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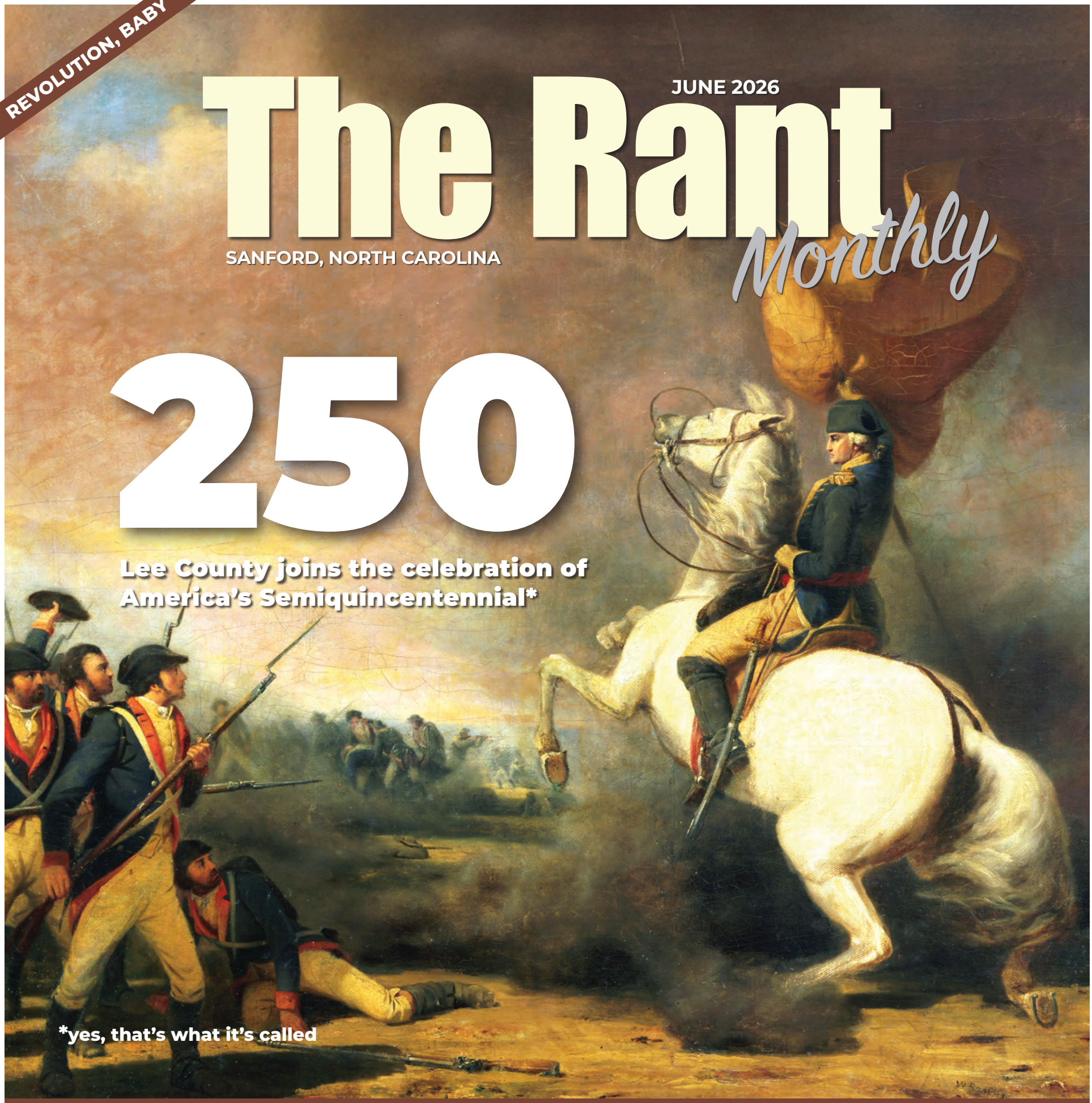
JUNE 2026

SANFORD, NORTH CAROLINA

250

Lee County joins the celebration of America's Semiquincentennial*

*yes, that's what it's called



SOUTHERN LEE'S MAGICAL SEASON | INDIE FEST PHOTOS | CCA PARENTS SPEAK OUT



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The Rant Monthly

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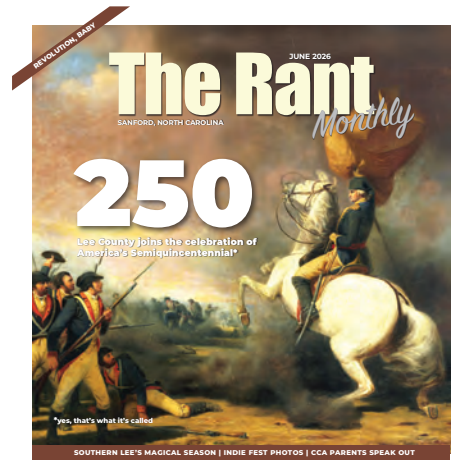
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The fascinating, layered history of our founding



It's really a shame that the majority of our "history learning" comes at such a young age. Sure, many of us went on to study American or world history after high school, but most of us got the brunt of it at a time when we probably didn't care.

A rite of passage for most men in this country entering their 50s (as I will next month) is a renewed interest in history. Maybe we just have more time on our hands, maybe we want to feel like we're part of something bigger than "now" or maybe we're still boys at heart and we like wars and things that go "boom."

I've taken to documentaries (and even a few books) these past few years, focusing on our country's wars; presidents like Washington, Lincoln and Roosevelt; and the whole story behind America's westward expansion. We get watered down versions of all of this in school.

Ken Burns' recent documentary on America's Revolution is must-see viewing (streaming) for those of you who want a big picture story of 1776 and what went into this country's independence from Great Britain. In school, we learned about great heroes like Washington, traitors like Arnold and villains like King George — in addition to tea parties and a few battles — but we don't get a sense of just how insane the idea of fighting the world's biggest military was at the time. Or just how many battles we lost. Spoiler alert: We pretty much outlasted England more than we defeated them.

North Carolina doesn't get a lot of screen time in the doc, but our state played a role in the outcome, especially toward the end. As Lee County joins the nation this summer in celebrating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, I urge all of you to take the time to learn a little more about how it happened.

Our country's history is full of inspiring stories. It's also full of terrible things we did to others (Native Americans, people of color) along the way. Learn that part of our past, too. Finding out that this country is far from perfect — and making the choice to not repeat that history — is far more patriotic than ignorant allegiance.

— Billy Liggett

FOUR BEACH OPTIONS

It's beach season ... here's what we like most about the Carolina coastline



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- August 10 - May
- Mondays -Thursdays
- 9:00am - 12:00pm
- $975/year

Registration Open until full ↓

Ladies Night Crafting: $25

Summer Porch Decor



- Ladies ages 18+
- Bob Hales Center
- Friday, June 5, 2026
- 6:30pm - 7:30pm

New Program: Fishing Derby



- Saturday, June 20th, 10am - 2pm
- $10/individual

SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Registration Ends: June 26

Summer Horticulture Club



- Southern Lee Senior
- Thursdays June - August 6th
- 9:00AM

AQUATICS

OT Sloan Pool & Horton Pool



- $3/person
- Tuesday - Sunday
- 12:30pm - 5:30pm

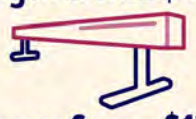
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SOUTHERN LEE HIGH REPORTS $30,000 EMBEZZLEMENT

Sanford police are investigating the embezzlement of nearly $30,000 from Southern Lee High School, according to an incident report. The report, dated May 18, stated that someone took $29,462.49 in "cash and illicit charges." The funds were last known to be secure at 10:10 a.m. on May 18.

According to a Lee County Schools statement, district officials recently flagged "some potential irregularities in the activities of an individual at one of our schools" and that "the individual whose actions are under review is no longer employed" by LCS.

This is the second case of embezzlement at Lee County Schools in as many years. In March 2025, Sanford police arrested a former central office finance employee on charges of embezzling nearly $200,000. A trial in that case is scheduled for July.

The LCS statement said district leadership "have been strengthening internal controls and oversight measures" with regards to finance, and credited those guardrails with identifying the irregularities that led to the discovery of the missing money.

WEDGIES COMING TO DOWNTOWN

A Southern Pines-based sandwich shop will open a second location in downtown Sanford.

Wedgies has operated a location on Morganton Road in Southern Pines since 1999, specializing in "hot deli sandwiches on a parbaked pizza crust" that are cut into the shape of a wedge.

CCA faces backlash after overhaul

Charter school administration steps down after assistant principal let go; parents and staff speak out against Central Services

By Gordon Anderson
gordon@rantnc.com

Parents, staff and even students at Central Carolina Academy showed up at an emergency meeting on May 22 of the public charter school's board of directors seeking answers about a wholesale change in the school's administration, but were frustrated by the vague responses they received.

Word began circulating through the community that the school's three administrators — Principal Greg Batten and Assistant Principals Frank Thompson and Mary Tatum — were no longer with the organization. All three had been with the school since its opening in 2022.

A message sent by the school to parents that was shared with *The Rant* indicated that Batten had "decided to retire" and that Mitch Stensland, a member of "the Central Services team … with over 30 years of experience in school administration" was filling the role for the time being. Batten's retirement came less than a week after the end of the school year. CCA responded to an inquiry from *The Rant* confirming Batten's retirement and said Thompson had decided to retire at the end of May. The email indicated Tatum was still in her role, although it was clear her exit was imminent.

Charter schools in North Carolina are publicly funded but independently operated by nonprofit boards under state-approved charters. They are not part of county public school systems.

The board met on May 22 in one of the school's classrooms, and at least 30 others, including Tatum and Thompson, were present, many of them holding signs with messages such as "we chose CCA for the people — not your politics" and "students and parents deserve the truth."

The board's only action at its May meeting was to go into a closed session that lasted for more than an hour for the purpose of consulting with their attorney. The board adjourned following the closed session, but its members stayed in place to field questions about the changes. A video conference that had been set up to allow virtual attendance maxed out after 100 additional participants logged in.

"I'm gonna sit right here and I'm gonna listen," Board Chair Don Sloan told the audience, stipulating that privacy laws prevented him from discussing any personnel decisions.

Tatum was among the first to speak up. "Why is my contract not being renewed?" she asked. Sloan cited the same "legal issues" and offered to talk with Tatum in private.

A common thread in the audience questions was Central Services, the charter management organization hired by CCA to manage the school, and whether the board was dictating the actions of Central Services or the other way around.

"Central Services makes recommendations," Sloan told the group. "We can approve those recommendations."

Central Services appears to oversee operations at both CCA and Chatham Charter School in Siler City, and Chatham Charter's website staff page identifies five employees listed as the "Central Services Team for Chatham Charter & Central Carolina Academy." CCA was created as a replication of the Chatham Charter model.

Tatum said CCA's board "is being micromanaged by the Central Services committee." She alleged that the board approved a 65-page policy earlier in the academic year that "shifted governance to Central Services" and that details about the vote were "not included in [meeting] minutes."

Stensland acknowledged that as acting principal, he'll be working for both CCA and Central Services. He said more involvement by the organization's School Improvement Team would be among changes CCA would see under his leadership, and also mentioned an apparently unsolved incident of vandalism in one of the school's bathrooms as something that needed addressing. It was unclear if that incident had ever been cited as an issue over which to overhaul the administration

"There was $30,000 of vandalism to the school and there have been no consequences," he said. But attendees who spoke didn't seem convinced any change was necessary.

Teacher Matt Mendiguren said he'd "seen nothing but successes here — so my question is if it's not broken, why are we trying to fix it?"

Other concerns raised during the meeting included the scheduling of board meetings during work hours and whether the board had enough members to properly operate under its own bylaws.

For his part, Sloan reiterated that he couldn't talk about personnel decisions, but said he'd never make decisions he didn't think were in the best interests of the students — which include his own children.

"I promise I'm looking out for my children's best interest, just like yours," he said. "I can promise this isn't some vast conspiracy."

A Change.org petition started by a student, which had more than 600 signatures by the day of the meeting, asked for "transparency and reason behind these decisions" and that the organization "reinstate our beloved administration team."

Parent Brandy Grindle said the fact that a student started a petition which spoke so highly of their school's administration spoke volumes about the quality of those administrators.

"It floored me that a student would write those things," she said.

School Board wants hand in future housing projects

District wants in on early discussions of how new subdivisions will affect school populations

By Richard Sullins
richard@rantnc.com

The Lee County Board of Education adopted a resolution in May asking for a formal role in reviewing large residential development proposals — a move that would place the school board inside a process traditionally handled by planning professionals and municipal and county governments.

The nonbinding resolution is the board's 10th policy statement in two years. It "formally requests increased coordination and collaboration between the City of Sanford, Lee County, planning authorities and the school system regarding major residential development proposals, annexations, rezoning and long range growth planning initiatives."

At its core, the resolution seeks to insert the school board into early discussions about how new housing projects will affect the communities around them. The request comes as Lee County continues to experience rapid population growth. New U.S. Census Bureau estimates rank the county as the 11th fastest growing in North Carolina, outpacing even Chatham and Mecklenburg counties by percentage.

The numbers behind that ranking are striking. In 2020, the five ZIP codes that serve Lee County had a combined population of 63,285. By last year, that figure had climbed to 71,700 — an increase of 8,415 residents in just five years. Demographers expect the county to surpass 75,000 residents well before 2030 and approach 100,000 by 2050.

Growth on that scale is already reshaping local needs: wider roads, expanded healthcare capacity, stronger emergency response systems, and more modern parks and recreation facilities. Much of that work is under way. But school board members argue that the quality and capacity of the school system — often a deciding factor for companies considering major investments — must be part of the conversation as well.

Board member Marcus Mason offered an emphatic endorsement of the resolution and the broader idea of shared planning.

"Growth in our community is happening, but it's not just a question of whether there will be growth in Lee County, but how will Lee County grow?" he said. "People move and invest in communities based on the quality of their schools, and coordination between the growth in this community and our school system is essential."

What remains unclear is whether the county's governing bodies will grant the school board the role it seeks. A structure for reviewing major developments already exists: the Sanford/Lee County/Broadway Technical Review Committee. The TRC is a monthly staff level meeting where engineers, planners, and representatives from local governments — including Lee County Schools staff — evaluate commercial projects and major subdivisions for compliance with codes and policies before they advance to elected boards.

Information obtained from Sanford City Hall shows that as of May 26, there are 92 existing projects within the county containing 14,830 residential family units.

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HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL

Southern Lee's magical season

Cavs enjoy best year in program's history

Editor's Note:
By the time this paper reaches your hands, the fate of the Cavaliers' season will have been decided. Rush over to rantnc.com if you'd like to know how it ends.



The Southern Lee Cavaliers baseball team finished the season 29-4 overall, scoring 269 runs and giving up just 92. The Cavs took on South Caldwell in the state finals in Burlington on May 29-30.

By Jonathan Owens
jonathan@rantnc.com

Before they ever took the diamond in the NCHSAA 6A state championship series on May 29, the Southern Lee High School baseball team already delivered the deepest playoff run and best season in school history. Should they bring home a state title (the series had not started as of deadline), it would mark the first sanctioned team sports championship for the school.

The Cavs finished atop the Carolina Pines 6A Conference standings this season with a 13-1 league record and 29-4 overall. Along the way, they scored 269 runs while allowing just 92, combining one of the classification's most explosive offenses with a pitching staff that controlled games all spring.

It's a dream season for a young team that has just four seniors on its roster. Many of the players contributing to this postseason push spent last season on the junior varsity team.

"They just went out there every day and not really looked at the big picture," head coach Tommy Harrington said. "Just went day by day, game by game. They never let the pressure of what a high school season can do to you get to them. They just played loose, and I think that played to their advantage."

Harrington said he believed the group had talent long before the season began.

> "I told people before the year started, 'I think we're going to have a pretty decent season, but I think our youth will show at times.' But this group's been resilient. They have put on a show this year, really and truly."
>
> *— Cavs head coach Tommy Harrington —*

He had watched many of them grow through recreational leagues and travel baseball. Even so, he expected a season filled with growing pains, especially after they lost the first game of the season.

"I told people before the year started, 'I think we're going to have a pretty decent season, but I think our youth will show at times,'" Harrington said. "But this group's been resilient. They have put on a show this year, really and truly."

That resilience defined the Cavaliers' postseason run.

Southern Lee carried an 18-game winning streak into the East Region finals before dropping Game 2 against Southern Alamance, 12-2. Rather than derail the team, Harrington believes the loss helped reset its focus.

"It kind of brought us back down to reality," he said. "It let the boys know we're not invincible. Once you hit the playoffs, it's basically a one-game season. Everybody needs a slice of humble pie every now and then."

The Cavaliers responded emphatically, winning Game 3 by a 13-3 margin to punch their ticket to the state championship series.

AN INNING THEY'LL NEVER FORGET

Southern Lee's playoff journey may ultimately be remembered for one unforgettable inning. Facing perennial powerhouse Terry Sanford High School in the fourth round, the Cavaliers entered the bottom of the seventh trailing 4-2 and down to their final three outs.

Then everything changed.

A leadoff single sparked the rally. The next batter hit what appeared to be a routine double-play ball, but beat the throw to first to keep the inning alive. A walk loaded the bases before junior Max Andrew Sercy ripped a two-run triple down the right-field line to tie the game.

Terry Sanford intentionally walked the next two batters to reload the bases, bringing sophomore Gavin Shaffer to the plate with two outs.

Shaffer had struggled offensively in recent games, but Harrington said nobody had worked harder behind the scenes. “He was coming to practice early and hitting, and he was staying late after practice to hit,” Harrington said. “It was his time.”

Shaffer delivered a walk-off single to score the winning run and send Southern Lee into the regional championship round with a dramatic 5-4 victory.

“We walk it off against one of the powerhouses of high school baseball around here,” Harrington said, “and send us to the regionals.”

YOUNG STAR LEADS THE WAY

Sophomore shortstop and pitcher Ben Harrington has emerged as the centerpiece of a deep and talented roster.

Harrington is batting .436 with a .553 on-base percentage, while leading the team in hits (44), runs scored (43), stolen bases (18), and slugging percentage (.614). On the mound, he owns a 1.70 ERA. His performance earned him Carolina Pines 6A Player of the Year honors.

He’s the fourth of the Harrington brothers to play for the Cavs, following Thomas (now with the Pittsburgh Pirates), Blake, and Cooper (pitching for Liberty University).

His head coach is also his father.

“I’m obviously blessed to be his dad, but also to be his coach,” Tommy Harrington said. “Ben has grown up with three older brothers, and I think he’s taken something from all of them — the calmness, the competitiveness, the ability to pitch. He’s put it all together and turned himself into an excellent high school baseball player.”

Tommy Harrington was also named Carolina Pines 6A Coach of the Year, giving Southern Lee both the conference’s top player and top coach during its historic season.

OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

The Cavaliers’ run has not come without setbacks. Sophomore pitcher Brody Brown posted a microscopic 0.38 ERA before suffering an injury midway through conference play. Brown continued contributing as the team’s designated hitter. Even with the injury, Southern Lee’s depth continued to show.

Junior catcher Luke Waters leads the team with 33 RBIs and 12 doubles while batting .320 with a .996 fielding percentage. Sercy has added a .327 average, 42 runs scored, and 16 stolen bases.

On the mound, Southern Lee has leaned heavily on Ben Harrington and senior Christian Cox, who has gone 9-1 this season and struck out 61, while also receiving key innings from Mitchel Bryant, Bailey Berg and Rylan Stephens.

ONE FINAL STEP

Southern Lee now turns its attention to South Caldwell (23-6) in the state championship series. The sixth-seeded Trojans knocked off the top seed in the West, Alexander Central, to advance to the final.

Harrington said he does not know much about South Caldwell, aside from the fact that the area is known as “Madison Bumgarner country” in reference to the Major League Baseball star who played there, but said his team’s approach will not change.

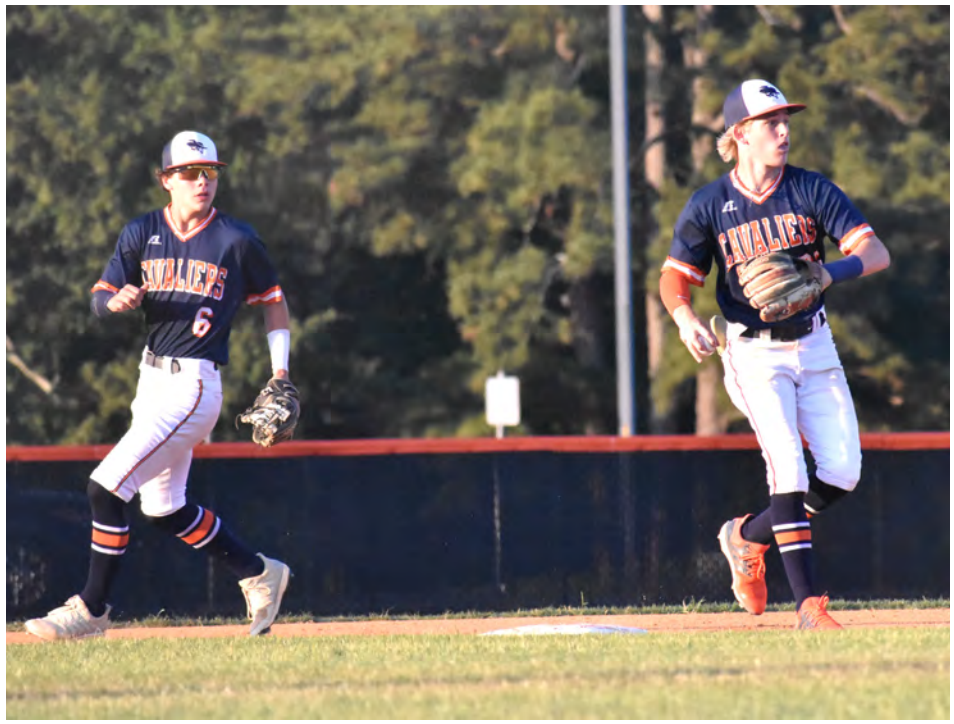
“Baseball’s baseball,” he said. “You’ve got to play between the white lines. Take what they give you. Don’t overthink it. Play to the last out. Effort and attitude.”

For Southern Lee, the opportunity extends beyond wins and losses.

The school has celebrated individual state champions before in wrestling and track and field, as well as non-NCHSAA bowling titles.

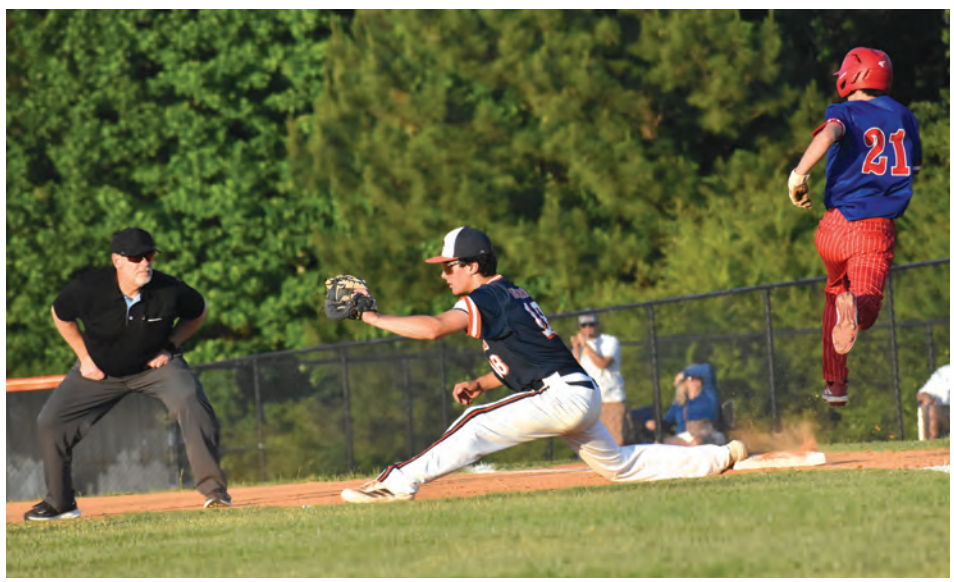
But no sanctioned team sport had ever reached a state final until this season.

“It’d be huge,” Harrington said. “When you say Lee County, baseball is sometimes what comes to mind. It would be huge for Southern Lee to get a piece of that pride and bring it back as a Southern Lee state championship.”









OPINION

My personal championship

By Billy Liggett

He was a big, stocky right-hander, and on this chilly early spring evening on a baseball diamond surrounded by cow pastures in deep East Texas, this guy was unhittable ...



Southern Lee High School's state finals run got me thinking about my own high school baseball experience. I played three years of varsity ball — I earned a starting spot as a sophomore because I was one of the few on the team who wasn't afraid to play third base (and one of the few with an arm that could accurately get it across the diamond on a consistent basis).

My fielding was fine. My hitting, however, less than stellar. I was what you call a "nine hitter." Bottom of the order. An easy out. Not that I didn't have my moments. I swung hard, and when I did connect, the ball often went straight up. On occasion, however, it also went far.

I was a huge Pittsburgh Pirates fan growing up. Born in eastern Ohio (before moving to Texas when I was young), my first Major League game was in Three Rivers Stadium. A popular outfielder named Mike Easley once waved to me in the left field bleachers.

I played pee wee ball (we wore blue jeans on my first team), and when I moved to Texas, I was introduced to "big kid" Little League and Pony League teams. I usually had a spot in the lineup thanks to my glove and arm, but I was never what you'd call a threat.

My mom remarried a dairy farmer the summer after my freshman year of high school, and we moved to a nearby rural town with a small, rural high school of about 200 students total. I made the varsity baseball team the following year, mostly because the school didn't have a JV team.

Our first baseman was my stepbrother. I got along fine with the guy — he wore a lot of camo, hunted a lot, took me fishing a few times and didn't seem too embarrassed of me. Instead, the hate came from his mother, a woman who made it a point to audibly harass me at our games. They weren't necessarily "boos," but rather, "Oh great, he's up with two outs" or "Here comes a strikeout." She wasn't wrong, mind you. But my own mother didn't attend many games, and for reasons that baffle me to this day, other parents didn't stick up for me.

So back to that chilly early spring evening in the cow pasture against a big corn-fed pitcher. He mowed down our first eight hitters — striking out six of them — leaving little me with two outs in the bottom of the third and nobody out.

"Well, here comes nine in a row," she said as I approached the box. (Again, where was my support?)

I didn't connect a lot, but I swung hard. This kid threw a lot of high fastballs, and I decided that on the first pitch, I was going to close my eyes, swing high and see what happened.

He rocked back and threw a bullet.

When you hit a baseball on the sweet part of the bat, no matter how hard the pitch, you barely feel it. A ball off the end of the bat or near the handle can hurt like hell. But the sweet part? I didn't really know I connected.

I sprinted toward first not knowing where the ball went. As I rounded the base, I looked up to see the center fielder giving the "round tripper" finger motion.

I knocked one out of the park.

I gave a little leap as I touched second, smiled big to my third base coach who was as shocked as anyone else and gave my biggest fan in the stands a thumbs up as I headed toward home. She wasn't pleased.

I never played for a state champion (or even a district champion). But I had my moment in the sun. Swing hard, friends.

EDITORIAL

CONTENTIOUS TERM AS BOARD CHAIR COMES TO AN END

Kirk Smith's time leading the Lee County Board of Commissioners came to an end in May. Smith, a Republican representing the eastern part of Lee County, stepped down from the role — although he remains on the board as a member — following a brief discussion by the rest of the board about changing their rules of procedure to allow removing its leadership.

The discussion never mentioned Smith directly, but it came on the heels of an embarrassing episode in which Smith used the gavel to pepper an expert who had been invited to speak to the board in March with nonsense questions aimed at undermining her position.

Further, Smith himself accused the rest of the board of "colluding" toward his removal — as though it's beyond the pale for elected commissioners to have discussions about who leads them.

It's almost funny that what amounts to a political iteration of badgering the witness — embarrassing for sure, but small potatoes compared to Smith's overall body of work that includes opining that schools should feed peanut butter and jelly to children of low income families, that an opioid addict who'd been administered life-saving Narcan seven times had been treated "six times too many," that CCCC basketball players had shown "total disrespect for our nation" by linking arms during the national anthem, and much, much more.

To be fair, these statements came before he was chair of the board of commissioners, but it's not like he's an unknown quantity. We also took some grief for including his "greatest hits" in our story about his resignation, but we'd argue public statements by public figures are not just fair game – they're integral to understanding who represents you.

Smith's tenure as chair isn't just marked by controversial statements, though. A decision under his leadership to award the county's EMS franchise to an unknown company that made questionable claims about its record in the field backfired spectacularly this spring, failing to save any taxpayer dollars in a field where experience matters (and possibly costing the county even more). And commissioners heard a budget preview at their first meeting after Smith's resignation which called for a five cent increase in the local property tax rate. There's rhetoric, but results speak just as loud.

All of that said, Smith will remain on the board through the expiration of his term at the end of 2026 — and almost definitely beyond. Smith drew no Democratic challenger in the filing period for this year's election and will run unopposed in the fall. There's been some activity on social media indicating potential for a write-in challenge, but even if that candidate completes the paperwork necessary to get a write-in line added to the 2026 ballot (we're unaware of any such development as of this writing), write-in campaigns are long shots at best. We don't say so, by the way, to discourage anyone from getting involved. Long shots aren't no shots, but we have to acknowledge the odds.

We've seen people of all political persuasions call for Smith's defeat at the ballot box: in light of the EMS debacle, in response to the proposed tax hike, and thanks to so much more. It's almost certainly too late for that, at least this year.

But if this series of events has you newly engaged, stay that way. There will always be Kirk Smiths in politics, and it's up to voters to hold them accountable.

READERS RESPOND

Comments from Rant readers on various stories from the past few months (visit our Facebook page @rantnc to see more):

On the Central Carolina Academy administration shakeup: I know that this school was a bright spot for this community. I do not know what went on, but I do know the members of the administration. They are of the highest integrity. I was so looking forward to my grandchildren having this school as an option. Now, the way these people have been treated it's a NO !

Keith Flood

On the Central Carolina Academy administration shakeup: My child's experience at CCA has been remarkable. Their team has been so supportive. One thing that always stood out to me was carline. Someone mentioned it in the meeting — the admin team is outside, working carline and monitoring students safety every single morning, rain or shine. That's not something you see often. It's just one simple example of how they go above and beyond. I'm deeply saddened by how this has played out and hope there's a way to remedy the situation, at least to some degree.

Elizabeth Colebrook

On the Central Carolina Academy administration shakeup: I chose CCA for my kids because of the administration. I don't want a school that is run by an administrator who is also on the Central Services team. That is double dipping, no matter how he tries to BS his way out of it.

Jennifer Spivey

On the Central Carolina Academy administration shakeup: The overwhelming turnout of more than 100 parents at the [most recent] meeting underscores the depth of concern regarding the administrative changes. The lack of transparency and communication from Central Services is troubling, especially given the success and personal attention the students have thrived under.

Devin Holt Bean

On Lee County commissioners announcing a 5-cent tax hike: We bought property in Lee County in January of 2020. he very next year, our property taxes doubled. We built a little house in 2024 and by next year, we probably won't even be able to afford the property taxes. Harnett County just had a major hike too. People wonder why those of us from North Carolina are so cranky about the change.

Kendel Smith

On Lee County commissioners announcing a 5-cent tax hike: I know a lot of people are frustrated and concerned about this increase, especially with how expensive everyday life has already become. At the same time, most of us feel like we really have no choice but to adjust and keep moving forward. I just hope the leaders of Lee County would truly consider the burden this places on families, seniors, and hardworking people throughout the county. Would you?

Elaine Hathcock

On The Rant's May feature on UNC pitcher Walker McDuffie: While I did not teach Walker, I was fortunate to get to know him during his time at East Lee. It's wonderful to see him living his dream and succeed for UNC ... and that's from an NC State fan. Way to go Walker!

Deborah Grace

On news that a new elementary school in Lee County is in the works: They need more schools, not just elementary. They also need another middle and high school with all the subdivisions they're building. But heck, they can't even get employees now with them receiving the bare minimal funding. How do they expect all of this to happen?

Kaylyn Thomann





WASHINGTON LEADS

During the initial engagement of the Battle of Princeton in 1777, British forces dispersed the vanguard American brigade after bayoneting its leader, General Hugh Mercer. In response, George Washington arrived dramatically on horseback to rally the troops, bolstered by fresh reinforcements and artillery. Artist William T. Raney issued this dramatic rendering of the scene in 1848. In 2026, *The Rant* used it for the cover of a small-town newspaper.

COVER STORY

SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL

AS LEE COUNTY JOINS THE NATION IN CELEBRATING THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICA'S FREEDOM, OUR AREA CAN BOAST A SMALL ROLE IN MAKING THAT INDEPENDENCE HAPPEN

BY GORDON ANDERSON, RICHARD SULLINS & BILLY LIGGETT

The year was 1781 — five years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence and a full 26 years before Lee County would be established in North Carolina. That spring, a teenage militiaman from what was then Moore County marched, fought and suffered through the final year of the American Revolution and became one of the many heroes who played a role in America's victory over the British.

Later that summer, a plantation home near today's Lee-Moore county line became the site of a "skirmish" between a small American militia and loyalists to the king.

That fall, the British surrendered at Yorktown, and the rest was history.

As today's United States of America prepares to celebrate the 250th anniversary of its independence, *The Rant Monthly* takes a look at not only the events planned locally marking the occasion, but this area's small part in securing a victory over the greatest of odds.



Recent reenactment of the Revolutionary War skirmish from 1781 at the House in the Horseshoe, located just west of today's Lee County line.

Lee County's 250th celebration plans

July 4 will be big locally, but the fun doesn't stop there

Next month will mark the Declaration of Independence's 250th birthday, and Lee County's efforts to commemorate the occasion have been taking shape behind the scenes for several months now.

A volunteer committee formed by the Lee County Board of Commissioners is coordinating the effort, pulling together local governments, civic groups and cultural organizations under a single "America 250" banner. The goal is less about a single event and more about a yearlong series of programs tied to history, education and community celebration.

The committee includes Lee County Commissioner Kirk D. Smith, Sanford Mayor Rebecca Salmon, Broadway Mayor Donald Andrews, Marsha Hanna, Elayne Monjar, Lee County Attorney Whitney Parrish, Bianka Stumpf, Kathleen Munn, Lee County Libraries employees Beth List and Hunter Randolph, Stacy Nooning, Sally Porter, Broadway Town Board member and Visit Sanford Director Wendy Bryan, and school board member Eric Davidson.

The key events, naturally, will come on Independence Day.

In Broadway, the Veterans Council and U.S. Marine Corps League will host a July 4 ceremony at the North Carolina Veterans Memorial. The program, which begins at 10 a.m., is expected to include a color guard, a public reading of the Declaration of Independence, musical performances and a patriotic quilt presentation to a local veteran. The town is also planning a golf cart parade as part of the morning's events.

Attention shifts to Sanford later in the day, when the city's "Red, White, and Blue Bash" is scheduled to begin at 5 p.m. at Kiwanis Family Park. The event will feature live music, food trucks and fireworks, continuing a format that has drawn large crowds in recent years.

Beyond July 4, the committee's calendar stretches into the fall.





Above: Temple Theatre will present "1776: An American Musical" in September. Left: Fireworks at Kiwanis Park is set for July 4.

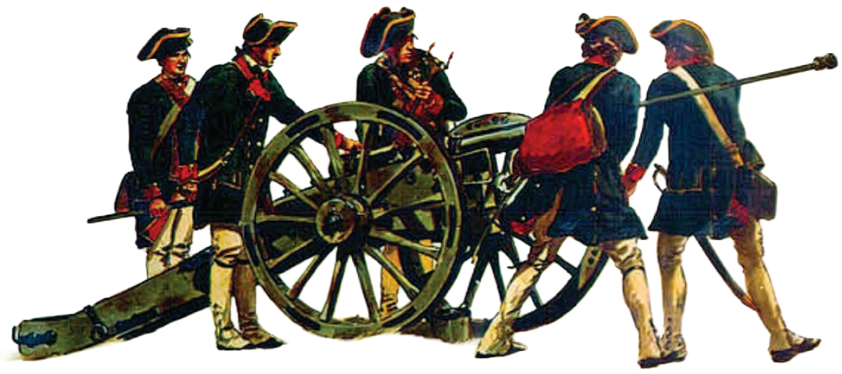
One of the larger projects is the "Beyond the Liberty Tree" initiative, which will culminate with a ceremonial tree planting at the Lee County Library at 10 a.m. on Sept. 17, Constitution Day. The project is part of a broader effort to plant 100 trees in Western North Carolina as part of hurricane recovery efforts, along with a commemorative plaque marking the anniversary.

Local history and education efforts will also play a major role. Lee County Libraries are planning a series of programs throughout the year, including monthly history talks, a traveling civil rights exhibit and hands-on activities tied to the Revolutionary era. Schools and community groups are expected to tie into those efforts with field trips and student programming. For more information about these events, visit library.leecountync.gov.

Downtown Sanford Inc. is working on a self-guided historical walking tour with permanent signage, while also exploring interactive elements like a scavenger hunt tied to the anniversary. The Lee County Agricultural Fair will adopt a "From Fields to Freedom" theme, highlighting the county's agricultural history alongside the national milestone.

There will also be arts programming marking the anniversary. Temple Theatre will stage "1776: An American Musical" in September, and Central Carolina Community College is planning a lecture and film series focused on early American history. Other organizations, including the Railroad House Historical Association and local arts groups, are expected to layer in exhibits and events throughout the year. These events and more will be included in *The Rant Monthly*'s upcoming event calendars.

— by Gordon Anderson



The story of Pvt. Jacob Gaster

The 'local boy' who fought for independence

Private Jacob Gaster, whose family homeplace later fell within the boundaries of Lee County when the General Assembly created it in 1907, is now the only known Revolutionary War veteran tied to the land the county occupies today. More than two centuries after his service, his remains rest at the Lee County Courthouse, re-interred there during the county's 100th anniversary celebration in 2007.

As Lee County pauses to remember the struggle of the thirteen colonies to cast off British rule and form a new nation, it can take pride in the one soldier known to have served from the land that would one day become the county.

Gaster's brief but well-documented service appears in his later pension application, which details his experiences as a young volunteer during the final campaigns of the war.

A VOLUNTEER AT SIXTEEN

On July 4, 1776, while delegates in Philadelphia signed the Declaration of Independence, an eleven year old boy in central North Carolina listened eagerly — along with millions of others — for word of what had taken place. That boy, Jacob Gaster, would grow up during the birth of the nation whose creation he would later help secure.

Just under five years later, as British General Charles Cornwallis marched his Redcoat army across North Carolina, Gaster volunteered for service. In March 1781, at age 16, he joined the Cumberland County Regiment of Militia, first under Captain Daniel Buie and later under his father, Captain Henry Gaster, both serving under the command of Philip Alston.

As Cornwallis pushed toward Wilmington, Captain Buie's mission was to harass the British column, slowing its progress and launching nighttime raids on its encampments.

CAPTURED AT BARBECUE CHURCH

On March 28, 1781, a detachment of Cornwallis' troops stopped to rest at Barbecue Presbyterian Church in pres-





Jacob Gaster was originally buried on land formerly owned by his father with only fieldstones marking the grave. In 2007 as part of the Lee County Centennial Celebration, his remains were moved to the Lee County Courthouse Lawn as he was the only known Revolutionary participant from Lee County.

ent-day Harnett County. Captain Buie led a small group of four militia soldiers, including young Jacob Gaster, in an attempt to disrupt the British position.

Only one of the four escaped. Gaster and the other two were captured and taken as prisoners of war.

The British marched them to Cross Creek (known today as Fayetteville), where they were placed aboard a ship on the Cape Fear River, then transferred to another vessel in Wilmington and carried to Charleston. There, Gaster spent roughly two months confined aboard a prison ship in the sweltering summer heat.

He was eventually exchanged for British prisoners and made his way home to Cumberland County around late July or early August 1781 – just 10 weeks before Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown on October 19, 1781.

RETURN TO SERVICE

Gaster re-entered service in January 1782 for a three month term, this time assigned to guard military supplies at Cross Creek against Tory raiders. He was discharged in April and returned home.

His pension application – approved in 1833 for an annual payment of $23.33, which he received until his death in 1855 – includes sworn statements from friends and neighbors attesting to his service.

One of them, Daniel McIver, testified that he served alongside Gaster in 1782 and knew of his earlier capture in 1781. McIver described him as "a man of good Character for Truth and Veracity" and noted that Gaster had been "frequently Elected a member of the Legislature of this state from this County."

A LOCAL SOLDIER IN A NATIONAL STORY

Today, Jacob Gaster's resting place at the Lee County Courthouse allows the community to tell his story—one woven into the final, decisive months of the American Revolution.

The nation's independence was secured not only by generals and statesmen, but also by young men like Gaster: farmers, militiamen, and future civic leaders who helped build the new republic they had fought to create.

— by Richard Sullins





The House in the Horseshoe is home to our area's only Revolutionary War fight, though the history books refer to it as more of a "skirmish."

Photo: North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

A skirmish at the Alston House

The House in the Horseshoe's role in the War

North Carolina's role in the American Revolution between 1776 and 1781 was significant, just perhaps not on the battlefield. Ours was the first colony to formally instruct its delegates to call for independence with the Halifax Resolves in April of 1776. The Ocracoke Inlet would become a crucial port for much-needed supplies for the Continental Army..

Locally, the Wilcox Iron Works along the Deep River in what is now Chatham County supplied critical munitions and iron for the army and for local militias. And while there was certainly blood shed on North Carolina soil during the war, the brunt of the fighting in the Tar Heel State didn't come until toward the end of it, beginning in 1780.

That's where the House in the Horseshoe comes in.

Located in a "horseshoe" bend on the Moore County side of the Deep River, near the present-day Lee County line, the house was built in 1772 by Philip Alson and was one of the first "big" houses to be built in the North Carolina backcountry. Alston was a colonel in the Whig militia — a group of part-time civilian-soldiers who supported the Patriot cause and independence — and he and his men were locked in a back-and-forth small battles in the Sandhills







The House in the Horseshoe holds annual reenactments of its battle from 1871. Guests can visit the site year-round (it's currently closed for renovations and a new visitor center), and learn more about the battle and American Revolution history.

Photos: House in the Horseshoe, via Facebook





In January of 1871, North Carolina saw its most "action" during the famous Race to the Dan — a competition between Patriot and British forces as they raced north from the Battle of Cowpens in South Carolina to be first to reach the Dan River at the Virginia/North Carolina line. The race would prove costly for Gen. George Cornwallis' troops, which suffered greatly at the hands of Gen. Nathanael Greene's Patriot troops. After the Guilford battle, Cornwallis' troops marched to Wilmington to regroup before its final push north (which would end with surrender to George Washington at Yorktown in October).

The fight at the House in the Horseshoe did not involve Gen. Cornwallis and his forces, but rather a small British militia led by 26-year-old David Fanning, who had previous run-ins with Alston and other Patriot militias throughout the spring and summer of 1871. Fanning's guerrilla-style tactics and bloodlust made him a notorious figure in the Carolinas at the time. Alston, considered a "ne'er-do-well" son of a prosperous plantation owner, didn't have a much better reputation. Alston reportedly had killed one of Fanning's officers, which made Fanning's surprise attack of the House on the Horseshoe — where Alston and his men were camping on July 29 — more of a revenge attack than anything independence-related.

From the *Journal of the American Revolution*: "At daybreak, Fanning launched his assault. His force, approximately 30 strong, came from the north, across what was then open farmland but today is covered with trees. Alston had about 25 men, who immediately barricaded themselves in the house, as his wife, Temperance, hid their four youngest children in the fireplace that still stands in the center of the great room."

Fanning's troops fired their rifles at the home (the bullet holes can still be seen today), and to force Alston's men out, decided to burn the house down. One Torie was shot down as he tried to run at the home with a torch. After a few more failed attempts, Fanning's men rolled a cart of burning straw up

to the side of the house (a scene that marks the climax of reenactments to this day).

The house did not burn, and after the deaths of about four Patriots and two loyalists, Alston surrendered. What happened next is also part of the annual reenactments. From the *Journal*: "The front door of the house opened, and out stepped the lady of the house (Temperance), waving a piece of white linen. Firing on both sides ceased immediately. The men, Loyalist and Patriot alike, must have been stunned at this extraordinary act of courage."

Each year, "Temperance" repeats her surrender on that porch: "We will surrender, sir, on condition that no one shall be injured; otherwise we will make the best defense we can and if need be, sell our lives as dearly as possible."

In his surrender, Phillip Alston agreed to acknowledge himself as a prisoner of war and signed a pledge of neutrality (which he would quickly ignore). He would later be jailed in Wilmington on suspicion of murder and escape to Georgia, where he was shot to death through his bedroom window in 1791.

In 1798, North Carolina Gov. Benjamin Williams bought the plantation. Williams was also a colonel under George Washington, a member of the first board of trustees of the University of North Carolina and served in the national Congress at Philadelphia.

In 1954, the Moore County Historical Association purchased the house, outbuildings and 4.2 acres of land. The next year the state assumed jurisdiction over the property. With local cooperation, the house was restored and more of the surrounding land was purchased. In 1971 the House in the Horseshoe was designated a North Carolina State Historic Site, which by 2005 featured, in addition to the Alston House, a visitors center, outdoor exhibits and monuments, picnic facilities, and a gift shop. Craft demonstrations and reenactments of the famous skirmish are also held at the site.

Work is currently underway on a new visitor center at the site, which will remain closed to the public until the work is complete.

— *Billy Liggett*



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CAROLINA INDIE FEST

PHOTOS BY BEN BROWN

The eighth Carolina Indie Fest at Hugger Mugger Brewing in downtown Sanford drew great crowds and 10 great bands on May 15-16. Photographer and Friend of *The Rant* Ben Brown captured not only the musicians, but the artists, vendors and music lovers who gathered for the two-day event.









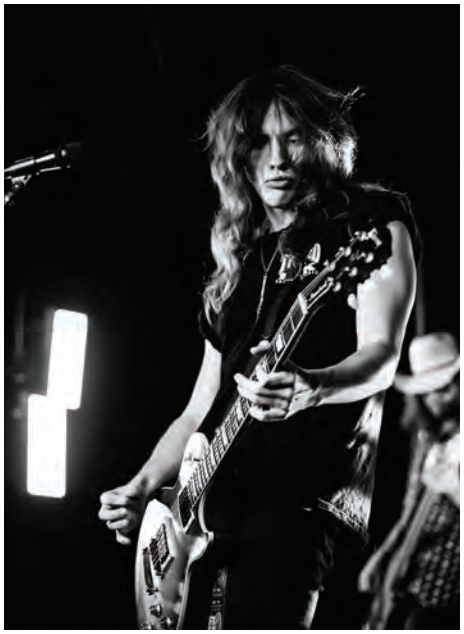


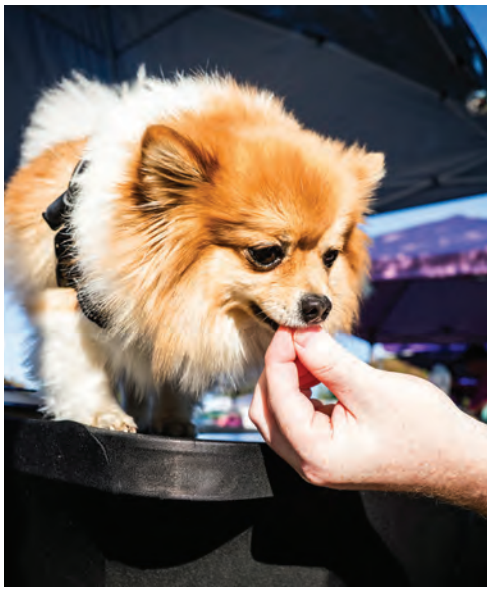





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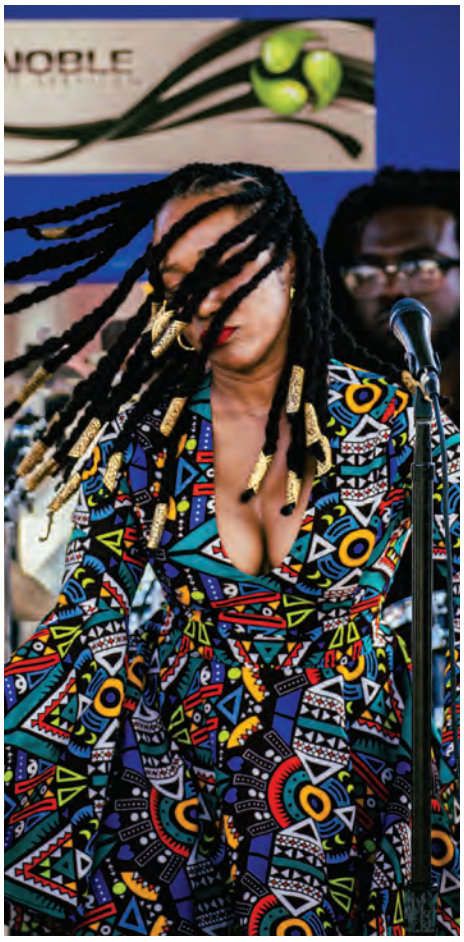

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LEE EARLY COLLEGE SENIOR EARNS FULL RIDE TO PRINCETON

Lee Early College graduate Allison Tunnard is preparing to leave North Carolina for Princeton University, where she will attend on a full four-year academic scholarship through the QuestBridge National College Match program.

She hopes to major in public policy and pursue a career in the legal field. “I really want to try and pursue education law,” she said. “Especially since I was here in the public school system.”

Recently, Tunnard served as an AVID tutor at West Lee Middle School, an experience she says profoundly shaped her goals.

“Just helping out the students made me realize how much we need legal input and adjustments in the education system,” she said. “It just made it really clear I want to make a difference in public education.”

She credits Lee Early College and the Lee County public school system for getting her to this point.

“I know public schools are a big, big reason why I’m in this position and how much Lee County Schools have helped me,” she said. “So I really want to help out and really advocate for those kinds of schools, because without that help, I would not be in the position where I am.”



Marc Mason was sworn in as a member of the Lee County Board of Education in January.

School board member dies in fire

By Gordon Anderson
gordon@rantnc.com

Lee County Board of Education member Marcus Mason died in an early morning house fire early on May 27.

The Lee County Republican Party appointed Mason, 59, to the board in January to fill the unexpired term of a member who resigned. He had filed a month earlier to seek a seat on the board in the 2026 election.

Authorities responded to the fire at Mason’s home around 2:35 a.m. on May 27, according to Sanford police. They identified him as the victim in a press release later in the morning. By 10 a.m., firefighters were still on the scene at 1326 Summerset Place, where major fire damage was visible from the street.

Police said that morning they were still investigating the cause of the fire and will release more information as it becomes available.



The home of School Board member Marcus Mason at 1326 Summerset Place in Sanford, following a fire on May 27.

Lee County Board of Education Chair Sherry Womack released a statement after the news spread on May 27:

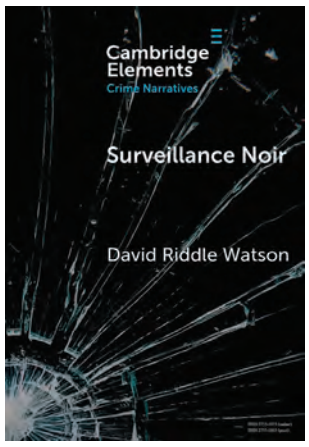
“All of us at Lee County Schools are deeply saddened by the tragic passing of Board of Education member Marcus Mason. Marcus was not only a colleague, but a dear friend. Although his time on the Board of Education was brief, he demonstrated a genuine commitment to the success and well-being of students, a sincere appreciation for the district’s staff, and a strong desire to learn more about public education in order to help guide thoughtful policy and decision-making. He was someone who quietly cared deeply about others. ... We will greatly miss his curiosity, compassion, and dedication to serving others.”

Watson's latest book explores surveillance in crime fiction

By Gordon Anderson
gordon@rantnc.com

Somewhere, someone's probably watching you. Over the past two decades, surveillance — especially in its digital forms — has become such a routine part of everyday life that it's almost faded into the background.

Dr. David Watson, a humanities instructor at Central Carolina Community College, wants you to keep that thought in focus. Not because you should be paranoid (well, not just because you should be paranoid), but because it's actively changing the way we process "truth" in the modern world.



That was the impetus for Watson's new book, "Surveillance Noir: Being Watched in 21st Century Film and Literature," which will be available everywhere on June 4 via Cambridge Press. Watson used crime fiction in many of its forms as a lens through which to talk about the ways in which we're being watched – and the ways that's changing our world.

"Anything we think of as crime fiction is going to fall under the idea of surveillance somehow," Watson said. "All the digital detritus of where you've been and who you've communicated with. I used things like 'Black Mirror' and 'The Handmaid's Tale' to talk about how this architecture of surveillance is shaping what becomes 'truth.' I took a pretty expanded idea of what I see as crime fiction — you might not think of 'The Handmaid's Tale' that way, but there's this totalitarian government, people are murdered. All the elements are there. The genre's much richer if you think about what makes something illegal, and who's judging this."

Similarly, Watson discusses works ranging from "Against a Loveless World," a story about the journey of a young Palestinian refugee, to recent works by Thomas Pynchon and Paul Thomas Anderson.

This isn't Watson's first foray into the topic. In 2021, he published "Truth to Post-Truth in American Detective Fiction," also via Cambridge. It mined similar territory — including a chapter on HBO's "The Wire," a crime story often hailed as one of the greatest television series ever — and Watson acknowledges the common thread in the works.

"That book talks a lot about how truth has gone from something being discovered to something being produced," he said.

It took Watson about two years to complete the text, which is meant primarily for academic settings, although he said he worked to make it digestible for anyone.

"I started thinking about this when I'd just completed my last book. I took about a year to read a bunch of novels and a bunch of theory," he said. "Once your proposal is accepted, you get peer reviewed and you get a bunch of edits. The publication process just takes some time."

The book will be available in both physical and digital formats, and you should be able to purchase a copy through any major book retailer. Watson says the subject matter may not be comforting exactly, but worth plenty of thought nonetheless.

"I think about the threat to bees," he said. "Humans aren't worried about bees because we're worried about individual bees. And maybe we're like that in a way — from our perspective it feels like we're living our lives, but maybe we're just programming the cloud."



Central Electric providing grants to local educators to fund innovative projects

Teachers, are you looking for new opportunities to fund projects for your classroom?



Central Electric is awarding up to $15,000 in Bright Ideas education grants to local educators in K-12 classrooms for the 2026-27 school year. Educators in K-12 classrooms with creative ideas for learning projects are encouraged to apply for a grant up to $2,000.

Central Electric Membership Corporation

Grant applications will be accepted through Sept. 15. However, it pays to apply early. All teachers who submit their applications by the early bird deadline of Aug. 15 will be entered into a drawing for one of five $100 Visa gift cards. Scan the QR code or visit *NCBrightIdeas.com* for more information or to apply!

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TRU HOTEL, MORE SUBDIVISIONS ON PLANNING AGENDA

The Sanford-Lee County Planning Department's Technical Review Committee looked at proposals for a hotel near the Lee County Athletic Park, multiple housing subdivisions and a handful of other projects at its meeting on May 28.

The hotel project is a Tru by Hilton, which if built would go at the entrance to the Lee County Athletic Park along Broadway Road. Tru by Hilton is owned by Hilton Worldwide and its locations are owned by franchisees.

According to documents on file with the Planning Department, the hotel would be 46,000-plus square feet and contain 98 rooms.

Also on the TRC agenda were two housing subdivisions.

- The first, Lemon Springs Meadows, would consist of 46 single family lots on 52 acres at the intersection of Lemon Springs Road and Deerfield Drive.
- Another, Thomas Grove, would consist of 93 single family lots on 37.7 acres at Lee Avenue and Cedarhurst Drive.

Additional items on the agenda included a transportation facility for Lee County Schools on 6.18 acres at 416 Cox Maddox Road, a Sanford Contractors recycling facility on 15-plus acres at 628 Rocky Fork Church Road, and an overflow lot for Sanford Honda on South Horner Boulevard.

Lee County residents face largest tax increase in five years

By Richard Sullins
richard@rantnc.com

Lee County residents are facing the largest property tax increase in more than five years — a jump county officials say is necessary as rapid growth, rising service costs, and stubborn inflation converge. If the proposed tax rate is adopted, homeowners, renters, and business owners alike will feel the effects when tax bills arrive this fall.

County Manager Lisa Minter delivered her recommended fiscal year budget to commissioners in May, outlining a plan that raises the property tax rate from 65 to 70 cents per $100 of assessed value. A public hearing was set for June 1, and commissioners will need adopt the budget before the June 30 in accordance with state law.

WHAT THE NUMBERS MEAN FOR YOU

The county's tax base grew modestly this year — a 4.45 percent increase in real property value and a 2.94 percent increase in motor vehicle value — bringing the total assessed value of all property in Lee County to $10.3 billion. But that growth wasn't enough to cover rising costs.

For residents, the most immediate impact is the five cent tax increase. In practical terms:

- A home assessed at $250,000 will see an annual tax increase of about $125.
- A $350,000 home will pay roughly $175 more.
- Commercial properties will see proportional increases, which may be passed along to tenants.

And renters aren't insulated. Landlords typically adjust rents to reflect higher tax bills, meaning many tenants could feel the impact when leases renew. The increase also arrives just months before the county's next full property revaluation in early 2027 — a process expected to raise assessed values for most property owners.

WHY THIS IS HAPPENING NOW

County officials say the squeeze is coming from every direction: higher fuel costs for county vehicles, rising construction prices for schools and public buildings, increased demand for EMS and social services, and a population that has grown faster than anyone projected.

"Natural growth in the tax base covered the majority of the continuation budget, but was ultimately not adequate to fund our required increases, cover our revenue losses, and advance the Board's priorities for the upcoming year without an increase," Minter wrote in her budget message.

Even with stronger than expected sales tax revenue — projected to grow four percent next year — the county says it can't maintain services without adjusting the tax rate.

A COUNTY GROWING FASTER THAN EXPECTED

Lee County is now the 11th fastest growing county in North Carolina, surpassing even Chatham and Mecklenburg in percentage growth. The population has climbed 13 percent since 2020, reaching 70,000 residents four years earlier than projected. Demographers expect the county to hit 75,000 by 2030 and 100,000 by 2050.

That growth has fueled demand for EMS, schools, law enforcement, and infrastructure — and the new budget reflects those pressures.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

A new five year EMS contract, expected to save money, instead became a drawn out process that will ultimately keep First-Health of the Carolinas as the county's provider. The first year cost of the contract is $2.87 million, an increase of $1.77 million over the current year. Similar increases are expected in future years.

LEE COUNTY SCHOOLS

After years of strained relations, the county and school board have started moving toward cooperation, especially around efforts to secure state funding for a new elementary school. Enrollment across the district's 17 campuses continues to hover above 9,000 students.

The recommended budget provides $25.18 million in operating funds — an increase of $1.88 million, but still short of the $26.75 million requested by the school district — to cover rising costs and implement new pay structures. It also includes $2.12 million for capital needs and funds 19 school resource officers at a cost of $1.99 million.

COUNTY EMPLOYEES

The budget recommends a 2.2 percent cost of living adjustment for all county employees, with eligible staff receiving additional pay plan adjustments for a total increase of 4.6 percent.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

The county's appropriation to Central Carolina Community College's Lee Campus would increase by $193,600 to support non instructional operations. Funding continues for the Lee College Promise Program, the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center, and the E. Eugene Moore Manufacturing and Biotech Solutions Center.

Nonprofit organizations receiving county funds will continue to do so, though at reduced levels. Solid waste disposal fees will remain at $150 per household, thanks to cost saving measures within the department.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The public hearing on the proposed budget will be held at 6 p.m. on June 1 at the new Lee County Library — a chance for residents to see the county's newest facility and to speak directly about how their tax dollars are being spent.

Martin replaces Smith as commissioners chair

By Richard Sullins
richard@rantnc.com

Republican Samantha Martin became the new chair of the Lee County Board of Commissioners on May 19, opening a new era of leadership in Lee County.

The change came five days after fellow Republican and now-former Chairman Kirk Smith submitted his letter of resignation from the position. There was no oath of office, just a gathering of personal effects as the two changed seats following a paper ballot vote of 6-1 in Martin's favor.

Martin's first words after being handed the gavel were of appreciation to Smith.

"As the board moves into a new chapter leadership, I think it is important that we pause to recognize and sincerely thank Chairman Kirk Smith for his years of dedicated service to Lee County, and for the tremendous amount of responsibility he has carried during his time as chair," Martin said. "Serving as chair requires much more than presiding over meetings. It requires countless hours of preparation, regional coordination, committee work, relationship building, and in representing the interests of Lee County, much of which happens behind the scenes and goes unseen by the public."



MARTIN



SMITH

Among the challenges Martin, first elected countywide in 2024, will face chair is a proposal to increase the county's tax rate by five cents, the largest tax increase in years and the first increase at all in the past five. Each member of the board took a moment near the end of the meeting to give thanks to Smith.

"We thank Mr. Smith for your years of leadership and service, and for what you've done for Lee County," said Democratic Commissioner Mark Lovick.

Smith had suggested in his letter of resignation to County Attorney Whitney Parrish on May 14 that some members of the commission had worked behind the scenes to remove him from office through changes proposed in the board's rules of procedures. "To avoid embarrassing the Board members, who worked behind the scenes colluding to change the Rules and Procedures of the Lee County Board of Commissioners and as my 'vote of no confidence,' effective immediately, I will step down as chairman, to preclude a vote of those who plotted with staff to revise our rules," Smith wrote.

But Republican Taylor Vorbeck, who chose not to seek re-election this November, pushed back on that narrative.

"On the addressing of rules of procedures, there was no collusion on my effort, and I can feel like I can speak for the rest of the members," she said. "I think when you are put into an elected position, you are held to a higher standard, and when you are voted in as chair, you are held to an even higher standard. I believe that standard should not be changed based on your personal opinion on a matter."

The effort to create rules allowing the removal of board leadership, and ultimately Smith's resignation, appeared to stem from an incident at the commissioners meeting on March 16, when Smith aggressively questioned an attorney representing the Southern Environmental Law Group in Chapel Hill about the potential environmental impacts of data centers.

Martin will serve out the remainder of Smith's term as chair through December.



BRIEFS



ARTS COUNCIL NAMES POETRY WINNERS

The Lee County Arts Council announced the winners of its 2nd Annual Blackout Poetry Contest, a celebration of National Poetry Month in April.

The contest recognizes outstanding student creativity through the literary and visual art form of blackout poetry.

The 2026 Blackout Poetry Contest winners are:

1st Place: Elora Gaddy (Mrs. Hill's class, Greenwood Elementary)

2nd Place: Willow Gaddy (Mrs. Saunders' class, Greenwood Elementary) Also awarded the Artist's Choice Award

3rd Place: Presleigh Denkins (Mrs. Brown's class, Greenwood Elementary)

Writer's Choice Award: Brady Blackmon

U.S. HOUSE CANDIDATE TO HOST TOWN HALL

Democrat and Sanford native Paul Barringer will hold a town hall from 6 to 8 p.m. on June 16 at the Lee County Courthouse. Barringer is seeking North Carolina's 13th Congressional District seat against incumbent Republican Brad Knott of Raleigh.

The event is open to the public, regardless of party affiliation. For more information visit Facebook and search "paulbarringernc."



Led by Director Beth List (holding the scissors), the staff of Lee County's new library — located at 1740 Bragg Street — invited the community to its ribbon cutting ceremony on May 2. Hundreds were on hand as the county officially opened the building, which offers something for everyone with sections for children, teens and adults; a future makerspace area; quiet study rooms, meeting rooms and more. "Thank you for making this dream a reality," List told the crowd on hand. "This is more than a building, it is the heart of our community. So please, come in, explore and make it your own."

LOCAL MAN ACQUITTED OF MURDER, FOUND GUILTY OF CONCEALING DEATH

A man accused of murder in 2023 was acquitted of the charge in Lee County Superior Court in May, but found guilty of concealment of death.

Lee County sheriff's deputies had charged Jackie Lamar Bright, 45, with first degree murder in connection with the death of Michael Cox, whose body authorities found inside a 55-gallon drum in a wooded area near Bright's home on Farrell Road. Cox's body had been dismembered and the barrel filled with concrete, authorities said at the time. Jury selection in the case began on May 11; the verdict came back May 19.

Judge Jessica Locklear sentenced Bright to between 10 and 14 years in prison. Concealment of death is a class D felony.

Bright was arrested in February 2023, but court documents show the date of Cox's death as December 25, 2022.

Bright's attorney, Fred Webb of Sanford, told *The Rant* that DNA evidence in the case — found on a concrete bucket and on one spent and one unspent shell casing — was not a match for Bright. Webb said the defense did not present a case because there was "no evidence linking (Bright) to the death."

LEE COUNTY SCHOOLS ANNOUNCES NEW CFO

Lee County Schools announced the hiring of Jolanda Jordan as the district's next chief finance officer. Jordan will officially begin in the role on July 6.

Jordan returns to Lee County Schools after previously serving the district for more than 15 years. She began her career in education in Lee County as a teacher assistant at B.T. Bullock Elementary School before later teaching at B.T. Bullock. She went on to serve as an assistant principal at Southern Lee High School and later as principal of Bragg Street Academy. In 2018, Jordan left Lee County Schools to become the chief finance officer for Washington County Schools, where she has served since that time.



JORDAN

Jordan brings extensive experience in school finance, leadership, budget development, financial reporting and compliance. She is a Certified Public Accountant and in addition to her CFO role with Washington County Schools, she also serves as a CFO representative for Region I finance officers and is a member of the North Carolina Association of School Business Officials.

Jordan will succeed Chief Finance Officer Kelly Jones, who will retire in the near future.

DUCKS UNLIMITED AWARDS COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS

Lee County's Ducks Unlimited chapter awarded two $1,000 college scholarships to young students in Lee County on May 5. Maliyah Wilson, a senior at Southern Lee High School, and Aiden Hall, a senior at Lee County High School, are both members of their schools' shooting teams and were selected by DU for their "strong commitment to wildlife conservation."

The Lee County chapter of Ducks Unlimited was organized in 2022. Its scholarships are open to students involved in their school shooting club.

"A lot of the money we raise doesn't stay here because the ducks don't stay here," said Chuck McDonald, founder of the Lee County DU chapter. "But we always put our youth first, and that's why we keep some of the money here — so we can do stuff like this."

Find Lee County NC Ducks Unlimited on Facebook, or contact McDonald at (919) 352-2034. Memberships cost $35.

POP WARNER FOOTBALL RETURNING TO SANFORD

Sanford Forged will bring Pop Warner football back to Sanford this year. The program kicked off activities with a football camp on May 16 at the Lee County Athletic Park to test the skills of young football players in the area.

The organization is affiliated with Pop Warner, a nonprofit youth football organization in existence for nearly 100 years, and will field its first team this year.

"Our goal is to build something that not only develops young athletes on the field, but also emphasizes character, discipline, accountability and community involvement off the field," said Hunter Steward, president and founder of Sanford Forged. To learn more, visit sanfordforged.com.





Above: Aiden Hall from LCHS and Maliyah Wilson from SLHS were each awarded $1,000 scholarships from the Lee County Chapter of Ducks Unlimited on May 5.

Right: Sanford Forged will bring Pop Warner football back to Sanford his year.

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CCCC OFFERS EV TECH PROGRAM TO MEET INDUSTRY DEMAND

Central Carolina Community College is offering a comprehensive Electric Vehicle Technology program to help prepare students for rewarding careers in the industry.

"These guys are making $40, $50 an hour," CCCC Automotive Instructor Wayne Cole told students as he chatted with them in the auto bay on CCCC's Lee Main Campus. "No dirt, no grease."

Hybrid and electric vehicles now make up more than one in five new light-duty vehicles purchased in the United States. That is a category that includes cars, SUVs, and most pickup trucks. Other commonly electrified vehicles include motorcycles, scooters, bicycles, and golf carts.

"There's more companies out there looking for young talent that they can grow, that can be interested in hybrid and electric vehicles, because there's not enough technicians out there now," Cole said.

CCCC's EV program begins with a certificate in Electric Vehicle Technology and provides pathways to a diploma or associate degree. The stackable credentials are designed to build progressively, starting with foundational knowledge beneficial to vehicle owners and to a variety of careers in and out of the auto industry.

For more information about CCCC's Electric Vehicle Technology program, visit cccc.edu.





Lt. Gov. Rachel Hunt visits CCCC's childcare program during a visit to the college. CCCC's Education Department offers childcare on CCCC's Lee Main Campus in Sanford for students taking morning and evening classes at the college.

Lt. Gov. visits CCCC campus, highlights Future-Ready NC

In a former biology classroom now lined with toys, a young child in CCCC's child care program balanced a block on his face — earning a grin from Lt. Gov. Rachel Hunt.

The lieutenant governor toured CCCC's child care services and other programs during a recent visit to the college. She has made tackling North Carolina's child care and early childhood education crisis a centerpiece of her agenda, alongside championing community colleges as engines of workforce development.

As part of her Future-Ready North Carolina Plan, Hunt is visiting all 58 community colleges across the state to connect with students and educators and highlight programs preparing a skilled workforce for today's economy.

"North Carolina's future is bright but we have to make sure our people are trained and capable to take on the innovative and exciting new jobs coming to our state," said Hunt.

At CCCC, Hunt learned firsthand how the college's Education Department is addressing the child care crisis on two fronts: training future childcare workers while simultaneously offering free morning and evening child care on its Lee Main Campus for students during their classes.

The lieutenant governor has been calling on the state to provide sustained funding for childcare programs like CCCC's and incentives to expand that model to all 58 community colleges. She is also championing Propel NC, a proposed new model for community college funding that would increase investment in training for health care and other high-demand fields.

At CCCC, she got to tour some of the college's health care career preparation programs, learning how dental hygiene students provide free cleanings and x-rays to the public, building clinical experience while increasing access to care.

Likewise, she saw how CCCC's Veterinary Medical Technology students benefit from a unique program model that provides them with hands-on experience. Pets come to live at CCCC's campus animal rescue from local shelters in the area and receive vaccines, checkups, and other care from veterinarians and the vet med tech students in the program.

"Everybody is up for adoption," said Tara Gillis, CCCC's Animal Facilities

Manager, who described the program as the lieutenant governor petted a sweet pup named Kashi.

Hunt's tour began and ended at CCCC's E. Eugene Moore Manufacturing and Biotech Solutions Center, where she learned about the progress CCCC is making to renovate the facility to educate the next generation of advanced manufacturing and biotech talent, bolster industry and catalyze economic growth in the area.

— courtesy of CCCC

CCCC, CATERPILLAR HONORED FOR JOINT YOUTH PROGRAM

Caterpillar Inc. and Central Carolina Community College were honored for the Caterpillar Youth Apprenticeship program by the North Carolina Community College System, State Board and Foundation. The manufacturer and the college were jointly awarded the 2026 Apprenticeship Champion recognition as part of the Workforce Development Pinnacle Awards on April 15.

The awards, presented by Duke Energy at a ceremony in Raleigh, recognize exemplary employers and education partners that demonstrate outstanding commitment to workforce development across North Carolina's 58 community colleges.

"Working with Caterpillar to support the right skill development ensures they have the talent pipeline they need and ensures our young people have the right education and training they need for a great career with a great company — right here in Lee County," said CCCC President Dr. Lisa M. Chapman.

The two-year program for high school juniors and seniors combines classes at CCCC with paid, hands-on industry experience. By the program's ten year mark, more than 30% of Caterpillar's workforce had roots in the program.

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MEN'S HEALTH MONTH

June is the month that we celebrate dads. What better time is there for men to get their health screenings scheduled?

Even healthy men need to get health screenings for preventive care.

If you are a man with Medicare coverage, now is the time to talk with your doctor about getting screened for prostate cancer, colorectal cancer and cardiovascular disease.

Medicare covers prostate screenings once every 12 months for men over 50 and the colorectal screening tests every 120 months, unless at high risk.

Cardiovascular screenings can detect conditions that could lead to heart attack or stroke and are covered by Medicare once every five years.

Ask a SHIIP counselor for more information.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: 919.776.0501 EXT2206



SCHOOL DISTRICT HONORS 36 RETIREES

Lee County Schools honored 36 dedicated employees during the district's annual Retirement Banquet last week, recognizing a group of educators and staff members whose collective service spanned hundreds of years.

"Each has made a meaningful impact on our district," said Superintendent Dr. Chris Dossenbach. "Their dedication to our students and unwavering commitment to excellence have helped make each of our schools stronger. We are deeply grateful for their service and wish them the very best in retirement."

- Melissa Douglas (B.T. Bullock Elementary)
- Ann McAllister-Wallace (Broadway Elementary)
- Hollis Andersen (Deep River Elementary)
- Jill Britt (Deep River Elementary)
- Wanda Coggins (Deep River Elementary)
- Debra Groce (Deep River Elementary)
- Electra Johnson (Deep River Elementary)
- Margie Reives (Deep River Elementary)
- Lori Tillett (Deep River Elementary)
- Sarah Dunn (Greenwood Elementary)
- Valerie Davenport (J. Glenn Edwards & Tramway)
- Melanie Altman (Tramway Elementary)
- Julie Bowlin (Tramway Elementary)
- Judy Coffer (Tramway Elementary)
- Robin Gatten (W.B. Wicker Elementary)
- Carla Bailey (East Lee Middle)
- Margaret Flowers (East Lee Middle)
- Mara Schuster (SanLee Middle)
- Sondra Shover (West Lee Middle)
- Jeffrey Coggins (Lee County High)
- Ronnie Coley (Lee County High)
- Scott Gunnett (Lee County High)
- William Mulligan (Lee County High)
- Martin Bryant (Southern Lee High)
- Paola Gensollen (Southern Lee High)
- LTC. Ernest McIntyre (Southern Lee High)
- Kenneth Page (Southern Lee High)
- Ernest Purnsley (Southern Lee High)
- Malissa Anderson-Cooper (Floyd L. Knight)
- Mary Foushee (Floyd L. Knight Center)
- Tina Lewis (Floyd L. Knight)
- Beverly Corley (Child Nutrition)
- Marcus Williams (Technology)
- Glenn Badders (Maintenance)
- Ruth Ellis (Central Office)
- Rebecca Maddox (Central Office)

LCH educator earns national Teacher of the Year honor

Courtesy of Lee County Schools

Lee County High School teacher Kaitlyn Adams was named one of five winners of the Rack Room Shoes Teacher of the Year Award, a national honor recognizing educators who go above and beyond to support their students both inside and outside the classroom. She will receive a $10,000 Innovation Grant to use for classroom items or program expansion.

Adams, who teaches family and consumer science courses including mental health and counseling, was selected for her "unwavering commitment to her students, her inclusive classroom environment and the meaningful relationships she builds with young people at Lee County High School."

"I grew up with two parents who were teachers, so I've always known the impact teachers can have," Adams said. "I did not initially want to be a teacher, but I believe everything happens for a reason. My heart told me to be here. I followed that, and now I really enjoy being a teacher."

Adams is known throughout the school community for making students feel seen, valued and supported. Whether attending athletic events, theatre performances or even visiting students at their jobs, she makes a point to show up.

"I try to do everything that I can to support my students," Adams said. "When they ask me to come to their games or their plays, or when they tell me they just got a new job and want someone to come see them at work, I try to show up for them as much as I possibly can. I just try to be someone they can go to, someone that they know will be there for them."



Principal Robert Newby (left), teacher Kaitlyn Adams (center) and Superintendent Dr. Chris Dossenbach (right) pose with the $10,000 Innovation Grant Check that Adams will receive thanks to being named one of five nationwide winners of Rack Room Shoes Teacher of the Year Award.

Her classroom reflects that same sense of belonging. Filled with colorful displays and photos of students, the room serves as a visual reminder that every student has a place.

"I do that so they can see themselves in my classroom and see the ways they are supported," Adams stated. "I try to have conversations with them about how their life is outside of school and see how I can help them."

According to LCHS Principal Robert Newby, Adams' dedication extends far beyond the school day.

"Ms. Adams shows up," Newby explained. "If it is at games or shows, it doesn't matter. She is there. She makes sure that the kids know she doesn't just want to teach them or care for them while they are in the classroom."

Newby also praised Adams' ability to create a classroom where all students can succeed.

"Her classroom is engaging," Newby said. "She makes sure that our ESL (English as a Second Language) and EC (Exceptional Children) students get what they need, so it is a differentiated classroom. It does not matter who the student is, she makes sure that they have what they need to be successful."

Adams has even taken it upon herself to learn Spanish to better connect with students whose first language is not English. "The students teach me so much — probably more than they learn from me. They teach me how to overcome things and keep showing up. Even with everything that they are going through, they show me how to be present every day."

As one of just five educators nationwide to receive the award, Adams said she is honored to be recognized for doing work that she feels called to do.



CCCC's Dental Hygiene graduates participate in a pinning ceremony recognizing their achievements on May 5.

NEW BEGINNINGS: CCCC CELEBRATES THE CLASS OF 2026

Building community for veterans. Homeschooling children. Showing kindness to classmates. These are some of the ways the members of CCCC's Class of 2026 gave and received support in the many facets of their lives as they worked to achieve their dreams.

Central Carolina Community College proudly celebrated 663 Spring graduates on May 14 at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic & Conference Center, where the 68th Commencement Exercises brought together graduates, families, faculty, and friends for a day of joy, reflection, and new beginnings.

CCCC President Dr. Lisa M. Chapman addressed the graduates at each of the three ceremonies.

"You have brought honor to the Cougar Nation while you've been our students and we know you'll carry that same spirit into whatever comes next as our alumni," she said. "Whether you're stepping into the workforce, continuing your education, or starting something entirely new, know that you carry with you the strength of this place and the belief that we all have in you."

Maximiliano Salgado, graduating with an Associate in Science, offered a tribute to the community his classmates built together. "When I was overwhelmed, someone comforted me," Salgado said. "When I forgot to eat, somebody went to get food with me. When I didn't understand something, someone explained it to me, and everywhere I turned, I saw that kindness around me."

Jennifer Hill, a single mother of two who worked part-time while tackling a triple major in Computer Engineering Technology, Electronics Engineering Technology, and Laser and Photonics Technology, spoke of the challenges members of the class surmounted. "Some of us were carrying responsibilities that no syllabus would ever prepare us for," Hill said. "And still, we showed up."

From veterans to first-generation college students, from parents juggling homework alongside their children's to students racing the clock on late-night assignments, the Class of 2026 arrived at graduation having already proven their kindness, courage, perseverance — and capability.

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EVENT CALENDAR

SATURDAYS

SANFORD FARMERS' MARKET ALL SUMMER

The Sanford Farmers' Market runs through Nov. 21 at the new Pilgrim's Sanford Agricultural Marketplace at 157 Charlotte Avenue in downtown Sanford. The market is dedicated to providing space for local food producers to connect with the community.



JUNE 4: The City of Sanford Summer Concert Series kicks off at 6:30 p.m. at Depot Park in downtown. Tuesday Night Music Club will perform. Admission is free.

JUNE 5: The Sanford Spinners home opener at Lee County High School's baseball stadium will begin at 7 p.m. against the Clayton Clovers. Tickets are $10, and $5 for children ages 6-12. Free for children 5 and under.

JUNE 5: Raven Forge Games in downtown Sanford will host a "massive, multi-table" Dungeons & Dragons celebration at 6 p.m. Grab your dice and join your fellow adventurers to work toward your shared goal to push back the encroaching darkness. Entry fee is $10.

JUNE 5: Hugger Mugger Brewing will host its monthly First Fridays Karaoke Championship at 8 p.m. Every month the audience anoints a new champion who will receive the coveted GOAT medal. All monthly winners compete for a handsome karaoke championship belt that will make the winner the envy of their peers.

JUNE 5: 80's Unleashed will perform at The Smoke and Barrel in downtown Sanford at 9 p.m.

JUNE 6: The 2026 MS Spring Flight Charity Ride begins at 8 a.m. Cyclists can choose from three fully supported routes along Lee and Harnett counties' peaceful scenic roads. Ride begins at Hugger Mugger Brewing in downtown Sanford. Register at racereach.com.

JUNE 6: The Pint Sized Pasture on Fire Tower Road will host Family Farm Day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Family Farm Day is a relaxed, outdoor experience with animals, activities, and space to explore — set up for all ages to enjoy. Admission is $10 a person.

JUNE 6: The San-Lee Chapter of the Antique Automobile Club of America presents the Classics to Customs Car Show in downtown Sanford from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

JUNE 7: Hugger Mugger Brewing and Sanford Yoga & Community Center partner for its monthly Yoga & Beer from 11 a.m. to noon at the brewery in downtown Sanford. Admission gets you yoga and a beer.

JUNE 8: Meditations on the Mat at Seva Yoga begins at 7 p.m. Each session offers guided meditation, stillness and reflection centered around a new theme each month.

JUNE 8: Wander the fields, take in the scent of blooming lavender and hand-pick a bundle to bring home at Lavender and Lore Farm in Sanford at noon. Space is limited and admission is $25 per person.

JUNE 10: Hugger Mugger Brewing's monthly Book Club runs from 6:30 to 8 p.m. An informal group of bookworms chooses the books and discusses them at this monthly happening. Often, beer, wine and cider are consumed.

JUNE 11: New Directions Bluegrass will perform at the City of Sanford's Summer Concert Series at Depot Park in downtown Sanford. Admission is free.

JUNE 12: The Guy Unger Band will perform at The Smoke and Barrel in downtown Sanford at 9 p.m.

JUNE 12-13: Hugger Mugger Brewing hosts Retro Arcade Games. Level by Level Gaming brings a selection of free-to-play arcade games and consoles spanning decades of video gaming. Find everything from Ms Pacman to Duck Hunt to Mortal Kombat and more. Most all games are usually setup by 3 p.m. on Friday and remain so until Sunday morning.

JUNE 12-13: Temple Theatre's mainstage conservatory event, Fiddler on the Roof Jr., kicks off the summer conservatory season. Ticket info at templeshows.org.

JUNE 13: The Lee County Veterans Council will host a flag retirement ceremony at 9 a.m. at the VFW Post 5631 in Sanford. If you have a flag that is frayed or tattered, you may bring it for the VFW to property dispose it.

JUNE 13: "Grilling at the Market" is the special event for the weekly Sanford Farmers Market. See a list of all special events for the 2026 season at sanfordfarmersmarketnc.com.

JUNE 15: Sips and Sequels in downtown Sanford will host Fantasy Book Club at 6 p.m. The club covers all things fantasy — high, low, romantasy, cozy, dark — you name it, it's on the table.

June 16: Democrat and Sanford native Paul Barringer will hold a town hall from 6 to 8 p.m. on June 16 at the Lee County Courthouse. Barringer is seeking North Carolina's 13th Congressional District seat against incumbent Republican Brad Knott of Raleigh.

JUNE 18: Workin' on Commission will perform at the City of Sanford's Summer Concert Series at Depot Park in downtown Sanford. Admission is free.

JUNE 18: Raven Forge Games will host Board Game Night from 6 to 9 p.m. This month, they are featuring demo sessions of three whimsical games: Wandering Towers, Spellbound and Casting Shadows. No experience necessary — show up, grab a seat at the table and the staff will teach you how to play.

JUNE 19: Rodney Brady and Rusted Root Live at The Smoke and Barrel beginning at 8 p.m.

JUNE 19-20: Temple Theatre youth conservatory presents Madagascar: A Musical Adventure. Tickets and showtimes available at templeshows.org.

JUNE 20: Pride Fest: Glitter & Sweat 80s Bash will be held at Hugger Mugger Brewing from 2 to 6 p.m. Get ready for an afternoon of community, joy and unapologetic fabulousness with a full lineup of delightfully chaotic goodness: A Richard Simmons-inspired Zumba, a unicorn petting zoo, arts and crafts, karaoke and all the glitter, love and community you can handle.

JUNE 20: The Juneteenth Freedom Parade and Day at the Park will be hosted by Zeta Phi Beta Sorority and will be held on Washington Avenue in Sanford beginning at 10 a.m.

JUNE 24: Gary Lowder and Smokin' Hot will perform at 7 p.m. at the Mann Center for the Arts in Sanford. A soul, R&B and horn tribute band, the group will play music from Chicago, Earth Wind & Fire and more. Tickets are $25-$35.

JUNE 25: Empire Strikes Brass will perform at the City of Sanford's Summer Concert Series at Depot Park in downtown Sanford.

JUNE 27: "Bloom and Buzz at the Market" is the special event for the weekly Sanford Farmers Market. See all special events for the 2026 season at sanfordfarmersmarketnc.com.

JULY 2-3: Temple Theatre youth conservatory presents High School Musical. Tickets and showtimes available at templeshows.org.

JULY 4: The City of Sanford's Red, White and Blue Bash will be held at Kiwanis Family Park and will feature live bands, children's activities and a variety of food vendors, as well as a fireworks show beginning at 9 p.m.

JULY 4: The Sanford Farmers Market will have an Independence Day and U.S. 250th celebration theme for the day.

JULY 17-18: Temple Theatre youth conservator presents The Tempest. Tickets and showtimes available at templeshows.org.

JULY 25: "Peach Party" is the special event for the weekly Sanford Farmers Market. See all special events for the 2026 season at sanfordfarmersmarketnc.com.

JULY 31-AUG 1: Temple Theatre's mainstage conservatory event, Fiddler on the Roof Jr., ends the summer conservatory season. Ticket info at templeshows.org.

SEPT 10-27: Celebrate 250 years of American Independence with the Temple Theatre mainstage production of 1776 to kick off the 2026-27 season. Witness the "obnoxious and unlikeable" John Adams attempt to ignite a revolution in the Tony Award-winning musical that breathes fire into American history. Ticket info at templeshows.org.

TUESDAYS: Hugger Mugger Brewing hosts Trivia Night with Trivia MasterZach at 7 p.m. every Tuesday night. Admission is free, and prizes await the winners.

FRIDAYS: Live music at Wana Navu Kava Bar in Sanford every Friday night from 7 to 10 p.m.

SATURDAYS: Every Saturday night, the stage at Wild Dogs Brewing in downtown Sanford comes alive with incredible live music, featuring local talent and touring acts.

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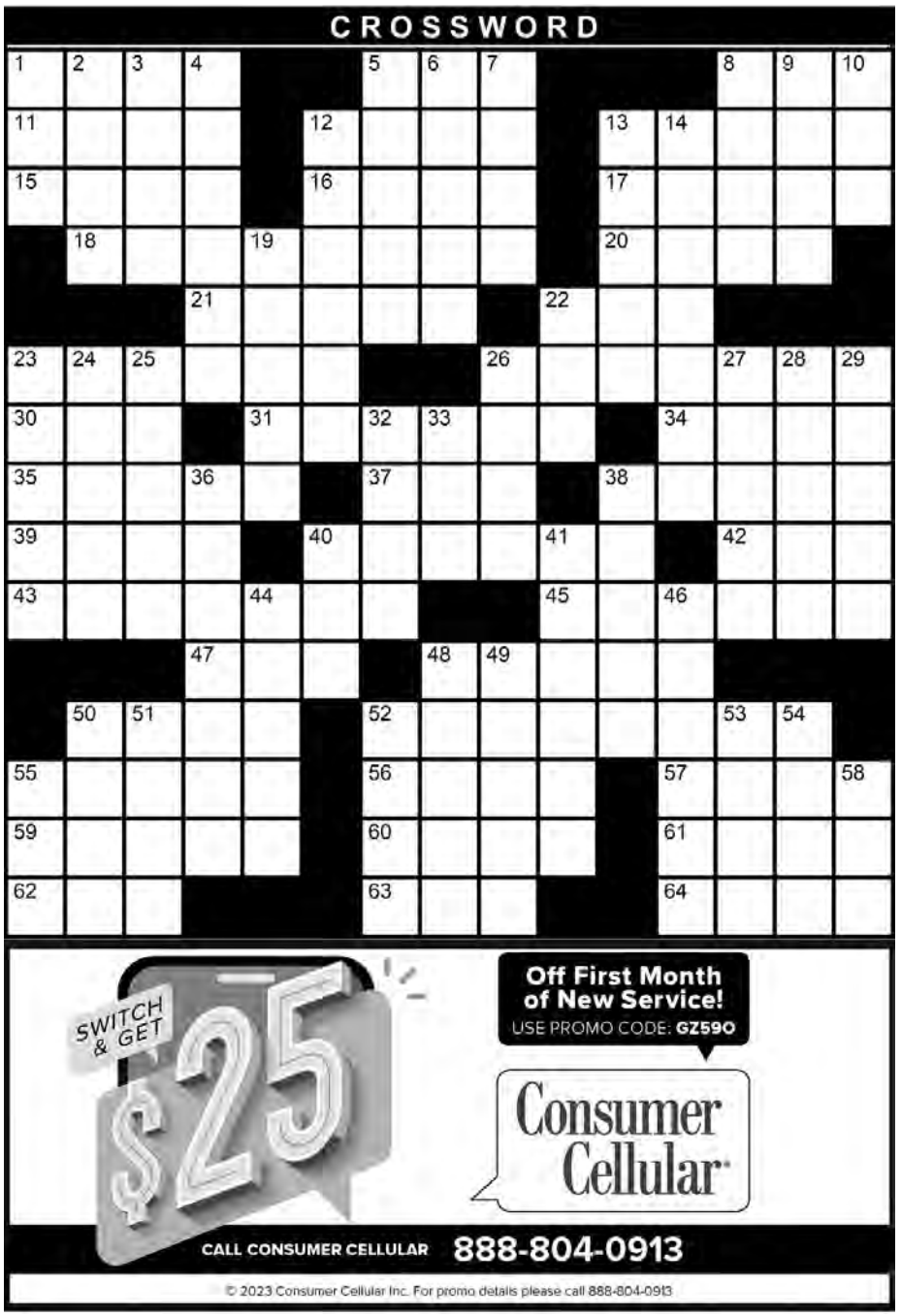
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CROSSWORD: MYTHOLOGICAL CREATURES

ACROSS
1. Throat-clearing sound
5. Like a fiddle?
8. Chicago baseballer
11. Cyberattack target
12. Opposite of pizzicato, in music
13. Bullying, e.g.
15. Pharmacy ware
16. Wedding cake layer
17. *Mythological part woman, part bird
18. *Part man, part bull
20. Means justifiers
21. Seize the throne
22. Found at the pump
23. *Part man, part fish
26. Julianne Moore or Lucille Ball, e.g.
30. Schiller's address to joy
31. Popular pet rodent
34. Bono's bandmate, with The
35. Chunk of iceberg
37. *Pointy-eared humanoid
38. Knight's breastplate
39. Independent chieftan
40. Pay, in casino (2 words)
42. Bugling ungulate
43. Like sun
45. Mother-of-pearl, pl.
47. Public health org.
48. Manila hemp
50. Vegan's protein choice
52. *Three-headed dog
55. African antelope, pl.
56. Not written
57. Arch above eye
59. Actor's rep
60. Sommelier's domain
61. *Large and hideous humanoid
62. *Giant bird of prey
63. Bulb type
64. *Abominable humanoid

DOWN
1. Tally
2. Stay out of its way!
3. Small ladies' handbag
4. Extra large wine bottle
5. Robin Hood's companion Tuck
6. Frost over (2 words)
7. Millimeter of mercury
8. Little Miss Muffet's morsel
9. Mail carrier, acr.
10. Beyonc , a.k.a. Queen ___
12. Adjust
13. Beforehand
14. *Wailing spirit
19. "Killers of the Flower Moon" Oklahoma location
22. Hair-raising product
23. Lawn trimmer
24. Organ swelling
25. Made over
26. Abundant
27. Landscaper's tool
28. Like an athlete
29. Office stations
32. Landlord's due
33. Acronym-named sandwich
36. *Part lion, part eagle
38. Lickety-split
40. Nurses' org.
41. Incapable
44. Sunbaked, archaically speaking
46. Demijohn
48. Eagle's home
49. Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop
50. Not for here (2 words)
51. Barrel-counting org.
52. Type of hood
53. Restless desire
54. Database command
55. Roofing sealant
58. Yellow river tributary



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