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SEPTEMBER 2025

# The Rant

SANFORD, NORTH CAROLINA

## Monthly

# WHERE HAS ALL THE FARMLAND GONE?

RESIDENTIAL GROWTH HAS  
MEANT THE LOSS OF VALUABLE  
FARMLAND IN LEE COUNTY

ALSO INSIDE: NEW ATHLETIC PARK OPENING | INDIE FEST PREVIEW | FALL EVENT CALENDAR





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# The Rant Monthly

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A little worse for wear, but I'm wearing it well.

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Friday, October 17th \_\_\_\_ (Art After Dark) \_\_\_\_ 6 pm to 9 pm



Sanford Brush & Palette Club is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.  
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COMEDY SERIES



**Reggie Rice**  
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FAMILY FUN SERIES



**Paul Reiser**  
Mad About You, Stranger Things  
Thursday, October 16  
7:00 PM  
COMEDY SERIES



**Are You Ready For It?  
A Taylor Experience**  
Saturday, November 1  
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TRIBUTE SERIES



**Yesterday & Today  
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Friday, January 16  
7:00 PM  
TRIBUTE SERIES



**Doktor Kaboom**  
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Saturday, January 17  
5:00 PM  
FAMILY FUN SERIES



**Erikson Herz**  
Friday, January 30  
7:00 PM  
COMEDY SERIES



**Nicole Henry**  
Sings Whitney Houston  
Friday, February 20  
7:00 PM  
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**Sheena Easton**  
Friday, March 20  
7:00 PM  
MAINSTAGE SERIES



**Puppy Pals Live! (return)**  
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COLD OPEN

# An unfortunate cost of residential growth

For the past five years now, *The Rant* has published several stories on new residential and business developments coming to Sanford and the effects that growth is having and will have on our community. In our editorial pages, we’ve applauded the city and county for its efforts to bring new businesses (and thus, new homes) to the area, and we’ve criticized plans that didn’t take “strategic growth” into consideration.

One of the unfortunate effects of Lee County’s growth is the loss of farmland, as we detail in this month’s cover story. Lee County has always been considered a “rural county,” even with the recent growth, and agriculture has been an important part of this area’s economy for decades.

As stated in our story, growth and other factors have eaten into Lee County’s farmland quite a bit over the years. Local cropland in Lee County declined from 19,534 acres in 2017 to 14,187 (27 percent) in 2022, the date of the last USDA Agriculture Census, and total farmland decreased from 35,062 acres to 31,204 (11 percent) in the same time period. That 11 percent loss far outpaces the statewide number – about 4 percent – over the same stretch. In Lee County, the loss could total 40 percent by 2040.

So what does it mean? Our story goes into great detail on Lee County’s rich farming history and the challenges farmers are facing as subdivisions and new businesses eat away at their land.



We will remain advocates for “smart growth” in Lee County, because sitting on our hands is not in the best interest moving forward. This issue coincides with the opening of the long-awaited Lee County Athletic Park (Page 8), a forward-thinking initiative that also ate up several acres of previously unused land for — what we feel is — the greater good.

But Lee County will not be better if we lose our farms. Not only do they provide vital goods to our state and community, agritourism hasn’t become a huge part of our local economy, which brought it more tourism dollars in 2024 than every before (Page 21).

Enjoy this month’s issue and perhaps take in a Farmer’s Market or trip to a local farm sometime this fall and support the men and women working hard to keep us fed.

— Billy Liggett

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# LEE COUNTY

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# Lee County Athletic Park opens to public Sept. 2

Grand opening event scheduled for Sept. 13; new complex features baseball/softall diamonds, soccer fields, playground and scenic walking trails

By Billy Liggett  
billy@rantnc.com

After years of debate, planning, delays and construction, Lee County’s long-awaited \$27 million athletic park will officially become reality on Sept. 2 when its turf and grass fields, baseball diamonds, playground and walking trails open to the public. A daylong public celebration of the park will take place on Sept. 13.

The park is being touted by the county as Sanford’s “premier destination for sports, recreation and community events in the region ... offering top-notch amenities in a family friendly environment, making it the perfect spot for tournaments, practices, community gatherings and everyday play.”

The finished product — designed by Raleigh-based engineering firm McAdams and built by Sanford Contractors — includes a collegiate-sized baseball diamond and three youth-sized baseball/softball fields, two large FIFA-sized turf soccer/ multi-purpose fields and four natural grass FIFA-sized soccer/multi-purpose fields, a large playground with separate areas for 2-5 year olds and 5-12 year olds, and a scenic walking trail that loops the park. The centerpiece of the baseball field is a fieldhouse that includes restrooms and a locker room, and the soccer fields have two designated fieldhouses with restrooms and locker rooms.

Parks & Recreation Director Joseph Keel has been a part of the process since the park’s inception, and he said seeing the final product (aside from a few minor touch-ups before Sept. 2) is “mesmerizing.”

“When you look at what was designed on paper to what we have today, you can’t help but be excited,” said Keel. “It’s just a



Images taken from recent promotional videos of the new Lee County Athletic, which opens to the public on Sept. 2 and will be celebrated with an event on Sept. 13.

Courtesy: Lee County Parks & Rec

whole other level of joy to see it in person. It takes your breath away. I’m very happy with the construction — Sanford Contractors have done a great job, and we’ve been really excited to have them on board from the beginning. And having them just down the road, we know they’re here if we need anything. They treated this like they would any project that they’ll be tied to forever.”

The park was the result of a \$25 million county bond initiative placed on the 2020 election ballot and approved by Lee County voters by a 59-41 percent margin. A “Grow Play Succeed” campaign was created to champion that vote, pointing to the success of similar parks throughout the state in



bringing in money from out-of-town visitors for tournaments and other events.

“My family has traveled our state and surrounding states playing both soccer and baseball,” Erin Borrell, co-chair of the campaign, told *The Rant* in 2020. “A sports complex to call our own in Lee County would bring a sense of pride to our community and our athletes. In addition, the economic impact it would have on our small businesses would be huge. Hosting families from around the surrounding areas would allow us the opportunity to show what Sanford has to offer, including so many great restaurants and small businesses.”

Lee County Parks & Recreation’s sports programs (such as flag football) will begin using the facilities immediately for practices and games, and the Sanford Area Soccer League (SASL) will also begin use on Sept. 2. Ryan Patterson, SASL’s executive director, said the park was sorely needed as his organization continues to grow with the county, and their former home (the Lions Club Fairgrounds and other fields around the county) weren’t big enough and didn’t have the amenities needed to host large tournaments.

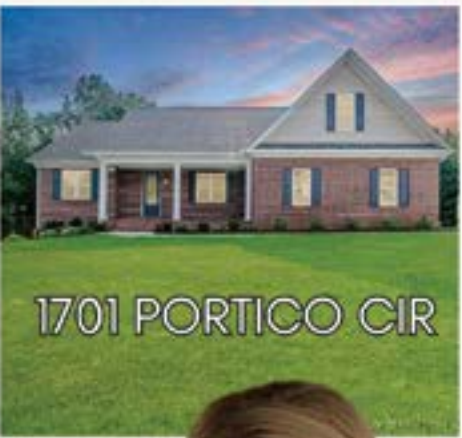
“As we continue to grow — we have doubled in size the last three years — we are outgrowing the current footprint of rectangular fields in Sanford,” Patterson said. “We really did not have any other options except to reduce teams’ practice times, limit registrations or give teams smaller areas to train on. The new complex alleviates this for us.”

The county will celebrate the new park with a daylong (2-8 p.m.) celebration on Sept. 13. The event will include a fly-over, live music, food trucks, games and activities for the kids and Lee County’s first drone show that evening. Keel said the celebration of this size is warranted for a complex that will become a “centerpiece” of activity for the growing community.

“It’s the first large celebration like this that Lee County has been able to do in some time,” Keel said. “We wanted to make sure it was a big event that had something for everybody. Because I feel like this park is for everybody — even if you don’t like sports or don’t have children playing sports, we have the trails, the playground, the food trucks ... it’s very much a place for families.”



A large \$1 million playground is one of the amenities of the new Lee County Athletic Park. The playground has areas for children 2-5 and 5-12 and is located near a small building with restrooms.



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OPINION

Fight for your right to cancel

By Billy Liggett

I found a better internet plan. And by “better,” I mean significantly cheaper. The WiFi itself is not as strong, but it’s not like I’m the fourth member of a professional esports team who needs 100 mbps to survive the last flurry of gunfire in a Fortnite squads game.

Online chess and the NY Times cross-word app are more my gaming speed these days. I could probably get by with dial-up if I had to.

When I went to cancel the faster, far-more-expensive WiFi plan from a very familiar national provider (I’ll refrain from naming names), I expected an easy process with an easy-to-find cancel button — perhaps a pop-up window or two asking if I was sure-sure I wanted to cancel, and maybe an offer for a cheaper deal.

But no. Canceling my WiFi became one of the more frustrating ordeals I’ve ever endured. In all, it took 90 minutes from logging in until I got that desired confirmation code. That process — which I will soon detail — should be illegal.

And it almost was.

In 2024, the Federal Trade Commission — under then President Joe Biden — announced the final details of its “Click-to-Cancel” rule that would make it easier for consumers to end recurring subscriptions and memberships. The agency said it received more than 16,000 comments from the public in drawing up the rule, which would have prohibited businesses from being vague in the language of their online subscription plans and required them to make the cancellation process as “quick and easy” as the agreement process. It also required businesses to be clear on when free trials and other promotional rates would end during the sign-up process.

The rule was set to go into effect this year, but the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 8th Circuit vacated the rule this summer, siding with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other corporate interests that fought against much of the language in the rule. Some consumer advocates blame the Trump administration for the decision, as opposition from the beginning was mostly led by Republican elected officials and FTC officials.

Without the rule, businesses are under no obligation to make the cancellation process an easy one. I learned this

when trying to access my account and billing settings for the aforementioned internet provider. The company provided a very-hard-to-find link to cancel, in addition to an 800 number that I could call to speak to a representative. Being a 21st century human who doesn’t like to talk to other humans on the phone, I chose the link option.

That link went nowhere.

After backtracking and searching for another way (and encountering more deadends), I decided to call the phone number. An AI chatbot did its very best to keep me from cancelling and to keep me from talking to a real person, but after 10 minutes of runaround, I finally got through to a woman who treated my request like a bouncer dealing with unruly guests at a nightclub.

The representative asked my reason for cancelling. Acceptable. She asked if I knew that I was signing up for a service that had slower speeds. Understandable. She asked what I was paying for the new plan. Questionable. She informed me that my new internet speeds would be a detriment to my family of five’s lifestyle. Weird.

I stood firm, and after about 15 minutes of back and forth, she asked if I could hold. That hold lasted 15 minutes and didn’t even include muzak I could hum along to. It was dead silence. The counting clock on my cell phone was the only thing that suggested I was still on the line. So I stayed.

When she returned, she thanked me for holding and offered me my current plan for the same rate as the new plan I was signing up for. When I asked how long that “deal” would last, she was unclear, but admitted it would be a “promotional rate.” I declined. I wish it would have ended there, but we talked for another 20 minutes. She repeated questions, and as I grew audibly frustrated and asked for confirmation, she continued to stall.

It did finally end, and I did successfully cancel my internet service. But it should have never been that difficult. My experience is what the “Click-to-Cancel” rule was supposed to prevent, but businesses seem to profit greatly from those who hold on to services they don’t use because the cancellation process is so difficult.

It’s my right to want cheap, crappy internet. Canceling an existing service shouldn’t require a legal team.



If you no longer wish to read Billy Liggett’s columns, there is no option to cancel.

EDITORIAL

THE SILENCE SAYS A LOT

Prior to our 7,000-word story on Grace Christian School and the criticism it has taken for doubling tuition (despite leading the state for three years in public-funded Opportunity Scholarship dollars), for letting students and faculty go for not “fitting the mold” or for questioning leadership, for its heavy focus on athletics over academics and for its recent announcement that it was raising an additional \$98 million for a large-scale expansion; we at *The Rant* reached out to both the school and church and to the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority to explain the reasons behind the increased tuition and whether or not these actions support the “mission” of the scholarship — which was to provide private education opportunities to those who may otherwise not be able to afford it.

That was a long sentence. And it was longer than any response we received from both agencies prior to the story’s publication. This sentence is longer, too.

Since the story was published — becoming one of the most-read articles ever published on our website and the most commented and shared story we’ve ever produced — *The Rant* has reached out to Grace Christian and the NCSEAA to provide another opportunity to explain their actions and respond to public criticism.

We’re still hearing only crickets. The NCSEAA responded on Aug. 27, only to say, “We don’t have a comment on this.”

The silence only says one thing — both organizations are very much aware of what they’re doing and aware of the public perception. And also, that doesn’t bother them.

We wish Grace’s students and teachers all the best as the fall semester begins, but we hold fast to the statement that public money going to schools that don’t need it is only hurting our public schools. Our state leaders and the men and women in charge of private education in North Carolina seem to be more than OK with this.

NOSTALGIA AT SPRING LANE

The Rant’s cover story on efforts to keep Spring Lane Cinemas alive through nostalgia and out-of-the-box thinking received a lot of praise (and a little criticism) from readers:

Everything they’re doing to show the throw-back movies is awesome. If they would just put a little more manpower into keeping the theaters and bathrooms clean, we’d happily go there instead of driving all the way to Cary.

Lauren Riggs

Spring Lane Cinemas is the best. If you want better, spend your money in town and let’s pack those seats and show the owners that Sanford is ready for an upgrade.

Matt Miller

I appreciate everybody that keeps this theater going and the people who support it by going. I go quite often and love having a local small town theater. People don’t appreciate a good thing when they have it — the community needs to support them more.

Daniel Weaver

ANTISEMITISM IN SANFORD

The Rant reported in August about Sanford Police’s investigation into antisemitic literature left at several area homes warning of “the Covid agenda” led by Jewish people:

This is not surprising. If those in Washington are enabling this kind of hatred and targeting, it is bound to show up at our doorsteps. In a country that enables a man who wears a large tattoo for white supremacy on his chest to be in charge of our nation’s military, what do you expect? MAGA got what they asked for, and the guy who sees white supremacy groups like the Proud Boys as patriots, this is what we have to endure.

Gary Small

Those in Washington have enabled and — through media outlets — groomed folks to be weapons of hate in rallies, in social media comments, etc. From liberal youth screaming for Hamas to red hat folks yelling about immigrants — they’re all sick in the head, thanks to programming. I choose to truly love my neighbor and those I disagree with.

James Wilson



“Back to France with you.”

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Troy Jackson's family has farmed the 700-acre White Hill Farms on the Lee-Moore county line for generations. The family says local growth has led to more customers, but they're watching closely as the agricultural landscape in Lee County shrinks.

Photo by Ben Brown

COVER STORY

# LOSING GROUND

AS MORE AND MORE RESIDENTIAL AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENTS EYE LEE COUNTY, THE AREA IS LOSING CROPLAND AT A MUCH FASTER PACE THAN THE STATE

By Gordon Anderson  
[gordon@rantnc.com](mailto:gordon@rantnc.com)

When the Sanford City Council approved the Vermillion residential development last July, a familiar set of events played out.

Vermillion, to be the county's largest-ever housing development, will consist of 1,233 homes on 470 acres near the intersection of U.S. 1 and Colon Road. It will occupy a part of Sanford that not very many years ago wasn't even in the city limits, but today includes the Central Carolina Enterprise Park, Sanford's newest fire station, and the Galvin's Ridge subdivision (which at 1,219 lots held that "largest-ever housing development" distinction for Sanford before Vermillion came along). There are new commercial developments already in the planning stages for properties that line that Colon Road exit, developments that are expected to include a convenience store, fast food options, a larger restaurant, and other establishments yet to be determined.

Many in the area haven't been pleased with that kind of rapid change, and the familiar set of circumstances that surrounded the Vermillion approval was the public expression of that feeling.



Census data shows that local cropland declined from 19,534 acres in 2017 to 14,187 (27 percent) in 2022, and total farmland decreased from 35,062 acres to 31,204 (11 percent) in the same time period. That 11 percent loss far outpaces the statewide number — about 4 percent — over the same stretch.





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“There’s gonna be growth in Lee County. The issue is when they come to areas like this and take up fields that used to be a pasture. To a lot of people it doesn’t make much sense when someone buys up a 20-acre field and put houses every half acre.” — *Troy Jackson, White Hill Farms*

*Photos by Ben Brown*



“We are a rural county. Everyone knows that. If you want to live in the city, then live in the city and please don’t bring the city to us,” Cindy Simpson, a Riddle Road resident who addressed the council in July, said at the meeting. “We don’t need more industry here. What’s wrong with the people who are here? They’ve been here forever. This will likely result in our property taxes doubling. I live on a fixed income. I only get by as it is. How can I live on a fixed income and pay double what I am already paying in taxes? I can carry my own trash off.”

Simpson’s comments — right or wrong — reflect a line of thinking that’s common in the area with regards to development, particularly residential development. Change and growth go hand-in-hand, and there’s a good number of people in the affected areas who just don’t like or want either.

The reactions to this change have manifested themselves in a lot of what are almost talking points, particularly on social media: “our schools are already overcrowded,” or “we don’t have the infrastructure,” or “we’re losing all our farms.”

These talking points aren’t always correct — there’s plenty of capacity in Lee County’s schools, actually, and unless you mean more shopping capacity by “infrastructure,” we’re doing alright on that front too — but the last one about the shrinking landscape for agriculture has at least a basis in fact.

Manufacturing has been a staple of Lee County’s economy since before it was Lee County, but farming and agriculture were obviously here first and have remained an important part of the business landscape (“Lee County’s European and African settlers had been agriculturists in their homelands, and so farming naturally developed as the mainstay of the local economy during the 1700s and early 1800s,” reads J. Daniel Pezzoni’s *The History and Architecture of Lee County*, published in 1995. “The Highland Scots cultivated corn, wheat, peas, beans, sweet pota-

toes, and flax on their farms”). While direct farming employment accounts for about one and a half percent of local jobs, the broader category of agri-business brings that number to about 13 percent.

But growth and other factors have eaten into that quite a bit over the years. U.S. Census data shows that cropland in Lee County declined from 19,534 acres in 2017 to 14,187 (27 percent) in 2022, and total farmland decreased from 35,062 acres to 31,204 (11 percent) in the same time period. That 11 percent loss far outpaces the statewide number — about 4 percent — over the same stretch.

Another telling metric via Lee County GIS system — there are 709 fewer square acres of “vacant” land today than there were in 2005. That comes to about 11 square miles, and in a county with only 258 of those, it’s a significant number.

Development isn’t the only cause of that loss, and the numbers available don’t always refer specifically to farmland (“vacant” in GIS speak means just that — no buildings), but there’s no questioning that time and progress have eaten into local farmland, even if they’re not looking to do away with it altogether.

And although farmland is demonstrably getting smaller and smaller, that doesn’t mean local leaders haven’t done anything about it. Lee County in particular has introduced the use of several tools that promote and incentivize the preservation of farmlands — Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD), Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts (EVAD), and conservation easements.

VADs are agreements that — like their name states — are voluntary, and technically nonbinding. The land in question is required to be used for farming, horticulture or forestry and meet minimum acreage standards, and

landowners agree in principle to limit use of their property to agricultural pursuits and receive recognition that their property is designated for agricultural use. This helps owners avoid things like nuisance complaints about noise, dust or other byproducts of an agricultural operation, and gives them a say in public decisions about how farmland around the county is used.

EVADs go a step further, requiring a formal commitment to enter a conservation agreement that’s typically irrevocable for at least a decade and automatically renews for additional terms unless they’re explicitly canceled. In exchange, the landowners gain priority access to various grant funding, potential waivers on utility assessments, and other protections.

Conservation easements go the furthest — they’re legally binding agreements that permanently limit development within certain paramet-

ters while maintaining private control of the land in question and opening access to various reductions in the tax burden. If a farmer wants their farm to stay a farm in perpetuity, a voluntary conservation easement is the surest shot to getting there — the conservation easement remains in place even if they eventually choose to sell their property. The Lee County Board of Commissioners established conservation easement procedures in March of this year.

Kirk Smith, chairman of the Lee County Board of Commissioners, said the decline in farmland isn’t a new problem.

“(Recently) at the Central Pines Regional Council of Governments, we were privy to review a historical report from 1983. One of the top items of concern was the encroachment on our agricultural and forestry lands. Here we are 42 years later and the encroachment on productive farm lands continues unabated,” he said in a statement. “This past March we

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unanimously approved the Agricultural Board’s recommendation to establish the Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District. A majority of the Lee County Board of Commissioners agreed to establish a Conservation Easement Fund to offset those costs to the land owner that are beyond state and federal funding grants. Those funds would cover attorney fees, appraisal, surveys, and boundary signage necessary to establish a conservation easement. The county continues to see pressures on our land by the ever increasing demand for housing and apartment developments.”

The county board will have a chance soon to weigh in soon on a few pieces of land that are looking to take advantage of the new programs. The Triangle Land Conservancy, a non-profit land trust that strives to create a healthier and more vibrant Triangle region by safeguarding clean water, protecting natural habitats, supporting local farms, and connecting people with nature through land protection and stewardship, catalyzing community action

There are 709 fewer square acres of ‘vacant’ land today than there were in 2005. That comes to about 11 square miles, and in a county with only 258 of those, it’s a significant number.

and collaboration is expected to present to the board three properties totaling hundreds of acres that hope to eventually be Conservation Easements. TLC is asking the county to allocate dollars from its farmland preservation trust fund — paid for using “rollback taxes” from land being sold out of farm use for development — that cover the associated costs.

“Lee County is known for its beautiful farms, which have also been economic drivers for generations. Over the past few years, TLC has increased our conservation efforts in Lee County, helping maintain the beautiful and economically important

rural character of the county as it grows. We have worked closely with farmers, resource professionals, and county staff to advocate for local investment in farmland preservation,” Sandy Sweitzer, executive director of TLC told *The Rant*. “Conservation easements allow farmers to maintain ownership of their land, knowing that it will be their legacy, even as it transitions to future generations. We are excited to be working with three families on preserving their farms, ranging from produce to timber to traditional row crops, and hope to continue expanding our conservation efforts in Lee County.”

TLC has been protecting wild and working lands in a six-county region since 1983, and has protected more than 25,000 acres across Chatham, Lee, Orange, Durham, Johnston, and Wake Counties — more than 8,000 acres of which are farms under private ownership with conservation easements held by TLC.

For Bill Stone, director of the Lee County Cooperative Extension, the question isn’t about whether Lee County should be pro development or anti development, but how leaders here can continue to strike a balance that’s been in place for decades.

“One of the things that’s made us attractive to industry is that we’ve been able to strike that balance, and it’s just really important to keep it,” he said. “The assumption with some people you talk to is that people in agriculture are going to be anti-growth, which isn’t the case. They know that having a population interested in and willing to buy locally grown prod-

ucts is so important, which keeps bringing me back to that balance. You see a lot of folks who have been successful, and that type of interest from the public is what’s allowed us to pursue projects like the Agricultural Marketplace downtown.”

Anna and Troy Jackson are the latest generation to raise crops and livestock on the lands around White Hill Farms, which consists of more than 700 acres that sit on the Lee-Moore county line along U.S. 15-501 between Sanford and Carthage. The brother and sister team’s roots go deep in the property.

“Our dad started this farm when he

graduated from N.C. State in 1987,” Troy Jackson said. “But our family’s been farming around here forever.”

The years have led to some changes around White Hill Farm in 2018 — mostly because of damage done during hurricane season — and shifted toward crop public facing crop production. They opened a produce stand that sits by the highway and serves the public seven days a week.

The Jacksons aren’t in danger of losing their farm to development. They own much of the property in Lee and Moore counties, and while they lease the rest,

their revamped business model is humming along well, and they both plan to keep at it well into the future. But with deep roots in both the area and the area’s agriculture community, they’re both closely watching what’s happening in Lee County and the greater area.

They both stress they’re not against growth and not against development — “the more people that live here, the more customers we’ll have,” Anna points out — but they see how farmland turning into houses changes things as well.

“The development they’re doing on (N.C. Highway) 78 — that’s a fine place

to develop. There’s gonna be growth in Lee County,” Troy said. “The issue people have is when they come to areas like this and take up fields that used to be a pasture. To a lot of people it doesn’t make much sense when someone buys up a 20 acre field and put houses every half acre.”

Anna said growth doesn’t just take up cropland, it also makes farming more expensive.

“If we have 500 acres in production, we’re paying property taxes on all that, so it’s a struggle to fight with that,” she said. “Growth coming raises a lot of those kinds of (financial issues) for us.”

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Troy said farming takes space, and too much pressure on space creates a challenge. “We live completely off the farm,” he said. “To do that, you’ve gotta have land.”

To understand the development-agriculture balance, one also must hear from developers. Many represent out of town interests, but many live here or at least have deep ties — and it’s unfair to suggest they want anything bad for Sanford and Lee County.

Tom Darden, one of three property owners in the Vermillion project, spoke to the Sanford City Council at that meeting in July about his family’s roots in the area. His grandfather was the president of Cherokee Brick Company in the 1950s, a business that was passed on to his father in the mid-1980s. Darden’s first subdivision project was in Sanford in 2005.

“This community means a great deal to me and my family, and we care a great deal about what we build here,” he said at the meeting.

In addition to the Vermillion site,

Darden told the council that his family owns “another 850 acres on both sides of Colon Road in the immediate vicinity of (Vermillion). We are approaching these properties with care and deliberation, working closely with the city and community to determine the best path forward.”

He continued that conversations with companies that might ultimately choose to locate operations here made it abundantly clear that the key to attracting top-quality industries is high-quality housing.

“Much of the area surrounding this site is very suitable, and very attractive, for industrial development in the short term,” he said.

Jimmy Randolph is the CEO of the Sanford Area Growth Alliance, the local economic development organization which works to attract new industry to the area, so he’s well-versed in the issues surrounding development. But he’s also involved with TLC and is passionate about preservation, and he’s a strong

proponent of the idea that preservation is actually a part of attracting the industry that helps to grow a community’s tax base.

“When I think about the role talent plays in the process for companies seeking the best possible site for their industry, quality of place is a critical factor,” he said. “Aesthetics, the value of open space, the culture and traditions - those are all components. “We allude to all of those things in the context of their ability to attract top talent from around the world, and through the local talent pipeline. Human beings are making those decisions, and they’re thinking about the future of their own existence. SAGA is committed to a serious, sustainable future. And we have to be, or we’re going to find ourselves missing out on the future we want to have.”

Sanford real estate agent Steve Malloy told the council at the same meeting that the Vermillion site is an excellent location for a development of this size and type.

“Many of the locations inside the present city limits are not big enough to do a project of this size, either because the owners are not willing to sell, or because the topography presents challenges that are just too difficult to overcome,” he told the council.

Lloyd Smith is a Lee County native who owns a small, 20-acre farm in the Broadway area. He serves on the county’s Environmental Affairs Board (which approved the recommendation of the Conservation Easement projects the TLC is expected to propose this fall), where he’s particularly interested in issues surrounding agricultural land use. He hopes to see more conversations at the leadership level across the entire community about what can be done to grow what needs to grow and preserve what needs to be preserved.

“What the city wants and what the agricultural community wants – those things can be at odds,” he told The Rant. “But finding a balance, it seems like it can be done. But we keep running along parallel lines, and we don’t connect.”

Additional reporting by Richard Sullins



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ANTISEMETIC FLIERS  
DROPPED IN SANFORD  
NEIGHBORHOODS

Sanford police are investigating antisemitic literature left at several area homes this week which ascribes “the Covid agenda” to Jewish people.

SPD Major Vinnie Frazer said authorities are aware of the fliers being distributed in Westlake Valley, Westlake Downs and Brighton Point, all neighborhoods in west Sanford. *The Rant* hasn’t learned whether any of fliers were reported outside the Sanford city limits. Frazer said the SPD received word of the literature on Wednesday and has detectives looking into the situation.

The flier claims “every single aspect of the Covid agenda is Jewish” and lists multiple Jewish government and business officials it claims are connected to Pfizer and GlaxoSmithKline — manufacturers of the Covid-19 vaccine — as well as “practically all of the media.” It bears a link to a website connected with an antisemitic and white supremacist organization that contains multiple other similar fliers detailing alleged Jewish connections to the media, the slave trade, “Disney child grooming,” gun control, abortion, the Joe Biden administration, donations to Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, the Ukraine-Russia war, the Federal Reserve, the JFK assassination and more.

Other fliers on the site claim the Jewish Talmud is Satanic, and that Jews are involved in child sacrifice, child sexual activity and “anti white hate.” Another includes information about The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a fraudulent Russian text first published in 1903 detailing a fabricated Jewish world domination plot that was often used in Nazi German propaganda.

The flier distributed in Sanford also includes a Star of David opposite an ostensibly Satanic pentagram, and includes a verse from the Book of Revelation which references “the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.” The flier has been cited in news reports dating back to 2021 and 2022, although many of the people it lists left government service around that time or before. A 2023 Newsweek report said the same flier had turned up in Alabama, California, Colorado, Idaho, Florida, Vermont, Texas and elsewhere.

— by Gordon Anderson

Indie Fest announces fall lineup

Carolina Indie Fest returns to downtown Sanford and Hugger Mugger Brewing on Sept. 26 and 27, bringing live, original music on a large stage to Sanford in the form of a free festival.

This will be the eighth time the festival has been held since it was inaugurated in 2021. Hugger Mugger Brewing is located at 229 Wicker St. in downtown Sanford. For more information, visit [www.carolinaindiefest.net](http://www.carolinaindiefest.net).

The lineup is as follows:

Friday, September 26

**5 p.m. The Corey Stevenson Band:** Greenville, South Carolina-based Corey Stevenson, who began playing guitar at a young age, places country and southern rock at the center of his sound. He’s opened for major acts including Kid Rock, 3 Doors Down, Zach Myers, Alice Cooper, Bucky Covington, Big Smo and more.

**6:15 p.m. Jack the Radio:** These Raleigh roots-rockers blend rock and blues sensibility with Americana, folk and country to create a tapestry of swampy, southern-tinged sounds. The common thread weaving through the songs tells us to stand strong while riding the highs and lows life throws at us.

**7:30 p.m. The Dapper Conspiracy:** Billing themselves as “storytellers, entertainers and liars,” this Raleigh group founded by lead singer and bassist Ben Byrom are inspired by the eerie gothic vibes of Fleetwood Mac, the virtuosity of Andrew Bird, and the creative energy of Spoon. Their tight but rowdy appeal shines in open air festivals and basement bars alike.

**8:45 p.m. Pageant:** Based in High Point, this four piece band carves out a new take on the classic sound of 1980s rock. Inspired by acts such as Motley Crue, Guns N Roses, Aerosmith, and Cinderella, they also infuse fresh and modern sounds that will help them contribute to a new generation of good time rock and roll.



Charleston’s 2023 Hip Hop Act of the Year Sxvxt (pronounced “Savant”) will headline the Saturday portion of Indie Fest on Sept. 27.

Saturday, September 27

**2 p.m. Pablo Atlas:** When people talk about “roots music” they’re often referencing what’s otherwise called folk music or, in the instance of Greenville, South Carolina-based Pablo Atlas, folk rock. Pablo’s tales are ordinary ones writ large with a musical backing that’s easily recognizable from the best in this tradition.

**3:15 p.m. Ol’ Joey Scrums:** Blending folk, rock, and bluegrass influences into a genre-defying sonic experience, Raleigh’s Ol’ Joey Scrums conveys personal stories of authentic emotion and the essence of Americana. With diverse instrumentation and a genuine passion for their craft, they draw upon their varied backgrounds to create art that resonates deeply.

**4:30 p.m. The Pinkerton Raid:** This Durham band crafts “a fine blend of Beatles-esque dreamy folk,” according to Americana Highways. “There’s a glorious spirit to it ... thoroughly alive and refreshing.” Also described as steeped in the mysticism or Star Wars, the existentialism of Kerouac, the naturalism of the Lord of

the Rings, and the liberation politics of Woody Guthrie and John Lennon.

**5:45 p.m. The Boom Unit Brass Band:** Billed as “the Triangle’s local version of a New Orleans Second Line jazz band,” with a powerful sound featuring trumpets, trombones and saxophones, and a funky drummer holding it all together.

**7 p.m. Late Night Special:** Charlotte based group with a “funked up, rockin’ soul vibe” that’s all about breaking rules, lifting spirits, and connecting with audience. Reminiscent of the Killers and Lord Huron, with Kings of Leon flare at the forefront.

**8:15 p.m. Sxvxt:** Charleston’s 2023 Hip Hop Act and Soul/R&B Act of the Year (pronounced “Savant”) blends thought-provoking lyricism, ambitious musicianship and production, and a dynamic presence into a seminal listening experience. The native Chicagoan’s critically acclaimed releases are magnetic showcases of his artistry, but it’s his live performances that truly set him apart.

Sanford reports record tourist spending growth in 2024

From Visit Sanford

Visit Sanford reported record tourism spending growth in 2024, placing eighth in the state and first the state’s North Central Region for growth.

Visit Sanford announced on Aug. 28 that tourism spending in Sanford and Lee County reached a record \$114.61 million in 2024, a 9.5 percent increase over the previous year’s \$104 million. Sanford and Lee County’s spending growth rate leads the region, which includes Wake, Orange, Durham, Johnston, Harnett, Nash, Person, Warren, Wilson, Franklin, Granville and Nash counties.

**Increased visitors and new partners**

The surge in spending was fueled by a significant influx of travelers, with Sanford welcoming 160,000 overnight trips in 2024. Data from Placer AI, which the

tourism authority uses to measure traveler destination and event attendance, indicates a strong visitation from both in-state and out-of-state markets.

Charlotte led the way as the top in-state origin city, while out-of-state visitors primarily hailed from major metropolitan areas including New York, Washington, D.C. and Atlanta, demonstrating Sanford’s growing appeal as a destination for regional and national tourists.

The city’s hospitality landscape expanded in 2024 with the addition of the new Home2 Suites hotel. Visitor spending was distributed across various sectors, with hotel stays accounting for \$22.64 million of the total.

**Top leisure visitors**

Visit Sanford recognizes golf and weddings as the top leisure activities

for visitors. Golf enthusiasts come for Sanford’s unique courses and competitive pricing. Sanford also continues to solidify its reputation as North Carolina’s fastest-growing wedding destination, drawing couples and their guests with its unique charm and diverse venues.

**Meetings and conferences**

For meetings and conferences in the area, the Dennis A. Wicker Civic and Conference Center at Central Carolina Community College saw almost 68,000 visitors in 2024 and hosted key events such as: the Triple Crown Charity Car Show, Circus on Ice, quilting and fiber arts shows, gospel and beach music concerts, community career and job fairs, corporate and industry trainings and seminars, No Scare Fair, college and high school graduations, and local cultural and enrichment vendor fairs and lecture series.

**Local impact**

The travel and tourism industry directly employs more than 740 people in Lee County. Total payroll generated by the tourism industry was \$28.58 million, and state tax revenue generated totaled \$4.62 million through state sales and excise taxes, and taxes on personal and corporate income. About \$3.18 million in local taxes were generated from occupancy, sales and property tax revenue from travel-generated and travel-supported businesses.

These statistics come from the “Economic Impact of Travel on North Carolina Counties 2024.” The study was prepared for Visit North Carolina by Tourism Economics. Statewide, visitor spending in 2024 rose 3.1 percent to reach a record \$36.7 billion.

Visit Sanford reports additional visitation statistics based on reports from Placer.ai and internal revenue sources.



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# Commissioners’ rezoning hearing gets intense

By Richard Sullins  
richard@rantnc.com

A standing-room-only crowd of at least 150 filled nearly every available seat at the Dennis Wicker Civic Center on Aug. 18 as the Lee County Board of Commissioners waded into a thorny issue concerning how land should be used.

The question was whether a large tract of land near the Raleigh Executive Jetport off U.S. 1 should be rezoned for use as Lee County’s latest business park. It’s a question that’s come before the commissioners, and the Sanford City Council, several times over the past three years as large tracts of land needed for parks like this began to dry up.

The commissioners receive a small handful of requests for the rezoning of properties each year. Most are usually within the Sanford city limits because they need to have access to available water and sewer lines like those provided by the city. But this recent application by Trustwell Property Group, doing business as Helix Ventures, to create a business park for tenants of “light industrial” use resulted in a long line of attendees wanting their turn at the podium to express disapproval.

## WHY ANOTHER BUSINESS PARK?

Sanford and Lee County have been incredibly successful in attracting new businesses and industries, but by 2022, city and county leaders grew concerned that those efforts might come to a halt because Central Carolina Enterprise Park was almost at capacity. The lack of large tracts of suitable land made it much harder for the Sanford Area Growth Alliance, the local economic development arm, to compete for any new industries that might create more jobs.

Recruiting new industry is hard work, and even after weeks and months of preparation that often extends into the long hours of the night, most communities will come up short. But Jimmy Randolph,

SAGA’s executive director, has told civic groups many times that not having the right type of available space can knock a community out of contention before the competition ever begins. Without new locations for use as potential business parks, Sanford and Lee County’s recent record of success could become just a footnote in the state’s economic history.

That began to change in 2022 as leaders became successful in negotiating with property owners to create several new sites suitable for development along major thoroughfares like U.S. 1 and U.S. 15-501 in the county’s northern portions.

It was against that backdrop that Jonathan Keener, Trustwell’s managing partner, came to the meeting. Two years ago, Trustwell gained approval from the city for its Helix Innovation Park at the Brickyard, a 900-acre site now under development north of the city on U.S. 15-501. It was a scant 18 months later that the park’s first tenant, Japanese pharmaceutical manufacturer Kyowa Kirin, announced plans to build a \$200 million biologics Center of Excellence in Sanford.

Keener spoke to the commissioners of his company’s successes in central North Carolina, including Fujifilm Amgen and Genentech in nearby Holly Springs. Though life sciences has been among its most recent areas of success, others include device manufacturing and packaging companies that have seen advances in specialty component manufacturing for items like critical infrastructure for electrical aerospace, and batteries for other sustainable technologies that include electric vehicles, components for sustainable energy, and tech infrastructure solutions that are critical to the region’s growth in the next 25 years.

Keener said the Vector Innovation Park site is unique among any other in the county, as well as across the state, because of its easy access to rail service. For the past two centuries, railways have demonstrated time and again their ability to move large amounts of bulk, reducing shipping costs

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for businesses and making them more competitive. Rail is frequently cited as the most cost-effective means to connect businesses with raw materials and markets, strengthening supply chains and making regions more attractive for investment.

“We want to help expand the commercial tax base of the county to help reduce the residential tax burden that you would otherwise have to face,” he said, pointing out that 56 acres of the 430-acre site would be preserved as a natural forest buffer around sections of the Vector site, even though it would be an attractive location for future residential development.

## HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Aside from Keener, a total of 14 others came to the podium to speak their mind about the proposal to create a business park in northern Lee County. One after another, most spoke without remarks that had been prepared ahead of time. Like so many similar hearings across the county in recent years, they talked of how they as individuals were tied to the land, how it had been

passed down from one generation to the next in their families, and of their convictions that a way of life would be allowed to disappear if developments like the Vector proposal continued to gain approval.

Among these was Mark Mansfield, who spoke for just over a minute about how land adjacent to the development site had been in his family for three generations and was a tree farm that had been worked consecutively for the past 40 years. He said Keener would have made a fine used car salesman, referring to the developer’s presentation to the commissioners that Mansfield said spoke only of the project’s benefits.

“All this stuff he has shown you tonight is Cary. It’s Wake County, and it is Apex,” he said. “We don’t want this down there. We don’t need it down there. We want to be able to shoot our guns, to be able to hunt and fish on land that his been in our family’s hands for generations. We don’t need no light industrial park “

Mansfield talked of the flooding that comes with heavy rains and tropical weather systems that cross the county, saying

any proposed buffer that might mitigate the damaging effects that come with rising waters will not be enough to hold back the runoff that he has seen go unchecked during his lifetime.

“I am totally opposed to this, and a lot of other people are, too. It’s going to change our whole way of life down there,” Mansfield said.

As he began to close, he talked of what he termed the “Yellowstone Effect,” meaning the impact that the natural beauty often has on people who see it for the first time. Those moments, he believes, should be preserved for future generations to enjoy, and he gave voice to feelings that others spoke of that night, and on many other nights.

“We’re growing too fast, way too fast,” he continued. “We have got to stop and take a deep breath and think about what we are doing. It’s filling the pockets of people up in Wake County. That’s wrong. We are Lee County, proud Lee County people, proud of our heritage. Let’s leave some things alone.”

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Another speaker, Jeff Kidd, said he lived in Apex for 18 years until urban sprawl pushed him out. He wanted to “live out in the country” so that when he retired, he would have the sort of quiet and rural life he had always dreamed of, and he got that when he moved to Lee County in 2022. He fears his dream will be shattered when the adjoining land becomes inhabited by companies that will bring traffic, noise, and lights that will be on 24 hours a day, taking away the chance to stargaze without impediment.

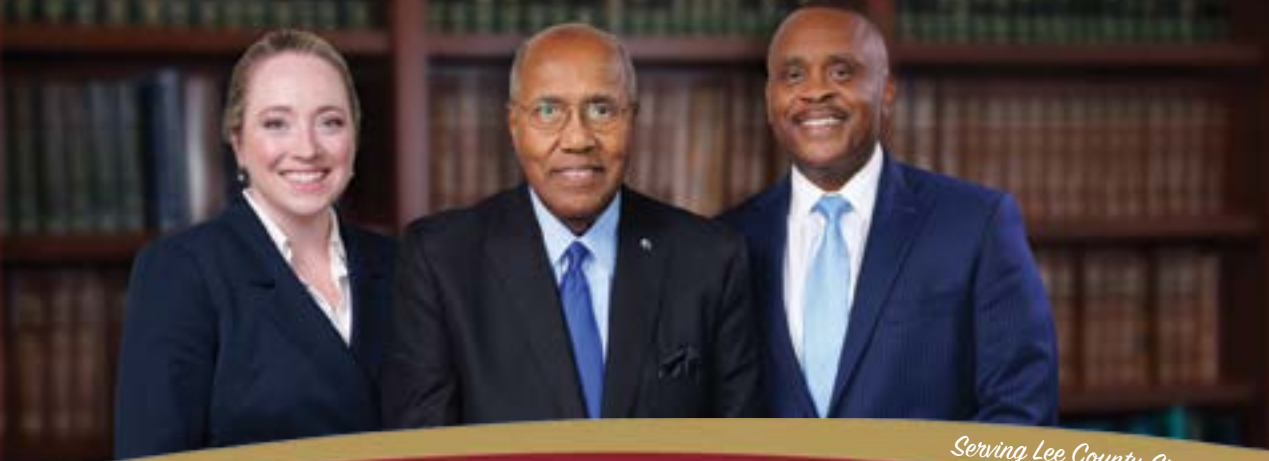
## ONE FINAL ACTION

After the final speaker, Chairman Kirk Smith closed the public hearing and declared a 10-minute recess. The combined Sanford/Lee County Planning Board that had been present for the hearing was allowed to retire to another room for their deliberations and recommendations to the commissioners. Those will be heard at the Board of Commissioners’ final summer meeting on Sept. 15, unless any changes are required.


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BRIEFS

WEST LEE’S PETRARCA NAMED LCS PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR

West Lee Middle School Principal Aimee Petrarca was selected by her colleagues as the 2025-2026 Principal of the Year for Lee County Schools. Superintendent Dr. Chris Dossenbach made the surprise announcement during the 2025 Convocation at Lee County High School in August.

Petrarca has worked for over 25 years in Lee County Schools including the roles of classroom teacher, assistant principal and now principal of her third school in the district. She previously has served as the principal at Greenwood and W.B. Wicker Elementary Schools prior to taking over West Lee last year.

During his Convocation announcement, Dossenbach highlighted the heart of what makes Petrarca a great leader saying, “At the core of Aimee’s work is a deep belief that students are capable of remarkable things — especially when they’re challenged to rise to high expectations. She does not believe in lowering the bar to meet students; instead she and her team build the support systems needed to help students reach it — and often, go beyond it.”

Petrarca and her team have pushed forward to apply for grants and opportunities to move the bar at West Lee, including earning the game-changing Golden LEAF Foundation Grant that will supply the school with more than \$1 million in grant funding targeted towards the implementation of the Marzano High Reliability Schools Framework, math curriculum resources, instructional coaching and career development resources specifically tailored to West Lee.

“I think what makes this recognition so special,” added Dossenbach, “is that it comes from the people who know the work of this role the best — their fellow principals across the district.

“Our principals are the steady force behind every successful school. I am honored to recognize Aimee with this award as she exemplifies the best of what our principals bring to our local public schools in navigating challenges, championing innovation and creating environments where both children and adults can thrive.”



West Lee Middle School's Aimee Petrarca was named the 2025-2026 Lee County Schools Principal of the Year — chosen by her fellow principals across the district. With more than 25 years of service in Lee County Schools as a teacher, assistant principal and principal, Petrarca is known for her “all-in” approach, high expectations and servant leadership style that puts students first. *Photo: Lee County Schools*

FOUR NEW TRUSTEES JOIN CENTRAL CAROLINA CC BOARD

Four newly appointed members have joined Central Carolina Community College’s Board of Trustees. Clerk of Court Susie Thomas swore in new trustees Brooks Matthews (Harnett), Charissa Moore (Chatham), Genia Morris (Harnett) and Thomas Womble (Harnett) during a ceremony at a Board of Trustees meeting on Aug. 6.

She also swore in reappointed trustees Julian Philpott (Lee) and James Crawford (Chatham). Philpott was reelected as chair, and Crawford was elected as vice chair. Karen Howard (Chatham County) was reappointed but not present.

The Board recognized and expressed appreciation to outgoing trustees Bill Tatum (Lee County), Derrick Jordan (Chatham County), Gordon Springle (Harnett County) and Jim Burgin (Harnett County) for their dedicated service and contributions to the Board. Each departing trustee was acknowledged for their commitment to advancing the mission of the college.

CCCC’s Board of Trustees is charged by the General Assembly of North Carolina with the responsibility of governing the college. There are 16 trustees in total. All are community members from CCCC’s service area of Chatham, Harnett and Lee counties.

LEE COUNTY SCHOOLS LAUNCHES ‘THRIVE’ INITIATIVE

Lee County Schools kicked off the new school year during a district-wide Convocation meeting by launching a major new initiative, Thrive in Lee, a new strategic plan to guide the district through 2030.

Surrounded by more than 1,000 employees from all of the district’s 17 school campuses, central office and operational departments, Superintendent Dr. Chris Dossenbach highlighted the district’s direction and shared commitment to ensuring every student is equipped to grow, achieve and thrive.

“A strategic plan is not just a checklist. It is not just a binder that sits on a shelf,” Dossenbach announced. “It is our collective commitment — a roadmap for where

we are going, how we will get there, and what matters most along the way.”

The Strategic Planning process for the district was led by Stefanie Clarke, the executive director of accountability, planning and performance. Together with a team of community members, school leaders, teachers and parents, Clarke and the Strategic Planning Committee embarked earlier this year to assess strengths, weaknesses and opportunities that would lead to focused discussion of priorities and growth areas for the district.

After months of meetings and planning, the committee put forward a plan that highlighted four priority areas and seven total goals. Thrive in Lee will push each district school and employee to focus on four key areas:

- *Student growth, achievement and future focused-pathways*
- *Comprehensive student well-being, safety, and resilience*
- *Operational efficiency and long-term sustainability*
- *Strengthen human capital pipeline and retain quality educators*

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GODFREY NAMED LCS TEACHER OF THE YEAR

From a field of 17 school-level nominees, Sammie Jo Godfrey was selected to earn the title Lee County Schools’ Teacher of the Year, moving on to represent the district at the regional and state level.

Godfrey, now in her fourth year of teaching, serves as an Exceptional Children’s teacher at J. Glenn Edwards Elementary School. Her role places her working with some of the most vulnerable students, those who experience a wide range of disabilities and challenges. Godfrey said she prides herself in meeting every challenge with grace, grit and an iced coffee in hand.

Described by her colleagues and coworkers as “an angel on earth,” Godfrey impacts not just her classroom, but families that she supports and teachers that work alongside her. One parent from her class said, “She did not just show up to teach. She showed up to care — with a heaven-sent kind of care that changed my child’s life.”

Godfrey said her mission is to let her

students know, both in word and deed, that they do not walk their difficult paths alone.

“I believe that I was called to be a special education teacher,” she said. “I truly felt that calling during my time at East Carolina University through the interaction I would have with individuals and children with disabilities in public places like the grocery store, Walmart or even the cafeteria. I just felt like God was laying on my heart that I needed to go into Special Education.”

Dr. Chris Dossenbach, superintendent of Lee County Schools praised Godfrey’s talent and drive saying, “She transforms her classroom into a space of growth, dignity and possibility. Whether she is developing a dozen individualized behavior plans or crafting creative ways to meet students’ emotional needs, she does it all with purpose, patience, and heart.”

Thanks to support from Wilkinson Chevrolet Cadillac GMC, Godfrey was gifted a one-year lease on a brand new GMC Terrain. Additionally, 3D Community Church gave her a \$500 award to put some gas in her new car and support her classroom needs.



Sammie Jo Godfrey, the Exceptional Children teacher at J. Glenn Edwards, was named Lee County Schools' Teacher of the Year at a ceremony in August, attended by Superintendent Dr. Chris Dossenbach. *Photo: Lee County Schools*



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EVENT CALENDAR



**SEPT 10-14**

**AWARD-WINNING LEE REGIONAL FAIR**

The Lee Regional Fair supports agriculture in our area and promotes local farmers by helping them showcase their products and educate the public about the importance of agriculture in our community.

Enjoy vendors, local bands and professional entertainment, magic shows, contests, pageants, agriculture displays, games of chance and — of course — a super midway with great rides.

*Learn more at [leeregionalfair.com](http://leeregionalfair.com)*

**SEPT 4:** The City of Sanford Parks **Summer Concert Series** will conclude with **The Phobes** (rock and blues) at 6 p.m. at Kiwanis Family Park. Free admission.

**SEPT 4-21: Temple Theatre's** mainstage production of **Grease** will run Thursdays at 2 p.m., Fridays at 2 and 7:30 p.m., Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. for three weeks beginning Sept. 4. Tickets available at [templeshows.org](http://templeshows.org).

**SEPT 5: One Night with Dalton Davis** will be held at Local Joes Tap & Grill at 8 p.m. Enjoy a night filled with great music, friends, food and drinks.

**SEPT 5: The Simpletones** will perform at Smoke and Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8 p.m.

**SEPT 6:** Vinous Wine Bar in downtown Sanford will host a **Raffaldini**

**Tasting** from 1 to 4 p.m. Try the amazon lineup of Jay Raffaldini Italian wines. Tickets are \$35 and must be purchased in advance.

**SEPT 6-7:** The Pint Sized Pasture will host **Family Farm Day** from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. both days. Enjoy cuddles with a Highland cow and selfies with a camel. Hands-on animal encounters with goats, pigs, bunnies, donkeys, llamas and more. Hayrides, play zones, farm fun and more. Admission is \$7. The farm is located at 1525 Fire Tower Road in Sanford.

**SEPT 12: 80's Unleashed** will perform at Smoke and Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8 p.m.

**SEPT 13:** The Sanford Farmer's Market's special event for September will be **"September Spice & Everything Nice,"** from 8:30 a.m. to noon in downtown Sanford.

**SEPT 13:** The grand opening celebration of **Lee County Athletic Park** will be held from 2 to 8 p.m. Join the community for a celebration of the new park and its several soccer and baseball fields and state-of-the-art facilities. Live music, food trucks, games and activities and a drone show will be part of the celebration.

**SEPT 18:** Downtown Sanford Inc.'s 3rd Thursday Downtown Alive Concert will feature **Soul Psychedelic Orchestra** from 6 to 8 p.m. The free concert series is located on Steele Street in downtown Sanford. Several surrounding businesses will remain open late that evening.

**SEPT 19: Big Bump & The Stun Gunz** will perform at Smoke and Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8 p.m.

**SEPT 20:** September isn't too early to celebrate **Octoberfest** at Hugger Mugger Brewing in downtown Sanford. Pinewurst is supplying the German food, and the brewery will have live music and dozens of authentic steins free to use during the fest. Event begins at 5 p.m.

**SEPT 20: Erik Strickland** will perform at Smoke and Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8 p.m.

**SEPT 26:** Wild Dogs Brewing will host **Stand Up Comedy Night** with Next Stop Comedy at 8 p.m. New lineups, no drink minimum. (May contain adult content). Admission is \$25 per person.

**SEPT 26: Dmitir Reznik & Bootleg Beat** will perform at Smoke and Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8 p.m.

**SEPT 26-27: Carolina Indie Fest** returns with its fall lineup from 3 to 10 p.m. both days at Hugger Mugger Brewing Company in downtown Sanford. Enjoy 10 live bands, food trucks, vendors, competitions and more.

**SEPT 27:** Sanford Car News' **Cruise'N** will be held from 3 to 6 p.m. in front of Camelback Brewing on Spring Lane in Sanford. Live music, door prizes, 50/50 tickets and more, along with sweet rides displayed by local car enthusiasts. Free admission.

**OCT 4:** Raleigh Exec will present its annual **Family Day at the Jetport** from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Join the fun at a free communication celebration of aviation.

**OCT 11:** Downtown Sanford's **StreetFest** will be held from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. This annual daylong celebration celebrates the revitalization efforts of Sanford's historic downtown while showcasing the community's artistic talents.

**OCT 16:** Downtown Alive!' **Trick or Treating Fun** event will be held in downtown Sanford from 5 to 7 p.m. Family-friendly trick-or-treating at local businesses. More details coming on Halloween fun, such as a jack-o-lantern walk and more.

**OCT 16-NOV 2: Temple Theatre's** mainstage production of **The Addams Family** will run Thursdays through Sunday for three weeks beginning Oct. 16. Ticket information and show times available at [templeshows.org](http://templeshows.org).

**OCT 23-31:** Downtown Sanford Inc.'s **Boo & Brew Ghost Tour** will run from Oct. 23-25 and Oct. 30-31. This pub crawl and self-guided audio tour pairs local shops, restaurants and bars with bone-chilling ghost stories.

**OCT 25:** Live comedy with **Brendan Eyre** (as seen on Late Night with Seth Meyers and Comedy Central) will be held at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center in Sanford for one night only. Proceeds will benefit Zoomies Funny Farm, a nonprofit animal rescue organization. Show begins at 7 p.m.

**OCT 25:** HAVEN's 24th annual **No Scare Fair** will be held from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center in Sanford. Enjoy an afternoon of kiddie crafts, games, vendors, food trucks and "no scare" trick-or-treating while supporting HAVEN of Lee County.

**MONDAYS:** Circle M City in Sanford will host **Monday Music Jam Monday** nights at 7 p.m. The town comes alive with pickin' and singing — guitars, mandolins, banjos, fiddles, bases and their players will gather in the livery stables.

**MONDAYS:** Lee County Library hosts **Story Time in the Park** each Monday at 10 a.m., rotating between Horton Park and Kiwanis Family Park (check the library website for details).

**TUESDAYS:** Lee County Library's **Movie Series** will run at 2 p.m. on Tuesdays. All ages welcome.

**WEDNESDAYS:** Lee County Library **Toddler Story Time** (for children ages 0-18 months) will be held Wednesdays at 10 a.m. at the main branch in Sanford and Fridays at 10 a.m. at the Broadway branch.

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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: Football

**ACROSS**

1. \*The Coaches \_\_\_\_ or The AP Top 25 \_\_\_\_

5. \*Super Bowl halftime performer Kendrick Lamar's genre

8. 1/168th of a week

12. Purse to match a gown

13. Karl of politics

14. Model builder's wood choice

15. \*YDS, TD or INT

16. Black like certain tree

17. \*Last season's NFL MVP

18. \*Worth 6 points

20. Way, way off

21. Owl cries

22. Come and \_\_\_\_ it

23. Ape

26. Stucco or aluminum on a house wall, pl.

30. "Wheel of Fortune" request

31. Bette Green's "Summer of my \_\_\_\_ Soldier"

34. Stag, not doe

35. Like an uncomfortable mattress

37. European Economic Community

38. \*NFL Hall of Famer Greene or comedian Hart

39. Seed coat

40. Cylindrical flower cluster

42. Stir or fuss

43. City in Illinois

45. #10 Down's counterpart

47. Small dog's bark

48. Adams of "Summer Of '69" fame

50. \*Point value of a safety in football, pl.

52. \*Worth 3 points in football (2 words)

56. Behind a stern

57. Raise the roof

58. Classroom parasites

59. Bloop

60. Actor and singer Kristofferson

61. Some are slippery

62. Scraps

63. Ballpark fig.

64. Dark loaves

**DOWN**

1. Bothersome one

2. \*Pro and College Football Hall of Famer Graham

3. Molokai party

4. Leeches, alt. sp.

5. R2-D2, e.g.

6. Declares to be true

7. \*College, home to football's Nittany Lions

8. \*Football intermission

9. Paella pot

10. Addict

11. \*What the NFL's Jim Brown famously did

13. Fixed up

14. Bleated

19. Hoagie, alt. sp.

22. Bathtub hooch

23. Green side

24. Accustom

25. Imitate

26. \*Quarterback's downfall

27. The N of U.S.N.A.

28. Move smoothly

29. Mister in Madrid

32. \_\_\_\_-view mirror

33. What Harry and Sally did

36. \*Pre-championship games

38. Work the dough

40. High tea vessel

41. Bucolics

44. Gustatory sensation

46. Hook, line and sinker person

48. Coffin holders

49. Rekindled

50. Type of ski lift

51. Drift like aroma

52. Type of fish net

53. Like acne-prone skin

54. Climber's destination

55. It's more, to some

56. Don McLean: "A long, long time \_\_\_\_..."

**CROSSWORD**

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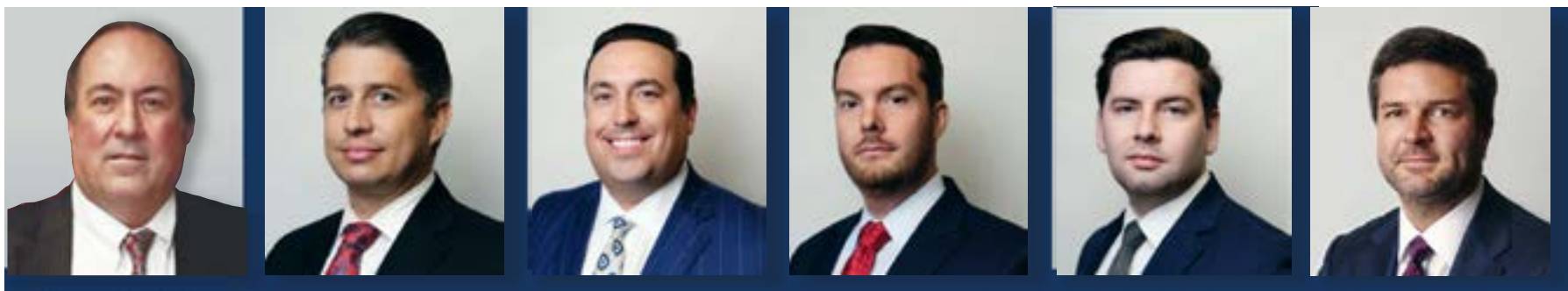


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