.

Experience How the West Was Wed | Take a step back in time to the days of the Wild West at Circle M City. This unique western-themed town inspired by the owner's love of cowboys and the Wild West. Round up your wedding party and get hitched at this entertainment destination featuring a church, mercantile, bank, saloon and horses.

SEE EVEN MORE WEDDING OPTIONS AND VENUES ONLINE AT VISITSANFORDNC.COM



“Get rid of ignorance, not immigrants” was among the many signs created for recent protests in Sanford against the country’s new immigration policies. Latinos make up roughly 22 percent of Lee County’s population, and North Carolina is home to about 400,000 undocumented immigrants. *Video still from Facebook, Bryan Rivera*

Like any other nonprofit, El Refugio’s single biggest challenge is funding — “we don’t have the resources to tackle every immigration issue that comes along,” Scott said — and that makes buy in from the community, whether that’s through donations or just volunteering or even spreading the word, that much more critical. El Refugio is located at Jonesboro United Methodist Church.

For more information, visit www.elrefugioleeco.org or call (919) 352-9709.

Scott said it’s important to remember that every immigrant has a unique story and that national headlines about immigration often take that human face off of the issue.

“I took a trip to Washington, D.C. my senior year of high school, and my parents were really hesitant,” she said. “My mom packed my birth certificate, my ID, and my passport. I didn’t need any of it, but there was a fear. In my

head, I know I’m an American, but here in the last few weeks I get worried that I may be approached, and I may need to have those on my to show I have legal status. So there are concerns.”

CHURCHES STEP UP TO ASSIST THOSE LIVING IN FEAR

More than a dozen members of St. Luke United Methodist Church gathered in a small classroom on the night of Feb. 12 to take part in a larger discussion (via Zoom) with Methodists across the state to talk about how the country’s new immigration policies would not only affect their congregations, but the resources they can provide to those living in fear of deportation.

The 90-minute discussion touched a lot on the legal rights of immigrants and the responsibility of Christian churches when it comes to this issue that has divided Americans and religious congregations.

WINSTEAD & FEINDEL

Eddie S. Winstead III and Susan M. Feindel

Attorneys at Law

***Residential and Commercial Real Estate,
Leases, Offers to Purchase and Sell, Easements,
Land Development and Rezoning***

1094 Wilkins Drive Sanford, NC

919-292-0526

Several Biblical passages were shared to confirm this responsibility, notably Matthew 25:35-40: *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.*

“In Matthew, Jesus spells it out pretty clearly what we should be about as Christians,” said Eddie Hill, lead pastor at St. Luke United Methodist. “Also, throughout the Bible, there always seems to have a special place in God’s heart for women in general, widows, children and the sojourner. As a church, I think we should be welcoming to all people, but especially the marginalized and the more vulnerable. I like to think of the church as a safe harbor, a place to refuel and be refitted for new adventures.”

As a safe harbor, churches have long worked with immigrant populations,

not only in ministry but also through charitable work and even counseling. That “safe harbor” status, however, is in jeopardy under the new immigration policies, one of which states authorities can now enter schools, health care facilities and, yes, even places of worship to seek out suspected undocumented people and conduct arrests.

“Criminals will no longer be able to hide in America’s schools and churches to avoid arrest,” a Department of Homeland Security spokesperson said in a statement on Jan. 21. “The Trump administration will not tie the hands of our brave law enforcement, and instead trusts them to use common sense.”

The strong wording has been both applauded by Trump supporters — many of whom ranked immigration and border security as a top concern heading into the November election — and criticized by those who believe the agenda is meant to “sow fear in our communities and cause chaos and dysfunction

READER RESPONSE

My heart is breaking for the kids who go to school with my kids. People who work their butts off in our community. People who serve us food and fix our homes, work on our cars and own the businesses we like to go to. People who were my dialysis patients. People who shop at the same stores as us, go to the same churches, play on the same sports teams as our kids. The way this is being done is wrong on so many levels. My heart is in pieces. — **Kelly Jean**

There is accountability if you’ve committed a crime. The majority of countries in the world would deport you if you tried to reside within their borders illegally. I don’t understand anyone who doesn’t get that. — **Brandi Marsey**

I understand this is a touchy subject, but the truth is the truth. Something had to be done or it would continue to spiral out of control. I couldn’t just stroll into another country and manipulate their immigration policy the way it was done here for decades. Ripping the Band-Aid off hurts initially as always. I absolutely love Hispanic culture and the people, but what is right is right. Find your way back the proper way and remember the American flag was your goal in the first place. — **Cory Coe**

We should actively participate in demonstrations alongside our LatinX community. The pursuit of immigration rights and human rights is inextricably linked. I regret not having participated in protests against the Trump administration’s immigration policies. — **Bob Finch**



131 Charlotte Ave., Ste 101
Sanford, NC 27330

(919) 718-9027
www.smithgrouprealtyllc.com



Elizabeth Smith
(919) 721-3303

esmith@smithgrouprealtyllc.com



Brenda Brown
(919) 777-3297

bbrown@smithgrouprealtyllc.com



Sherri Garner-Diaz
(478) 258-6322

sdiaz@smithgrouprealtyllc.com



Angie Hegwer
(919) 356-6678

ahegwer@smithgrouprealtyllc.com



Randy Howell
(919) 410-4785

rhowell@smithgrouprealtyllc.com



Bruce Kelly
(919) 770-4737

bkelly@smithgrouprealtyllc.com



Jean Moore
(919) 880-4168

jmoore@smithgrouprealtyllc.com



Leslie Oldham
(919) 708-3138

loldham@smithgrouprealtyllc.com



Jason Pate
(919) 592-1570

jpate@smithgrouprealtyllc.com



Kristen Lind Rogers
(704) 467-0866

krogers@smithgrouprealtyllc.com



Linda Vance
(919) 499-8635

lvance@smithgrouprealtyllc.com



Jennifer Williams
(919) 353-1396

jwilliams@smithgrouprealtyllc.com



Lora Wright
(919) 770-2386

lwright@smithgrouprealtyllc.com



SHIIP

SENIORS' HEALTH INSURANCE INFORMATION PROGRAM

N.C. Department of Insurance • Mike Causey, Commissioner
855-408-1212 (toll free) • www.ncdoi.gov

MARCH IS NATIONAL COLORECTAL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Colorectal cancer is the fourth-most common cancer in the U.S. and the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths.

It affects all racial and ethnic groups and is most often found in people ages 50 and older.

Screening and early detection are vital.

Medicare covers certain colorectal cancer screening services—ask a SHIIP counselor for more information.

Colorectal cancer is preventable, treatable and beatable!

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: JOURDAN HUSKEY @ 919.776.0501 EXT 2206

in our immigration system,” writes the organization Vera, whose mission is to end over-criminalization and mass incarceration of people of color.

The idea that only undocumented citizens or immigrants who have committed violence crimes will be affected is a misconception, said Doug Thie, an immigration lawyer with Charlotte-based Clawson & Staubes who spoke to the Methodist gathering on Feb. 12. Even the smallest offense — shoplifting a loaf of bread for a hungry family or possession of a small amount of marijuana that would be considered legal in several states — are cause for deportation. Thie said double jeopardy laws that Americans enjoy also don't necessarily apply in immigration cases.

“I know there's fear, and I know there's anxiety out there,” Thie said. “What I'm advising to my clients — and what I'm telling congregations — is know your rights. You have a right to a hearing before an immigration judge. You have the right to speak with an attorney. And you have the right to remain silent. If you're an immigrant, and you're detained by ICE, it's really important that you don't sign anything without an attorney present.”

Thie's advice for churches — understand that if ICE were to enter a facility, the pastor has the right to ask them to leave. There's gray area as to whether a church is considered a public or private area, so if ICE remains, he recommends members of the church remain silent.

“You're people of Christian faith, so we should welcome the stranger or the foreigner among us,” he said. “Much of immigration law, unfortunately, is focused on who we keep out instead of who we let in, which I think should be the starting point for us from a faith-based perspective.”

The Rant reached out to two Spanish-speaking churches in Sanford for comment on this story, one of which declined while the other did not respond. North Carolina's Methodist congregations aren't alone in helping

those affected by the new immigration policies. The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina released a statement recently saying its staff is “continually cultivating resources to help our pastors and our churches respond to the refugee and immigration policy changes. We have compiled information from a number of trusted resources to offer guidance.” The group also released a strong statement in support of the Latino community it serves.

On Jan. 23, the Catholic Diocese of Raleigh announced it had reached

capacity in its caseload assisting its congregation with immigration legal services. The group anticipates it will begin accepting new cases by April.

Hill said one thing churches can do — even those that do not serve a large Latino population — is simply reach out and ask how they can help. Anyone, he said, can pray on the issue and for those affected by changes over the last month.

“I understand that our country was founded and built on people coming from all over to pursue a dream. Some of these first immigrants were not

exactly stellar individuals. Georgia had a whole bunch of convicts as its first residents,” Hill said. “Consequently, I think it is in our DNA to welcome others. I also think that the process of becoming a citizen does not favor those who do not have a lot of available resources. I would like to see an immediate reform — if someone has been in the country a certain amount of time — say seven years since seven is a Biblical number representing completion — and they have not had any legal issues, have been employed and have paid taxes, I think they should be streamlined in.”

He also said that while churches should avoid being “political,” they also have a responsibility to be relevant and knowledgeable of what is going on around them.

“One of my often-used expressions is to talk about Saint Luke being a ‘difference making’ church,” he said. “I want our church to make a positive difference whenever and wherever we can. I think it is pretty evident that the current policies and enforcement of these policies are anything but Christlike and certainly not Christian oriented.”

**THE 2025
GOLD WING**

HONDA

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS
OF FLIGHT

GOLD WING

Honda of Sanford

3128 S. Horner Blvd., Sanford NC
Call or Text 919-775-3638
HSOFSANFORD.COM

GALVIN'S RIDGE FALLING SHORT ON PROMISED AMENITIES, OWNERS SAY

Antonia Valentine bought her house in Galvin's Ridge in July 2023.

The mega development in Deep River — controversial at the time of its announcement for a host of reasons, most notably its 1000-home size — was attractive to Valentine largely because of its location.

"I'd heard a lot of the talk about the development when it was still just a proposal, but it was really well-suited for my needs," she said.

But another aspect that Valentine said was "a big ticket item for me as a single mom" was the advertised inclusion of several amenities — a pool, pickleball courts, playgrounds, and more.

Those amenities, however, have yet to materialize. And while Galvin's Ridge is far from complete (it's currently in Phase 2 out of four), the absence of those amenities is starting to frustrate Valentine and her neighbors. "It's frustrating to be two years down the road, and it's still not a thing," she said. "Lots of people moved here for those reasons."

Valentine said representatives from D.R. Horton, which bills itself as "America's Largest Homebuilder" and is the developer of Galvin's Ridge have "all been super friendly."

"I don't think anybody intended for this to be the case," she said. "But I see a lot of swingsets in yards and I wonder if those people had really hoped to buy those. There's lots of frustration for sure."

The Sanford-Lee County Planning Department's Technical Review Committee reviewed plans for a "major commercial development" in late February that would include a grocery store, new restaurants and more next to the Galvin's Ridge site along U.S. 1 and Colon Road. The project if developed would sit on just shy of 14 acres adjacent to the 1,000 home subdivision with the same name and include a 46,000-plus square foot grocery store, another 12,600 square foot grocery store, a sit down restaurant and two fast food restaurants, a convenience store, office space, and four more outparcels.

D.R. Horton couldn't be reached for comment.

— by Gordon Anderson

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Proposed 1,200-unit subdivision could be one of city's largest

By Richard Sullins
richard@rantnc.com

A planned new development in the northern part of Sanford and Lee County could become one of the area's largest, with more than 1,200 units, if it makes it through the approval process during the spring.

As *The Rant* reported in a story earlier this month, this proposed new neighborhood underwent the first stage of the approval process on Feb. 27 (after deadline of this publication), as the Sanford and Lee County's Technical Review Committee put it under the microscope. The committee — made

up of planning, development and construction specialists from across the county's public agencies — meets monthly to review major subdivision and commercial projects to ensure their compliance with the requirements of various local departments and development ordinances.

The proposed subdivision, submitted by one of North America's largest homebuilders known as Mattamy Homes of Raleigh, would be known as Vermillion, a 480-acre site that straddles both sides of Riddle Road in the Colon section of the county just outside the city's northern boundaries.

If the project is fully developed as described in the documents submitted to the committee, it would consist of 1,219 homes made up of 436 detached single-family homes on small-sized lots of 40-by-150 or 50-by-150 square feet, another 377 single-family detached homes on medium-sized (60-by-150 square feet) lots, and 406 town homes.

Mattamy expects that the project will be carried out in three phases, the first of these being the construction of 455 homes on the south side of Riddle Road. With more than 1,200 units to be constructed, Vermillion is the largest private development to be considered so far in 2025.

S-Line railroad funds now in doubt

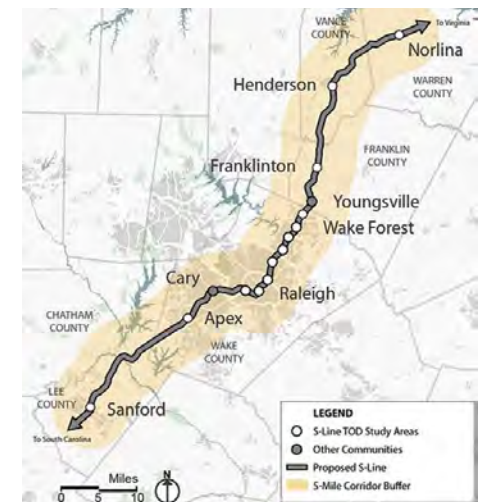
By Richard Sullins
richard@rantnc.com

Almost as soon as the 45th president of the United States became the 47th President on Jan. 20, Donald Trump turned the federal budgeting process upside down by refusing to spend money that the Congress had previously authorized, and that President Joe Biden had signed into law.

One of Trump's first actions was to freeze expenditures on all grant projects that included federal dollars as a primary funding source, with the explanation that every federal grant program was going to be reviewed by the president's new watchdog group, the Department of Government Efficiency, along with the program budgets of the cabinet-level departments and other agencies, like the CIA and NASA, that report directly to the president.

The goal of this effort to "stop payment" on checks for the present is to assess, rightly or wrongly, the aims of each program and whether the amount of funds authorized by the Congress are actually needed. As this process plays out in each of the 15 cabinet-level departments of government and the dozen or more independent agencies that have open-door access to the president, thousands of lawyers from across the country are gearing up for lawsuits that will allege that Trump's actions have violated the Constitution.

To put things simply, the Congress has the duty to authorize the federal government to spend a given amount for a particular purpose that a majority of the 535 members have agreed to as necessary. It is the job of the president to spend those dollars on the programs that have been approved. The president proposes, and the Congress disposes.



Given that brief outline of how federal grant dollars are spent, especially as they may apply in this case, a decision by either branch of the federal government to arbitrarily impound program dollars brings the work of that project to a screeching halt, and

that is what federal program officers fear could be the end result here.

In March of 2024, then-Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg announced the first of \$3.3 billion in awards to 132 projects across 41 states through the Reconnecting Communities initiative, a plan funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

The proposed S-Line project would have provided passenger rail services from the Virginia state line to Hamlet, just a handful of miles from the South Carolina border. North Carolina's segment of the project from Raleigh to Richmond was chosen for funding, while the Raleigh to Hamlet line — the portion including Sanford and Lee County — was not on the medal podium when the winning projects were announced.

City leaders have remained hopeful during the past year that Sanford might again be competitive in a potential second round of funding, but nothing has yet been announced

to even indicate that consideration is being given to a repeat of a program that has no track record of success that could be pointed to as DOGE sweeps across the federal bureaucracy with Elon Musk's fine-toothed comb.

All this seems to leave City Hall, Sanford Mayor Rebecca Wyhof Salmon and its city council, Lee County government, and state and federal officials that go all the way to the Oval Office, unsure of how long this process will take or what the endgame might be. But what *is* clear to those who keep an eye on local politics is that the fallout from the railroad project won't stop once this 'review' of federal spending concludes.

Trump visited western North Carolina on Jan. 24, his first trip outside the White House since the inauguration on Jan. 20, to get a close-up look at some of the damages caused by Hurricane Helene when it struck mountain counties in the early morning hours of Sept. 27.

He made promises at several lo-

cations along the storm's track that the federal government would do everything possible to speed up relief funding to those communities.

What's important about Trump's visit is that he was met at the Asheville Airport by North Carolina Gov. Josh Stein, and during their helicopter rides between stops, Stein talked to the president about North Carolina's most important needs, and the completion of a new passenger railroad service capability between Raleigh and Columbia, South Carolina, was at the very top of that short list.

Stein said later that he was further encouraged by the president's engagement on the issue, and by Trump's sending his U.S. Secretary of Transportation back to North Carolina in February to talk about urgent capital needs. But now Stein, along with state officials, US Senators Tillis and Budd, and a supporting cast of thousands, can only wait for Musk's slash-and-burn review of federal spending to be finished.

SANFORD FARMERS MARKET TO OPEN APRIL 5

The Sanford Farmers Market will open two weeks early for the 2025 season, bringing with it a host of new vendors and activities for the whole family.

The market's first Saturday will be April 5, two weeks earlier than normal. The season runs through Nov. 15, with the market — in the parking lot at 115 Chatham St. in downtown Sanford — opening from 8:30 a.m. to noon each Saturday.

"Our farmers were reading to get started," said Meredith Favre, local foods coordinator for the Lee County Cooperative Extension. "Last year was interesting — the strawberries came in early, and we had a lot of people sitting on product.

Favre said the market will be bigger this year, full of new products from an average of 30 vendors a week. Vendors new to the market this year will include an oyster farmer from Carteret County and a goat dairy from Chatham County. "I have to do Tetris every week trying to fit all the vendors in. We're pretty much at capacity."

**Voted Best of Lee County
for 12 Consecutive Years**

Thank You Lee County!



Serving Lee County Since 1977

Servicio
En Español!

Free
Consultation.
No Recovery,
No Fee.



**WILSON
REIVES
& DORAN**

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

- Automobile Accidents
- Personal Injury
- Accidental Death Claims
- Workers' Compensation
- Civil Litigation
- Family Law
- Criminal Law



SARAH STRONG ALREADY A STAR AT UCONN ALONGSIDE BUECKERS

On the same week her former high school team, the Grace Christian Lady Crusaders, won their fourth consecutive state title, the nation's most coveted college freshman, Sarah Strong, earned her ninth Big East Freshman of the Week honor.

Strong, as a freshman, is already a key addition to the UConn Huskies, ranked fifth in the nation with a 26-3 overall record and a spotless 16-0 mark in the Big East. Playing alongside senior Paige Bueckers, considered a lock for the No. 1 pick in next season's WNBA draft, Strong is second on the team with 15.9 points (behind Bueckers), second in assists (behind Bueckers) and leads UConn with 8 rebounds a game, 41 total blocks and 67 steals.

Legendary UConn coach Geno Auriemma told *The Athletic's* women's basketball podcast recently that Strong is one of the most "coachable" athletes he's ever dealt with.

"Sarah loves being coached, Sarah looks right through you, like right into your soul when you're talking to her," Auriemma said. "She loves being coached, she asks a lot of questions, she wants to learn more than anything in the world."

UConn will wrap up their regular season against Marquette on March 2 before playing the Big East Tournament. The Huskies are considered a lock for the NCAA Tournament and among the favorites to reach the Final Four.

— by Billy Liggett



Photos: Joy Shaver Media

Former Southern Lee High School and UNC-Wilmington pitcher Luke Craig was taken in the seventh round of the 2024 MLB Draft and is pitching well for the Arizona Diamondbacks' Single-A affiliate in Visalia.

Southern Lee grad looks to climb ranks in Diamondbacks' system

By Jonathan Owens
jonathan@rantnc.com

Last summer was a whirlwind for Sanford's Luke Craig. One minute, he was helping UNC-Wilmington win the Coastal Athletic Association tournament and the first game of the NCAA Regional against Georgia Tech.

A few weeks later, the Arizona Diamondbacks drafted him in the seventh round of the 2024 MLB Draft and shipped him off to training camp.

A month after that, he was on the mound for the Visalia Rawhide, the

Diamondbacks' Single-A affiliate in the central valley of California.

"Last year was pretty wild," Craig recalled from the Diamondbacks' Spring Training in Scottsdale, Ariz., in late February. "It all happens quickly. It was all in a blink of an eye."

He made seven appearances for Visalia last year, compiling a 1.13 ERA and striking out 11 in just eight innings of work. He said it was a culmination of a dream he had his whole life.

"(Playing professionally) was always the dream and the goal for me," he said.

"That's something I work for every day. Mentally, I've always believed I was going to make it."

A conference MVP with 101 career strikeouts at Southern Lee High School, Craig had a remarkable junior year at UNCW that propelled him up the draft board. He allowed just one run over his last 15 innings pitched in 2024 as a redshirt junior, compiling a 4-1 record (including a win against College World Series-bound N.C. State) and 1.83 ERA to earn First Team All-CAA honors as a reliever.

Analysts expected him to go in the 8th to 10th round pre-draft. He said he spoke with every team but one and worked out for several, including the Royals.

“The draft was obviously an unbelievable feeling,” he said. “I got a call initially that I was going to the Royals in the eighth round. Then I got a call back about three minutes later that we were going to the Diamondbacks with the next pick (in the seventh).”

He’s still adjusting to the pro game, he said: “There’s not as much room for error. The little things always matter in college, but they matter a lot here. Mistakes that you maybe got away with in college or high school, you can’t get away with that anymore. You have to be somewhat of a perfectionist.”

Craig was part of a rotation that included four future Division I pitchers in his senior year at Southern Lee, along with Pittsburgh Pirates prospect Thomas Harrington. That squad had its dream season cut short by the COVID pan-

dem. The Cavaliers seemed destined for a deep playoff run — until the whole world came to a stop.

He said he stays in touch with his Cavs teams, and they still talk about what might have been.

“It still hurts to talk about it to this day,” he said. “It was an unbelievable team — not just the talent we had but the group of people that we were with every day. It just sucks that we got cut short mainly for that reason.”

He hasn’t been assigned to a team for the upcoming season yet but thinks he’ll be in High-A with the Hillsboro Hops. His ultimate goal is to play on the biggest stage, but he’s taking it one day at a time.

“I’m trying to be where my feet are and make it (to the big leagues) as quick as possible,” Craig said. “I’m just trying to succeed every single day. I’m focusing on all the right things. If I have a good year and continue to move up, that’ll all handle itself.”



Before pitching collegiately for UNC-Wilmington, Luke Craig was part of a stellar staff at Southern Lee High School that included four future Division I pitchers, including Thomas Harrington, currently a highly ranked prospect in the Pittsburgh Pirates farm system.

Rogers-Pickard Funeral Home, Inc. & Cremation Services Since 1913



509 Carthage Street • Sanford, NC 27330
(919) 775-3535

www.rogerspickard.com



4th Generation of Our Family Serving Your Family



THE **Shed Depot**
OF NORTH CAROLINA

1732 Westover Drive
Sanford, NC 27330
(919) 776-0206





KANE NAMED NEW GM OF SANFORD SPINNERS

The Sanford Spinners Baseball Club announced the appointment of Hunter Kane as the team's new general manager for the 2025 season.

"With a strong background in military service and sports management, Kane brings a wealth of leadership, operational expertise and passion for the game to the Spinners organization," the team stated in a press release on Feb. 20.

Originally from Columbia, South Carolina, Kane is currently pursuing a degree in Sports Management at Troy University after transferring from Grand Canyon University. Over the past eight years, he has served in the U.S. Army with assignments in Germany, Georgia and North Carolina.

Kane takes over for Carl Bryan, who served in the role in 2024.

"Dr. Bryan has been an instrumental part of the Spinners' growth, bringing leadership, dedication, and a deep passion for the game. His efforts have helped shape the organization, and his contributions will leave a lasting impact on the team and the community. Dr. Bryan's leadership and commitment to the Spinners have been invaluable," said Al Anderson, the team's owner.

"While we will miss his presence in the front office, we respect and appreciate his decision to focus on what matters most—his family and his continued contributions to education. We are grateful for everything he has done and wish him nothing but the best in this next chapter."

Bryan joined the team as general manager in 2024. Anderson said the Spinners remain committed to building on "the strong foundation Bryan helped establish."

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Commissioner calls for more collaboration among boards

Two boards at odds over pay raises for district's 600-plus classified staff

By Richard Sullins

richard@rantnc.com

A member of the Lee County Board of Commissioners has said she hopes the olive branch it has extended to the county's school board to settle their differences will be accepted.

Republican Commissioner Taylor Vorbeck spoke at length toward the end of the commissioners' meeting on Feb. 3 and called for an end to the struggle between the two elected bodies over the issue of education funding that has gone on for the past four years.

The conflict between the boards has taken several different forms during its lifetime. The most recent comes in the form of political tennis where the school system's 600-plus classified employees have been batted back and forth between the two since last November in a finger-pointing contest over who is to blame for low salaries and benefits for non-certified employees that the county's 17 campuses simply could not operate without.

This employee grouping includes bus drivers and cafeteria workers, teacher assistants and office staff, library workers and others who are not required to obtain a license or certificate in order to be employed. Many of the school district's classified workers are long-term employees who have been with the system for decades.

They began organizing to push not



Lee County Commissioner Taylor Vorbeck called for an end to the struggle between her board and the Lee County Board of Education at the county's first meeting in February.

just for better wages, but also for a share of earned vacation and sick time, and for the right to participate in the TA to Teachers program, providing opportunities for employees to work toward a bachelor's degree that could one day qualify them to become teachers in their own right, among other demands.

VORBECK SEEKS TO CLEAR THE AIR

Vorbeck, who was first elected in 2022, waited until near the end of the Feb. 3 meeting to attempt to clear the air on several issues where she believes misunderstandings and misstatements of facts have led the matter of the classified employees salary and benefits to reach the point where it is today.

"Some of the biggest issues I believe causing the back and forth are when statements are made, and they are either not

vetted or they are repeated without going to the source. Opinions are not fact," she said. "How you think something should happen is still not fact, repeating something you heard without knowing if it is a fact does not make it a fact."

That circumstance only gets improved, she suggests, when "we all hold ourselves a little more accountable when it comes to fact-checking" the things leaders say and repeat.

An example of where being sure of facts might improve the dialogue back and forth, and actually move the discussion forward, centers around claims being made about using some of the county's fund balance, an account made up of unspent funds at the end of each fiscal year that each of the 100 counties in the state are allowed to use at their discretion. Fund balance spending most often goes toward major construction

projects, short-term relief during economic downturns, or in times of disaster.

Vorbeck likened the county's annual budget to that of an average family, where known expenditures are planned, and some money is set aside regularly for future needs. It doesn't make sense then, she said, to pay for something like salaries out of those reserve funds year after year, knowing those dollars were intended to cover only one-time costs.

"Using savings to pay monthly expense is terrible money management," she said.

NO PAY INCREASE IS A MYTH

Perhaps the most oft-repeated claim made over the past three months is that classified staff members have not seen an increase in their pay in almost 16 years. Vorbeck maintained that this is a misconception.

She said to those attending the commissioners meeting that during the Great Recession of 2008, it was the pay scale for classified employees, not pay increases, that was frozen as part of a nationwide effort to head off what could have been the country's worst financial disaster ever.

The Rant inquired further about this issue to the Lee County Schools district office and received similar information in the form of a statement.

"District leadership and the Board of Education continually discuss ways to better retain and attract employees. Through these discussions in 2023, it became clear that classified employees pay needed attention," the statement read. "To address this, the Board initiated a salary study to gather accurate data for future budget requests to the county commissioners, which was the top request submitted last year. Since 2008, our classified staff have been paid at or above the minimum required by the state of North Carolina.

"While the local board did freeze the local salary schedule in 2008, classified employees have continued to receive base increases in alignment with state raises."

The district also said it made classified pay increases their top priority in the FY 2024-25 budget and is likely to do so again this year.

Vorbeck believes it is important for everyone to remember that the county's public school system is the only one of its 21 departments "that we can't control where the money goes."

She spoke of the funding earned by the system based on its average membership, or ADM, number (a calculation that floats up and down with each day of the school year) and which state law says that while counties must fund their system of public schools, they have no say when it comes to determining how those dollars are spent.

"We know that the school system needs more money. That's across all counties in all states," she said. "But if we were to fully fund their requests from just Fiscal Year 2023-24, we (would) have had to choose to put less in the budgets for other county departments – the sheriff, social services, parks and recreation, senior services, or COLTS. I'm not saying that one is better than the other. It's just not as black and white as everyone likes to believe."

A WAY FORWARD?

Vorbeck's remarks offered some of the clearest statements yet of the issues not only for the classified school employees who have sought their help in advocating for their issues, but in a much bigger way, of those between the commissioners and the school board since 2021.

During those four years, the school board has gone time and time again to the commissioners with expansion budget requests to address what it has viewed as mission critical needs that must be met, and in each of those four years, the commissioners have voted down – unanimously – those requests, choosing instead to grant the school board a lesser amount of unrestricted funds, with which they could spend as they saw fit.

But it's a pattern that Vorbeck is deter-

mined to break.

"This continued fight back and forth is tiring. It's clearly getting us nowhere and as it continues, it only diminishes the efforts that our certified and classified staff are doing on a day-to-day basis," she said. "I'd like to say that in efforts by the Board of Commissioners in unanimously funding the Jonesboro School's demolition project, as well as the foundation for the bleachers at Lee County Senior High, that we as commissioners are extending an olive branch to the Board of Education, that we are doing the right things when it comes to what we are funding. With this olive branch, I would like to ask the school board to take a step toward trusting us, and we will take

another step toward trusting you.

"We can't change what took place with boards of the past, but what we can do is to take ownership of what has occurred and stop using it as an excuse, but turn it instead into fuel to do better."

Budget season is already underway. Requests are now being made within each of the 21 departments under the funding umbrella of Lee County government, with a plan for County Manager Lisa Minter to present a first draft of her recommendations to commissioners in May. The school board is aiming to be the first of those to submit its request for the 2025-26 fiscal year, and that could happen by the time schools let out for spring break in mid-March.

The Heart of Carolina Jazz Society Presents



The Heart of Carolina Jazz Orchestra Directed by Gregg Gelb

And special guests



Jerald Shynett, Trombone



Kathy Montgomery Gelb, Vocalist

**March 28th, 2025
7:30 pm**

**The Temple Theatre
120 Carthage St.
Sanford, NC 27330**




[Link for Tickets](#)

This project was supported by the North Carolina Arts Council, a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources via the grassroots program from the Lee County Arts Council

BRIEFS

FIRSTHEALTH RANKS AMONG FORBES' 'BEST EMPLOYERS' LIST FOR 2025

FirstHealth of the Carolinas has been named to the Forbes 2025 list of America's Best Employers. FirstHealth ranked 43rd out of 701 employers and 15th among the 57 hospitals and health systems on the list.

"We are thrilled to receive this recognition and I'm deeply proud of the incredible team we have here at FirstHealth of the Carolinas," FirstHealth CEO Mickey W. Foster said. "Our providers and employees are at the heart of everything we do and being included on this list reflects our ongoing commitment to being the best place to work in health care nationally."

Forbes presented the award in collaboration with Statista, the world-leading statistics portal and industry ranking provider. Forbes and Statista selected America's Best Employers 2025 through an independent survey of more than 217,000 U.S. employees working for companies employing at least 1,000 people in the U.S. Over 6.5 million employer evaluations were considered.

The final score was based on two types of evaluations: personal (those given by employees themselves) and public (those given by friends and family members of employees, or members of the public who work in the same industry).

Based in Pinehurst, FirstHealth has primary care, convenient care and family medicine clinics in Sanford.

— *FirstHealth*

GARDNER-WEBB PRESIDENT LEAVES FOR CAMPBELL

Dr. William M. Downs was named the sixth president of Campbell University on Feb. 10. He will succeed Dr. J. Bradley Creed on July 1.



An accomplished academic leader and political science scholar with more than 30 years of experience in higher education, Downs served as the



Grace Christian's girls basketball team won its fourth consecutive NCISAA state title on Feb. 22 with a 56-45 win over Concord Academy. The Lady Crusaders finished the season 22-4 and were led by Jordan Speller (23 points), Kyndoll English (18 points, 10 rebounds) and Isa Roman (5 points, 5 rebounds, 7 assists) in the championship game.

13th president of Gardner-Webb University. Prior to his appointment at Gardner-Webb, Dr. Downs served as dean of the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences, professor of political science, and W. Keats Sparrow distinguished chair in liberal arts at East Carolina University.

"Dr. Downs represents everything we hoped to find in Campbell University's next president," said Gene Lewis III, chair of the Board of Trustees and presidential search committee. "With his extensive experience, deep personal faith, and infectious energy, he is uniquely qualified to elevate Campbell to new heights, while upholding our mission and values."

Campbell's presidential search committee — composed of trustees, faculty, staff, and students — unanimously recommended Dr. Downs to the Board of Trustees, concluding a six-month search process led in partnership with the execu-

tive search firm CarterBaldwin.

"I'm grateful for the honor to serve as the sixth president of Campbell University. I'd like to thank the presidential search committee and the Board of Trustees for entrusting me with this opportunity to help shape the future of this exceptional institution," said Downs. "I admire Campbell's firm foundation and dedication to academic excellence, and I share in the university's mission to prepare students for purposeful lives and meaningful service. My wife Kim and I look forward to immersing in the campus lifestyle and becoming part of the Campbell community."

A Raleigh native, Downs earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from North Carolina State University. He also holds his master's degree and Ph.D. in political science from Emory University in Atlanta.

— *Campbell University News*

'SESQUI-COIN QUEST' CAPS OFF SANFORD'S 150TH YEAR

The City of Sanford's Sesquicentennial Committee invites the community to participate in one last sesquicentennial coin hunt on March 1.

To celebrate Sanford's 150th birthday, the City of Sanford's Sesquicentennial Committee has hidden a commemorative coin in public spaces around the city over the past year, starting last February.

For the grand finish to the coin hunt, the committee — which is comprised of the City of Sanford, Downtown Sanford, Inc., and Visit Sanford, with committee chair Bob Joyce — planned the "Sesqui Coin Quest," a one-day mega-hide for those who have not yet found a coin.

How it will work: The committee will

hide 24 redeemable tokens across Sanford. Clues to find the tokens will be released at 10am on Saturday, March 1. Hunters must find and bring a token to the Visit Sanford Welcome Center, located at 229 Carthage Street, to redeem for a coin.

For more information, contact Kelly Miller at 919-718-4658 x1 or kelly.miller@sanfordnc.net.

— *City of Sanford*

SANLEE'S WINDMEYER CROWNED SPELLING BEE CHAMP

Spellers from every elementary and middle school in the district convened on W.B. Wicker Auditorium for the 12th annual Lee County Schools District Spelling Bee last week. After dueling with a pair of challengers for ten rounds in a three-way spelling battle, Luke Windmeyer, a sixth grade student from SanLee Middle School, emerged victorious and will move on to represent the district in the Regional Spelling Bee hosted by the Carolina Panthers next month.

East Lee Middle School's Kaylah Long and

Tramway Elementary's Emma Falls each put Windmeyer's prowess under pressure as the trio correctly spelled 30 words in ten consecutive rounds after the other competitors had bowed out.

Luke Windmeyer wins 2025 LCS Spelling Bee. In the eleventh round of their duel, Long and Falls misspelled "auburn" and "bureau" leaving the door cracked for Windmeyer to advance to the championship round. To secure the opportunity to close out the Bee, Windmeyer correctly spelled "arbitrary" before sealing the victory in the championship round with a perfect spelling of "fajitas."

The two runners-up had a spell off for second place with Kayla correctly spelling "tabulate" while Emma got stumped by "assailant" handing Long the second-place spot and first alternate honors.

Windmeyer now begins his preparation for the Carolina Panthers Regional Spelling Bee on March 9th at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte. If he is able to finish in the top four spots, he will qualify for the Scripps National Spelling Bee which will be held in Washington D.C. on May 27-29.

— *Lee County Schools*



MujerWoman, a event launched in 2023 made up of professional Latina women from local business, will be held on March 8 at Energy-Time, a Latina-owned business located at 109 Steele St. in downtown Sanford. This year's free event is co-organized by Ellie Macias Lagunas, owner of Lee Insurance Service Center, an insurance brokerage that specializes in providing coverage for homes, businesses, and automobiles. "As an insurance agent, I take pride in assisting the Latino community, drawing from my identity as a Latina to ensure everyone has an equitable and clear understanding of insurance," she said.



BACK TO BACK! B.T. BULLOCK WINS SECOND CONSECUTIVE LCS ELEMENTARY CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP

B.T. Bullock's chess team dominated the second annual Lee County Schools Elementary Chess Championship, winning back-to-back titles in convincing fashion. For the second year in a row, the Bengals were without their top seeded player in the tournament, as this year's top seed was battling the flu, similar to their story from a season ago.

The Bengals defeated Tramway in the Finals by a 63-5 count despite having their top-seeded player Henry Liggett unavailable. Noah Benson slid up a spot from the number two position to top-seed and performed admirably, posting a 5-1-0 record in the event with his only loss coming in the semifinals to Killian Johnson from J. Glenn Edwards.

The Bengals cruised through Pool B Play, shutting out Deep River in the opening match before convincing wins over J.R. Ingram and Broadway. B.T. Bullock players only conceded points in two individual games of pool play matches, establishing their spot atop the quarterfinal bracket.

Tramway once again advanced to the finals to grab second place after falling to B.T. Bullock in the Finals 63-5. The Tigersharks also advanced from pool play with a spotless 3-0 team record in the opening rounds. Tramway battled through a tight first contest nipping J. Glenn Edwards 39-29 in their opening match before only allowing points in three individual games during the final two rounds of Pool A play against W.B. Wicker and Greenwood.

Sawyer Paderick at the number three position for Tramway won his first five games of the day before slipping in the Finals to B.T. Bullock's Maci Houchins. Paderick scored 50 points for Tramway through his victories throughout the day.

J. Glenn Edwards secured third place in the tournament with a strong 46.5-21.5 win over Deep River in the 3rd Place Match. Killian Johnson led the way for Edwards, posting a perfect 6-0-0 record throughout the tournament and earning 72 total points for the Bees in his six matches as the top seed.

Deep River finished fourth just one year removed from not winning a single match in the inaugural event a season ago. This year's Gators were 3-3 in the tournament, winning three straight matches after an opening loss to B.T. Bullock in pool play. The Gators dispatched Broadway 42-26 in their second match before defeating J.R. Ingram 59-9 in the final pool play match. Deep River handled W.B. Wicker 46.5-21.5 in the Quarterfinals before falling in the closing two matches.

— *Lee County Schools*



APRIL 24-MAY 18

'BEAUTY AND THE BEAST' RETURNS TO TEMPLE

Step into the enchanted world of Disney's beloved classic. This "tale as old as time" tells the classic story of the beauty, Belle, and the Beast, who is trapped under the spell of an enchantress. If the Beast can learn to love and be loved, the curse will end and he will be transformed into his former self, but time is running out. If the Beast does not learn his lesson soon, he and his household will be doomed for all eternity. Tickets and showtimes can be found at templeshows.org.

MARCH 1: Temple Theatre's first of three Centennial Celebrations — honoring 100 years of the theater's presence in downtown Sanford — will be the **100 Years Gala** on March 1. Visit temple-shows.org to learn more.

MARCH 5: The Ongoing Fight for Freedom: Black Veterans in N.C. History will be held at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center in Sanford from 1 to 2:15 p.m. Dr. Sonny Kelly is a scholar performer, storyteller and actor and will perform this show depicting and referencing scenes of battle, war, the Jim Crow era, racism. To learn more, email bstumpf@cccc.edu.

MARCH 6: The ninth annual **International Culture Night** will be held at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center from 6 to 9 p.m. El Refugio is proud to celebrate diversity through music, food and cultural exhibitions from around the world. To learn more, email elrefugioed@gmail.com.

MARCH 6: Alchemy Wellness Center in Sanford will host a **CommUNITY Reiki Energy Healing Sampler** from noon to 2 p.m. (repeating each Thursday) That evening, the center will host a Medicine Drum Sound Bath from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Both events are donation based. Register at eventbrite.com.

MARCH 6-9: Temple Theatre's second of three Centennial Celebrations — honoring 100 years of the theater's presence in downtown Sanford — will be the **Roaring 20's Revue**, featuring hits from the 1920s through the 2020s.

MARCH 7: Shamrock Shindig, an evening of Celtic music and mythic tales with nationally acclaimed violinist Jamie Laval and Sheena Anderson, will be held at the Mann Center in Sanford at 7:30 p.m. For ticket information, visit mann-centernc.org.

MARCH 7: Dmitri Resnik & Bootleg Beat — a Chatham County native who

will bring blues, roots rock and Louisiana rhythms with a nod to New Orleans — will perform at Smoke & Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8 p.m.

MARCH 8: Alchemy Wellness Center will host a **Plant Swap**, celebrating International Women's Day, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. (free). Register at eventbrite.com.

MARCH 8: The **Lee County Community Orchestra** will perform "Scenes from Hollywood" at Harper Center First Presbyterian Church in Sanford at 3 p.m.

MARCH 9: The **Lee County Community Orchestra** will perform "Scenes from Hollywood" at Harper Center First Presbyterian Church in Sanford at 7:30 p.m.

MARCH 10: Lee County Library will host **Lore & Legends Gaming: Strategy & Adventure Club** — featuring a world of strategy, adventure and fun — from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. for ages 13 and up. No registration required.

MARCH 14: The North Carolina Cooperative Extension will host a **Therapeutic Horticulture Garden Craft Gathering** from 3 to 4:30 p.m. at the extension of fice. Registration is free (visit go.ncsu.edu and search for the event).

MARCH 14: 80's Unleashed — led by Sanford native Bryan Shaw — will perform at Smoke & Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8 p.m.

MARCH 15: Lee County Library's Local Author Festival will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the library on Hawkins Avenue. Those interested in participating as a published author can apply at the library's website.

MARCH 15-16: Temple Theatre's third of three Centennial Celebrations — honoring 100 years of the theater's presence in downtown Sanford — will be the **Temple Teen Reunion Celebration**. Visit templeshows.org to learn more.

MARCH 15: Gary Braddy & Allyn Love will perform their varied mix of classic country and rock at Smoke & Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8 p.m.

MARCH 15: Alchemy Wellness Center will host **Love & Light Pendulum Workshop** from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Cost is \$40, includes a handmade crystal pendulum). Register at eventbrite.com.

MARCH 15: SanLee Park will host **4 Hours of SanLee Mountain Bike Madness** beginning at 10 a.m. at the park. This four-hour endurance event will test your skills, stamina and determination on the park's rugged and beautiful trails. Teams can alternate laps to any schedule they prefer. Teams and solo riders will be scored on the number of laps they can complete in the four hours. Registration available at webscorer.com.

MARCH 21: Tin Can Alley — a talented and experienced trio of musicians hailing from the North Carolina mountains — will perform their variety of classic rock, soul and R&B at Smoke & Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8 p.m.

MARCH 22: The Pine Sized Pasture in Sanford will host **Family Farm Day** from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Meet and pet the animals and enjoy games for the kids and food trucks. Tickets are \$7 a person, children under 1 get in free.

MARCH 22: The **Sanford Car News Cruise** In will be held every fourth Saturday of the month throughout 2025. Open to all makes, models and years, the cruise-in will be held in front of Camelback Brewing on Spring Lane from 3 to 6 p.m. Visit Sanford Car News on Facebook to learn more.

MARCH 22: The **Sanford Area Society of Shaggers Make-A-Wish Benefit** will be held from 6 to 11 p.m. at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center in Sanford. Jim Quick & The Coastline will perform.

MARCH 28: Heart of Carolina Jazz, featuring director Gregg Gelb, joined by Jerald Shynett and Kathy Gelb, will perform at Temple Theatre in Sanford at 7:30 p.m. Tickets range from \$13 to \$28. Learn more at templeshows.org.

MARCH 28-29: Retro Arcade Games at Hugger Mugger Brewing in downtown Sanford is your chance to test out classic cabinet games like Galaga, Buck Master or Area 51 or even some older console games like Mario Brothers, Duck Hunt and much more. Event (from 3 to 11:30 p.m. both days) is free, and there's always something new each time they visit.

MARCH 28: Robert Watson, known locally for his part in Tuesday Night Music Club, will perform as a solo artist for the first time at Smoke & Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8 p.m.

APRIL 5: Pipes, Accordions, Fiddlers & More at Hugger Mugger Brewing from 2 to 5 p.m. Hugger Mugger is hosting an old-fashioned pub style afternoon of music and fun with pipes, drums, fiddle, guitar, bodran, whistle, banjo and accordion. If the music of the Emerald Isle (the country, not the beach) stirs your soul, then you must join us for a lively afternoon of fun courtesy of some talented musicians.

APRIL 30: The Magic of African Rhythm will be held at Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center in Sanford from 10 to 11 a.m. Event will feature a performance of The Griot's Gourd will to a blended audience of community members and CCCC students, faculty and staff. CCCC's Academic and Cultural Enrichment Series presents the West African music and dance troupe. To learn more, email bstumpf@cccc.edu.

BIG T's

Best Burgers,
Dogs and Biscuits
in Town

Open for Breakfast and Lunch Monday-Friday



508 Wicker Street
Sanford

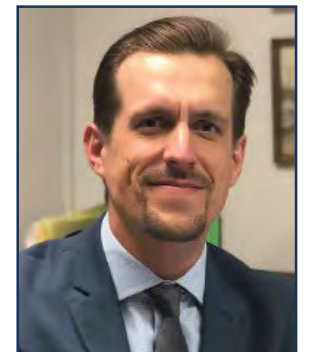
Call Ahead • (919) 776-4381



POST | FOUSHEE | GORDON
TRIAL LAWYERS

**Social Security
DISABILITY Denied?**

**Call us,
we can help!**



Harris Post

Social Security
Disability Advocate

919-775-5616
harris@centralcarolinialawyers.com

SUDOKU

Call today and receive a
**FREE SHOWER PACKAGE
PLUS \$1600 OFF**

**SAFE STEP
WALK-IN TUB** 1-855-576-5653

With purchase of a new Safe Step Walk-in Tub. Not applicable with any previous walk-in tub purchase. Offer available while supplies last. No cash value. Must present offer at time of purchase. CSL# 1062169, N5CB 0092999 0083445

	1		4										
7		3		9		4							
	4				6	9							
				1	2							7	
		5					8						
6			9	5									
		7	5								2		
		2		3		6						8	
					8						5		

© StatePoint Media
Fill in the blank squares in the grid, making sure that every row, column and 3-by-3 box includes all digits 1 through 9.

CROSSWORD: The Oscars

ACROSS

1. 1/10
6. European tourist tax, acr.
9. "Germinal" author ...mile
13. Bye, in Paris
14. Bigheadedness
15. Relating to wine, arch.
16. Tabletop mountains
17. H+, e.g.
18. Large key on the right
19. *"___ Boys"
21. *"Emilia Pérez" leading actress
23. H in HMS, sometimes
24. Kids' get-away
25. Like certain Four
28. Queen of Carthage
30. Razzed
35. Scary fairytale creature
37. Soft drink
39. Like certain egg order
40. Sir Mix-___
41. *Sean Baker's original screen-play
43. Loyal, arch.
44. Caldecott award
46. Ascus, pl.
47. AI's learning material
48. Harry ____, once of One Direction
50. Wearing footwear
52. *At 2024 Oscars, Ryan Gosling sang "I'm Just ___"
53. Sushi restaurant libation
55. Unit of length of yarn
57. *This year's Academy Awards host
60. *Elphaba and Galinda story

63. Antique shop item
 64. Metal-bearing rock
 66. Mountain nymph
 68. Southeast Asian org.
 69. Lavatory, abbr.
 70. *___ Theatre
 71. Whimper
 72. Sodium hydroxide
 73. Follow
- DOWN**
1. Scottish cap
 2. Barbara of "I Dream of Jeannie"
 3. Not yet final, at law
 4. Mold a mind
 5. Like ear of corn that is ready to cook
 6. Bride's cover

7. Opposite of hence
8. Polynesian kingdom
9. Zn
10. "I'm ___ you!"
11. Property right
12. Acronym, abbr.
15. Evening worship
20. "All My Children" vixen
22. Invoice qty.
24. Colossus, pl.
25. Fizzes
26. End of a shoelace
27. *"The Brutalist" leading actor
29. Spanish lady
31. Old, in Scottish
32. Go stealthily
33. Related on mother's side
34. *Chalamet's role
36. Et alibi, abbr.

38. St. Louis' Gateway
42. Garlicky mayonnaise
45. Acne, technically
49. Famous frat house
51. Crack
54. Grassy mound
56. Ohio metropolis
57. Yorkshire river
58. Tea or beer
59. Iranian money
60. We have
61. Mature elvers
62. Dabu-___, chili pepper condiment
63. Operator's equip.
65. *Jamie Foxx won Best Actor in 2005 for this biopic
67. Yellow #5, e.g.

CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12	
13						14				15				
16						17				18				
	19				20			21	22					
			23				24							
25	26	27		28		29			30		31	32	33	34
35			36		37			38		39				
40					41				42		43			
44				45		46					47			
48					49		50			51		52		
				53		54			55		56			
	57	58	59					60				61	62	
63						64	65			66				67
68						69				70				
71						72				73				

Express
EMPLOYMENT PROFESSIONALS

40TH
ANNIVERSARY
1983-2023

You can view our jobs at
[Expresspros.com/sanfordnc](https://expresspros.com/sanfordnc)

Stop by and meet with our recruiting specialist.

307 North Horner Blvd.
Sanford
(919) 775-1292

SWITCH & GET

\$25

Off First Month of New Service!
USE PROMO CODE: GZ590

Consumer Cellular

CALL CONSUMER CELLULAR 888-804-0913

© 2023 Consumer Cellular Inc. For promo details please call 888-804-0913



LEARN MORE
ABOUT PINEHURST
MEDICAL CLINIC!

Pulmonology

Sleep Medicine

Dermatology

Primary Care

Endocrinology

Cardiology

Electrophysiology

Rheumatology

Hematology & Oncology

Wellness Programs

Gastroenterology

Medical Weight Management

SERVING EXCELLENCE IN HEALTHCARE SINCE 1952

Pinehurst Medical Clinic's providers and team share a commitment to patient-centered care utilizing the latest advances in medical technology. This combination of leading-edge medicine and deep compassion for the people we serve has been a hallmark of the organization since 1952 and is one reason why we are a recognized healthcare leader in the Sandhills Region of North Carolina.

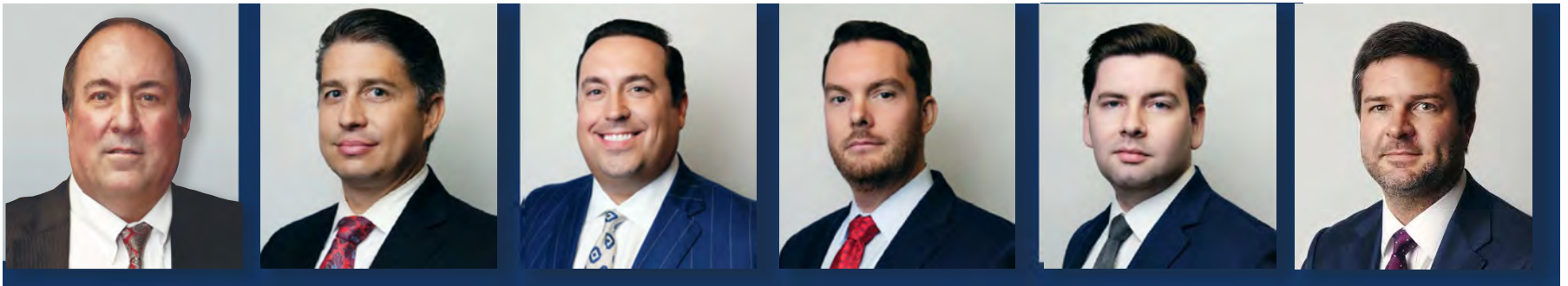
**Cardiology • Dermatology • Electrophysiology • Endocrinology • Gastroenterology
Hematology & Oncology • Medical Weight Management • Primary Care
Pulmonology • Rheumatology • Sleep Medicine • Wellness Programs**

TO VIEW ALL OF OUR LOCATIONS AND SERVICES VISIT [PINEHURSTMEDICAL.COM](https://www.pinehurstmedical.com)

THIS IS AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR LEGAL SERVICES



POST | FOUSHEE | GORDON
TRIAL LAWYERS



NORMAN C. POST, JR.

KEVIN C. FOUSHEE

NORMAN CHAS. POST III*

WILLIAM A. GORDON

NICHOLAS C. ROHNER

T. BROOKS HAISLIP

Post, Foushee and Gordon, P.A. is a trusted full service litigation firm located in Sanford, North Carolina. With a committed approach to the law and an unyielding drive for success, the attorneys at Post, Foushee and Gordon, P.A. are dedicated to providing clients in Lee, Harnett, Chatham and Moore counties with the foremost representation in the region.

Conveniently located across the street from the Lee County Courthouse, Post, Foushee and Gordon, P.A. has been representing the people of central North Carolina for over 70 years. Whether you have been injured because of a motor vehicle accident or while on the job, charged with a crime, have a family or domestic issue or contractual dispute, Post, Foushee and Gordon, P.A. can assist you. In most any type of litigation, Post, Foushee and Gordon, P.A. has an experienced advocate ready and willing to help.



BOARD CERTIFIED SPECIALIST*
NORTH CAROLINA STATE BAR
State Criminal Law

POST | FOUSHEE | GORDON P.A. 205 Courtland Drive • Sanford, North Carolina 27330

OFFICE 919.775.5616 **TOLL FREE** 1.800.552.0840 **WEB** centralcarolinalegals.com