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AUGUST 2026

The Rant

SANFORD, NORTH CAROLINA

Monthly



PARDON OUR DUST

A RUNDOWN OF THE
MANY MAJOR PROJECTS
UNDERWAY IN SANFORD
AND LEE COUNTY

INSIDE

POPULAR ADMINISTRATORS RETURN
TO CENTRAL CAROLINA ACADEMY





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The Rant *Monthly*

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That's great, it starts with an earthquake, birds and snakes, an aeroplane, and Lenny Bruce is not afraid

The advertisement features a background image of a technician in a dark blue shirt working on a large HVAC unit. Overlaid on the image is the "TARGET TEMP" logo, which consists of a red and blue circular graphic with the text "TARGET TEMP" and "HEATING AND COOLING". Below the logo is a red box with the text "FINANCING AVAILABLE" and a QR code. To the right of the QR code, the text "GET THE JOB DONE RIGHT" is written in a large, white, handwritten-style font. At the bottom left, the phone number "919-704-5058" and website "www.targettemp-hvac.com" are listed. At the bottom right, the text "Licensed • Insured • Trusted Local Experts" is displayed.

The advertisement has a dark teal background. At the top, the text "READY TO BE A LEADER IN YOUR COMMUNITY?" is written in white. Below this is a graphic of three stylized blue figures climbing a mountain, with a blue star above them. The text "LEADERSHIP SANFORD" is written in large white letters, with the Sanford Area Growth Alliance logo integrated into the word "SANFORD". Below the graphic, the text "The Leadership Sanford program helps provide a continuous, diverse supply of creative leaders to the community by developing aspiring leaders' knowledge of the region and providing them the opportunity for meaningful action." is written. To the right, the text "Learn More and Apply Today!" is written above a QR code. At the bottom right, the text "growsanfordnc.com/chamber/leadership-sanford" is written above the Sanford Area Growth Alliance logo.

TEMPLE THEATRE

2026-2027 MAINSTAGE SEASON

1776

Sep 10 - 27

WHITE CHRISTMAS THE MUSICAL

Dec 3- 20

WAR BONDS: THE SONGS & LETTERS OF WORLD WAR II: A MUSICAL JOURNEY THROUGH A WAR THAT REDEFINED THE WORLD.

Feb 4 - 7

LITTLE WOMEN the broadway musical

Oct 15 - Nov 1

ONE NOBLE JOURNEY

Jan 28 - 31

RED WHITE & TEMPLE

A Patriotic Revue

Feb 25 - Mar 14

Flex Passes & Season Subscriptions are available at www.templeshows.org

COLD OPEN

No joke this time, Sanford has a lot going on right now

“Yeah, sorry about that. It seems our little Facebook post announcing construction of a new Target in the Tramway area has gotten a little out of hand. Many saw it for what it was immediately — a nice little April Fools’ joke. Some of you, however, got pretty excited about it.

To be clear — Target is not coming to Tramway. At least not that we’re aware of.”

— The Rant | April 1, 2015 —

It was 11 years ago and some change when *The Rant* — then just a news website and four years away from becoming a printed publication — decided to have a little fun on April 1 and photoshop the image of a “Target Coming Soon” sign in the Tramway area for our readers.

The response got a little out of hand. Forty-plus shares and even more comments later, we had to do a quick “gotcha!” post reminding everyone it was, indeed, April Fool’s Day. In our minds, there was no way Target — a retail brand that has pretty strict demographic requirements to even consider a town or city for development — would even consider “little ole’ Sanford” for a new location.

And we picked Tramway then, because we thought — at the time — that would be an even more ridiculous idea. Tramway 15 years ago consisted of a Food Lion, a Walgreen’s and acres and acres of trees, grass and sand.



Look at where we are now.

Target is coming, though not in Tramway, but not far away in west Sanford. Tramway is booming with new retail, restaurant and other business announcements almost weekly. And Sanford is booming at a rate that even has the Triangle-area business publications — who know a thing or two about growth — on alert.

We at *The Rant* get a lot of inquiries asking “what’s coming,” and today’s cover story is an attempt to answer those questions. It’s not a complete list, but when this story goes online, it will become a running list as new announcements are made throughout the rest of the year.

We love a good prank, but this is no joke. Like it or not, Sanford is booming. And this list just scratches the surface of what’s on the horizon in our fair ’burg.

— Billy Liggett

FOUR Best Back-to-School purchases

Leaving summer is never fun, but at least you get a few new things heading into the fall ...

ERASERS

SHOES

BACKPACKS

TRAPPER KEEPERS



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LEE COUNTY GOVERNMENT
Parks & Recreation

AUGUST HAPPENINGS



GYMNASTICS

Registration Opens August 10

Session 5: August 31 - October 24

Cost varies with class length & skill

- All ages
- All skill levels

Gymnastics Day Camp: \$30

7:30am - 5:30pm

- October 15, 2026



ATHLETICS

Registrations Closes: August 14

4U & 6U Tball; \$30

6U Flag Football; \$30

8U, 11U & 14U Flag Football; \$50

9U, 12U, 16U Volleyball; \$50

8U, 10u, 12U Baseball/Softball; \$50

Adult Softball (Team); \$625

- Age as of August 1st
- All practices start at 6pm or later on week nights



AQUATICS

(HORTON & O.T. SLOAN POOL)

Weekends Only Starting August 8

- August 8-9, 15 - 16, 22-23, 29 - 30
- September 5, 6, & 7



PROGRAMS

Registration Open!

Youth Art Classes: \$60

- Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday Options
- Bob Hales Center at 5:30pm



Fall Intercession Camp Registration; \$130

- September 14 - 18
- September 21 - 25
- September 28 - October 2



Registration Opens August 3

Parent's Night Out; \$30

- Saturday, October 17 (ages 4-12)

Ladies Night Crafting; \$25

- Friday October 23 (ages 18+)



Cupcakes & Canvas; \$25

- Saturday, October 24 (ages 4-12)

Registration Closes August 14!

Sideline Cheerleading (Rec); \$30

- Girls, Ages 5-14 as of August 1
- Lee County Athletic Park



SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Registration Open

Special Olympics Lee County

- Bocce, Golf, & Flag Football Clinic

Social Squad; \$25

- 2nd Tuesday of August - December
- San-Lee Park at 3:30pm - 5:30pm



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

2303 Tramway Rd Sanford, NC | 919-775-2107 | Monday - Friday | 8 am - 5pm   @LCGParksnRec

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MYSTERY PROJECT NETS \$600M IN INCENTIVES, TO BRING IN 335 JOBS

Lee County may be poised to land another major economic development project that could bring as many as 335 new fulltime jobs and a tax base investment of more than \$600 million to the county over a seven-year period.

The Lee County Board of Commissioners approved a performance based cash incentives grant in July that will consist of annual payments based on a net new taxable value for the unnamed company's new facility that would be built in Lee County. The amount of each year's grant will be 70 percent of the property taxes paid by the company during the previous year.

The average annual wage projected to be paid by the company is \$71,132, an amount that is about 15 percent higher than the county's current average wage of \$59,900.

Sanford Area Growth Alliance CEO Jimmy Randolph told the commissioners this project has been in the works since last year, and many of Lee County's strengths that have helped convince other major companies to choose the Sanford area as the site for their next expansion were also in play here.

Among these, Randolph said, are "our proven, highly experienced talent pool in advanced manufacturing, CCCC's customized and highly responsive training programs including biowork and the Moore Center's BioSolutions Center, our proximity to the world class Tier One research universities in the heart of the Triangle, a strategic location, and ready sites that create a competitive cost of doing business."

— Richard Sullins

CCA cuts ties with central services, rehires Batten, Tatum

By Gordon Anderson

gordon@rantnc.com

A newly reconstituted Central Carolina Academy board of directors reversed course in July after months of controversy, casting a series of unanimous votes to rehire two administrators with whom they'd parted ways back in May and dismantle much of the charter school's governance structure.

Greg Batten and Mary Tatum had been the school's principal and assistant principal until late May, when Batten took an unexpected retirement and the school declined to renew Tatum's contract. Assistant Principal Frank Thompson resigned shortly after. All three were involved with the school's founding, and many parents said they played a large role in the decision to send their children to CCA.

The unexpected moves prompted an outcry from parents, students and even some staff, who packed a number of board meetings in June and July with questions about whether the decisions came from the board or Central Services, a group of employees from Chatham Charter School in Siler City who provided central office services for both schools. CCA was founded as a replication of Chatham Charter, one of the oldest charter schools in North Carolina, but the move to sever ties with Central Services appears to be a move away from the replication model on which CCA was founded.

Charter schools are governed by independent nonprofit boards rather than local school districts which govern traditional public schools.

Four of CCA's board members left between May and July and two new members took seats last month. The newly reconstituted board moved quickly to end the arrangement which had become the heart of the controversy, voting unanimously in a series of meetings on July 23 and 28 to end its relationship with Central Services, retain a new attorney,



Mary Tatum hugs a supporter after being reinstated as Central Carolina Academy's assistant principal on July 28. Photo by Gordon Anderson

and ultimately make Batten CCA's new interim head of school — essentially the role Central Services had filled — and bring Tatum back as assistant principal. The board hired Jay Czap as principal on July 13.

"There have been so many great accomplishments by so many people here," Batten said after the votes. "I'm just wanting to focus on moving forward and not looking back. We want to get things calmed down and reassure families and the community that CCA is the place to be for many families."

Thompson told *The Rant* on July 28 that he'd be available to support Batten and Tatum in any way he could.

"I'm all in for the school," he said. "Whatever they need, I'll be open to."

The Rant reported in July about the school's relationship with Central Services and questions about how supervisory authority was divided between Central Services and CCA's board. Public records and statements from board

members showed the group supervised school administrators and functioned as the central office for both CCA and Chatham Charter, though the board retained ultimate legal authority over the school. Many of those objecting to the chain of events raised questions about whether that governance structure was functioning as intended in practice.

Those questions intensified after parents learned the board had adopted governance changes in November 2025 that expanded Central Services' role by giving it supervisory authority over the administration. During packed board meetings, some argued the arrangement gave the group too much influence over school operations, while board leaders at the time defended it as an appropriate structure for a replication charter school.

Additional reporting on the board's actions and changes to CCA's governance structure will be published online at rantnc.com.

The Rant earns 5 N.C. press awards, 3 for Grace article

From The Rant

The Rant’s July 2025 cover story on Grace Christian School doubling tuition after receiving the most public funds of any private school in the state won three North Carolina Press Association awards, the organization announced in July.

“State of Grace” detailed the unprecedented success of Grace Christian School — a private K-12 school whose enrollment has tripled in size since the pandemic — and uncovered instances of the school taking advantage of the North Carolina Opportunity Scholarship, a state tuition program designed to help families afford private education.

Written by Billy Liggett with additional reporting by Gordon Anderson, “State of Grace” won first place for education reporting, second place for enterprise reporting and third place in the state for investigative reporting. The story also featured interviews with parents whose

children were denied enrollment based on “administrative prerogative” and former faculty members who accused the school of firing or not extending their contracts for not “falling in line” with recent decisions made by the school.

Grace Christian School led the state in Opportunity Scholarship funding for three consecutive years between 2022-2025. The school took in more than \$10.4 million in public funds over the three years, nearly half of that in the 2024-2025 school year alone (numbers have not been released for 2026 funding).

The article was published on the heels of an announcement by the Grace Christian School of a nearly \$100 million expansion project that will include new buildings and athletics facilities to keep up with their fast-growing enrollment.

The Rant won two additional N.C. Press Awards this year — Billy Liggett earned second place for column writing,

and Liggett, Anderson, Richard Sullins and Jonathan Owens earned second place for overall community coverage.

NCPA’s contest continues to be one of the largest in the country with more than 4,000 entries from over 125 newspapers and news organizations from across the Tar Heel state.

The Rant joined NCPA in September 2021, nearly two years after launching The Rant Monthly publication. The paper earned six N.C. Press awards during its first year in the organization in 2022, and has won 17 awards total since.

Founded in 1873, the NCPA is a nonprofit organization representing the interests of North Carolina newspapers, their employees, and the communities they serve. NCPA works to protect First Amendment freedoms, open government rights, and to support strong, independent journalism across the state.



The Rant Monthly’s July 2025 feature on Grace Christian School was winner of three North Carolina Press Association awards, the organization announced in July.



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OPINION

EDITORIAL

Pushback to moves at CCA was well organized, effective

What a difference two months can make. At the end of May, the situation looked bleak for supporters of the administrative team at Central Carolina Academy. The charter school on Douglas Drive had just parted ways with Principal Greg Batten and assistant principals Mary Tatum and Frank Thompson, and it didn't look like the school's board of directors was interested in changing course.

But going into August, virtually everything is different than a neutral observer might have been expected. Not only are Batten and Tatum back at the school (Thompson has indicated he's interested in returning as well), but the school's board — from which multiple members stepped down, and to which two new members were appointed in the meantime — has also cut ties with the management group many felt was responsible for the change, essentially repudiating the school's previous direction.

It's the type of thing that can't be done without sustained pushback. There was plenty of that.

Meetings of the board in June and July — both regularly scheduled ones and those called for special reasons — were filled to the gills with people expressing just how unhappy they were about the change, people who made it clear they weren't interested in accepting the new normal.

But just as important — arguably more — were the handful among those who took the time to dig into what the law says, what CCA's bylaws say, how those things interact, and then make sure their efforts were centered on a coherent strategy. Without a clear vision, movements can struggle to coalesce. They may still achieve things, but those achievements may be unintended or even counterproductive.

We're not interested in comparing the issue at CCA to any other ongoing issue in our community, even if comparisons may invite themselves.

But if you're part of a movement to get something done — and there's a lot of that around here lately — you could do worse than to study the work done by the folks involved with Central Carolina Academy who went to bat this summer for the administration they supported.

COLUMN

World Cup fever, like for many of you, was rampant in my home

By Billy Liggett

I got into soccer because my kids got into soccer. Growing up, I didn't see a whole lot of the sport. My dad was a football-first kind-of-dad, and when I was old enough to start joining Pee Wee leagues in eastern Ohio, he signed me up for the gridiron. There, at the time in the early 80s, coaches tossed helmets and pads that, combined, weighed more than us, put us on large fields and told us to hit each other.



I wasn't big enough for football, and I got knocked around a lot at that age (which might explain a lot as I turned 50 this summer). But football was always there, and I loved the sport.

When my family moved to Atlanta when I was in third grade and Texas when I was in sixth grade, one of the first things my parents would do in each new town was sign me up for football. I only played baseball in the spring, because football wasn't year-round.

Soccer was never really an option. Not just because it was a word rarely uttered in my house, but the towns I lived in didn't have much in the way of youth soccer programs.

Fast forward 30-plus years, and now I'm the dad looking to get his daughter and two sons into sports. Sanford, North Carolina, is home to many options in a number of sports, and while my genetics had me me hoping my kids would lean toward the pigskin, they all saw soccer as a more attractive option.

Instead of wallowing in self pity, I decided to learn more about the sport. I volunteered to be an assistant coach for my youngest son's team. That eventually became a "head coach" gig. I'm now on Year Four of being a soccer coach, and while I'll always think fondly of my days wearing a helmet getting the crap knocked out of me in my youth, a big part of me wishes I had discovered soccer much sooner in life.

That brings me to the World Cup.

Despite learning the fundamentals and strategy of soccer at the youth level for the past four years, I admit I hadn't watched a whole lot of sport at

the highest level — international play and Premier League play. When the World Cup began group play in June, I watched with my family because A) my youngest son really wanted to see the world's best players and B) there is absolutely nothing else to watch this summer (sorry, baseball fans).

I, like the rest of America, was instantly hooked.

More than 6.8 million fans attended World Cup games in several U.S., Mexican and Canadian cities this summer, and more than a billion others broke viewership records tuning in on TV like me.

I can't speak for other Americans as to why the tournament was must-see TV, but it hooked me for several reasons. First, it's a sport with several highly marketable players who actually lived up to the billing this summer. MBappé, Haaland, Messi and other big names were magicians on the field (sorry, pitch), and their personalities shone through.

Games that finished 2-1, 1-0 or even 0-0 — perhaps this country's biggest gripe about the sport is that there isn't enough scoring — still managed to pack a lot of drama, and kept us engaged.

And the United States — despite their flop in the Round of 16 — showed a level of respectability in its first four games, just enough to keep us interested in the home team before jumping ship to Norway and, eventually, Argentina for the final.

My favorite football player as a kid was Tony Dorsett and, eventually, Troy Aikman, and I had to have their shirts or jerseys. Today, my son wants the same pink cleats his soccer heroes are wearing, and he wants to be a beast around the net like Erling Haaland.

Many think this summer's World Cup will help the sport in this country as more kids sign up for youth soccer and more programs — like the ones we have here in Sanford — look at European models that promote development and easy access over the winning-first and pay-to-play approach in the U.S.

Just look at me. One of my 50th birthday gifts was a trip to Charlotte for the MLS All-Star Game with my family.

Consider me among the converted.

READERS RESPOND

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

On The Rant's July cover story on Central Carolina Academy: I didn't realize the Battens were involved with this school, but had I known, I would have been loudly advocating for them and for the school from the beginning. I'm only two years away from having another child in school, so this matters to me.

The Battens have been in education for a long time. Mr. Batten earned my respect years ago when I was a freshman at Western Harnett High School, and while I never personally interacted with Mrs. Batten, I have only ever heard wonderful things about her. They both seem to have a true gift for guiding students and supporting children. I was thrilled when Mr. Batten became principal at Lee and genuinely disappointed when he left.

I signed the petition in support of this team because the success of children should always come first. Based on what has been shared, this move by Central

Services feels very questionable. Removing a team that has demonstrated success was deeply concerning.

When something is working for students and families, we should be asking how to support it — not how to dismantle it.

Katie Main

On The Rant's July cover story on Central Carolina Academy: Critical thinking, timeline of events and months of disengagement, silence and repeated unfulfilled requests lead the belief to be a mostly corrupted and spineless board that for months has refused to produce public records, explain issues or even communicate at all with the body it represents.

The central services team has been accused of overcharging for services, double dipping, rewriting bylaws and contracts behind closed doors, editing and adding meeting minutes, ceasing powers to continue their cash flow up against a renewed charter that doesn't really need them, and retaliating against employees that draw attention to it. If there is any other explanation, they aren't providing it, because they won't engage with the public. But we'd all love to hear a counter point or any statement at all.

Schools are not businesses. Thank goodness for the amazing teachers the administrators did bring in. They have really been there for these kids.

Brad Guseman

On The Rant's July cover story on Central Carolina Academy: We adore this school and the admin. I assure you that NOTHING will improve with the central services team overreach measures they're hoping to put into place. It will be a disaster.

Sonja Lowry

On data center opponents speaking out before Lee County commissioners: I do not have a problem with data centers per se. They are part of what makes the internet work. They support all sorts of media that all of us use daily. The general public is the impetus for these data centers being built.

Businesses, schools, and individual homeowners are driving the need for data centers. We need them to be competitive on the world stage. However, it is within our jurisdiction to place requirements on these data centers. The biggest issue seems to be their energy usage.

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Let's require them to build solar energy farms and utilize geo-thermal technologies to reduce their carbon footprints. Our local and state authorities can make this happen, and all of us will be better for it.

D. Jones

On data center opponents speaking out before Lee County commissioners: Robert Reives needs to stop playing politics and do the right thing already. The board has full power to put a stop to this and they continue to refuse.

Kristen Herrmann

On data center opponents speaking out before Lee County commissioners:

I am all for bringing in a data center. One million dollars in annual revenue means better schools, more jobs and better quality of life. SAGA has laid out a comprehensive plan that is well thought out, and they have brought in experts to articulate how this would be run. The people who are complaining are almost guaranteed to use cell phones, computer tablets and other digital means to communicate via .. wait for it ... data centers.

Online Comment



THE SCENE AT RIVERBIRCH

Fences and sight barriers are up at Riverbirch in west Sanford as crews are hard at work clearing land for the new commercial development that will include Target, a new grocery store and several other new businesses by fall of 2027. *Photo by Billy Liggett*



COVER STORY

PARDON OUR DUST

FROM LARGE-SCALE RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL PROJECTS TO NEW SCHOOLS, PARKS AND LIBRARIES, OUR LIST OF 'WHAT'S GOING ON' AS SANFORD EXPERIENCES UNPRECEDENTED GROWTH

BY BILLY LIGGETT

Huge clouds of reddish orange dust billow and move through the air, engulfing the nearby parked cars and businesses that border the busy construction site at Riverbirch Corner in west Sanford. The regular dusting is a sign of progress at the once-forgotten shopping center that appeared to be on life support until commercial developers deemed it the right spot for a new Target and several other retailers.

Riverbirch Corner is a symbol of the unprecedented growth happening right now in Sanford, North Carolina. The idea of a Target — and similar large-scale retail chains — was once so ridiculous, it was the subject of a 2015 April Fools prank from this very newspaper.

No one is laughing anymore.

Consider the following: Lee County is now among the Top 10 fastest-growing counties in North Carolina, surpassing its neighbor to the north, Chatham, and even Mecklenburg in percentage growth. The population grew from just over 62,000 in 2020 to more than 70,000 in 2025 (a 13 percent climb), and is projected to far exceed 75,000 in the next three years.

And those are conservative figures. The City of Sanford — current population of nearly 35,000 — could double (according to some estimates) by 2050.

With growth comes change, and Sanford and Lee County are full of “under construction” sites at the moment; everything from new restaurants to new



West Main Townes along Tramway Road in Sanford is one of many residential construction sites currently in progress in the Lee County area. The site of mostly townhomes is located between Jonesboro Heights and Southern Lee High School. *Photos by Billy Liggett*



Construction sites can be found all over Sanford and Lee County. Pictured are sites for an Ace Hardware store (above) in Tramway, a new Dairi-O restaurant (right) in Tramway and townhomes near the Jonesboro Heights area (below). *Photos by Billy Liggett*



large neighborhoods and major road expansions. The following is the start of an ongoing list — which we’ll continue to update online at rantnc.com — of projects underway or recently completed in Lee County. And this list does not include all of the infrastructure projects needed to handle this growth (that’s for another edition).

RESIDENTIAL

The City of Sanford alone — not counting rural areas in Lee County — has approved more than 12,000 new residential units over the last five years. Estimates that the city will double in population are born from this number.

There isn’t enough room in these pages to detail every residential project currently in progress locally, but here are the projects making the biggest impact on the area’s population growth:

❑ **Adams Village:** Adams Village has been associated with news surrounding Sanford’s residential and business growth since it was first announced in March 2022. Located on the southern end of Sanford (next to WalMart), it will feature 250 single family lots and 231 townhome lots in its residential area. The commercial portion (highway facing) will sit on 30-plus acres of land.

❑ **Ashby Village:** Not to be confused with Adams Village, Ashby Village was also first announced in March 2022 and will feature 250 single-family homes, 200 townhomes and 350 apartments, according to the initial plans provided to the city. The community’s main entrance will be along South Horner Boulevard (next to Lowes Home Improvement), but will ultimately connect to Lee County Athletic Park.

❑ **Estates at Oakton:** The Estates at Oakton, a major housing subdivision proposal at the intersection of U.S. 1 and Colon Road three miles north of

Annual Lee County Libraries Event of the Summer!

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2026

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Saturday,

August 15th 10 AM - 4 PM

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Lee County Libraries - Main | 1740 Bragg St., Sanford, NC | <http://library.leecountync.gov>

Sanford, will include 173 single-family homes (three different sizes) and 300 apartments. Current plans call for retail space, at least one restaurant with a drive-thru option and even a hotel. Other amenities would include a park, a clubhouse, a dog park, a playground, a pickleball court, a pool, a trail and a linear park.

❑ **Galvin's Ridge:** One of the largest and most ambitious plans is Galvin's Ridge, a 1,000-unit community along U.S. 1 and Colon Road that will feature a mix of single-family homes, townhomes and apartments. Amenities will include a clubhouse, public and private greenways, a community pool, a playground, a dog park, a multi-sport court and a picnic area. The project is slated to be built in four phases, with a latter phase expanding the development to the east side of US 1. More than 13 acres of the 427-acre site will eventually be developed into commercial space. Early plans also called for a 46,000-

plus square foot grocery store, another 12,600 square foot retailer, a sit down restaurant and two fast food restaurants, a convenience store, office space and four more outparcels.

❑ **Vermillion:** Even larger than Galvin's Ridge is the 480-acre Vermillion subdivision that will straddle the north and south sides of Riddle Road north of the 421 bypass. Vermillion, if developed, would consist of 406 townhomes, 436 detached single family homes on small lots, and 377 detached single family homes on medium lots — 1,219 homes total. Plans also include a community clubhouse and swimming pool, walking trails, multiple neighborhood parks and community garden spaces.

❑ **Campbell Creek:** First introduced in 2023, Campbell Creek Subdivision will add 98 new homes on 52 acres at the end of Sandy Creek Church Road (off of Cool Springs Road parallel to U.S. 421).

❑ **Sycamore Ridge:** Sycamore Ridge is a new 45-lot residential development located off Sugar Maple Road and U.S. 1, south of Tramway. The subdivision will feature single-family homes on roughly one-acre wooded lots.

❑ **Pendergrass Village:** Located at the intersection of Pendergrass and Steel Bridge Roads, Pendergrass Village will contain 548 homes on 166 acres, ranging in size

❑ **Petty Road Subdivision:** Introduced in 2025, the currently unnamed subdivision would consist of 133 homes over two phases and be situated on 58.21 acres along Petty Road in west Sanford. The first phase would have 102 units, and the second phase would have 31.

❑ **Lemon Springs Meadows:** Announced this year, Lemon Springs Meadows will consist of 46 single family lots on 52 acres at the intersection of Lemon Springs and Deerfield.

❑ **Thomas Grove:** Also announced recently, Thomas Grove will feature 93 single family lots on 37.7 acres at Lee Avenue and Cedarhurst Drive.

❑ **Sky Ridge Estates:** A smaller subdivision located on Eddy Drive (near Commerce Drive and N.C. 87), Sky Ridge will feature 28 homes on just over 16 acres.

❑ **L&S Drive Subdivision:** Located on the north side of Tramway Road between Firetower Road and Courtland Drive, this subdivision would contain 140 homes, including 51 townhomes and 89 single family homes on 6,000-square-foot lots.

❑ **Pines at Buckhorn:** At Buckhorn Road and Pottery Lane, the Pines will have 113 units with a minimum lot size of 40,000 square feet on 210 acres.

See even more projects currently underway at sanfordnc.net/906/2025-Project-List

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RETAIL

If Sanford truly does “double” in size over the next 14 years, it will need more places to shop. Already, several new retail spots are under construction or rumored to be on the way.

❑ **Target:** The big one in Sanford. Work has begun to clear the land at Riverbirch Corner in west Sanford to make room for Target, which according to the Sanford Area Growth Alliance, is expected to have its grand opening in fall of 2027. Simultaneously, new buildings will go up to house a new-to-market grocery store and a host of other new businesses and retailers.

❑ **New-to-market grocery store:** The term “new-to-market” means Sanford doesn’t currently have whatever is coming to Riverbirch Corner in fall 2027. So it won’t be a Lowe’s, Food Lion, Aldi, Lidl or Piggly Wiggly. Speculation is that Harris Teeter will be the likely choice, but don’t count out Trader Joe’s or something entirely different.

❑ **BJ’s Wholesale:** It was announced this year that BJ’s was joining Olive Garden, Whataburger and Ulta Beauty for the commercial spots in the Adams Village subdivision along N.C. 87 near Walmart. BJ’s is a popular big box wholesale store (much like Costco and Sam’s Club) that plans to open 25 to 30 new stores in the U.S. over the next two years.

❑ **Ulta Beauty:** Joining BJ’s in Adams Village, Ulta is the largest specialty beauty retailer in the United States, offering a wide range of cosmetics, skincare, fragrances and haircare products. The company has more than 1,500 locations and saw a nearly 12-percent increase in sales in the fourth quarter in 2025.

❑ **Provision Ace Hardware:** The hardware store — with a location south of the city in Southern Pines — is expanding into Sanford with a new two-story building under construction near the intersection of U.S. 1 and

Tramway Road.

❑ **Firestone Complete:** A permit was issued on March 20 to allow the construction of a Firestone Complete Auto Care store on N.C. 87, just south of the Wilkinson Auto dealership and across from the Adams Village project.

❑ **Unnamed grocery store:** The City of Sanford has a zoning request for a large project along Kelly Drive (between U.S. 421 bypass and Central Carolina Community College) for a site that will include a new 45,000-square-foot grocery store, hotel and retail space.

RESTAURANTS

Sanford’s first Chipotle opened this summer along N.C. 87 near Lidl, across from Chick-Fil-A. It’s one of many large chain restaurants coming the Sanford in the coming months.

❑ **Olive Garden:** Expected to be built at the entrance of the future Adams Village subdivision along N.C. 87 next to WalMart, Olive Garden — known for its “never ending pasta bowl” and its breadsticks — is expected to open in Sanford in 2027. There are approximately 956 Olive Gardens in the United States, and the restaurant has announced plans for 60 new locations in 2026 and even more in 2027.

❑ **Dairi-O:** The giant inflatable milkshake cup can already be spotted in front of the going-up-fast Dairi-O restaurant in Tramway along U.S. 1. The restaurant was founded in King, North Carolina in 1947 and began expanding in 2006 with its first sit-down location in Rural Hall. Today, the company has 12 locations in places like Winston-Salem, Clemmons, Kernersville and Asheboro.

❑ **Culver’s:** A fast casual chain of burger restaurants based in Wisconsin, Culver’s has proposed a 4,500-square-



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foot location on Tramway Road opposite the site's existing Bojangles, next to the recently-opened Waffle House. Culver's has about 1,000 locations in 26 states.

❑ **Starbucks:** The city/county's planning committee is considering a proposal for a third Starbucks in Sanford, this one in Tramway in a spot that will include a dental office and two other tenants. The building would sit at the intersection of Tramway Road and U.S. 1, between the existing CVS and Bojangles locations.

❑ **Wedgies:** The popular Southern Pines-based sandwich shop will open a second location in downtown Sanford soon. 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. The Sanford location will be housed in the former Java Express next to Sanford Antique Mall.

❑ **Whataburger:** Joining Olive Garden at the Adams Village commercial area, Whataburger continues to expand in North Carolina after developing a cult following in Texas and other southern states. A fast food burger joint with great taquitos for breakfast, the chain added a new location roughly every four days in 2024.

❑ **Del Taco:** Del Taco is coming to 3116 South Horner Boulevard — between Jersey Mike's and Sanford Honda. A California-based fast food chain which has existed since the 1960s, it has locations in Durham and Kernersville.

❑ **Chipotle:** Unlike the other restaurants listed here, Chipotle has already opened its first Sanford location, next to Lidle along N.C. 87.

❑ **CiCi's Pizza:** Not long after the Target news came out, CiCi's Pizza — a national pizza chain known for its all-you-can-eat buffet — announced plans to build its 14th N.C. location at 814 Spring Lane, near Lowe's Foods.

SCHOOLS

A big debate with the population growth in Sanford is how the area will educate all the new children coming in. A few projects are in the works, and more is expected in the coming years.

❑ **New public elementary school:** Work on what will become Lee County's ninth elementary school is moving forward — quietly, slowly and mostly out of public view. A new school serving about 800 students is projected to cost \$56 million, or roughly \$66,000 per student. The last new school built in Lee County was W.B. Wicker Elementary, which opened in 2019 as Sanford's economic development efforts began to accelerate.

❑ **Grace Christian School:** Lee County's largest K-12 private school announced plans in 2025 for a two-phase \$98 million expansion that will add a new 59,000-square-foot facility for high school and middle school students; a new football/soccer stadium

with a turf field, field house, press box and bleachers for 2,000 spectators; a new elementary and pre-school building with space for administration and other staff; six additional athletic fields for soccer, softball and baseball; new basketball and volleyball courts and an expanded strength and conditioning area for athletes.

COMMUNITY ASSETS

Big projects are already completed (a new library and athletic park) and currently in the works in Lee County.

❑ **Lee County Library:** The new \$24 million Lee County Library — a 34,000-square-foot state-of-the-art structure located along Bragg Street (next to O.T. Sloan Park and across from Lee County High School) — more than doubles the space of its predecessor. The library celebrated its grand opening in the spring and is already a popular desination for book lovers old and young.



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❑ **Lee County Athletic Park:** Opened last fall, Lee County Athletic Park is already the county’s premier destination for sports, recreation and community events. With two large turf soccer and multi-sport fields, several large grass fields and four baseball stadiums, the park also features walking trails and a million-dollar playground. Work is already underway on a new gas station and hotel near the park’s entrance.

❑ **Pilgrim’s Sanford Agricultural Marketplace:** In April, Sanford’s new farmer’s market (and more) opened to the public at 157 Charlotte Avenue in downtown. The open-air facility (with indoor meeting rooms and classrooms) is already drawing big crowds every Saturday and Wednesday for the county’s regular market events.

❑ **Depot Park:** Sanford celebrated the renovation of the historic Sanford Depot Building in May. A cornerstone of Sanford’s roots as a railroad town, the

Depot has undergone a comprehensive renovation.

❑ **Broadway Road expansion:** The North Carolina Department of Transportation is widening a five-mile stretch of Broadway Road from Horner Boulevard in Sanford to East Harrington Avenue in Broadway. The \$55.2 million project will transform the connector into a multi-lane roadway featuring turn-lane enhancements and raised medians. It also eliminates select left turns at non-signalized intersections and adds designated U-turn areas alongside new pedestrian sidewalks.

❑ **‘Mystery’ economic development project:** Sanford and Lee County are to land another major economic development project that could bring as many as 335 new full-time jobs and a tax base investment of more than \$600 million to the county over a seven-year period. The Lee County Board of Commissioners approved a performance-based cash incentives grant in July that will consist

of annual payments based on a net new taxable value for the unnamed company’s new facility that would be built in Lee County. The amount of each year’s grant will be 70 percent of the property taxes paid by the company during the previous year.

❑ **More lodging:** In addition to an unnamed hotel planned along U.S. 421 bypass near Kelly Drive, plans are in place for a Tru by Hilton hotel — if built, it would go at the entrance to the Lee County Athletic Park along Broadway Road. According to documents on file with the Planning Department, the hotel would be 46,000-plus square feet and contain 98 rooms.

❑ **North Carolina Core:** When completed, the 120-mile stretch of what is now U.S. 421 from west of Winston-Salem to Dunn will bear the designation as one of the state’s newest and most important interstates, I-685. The highway will connect the cities of Greensboro, High Point, Siler City,

Sanford, Lillington and Fayetteville, and most importantly, will provide the vital connection between I-85 and I-95. How the project will look when it connects to the current U.S. 421 Bypass west and south of Sanford is still unknown.

❑ **Data center proposal:** Maybe we shouldn’t list this as an “asset,” because of the controversy, but a developer has applied for a permit to build a large capacity data center in northern Lee County, according to paperwork on file with the local planning department. Virginia-based PointOne, in conjunction with local developer Helix Ventures, has proposed a 300,000 square foot data center facility on 56 acres off Lower Moncure Road. The project comes with a significant tax base investment. The building itself will be valued at \$900 million, containing technology worth as much as two to three times that value.

Note: We will continue to add to this story throughout the year at rantnc.com



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Residents speak out against data centers

By Gordon Anderson

gordon@rantnc.com

Nearly 20 people addressed the Lee County Board of Commissioners at a meeting in July, expressing opposition to a proposed data center on Lower Moncure Road.

The data center proposal became public on June 8, when it was announced that Virginia-based PointOne had applied for a permit to construct a 300,000 square foot data center on 56 acres off Lower Moncure Road. The facility, if built, would be operated by Dallas-based CyrusOne. The proposal is “phase one” of a development that totals 430 acres. Uses for the remainder of the development have not been announced.

PointOne has said the project represents a \$900 million tax base investment that should bring in at least \$1 million annually in new tax revenues for Lee County. But the project has received a large amount of criticism, particularly online, from data center opponents concerned about environmental and other potential impacts.

The July 13 meeting was over capacity, with a large number of people watching proceedings from outside the meeting room. Those who spoke did so during the meeting’s public comment period. The agenda didn’t include any action items related to the data center proposal.

Lower Moncure Road resident Eric Evenson said he believed the land the data center is proposed for was rezoned under false pretenses. The commissioners rezoned the land in August of 2025.

“When the representative from (real estate developer) Trustwell delivered a 28-minute presentation for a standard, quiet business park bringing 500 jobs, did you believe him?” Evenson asked. “The citizens believed him, so we accepted the rezoning. You believed him, so you granted it. Do you believe him now that the mask has slipped?



Several residents spoke out against data centers coming to Lee County during a July meeting of the board of commissioners.

Would this board ever trust them on another land use application? This isn’t economic growth, it’s an extraction of Lee County’s resources.”

Resident Michelle Eaves concurred, saying the proposal “is not a typical light industrial business.”

“A modern data center is an industrial scale operation that runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” she said. “It requires enormous amounts of electricity, significant infrastructure, industrial cooling equipment, backup diesel generators, and depending on the cooling system used, substantial water resources. That is not the image most have when they hear light industrial.”

Several speakers discussed “infrasound,” which is sound below the normal threshold of human audibility (typically below 20 Hz).

“Low frequency, long amplitude waves is responsible for something called Havana Syndrome,” said resident Gary Phelps, referencing a disputed explanation for a cluster of illnesses reported by some diplomats in Cuba. “This is something a foreign nation did to our delegates. Would you willingly, voluntarily do this to

your own citizens?”

If the project is permitted, PointOne is looking to begin work in the fall of this year and be operational sometime in 2028.

Prior to the June announcement, there had been months of speculation about the possibility of a data center in Lee County dating back to 2025, when it was reported that a company called Deep River Data was interested in accessing natural gas from an old test well in order to power an AI data operation.

Concerns about fracking, as well as potential adverse impacts from that project – which was never officially proposed or submitted for approvals – led local leaders to adopt a rule set governing data centers in Sanford and Lee County. Those rules, among other things, banned fracking-associated data centers.

Most of the speakers continued to call for the county to enact a moratorium on data centers.

“Twenty one jurisdictions in North Carolina have paused data centers, including Charlotte,” said resident Keely Puricz. “And the list is growing.”

Developer revamps Oakton proposal

By Richard Sullins

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After rejecting multiple versions of a proposed mixed-use development at one of Sanford’s main gateways over the past three years, the Sanford City Council signaled in July that the developer has finally addressed many of its concerns.

The Estates at Oakton, a major housing subdivision proposal at the intersection of U.S. 1 and Colon Road three miles north of Sanford, was one of seven such projects before the council in July. But the council rejected proposals floated by the Oakton developer in 2022 and 2023 because they didn’t meet conditions council members said were necessary for a project along one of Sanford’s primary entry corridors.

The latest proposal made to the city is markedly different.

Anybody listening out there?

Overall, the Oakton project calls for the construction of buildings to house 473 total units, 300 of these being apartments and the remaining 173 to be single-family homes of three different sizes.

The plan calls for retail space, at least one restaurant with a drive-thru option, and even a hotel. Other amenities would include a park, a clubhouse, a dog park, a playground, a pickleball court, a pool, a trail, and a linear park.

Known previously as Gum Fork, the project first came before the council December of 2022. It was rejected because conditions the council had previously spelled out to the developer as necessary for approval were repeatedly not addressed, from one meeting to the next.

In April 2023, the council unanimously rejected D.R. Horton’s proposal for a 600-home subdivision after months of debate. Council members said the company had repeatedly returned with plans that failed to address concerns they had already outlined.

Councilman Charles Taylor spoke up at that meeting about what the city would accept, and what it would not.

“My problem tonight is that (U.S. 1) is the gateway coming into our community. This board has been diligent in expressing to you, for the last two times you have come to us, that we don’t want an inexpensive, cheap looking product along that corridor coming into town,” he said. “Still, you keep coming back to us with your least expensive, low-end-of-the-line product. You have several lines above this one that would be much more attractive along that corridor. We’ve told you that repeatedly. I don’t know how much more explicitly we could have expressed that. And here you are again, bringing us the same thing.”

Horton hears the who this time

It’s been three years since Horton went to the city council to ask for rezoning of those four adjoining tracts that together would make up the approximately 111.67 acres where the Oakton project would be located. But this time, the council praised the revised design, calling it a huge improvement and much more aligned with the city’s vision of what a mixed-use development at its most heavily traveled gateway should look like.

One of the major concerns expressed by the city council in 2023 was that Horton was planning to put rows of its cheaper homes along the northern and western boundaries of the project where they could be seen from U.S. 1. The company pledged then to leave a portion of a “tree buffer” still standing to reduce visibility of these lower-priced homes, but the council remained unconvinced that maintaining a portion of a buffer would solve the problem.

The latest proposal addresses many of the objections council members raised in

2022 and 2023.

Instead of cheaper single-family homes to line the edges of the development, the new Oakton design calls for the restaurant to be located at the entrance point to the property where the U.S. 1 north access ramp touches Colon Road, with apartment buildings and higher-end homes flanking the ramp as it merges with the four-lane road.

The new plan calls for construction at Oakton to be divided into four phases. The first phase would be for commercial users at the entrance to the development just off Colon Road across from the city’s Fire Station Number Five.

Phase Two would see the construction of single-family homes just south of the commercial zone, followed by the building of apartment complexes in Phase Three along the edges of Colon Road and U.S. 1. The final phase would be in the easternmost region of Oakton where additional single-family homes would be constructed.

Other projects heard

The public hearing also provided an opportunity for citizen input on a proposal from Otter Creek Properties to rezone six parcels of land that total four and a half acres with frontage on Palomino and Dogwood Acres Drives from the Palomino Townhomes Conditional Zoning District to Urban Neighborhood to allow for a wider range of housing types to be constructed. The site previously had been approved strictly for townhomes only.

Two other proposals were heard, both from Rhetsen Capital, one for .94 acres and another for 14.39 acres, each seeking re-zoning of lots from residential to commercial uses.

These were all referred to the Planning Board, and several of them – if not all – are expected to be returned to the city council with a recommendation for final dispensation at its next meeting, scheduled for August 4, in the council’s chambers at city hall on Weatherspoon Street.

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CCCC’S BROWN
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40 UNDER 40 LIST

The *Triangle Business Journal* named Meghan Brown, CCCC’s Vice President of Advancement and Operations, to its prestigious 2026 40 Under 40 list, recognizing emerging leaders whose work is shaping the Triangle.

Brown sees the recognition as an opportunity to tell a larger story. “One of the things that means the most to me about receiving this recognition is that it reflects far more than my own work. It shines a light on Central Carolina Community College and the incredible people I have the privilege of serving alongside every day.”

Brown said the recognition also highlights the growing role CCCC plays in the Triangle’s workforce and North Carolina’s economy. While rooted in the communities it serves, the college has become an increasingly important partner to employers, school districts, universities, and local governments throughout the Triangle and central North Carolina.

“We are proud to be North Carolina’s largest rural-serving community college, but we’re also an institution of the Triangle,” Brown said. “That unique position allows us to bridge worlds, serving rural communities while helping power one of the nation’s most dynamic economic regions.”



The Jerry M. Wallace School of Osteopathic Medicine welcomed its inaugural class in 2013, with its first graduating class in 2017.

Photo by Ben Brown

Sanford doctor donates \$100K to med school

Story courtesy of Campbell University

A Sanford doctor and Campbell University graduate has established a \$100,000 scholarship to help students enrolled at Campbell’s Jerry M. Wallace School of Osteopathic Medicine.

The Thomas A. Wilson, MD, and Family Medical Endowed Scholarship Fund is targeted toward students who’ve lived in Lee and Harnett counties, as well as those who’ve lived in North Carolina. The scholarship also gives preference to students who earned an undergraduate degree from Campbell.

“Dr. Wilson understands the challenges of rural healthcare because he lived them,” said Dr. David Tolentino, dean of Campbell’s medical school. “His extraordinary generosity strengthens the Campbell mission to train physicians who will serve rural and underserved communities. The Thomas A. Wilson, MD, and Family Medical Endowed Scholarship not only honors his journey but also ensures that future osteopathic physicians have the support they need to make a lasting impact across North Carolina.”

Dr. Tom Wilson, who was raised on a small tobacco farm in the western part of Harnett County, has spent most of his

career in psychiatric medicine, serving patients throughout Harnett and Lee counties, where he continues to practice. Wilson graduated from Campbell College, summa cum laude, in 1968, with a major in chemistry. He received his medical license in 1974.

Wilson says the inspiration and support he received from his professors at Campbell College was key to his success, and that sense of gratitude led him to establish the scholarship.

He became the first in his family to attend college when he enrolled at Campbell, where he studied under legendary chemistry professors Edna Queener Proffit and James M. Jung. He majored in chemistry and earned his medical degree from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill before completing a residency in psychiatry.

Wilson then returned home to live and to practice. He served as Clinical and Medical director for the Lee-Harnett Mental Health Authority, a public agency with main offices in Sanford and Buies Creek, from 1979 until 2005, when the agency merged with a larger mental health provider.

Wilson, who lives in Sanford with his

wife, Sandra, remains passionate about giving back to the next generation of medical professionals, said Grant Harden, director of Planned Giving, Estate Planning at Campbell.

Wilson also recognizes the significant financial burden that comes with pursuing a medical degree: “The inspiration and support I received from professors at Campbell College was key to his success as a doctor, and that sense of gratitude led to the scholarship.”

The scholarship will go to eligible students with the following preferences:

- Any full-time student pursuing a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree who ever resided in either Lee County or Harnett County in North Carolina and holds a prior four-year degree from Campbell.
- Any full-time student pursuing a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree who ever resided in North Carolina and holds a prior four-year degree from Campbell.
- Any full-time student pursuing a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree who has ever resided in North Carolina.

Success of July 4 has Broadway looking at possible fall event

By Richard Sullins

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Broadway Mayor Donald Andrews reported at the July 27 meeting of the Town Board that a very successful July 4 celebration has created interest in a potential fall festival like the annual “Broadway Our Way” celebration which takes place in the spring.

The Veterans Council and U.S. Marine Corps League served as hosts for the July 4 ceremony at the North Carolina Veterans Memorial. The program included a color guard, a public reading of the Declaration of Independence, musical performances and a patriotic quilt presentation to local Air Force veteran Katie Eddings.

There were musicians and street vendors to help make Broadway’s hometown Independence Day observance a memorable one for all who came.

The town has celebrated Broadway



Broadway’s July 4 celebration drew hundreds last month, and the town’s “Our Way” festival has grown to more than 5,000.

Our Way since 2009, when attendance was in the few hundreds and the celebration functioned more like a block party, with food vendors, small performances, and a focus on Broadway residents.

When this year’s celebration took place in April, attendance had grown to more than 5,000 people greeted by 100 or more vendors, and with musicians

playing into the night for those who felt like dancing in the streets.

Let’s do it again

It’s this kind of community party Andrews has in mind, and he’s quietly been trying to determine over the past few weeks whether there’s enough interest in Broadway to pull together enough volunteers and donations and community support to make a fall festival happen in a way that is on par with the spring event.

Andrews didn’t ask the town commissioners for a commitment during the meeting to holding such an event in years to come. But the idea is now officially open for discussion.

Lee County Commissioner Kirk Smith, who regularly attends Broadway’s meetings, also spoke to the board about the county’s recent actions in approaching a controversial data center project that’s not far from Broadway.

Smith spoke of the economic benefits that have come to some areas like Loudoun County, Virginia, which has one of the highest concentrations of data centers in the world, and talked about the way Lee County’s Board of Commissioners enacted restrictions on how future data centers can operate within the county.

“We did a great job in putting these needs and these rules together,” he said. “Because we have these rules, we don’t need a moratorium.”

Andrews reminded the board and the public about National Night Out, to be held on Aug. 4, at Broadway Town Hall. Town police, sheriff’s office, fire department, and EMS vehicles will be parked there for an opportunity to see up close and talk to the men and women who operate them. The Red Cross Bloodmobile will be on hand to receive donations of blood, and the Broadway Police will be doing a “Stuff the Police Car” event to receive school supplies.



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SEP. 10 - 27

State official recommended eliminating Sunday early voting

Official was reassigned by state auditor after pressuring election board in other county

By Gordon Anderson

gordon@rantnc.com

A state elections official recommended eliminating Sunday from the county's early voting schedule in the 2026 general election to two members of the Lee County Board of Elections, according to public records.

The official, Dallas Woodhouse, was reassigned in June from his role as a liaison to county elections boards from

the Office of the State Auditor, after allegations that he had improperly pressured election boards in another North Carolina county over whether to eliminate early voting sites.

Audio of the July 13 Lee County Board of Elections meeting shows the members later acknowledging those discussions with Woodhouse.

Woodhouse suggested eliminating Sunday voting while increasing Saturday early voting hours in a May text message to Jay Delancy, a member of the Lee County board. Woodhouse also emailed a similar suggestion to Lee elections board Chair Tom Duncan.

"We are going to get shit removing Sundays in so many places and

the overall increase in hours makes it easier to sell plus it is better for voters," Woodhouse wrote in the text to Delancy, which began with the word "Confidential."

"I think we are in one accord on this," Delancy replied.

The text exchange, along with related emails involving Delancy and Duncan, was obtained through a public records request.

The Lee County Board of Elections considered several early voting plans on July 13 but failed to approve any unanimously, as required by state law. Lee County Elections Director Jane Fawcett forwarded the three plans that received votes to the State Board of Elections, which will now determine Lee County's early voting schedule.

Four of the five members of each county board of elections are appointed by the State Board of Elections from lists of nominees submitted by the state chairs of the Republican and Democratic parties. The state auditor appoints each county board's chair.

Woodhouse's May communications with Delancy and Duncan followed an April email from Woodhouse to county election board chairs in which he said the State Board had accepted reductions in Sunday voting during the March primary when counties extended hours on other days, added Saturday hours, or opened additional locations. He also asked county officials to notify his office before adopting their plans "just so we know what is happening before it occurs and can ask questions if needed."

The contacts between Woodhouse, Delancy and Duncan became public at the July 13 meeting when Democratic Board Member Becky Whitaker asked questions about why the board was being asked to consider adopting early voting plans that eliminated Sunday voting.

"I think it's really interesting that in a year where the State Auditor's Office has reassigned someone for inappropriately pressuring county boards to eliminate Sunday voting that we're suddenly

having this conversation," she said, later asking whether anyone on the board had been contacted "by anyone from the state auditor's office."

Both Delancy and Duncan acknowledged talking with Woodhouse, with Duncan being the first to name him.

"He's trying to talk us into having another precinct for early voting, and I flat out told him that's not happening," Duncan said. "Then he started on me about the Sunday voting stuff and all that. But he never pushed me. He just gave me statistics."

Delancy said Whitaker's "suspicions are correct, I'll confirm that," but said Woodhouse was only informing him that Sunday voting isn't required by law, something he claimed he didn't know until that discussion.

"It's interesting that he contacted you two and not me," Whitaker said.

"He contacted me because I'm the chairman," Duncan replied.

"Jay's not the chairman," Whitaker said back.

"Jay's in meetings with him," Duncan replied again.

When asked what kind of meetings Delancy and Woodhouse were in together, Delancy said "it's election integrity meetings. Was. I don't think he goes there anymore. He was an invited guest in those meetings. So he called me on the side and said 'you know you can do this?'"

Duncan closed that part of the discussion by saying "for the record, I don't particularly care for Mr. Woodhouse. Never have."

Delancy told *The Rant* that the issue on which he felt "in one accord" with Woodhouse was "overall the principle of getting rid of Sunday voting," citing his religion and "seeing what a pain it can be" for election workers.

"Until I got on the (Lee County Board of Elections), I was agnostic on it," he said.



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JUDGE INVESTIGATED FOR DISPLAYING FIREARM IN COURT

A Lee County District Court judge allegedly displayed a firearm in court on July 17, and the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts has told *The Rant* it's "aware and the allegations have been referred to the Judicial Standards Commission."

The Administrative Office of the Courts provided the statement in response to an inquiry about reports of a courtroom incident involving a gun but didn't provide details about the allegations.

Citing "a source," WRAL in Raleigh identified the judge as District Court Judge Brian Lewis and reported the firearm had a laser sight, which flashed into the face of an employee of the Clerk of Court's Office. WRAL reported that the gun was not displayed "in a threatening manner."

Lewis is a Republican who serves Lee, Harnett and Johnston counties and was first elected in 2024 without opposition. According to his campaign website, he served in the Air Force and became an attorney in 2013, prosecuting cases in Durham and Cumberland counties before his election to the bench.

Proceedings of the North Carolina Judicial Standards Commission are confidential under North Carolina law unless disciplinary action is taken. State law allows judges to carry firearms in courtrooms under certain conditions. WRAL's report indicates the allegations involve the manner of the firearm's display, rather than Lewis' possession of the gun.

The Rant has requested records from Lee County related to the incident and will update this story if information is available.

— Gordon Anderson

BRIEFS

BOYCE QUALIFIES FOR WRITE-IN CANDIDACY IN DISTRICT 2



An unaffiliated voter in the Deep River area has qualified as a write-in candidate for the Lee County Board of Commissioners seat held by Republican Commissioner Kirk

Smith. Jonathan Boyce lives on Lee's Chapel Road in the Deep River area. He was able to gather enough signatures from eligible voters to earn a write in line in the District 2 race this fall for the Lee County Board of Commissioners. Boyce's name won't be on the ballot, but only write in votes for his name will count in the 2026 election.

Boyce has spoken in at least one meeting of the Lee County Board of Commissioners in recent weeks, appearing during a public comment period to advocate against a proposed data center near his home. A media sheet provided by the Lee County Board of Elections lists his occupation as life coach and indicates he's an unaffiliated voter.

Boyce said he "felt led to run" because of the data center issue.

"There are so many people in the community who feel like they were deceived by the data center rezoning," he said. "I don't like the way it was handled, and the residents of Lee County don't either. This is nothing I ever planned to do, but I think leaders need to show honesty and transparency."

Boyce, who moved to Lee County in 2021, said he doesn't intend to be a one-issue candidate and will spend the next four months working to hear from voters about how best he can serve them.

"I just learned yesterday I was qualified as a write in candidate," he said. "Obviously there are a lot of other issues besides the data center, and I've got a lot to learn. I'm looking forward to talking with voters and learning about what they think."

DAVIDSON APPOINTED TO BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

The Lee County Board of Commissioners appointed Republican Eric Davidson Monday night to fill a vacancy left when Taylor Vorbeck resigned earlier in July. The board voted unanimously to appoint Davidson, most recently a member of the Lee County Board of Education, to the seat. The commissioners took the vote during a special called meeting to consider the appointment, and Davidson was sworn in following the vote.

The District 4 seat Davidson now occupies covers much of western Lee County. He was already a declared candidate for the seat in this fall's election and will square off against Democrat Jamey Laudate in a race that will decide which political party will control the board

for the next two years. Vorbeck was not seeking re-election.

Davidson is well known in Lee County for his broad career across public service, education and ministry. He is an Asheboro native who has served as pastor at Buffalo Presbyterian Church since 2024 and earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in religious studies at Campbell University. He is the founder and CEO of EDJE Consulting Group, a Sanford-based leadership and business development firm that focuses on team building, culture and training.

Davidson was elected to the Lee County Board of Education in 2022 and served as vice chair in 2023 and chair in 2024. He'll serve out the remainder of Vorbeck's term while continuing his campaign for the seat in November.

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.

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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WEST LEE PRINCIPAL
FINALIST FOR STATE
GOLDEN LEAF AWARD

West Lee Middle School Principal Aimee Petrarca was chosen as one of only four finalists for the Leader of the Year Award in the Golden LEAF Schools Initiative. The honor recognizes her exceptional leadership during the initiative’s first year of implementation.

The Leader of the Year Award honors a principal, assistant principal or district implementation coordinator who has created sustained, school-wide conditions for the successful implementation of the Golden LEAF Schools Initiative.

Petrarca earned this recognition through her innovative Open Campus initiative, a student-centered approach grounded in trust, accountability, and shared responsibility. The initiative transformed school culture by empowering students while maintaining high expectations for behavior and engagement.

Said Petrarca: “This recognition belongs to the dedicated teachers, staff, students, and families of West Lee Middle who embraced a shared vision for creating a school culture built on trust, accountability, and opportunity. Together, we’ve shown that when students are empowered to make positive choices, everyone benefits.”

CCCC formed grad’s desire to help others

Story courtesy of CCCC

As a homeschool student, Isaac Barstow felt a little intimidated socially during his first couple weeks taking classes at CCCC.

That changed as he started talking more to other people on campus.

“I’m really glad I did that, because I discovered that people here are great,” said Barstow, a Sanford resident who graduated this spring with two CCCC associate degrees, in arts and in science, as well as his homeschool high school diploma. What he found, he said, is people at CCCC tend to be very friendly and open. He said he loves how diverse the community is, not just in terms of ethnicity but also in terms of age, life stage and goals.

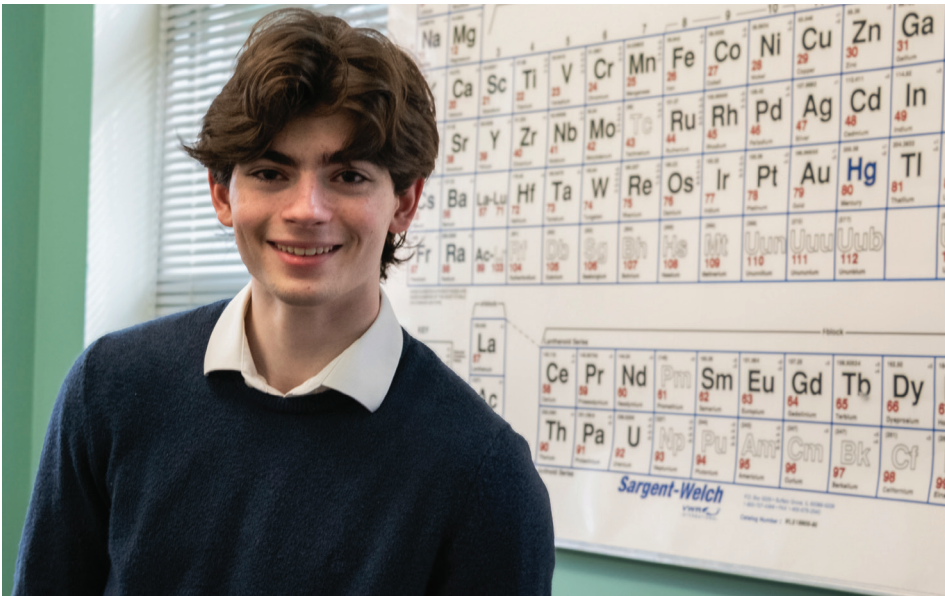
His CCCC friends range from high-school students attending the Lee Early College program to people in their forties looking for a change of pace.

“It’s really great seeing all these different walks of life, all these different careers and experiences, and just being able to be in a community with them, learn from them, and hang out with them,” he said.

Joining CCCC’s chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society and serving as the organization’s Recording Officer turned out to be great ways to meet new people, Barstow said.

He also loved the small class sizes at CCCC and how willing his instructors were to talk during office hours and through emails.

“I really appreciated not only having this great one-on-one instruction from



Central Carolina Community College graduate Isaac Barstow at his workplace at CCCC’s tutoring center on the Lee Main Campus in Sanford. Photo courtesy of CCCC

them but also being able to learn from them and also kind of share in their excitement for their materials, because we have a lot of very passionate people working here,” said Barstow.

Barstow excelled in his classes and was highly honored by CCCC and its faculty, earning both the Academic Excellence Award for the Associate in Science at the college’s annual honors ceremony, as well as the Highest Academic Award for the Associate in Science at CCCC’s spring graduation.

Those recognitions, he believes, greatly contributed to his gaining admission to the University of Michigan honors program, which he plans to attend this fall.

He is interested in studying biochemistry or molecular, cellular, and developmental biology, with hopes of going into medicine or a related field.

Barstow said what clinched his decision to attend the University of Michigan was the collaborative environment there and students’ attitude of “we’re all in this together, so we might as well work through it together.”

At CCCC, he has worked as a tutor and also assisted classmates, so that way of thinking makes a lot of sense to him.

“I think it kind of formed into a genuine desire to just help people,” he said. “I want to see everyone succeed.”

CITY’S THIRD STARBUCKS
PROPOSED FOR TRAMWAY

The Sanford-Lee County Planning Department’s Technical Review Committee heard a proposal in July for a multi-tenant commercial building in Tramway that would, if approved, include a Starbucks store.

The 9,833 square foot proposal would also include a dental office and have

space for two other unspecified tenants.

The building would sit at the intersection of Tramway Road and U.S. 1, between the existing CVS and Bojangles locations. The TRC is comprised of local officials from various city and county government entities and meets monthly to review commercial projects and major subdivisions for compliance with the codes and policies of various local departments.

Also on the TRC agenda for July were two housing subdivision proposals, one on Steel Bridge Road and one on Carthage Street.

Both proposals have been before the TRC in the past — one is being reviewed again because its preliminary plat has expired; the other is getting a second look because the land in question has since been rezoned.

LOCAL MUSIC

HemlockFest emphasizes music and community

By Bryson Lyons

Music is a language that ties us all together, and it's always been easy to find speakers of that language in Sanford.

In terms of local live music, Sanford has in the last several years been having something of a city-wide renaissance. From Carolina Indie Fest to the city's Summer Concert Series and one-off events at smaller venues like Wild Dogs, Camelback and the Smoke & Barrel, opportunities to hear music live have manifested locally in recent years, and there are a number of active bands who have been formed here and call Lee County home.



The main force behind one of those bands — Sanford's Hemlock Theory — has been working hard to ride that wave. Billy O'Brien, the band's singer and guitarist, has stayed busy for the last several months planning HemlockFest, a two day event featuring 14 live bands at the Mann Center for the Arts, which is set for Aug. 29 and 30.

(Before we go any further, I have to provide a disclaimer and some candor. I'm a musician. Further, I'm a musician involved with this festival through not only my role in Hemlock Theory, but also my band Solar Illusion. Even further, I'm roommates with Billy. It's not hard to set up an interview when you share a living room with someone.)

This year will mark HemlockFest's third, bringing bands from as far away as Charlotte to the Mann Center. The event has grown since beginning in 2024 with just seven bands over one day. Although O'Brien has always held HemlockFest at the Mann Center, this year should sound better with the venue's upgraded sound system available. In years past, we had to bring in loads and loads of our own speakers.

"We now have more speakers to simultaneously provide better sound to the band onstage," O'Brien told me.

O'Brien began HemlockFest primarily out of a passion to bring smaller bands from around North Carolina to the Sanford music scene and make it a part of the region's live show network. Performing from a very young age at Temple Theatre, his love for music and being on stage has given him connections in North Carolina's underground music scene.

"I played a show at The Night Rider (in Raleigh) with Sunshine's Moonlight and it was such an enjoyable experience that I wished Sanford had the same thing," he told me when I asked why he started HemlockFest, referencing a now-closed downtown Raleigh music venue where many of the bands on the bill cut their teeth.

Community is a big part of HemlockFest. Most of the bands know one another already, either through playing shows together in the past or even sharing members. But that focus on community extends beyond the network of area musicians. For the second year, HemlockFest has teamed up with Musicians For Overdose Prevention, an organization that provides free Naloxone nasal spray to music venues around central North Carolina in an effort to stop opioid overdoses. MFOP will have Naloxone available at the door when guests arrive.

HemlockFest emphasizes community connection in other ways as well. An assortment of local vendors will be on hand selling wares at the event, and there's a raffle both days. HemlockFest runs from 2 to 9 p.m. on Aug. 29-30. Tickets — available at the event's door — are \$10 per day or \$15 for both days. See the schedule by clicking this column at rantnc.com.



Bryson Lyons is a local musician who writes about the local music scene.

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EVENT CALENDAR

AUGUST 20

DSI'S ANNUAL BACK TO SCHOOL NIGHT

Downtown Sanford Inc.'s Third Thursday: Back to School Night is a free community event at Depot Park designed to help families, students and educators kick off the school year together. Enjoy an evening filled with community resources, kid-friendly activities and opportunities to connect — all in a relaxed, welcoming downtown setting from 5 to 7 p.m.

AUG 3-7: Animal Superpowers — a creative and active week focused on how animals survive and adapt — comes to the Pint Sized Pasture from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day. Cost is \$300 for the full week of summer camp or \$75 for one day.

AUG 4: The next generation of Starter Decks has landed at Raven Forge in downtown Sanford, which is hosting a One Piece Beginners Deck party at 7:15 p.m. Entry is \$20.

AUG. 6: d.a.l.i.a. will perform for City of Sanford's Summer Concert Series at 6:30 p.m. at Depot Park.

AUG 7: The Mann Center for the Arts will host its First Friday Art Reception from 5 to 7 p.m. Enjoy exhibitions in their Emerging Artist Gallery, Brick City Gallery, Lee County Arts Council Gallery and more.

AUG 7: Whiskey Pines will perform at The Smoke & Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8:30 p.m.

AUG 7: The First Fridays Karaoke Championship at Hugger Mugger Brewing will begin at 8 p.m.

AUG 8: Tasting Queens Market on Hawkins Avenue will host Curry, Jerk & Jolly Fest from 2 to 8 p.m., celebrating the richness of Caribbean and West African culture. Enjoy a full day of food trucks, local craft



and merchandise vendors, live DJ sets, drummers and dancers bringing the energy from start to finish.

AUG 8: The Taylor Phillips Writer's Cup Invitational is a premier golf event bringing together community leaders, partners and supporters for a memorable day on the course. The invitational tournament will be held at Quail Ridge Golf Course. Hosted by Visit Sanford and Downtown Sanford Inc.

AUG 8: Free Range Beats will perform at The Smoke & Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8:30 p.m.

AUG 8: The Sanford Farmers Market in downtown Sanford will host the Agape Lavender Lab from 8:30 a.m. to noon. Lab will include a full collection of lavender-based products crafted with research-inspired ingredients and designed to support simple, everyday rituals like rest, refresh and reset.

AUG 9: Raven Forge Games will hold a pre-release party for The Hobbit at 7 p.m. Entry is \$35.

AUG. 13: Big Time Shine will perform for City of Sanford's Summer Concert Series at 6:30 p.m. at Depot Park.

AUG 14: The Mixtapes will perform at The Smoke & Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8:30 p.m.

AUG 17: Sips and Sequels in downtown Sanford will host its Fantasy Book Club at 6 p.m. The August book is Green & Deadly Things by Jenn Lyons.

AUG 22: The 18th annual Run For Their Lives 5K and 10K run/walk will begin and end at Kiwanis Park and wind through the beautiful historic district. Event begins at 7:30 a.m.

AUG. 22: Feeling 22 will perform for City of Sanford's Summer Concert Series at 6:30 p.m. at Depot Park.

AUG 24: Visit Books at a Steal on Steele Street in downtown Sanford at 11:30 a.m. for their new storytime event for children.

AUG 26: Band of Oz will perform at The Mann Center for the Arts at

6 p.m. The Band of Oz is one of the most well-known and successful Beach Music groups in the region. Tickets for the concert range from \$25 to \$36 and can be purchased at manncenterarts.org.

AUG. 27: 22 Strings will perform for City of Sanford's Summer Concert Series at 6:30 p.m. at Depot Park.

AUG 29: Zane's Carolina Expo will run from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center. The expo is a "premier shopping, food and community event hosted by Zane's Carolina Seasoning," bringing together artisans, local businesses, food vendors and community partners from across the state.

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 templeshow.org.

LIVE, ORIGINAL MUSIC

AUG 8: Local alt rock group Hemlock Theory will perform at Wild Dogs Brewing, 136 N. Steele St., with Lydia Saint George, Dumb Apologies and The Gaussed. Admission is free, and music starts at 7 p.m.

AUG 22: Wendell-based singer/songwriter Russ James will perform at Wild Dogs Brewing, 136 N. Steele St., from 7 to 10 p.m. Admission is free.

AUG 29-30: The third annual HemlockFest will be held at the Mann Center for the Arts, 507 N. Steele St., from 2 to 9 p.m. both days. 14 bands ranging from pop rock to indie rock, hardcore and hip hop will perform over the two day event. Tickets, which can only be purchased at the door, are \$10 for one day or \$15 for both.

Got an event with live, original music coming up? Email Bryson Lyons at brysonlyonsmedia@gmail.com

SEPT 11: Tuesday Night Music Club will perform at The Smoke & Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8:30 p.m.

SEPT 12: The 2026 North Carolina Enchanted Sweetheart state pageant will be held at the Mann Center for the Arts at 10 a.m.

SEPT 13: Second Sunday concerts at Kiwanis Park is free outdoor concert series held on the second Sunday of each month during the spring and fall at Kiwanis Family Park. Live music starts at 5 p.m.

SEPT 16-20: The Lee Regional Fair marks the official kick-off of fall in Sanford and Lee County. Learn more about this year's event at leeregionalfair.com.

SEPT 20: Quarters for CARA will be held from 3-6 p.m. at the Stevens Center. The event is a blend of auction/raffle/shopping party where you bid quarters to win prizes. Proceeds benefit Carolinas Animal Rescue & Adoption in Sanford.

SEPT 26: Carolina Veterinary Hospital in Sanford will host Mutts, Makers & More Fest returns from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. for a day filled with vendors, food, handmade treasures, community spirit and adorable pets. \$10 rabies vaccines will be available for those who bring their pets.

OCT 10: Downtown Sanford Streetfest returns with a celebration of art, music, entertainment, food and more. Held the second Saturday of October every year.

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.

WEDNESDAYS: The Sanford Farmers' Market have added an additional market day each week starting this month. The market — located inside the Pilgrim's Sanford Agricultural Marketplace downtown — will be held Wednesdays from 4 to 7 p.m. through Nov. 18.

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.

SATURDAYS: 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.



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CROSSWORD: History 101

ACROSS

- 1. Charlie “Bird” Parker’s sax
- 5. Mary ____, businesswoman extraordinaire
- 8. Downloadable smartphone purchase
- 11. In ____ of
- 12. Greek salad staple
- 13. Appraisal
- 15. Law school prerequisite, acr.
- 16. “Once ____ a Time in America”
- 17. Dictum, pl.
- 18. * ____ press, Johannes Gutenberg’s invention
- 20. “Sittin’ On the Dock of the Bay” singer
- 21. In need of a muffler
- 22. Make a choice
- 23. *Genghis Khan’s ____ Empire
- 26. Intima, pl.
- 30. Fertility clinic stock
- 31. Tranquil
- 34. Famous Steeler coach, Chuck ____
- 35. Twisted cotton thread
- 37. Key next to spacebar
- 38. Like a gymnast
- 39. Naysayer’s favorite prefix
- 40. Develop, as in story
- 42. ____-AFTRA
- 43. Famous fox of fable
- 45. Like a smell of soil
- 47. *World’s first 24-hour TV news network, acr.
- 48. Molten rock

- 50. Smoke plus fog
- 52. *First Roman emperor
- 55. Part of foot, pl.
- 56. Chowder protein
- 57. Pelvic parts
- 59. Are not
- 60. *Homesteader’s purchase, sing.
- 61. “____ the good die young”
- 62. *Pres. during the Cuban Missile Crisis
- 63. It is
- 64. Fermented rice brew

DOWN

- 1. Pledge of Allegiance ending
- 2. Talk like Daffy
- 3. Eye drop
- 4. Day trip

- 5. Flat-topped military caps
- 6. Lack of muscle tension
- 7. Opposite of yin
- 8. Mushroom spore sacs
- 9. Benatar and Morita, e.g.
- 10. Money in Myanmar
- 12. Pointless
- 13. Take as one’s own
- 14. * ____ Bull, Lakota’s famous leader
- 19. Gallows’ rope
- 22. *World War ____, 1914-18
- 23. Wisdom tooth, e.g.
- 24. Sheep-like
- 25. Highly unpleasant
- 26. “He’s Just Not That ____ You”
- 27. Damp
- 28. Islam’s Supreme Being
- 29. Lament for the dead
- 32. Writer Ayn

- 33. Rudolph’s friend Hermey, e.g.
- 36. *One of Mount Rushmore presidents
- 38. *First President in the White House
- 40. Cremation ashes container
- 41. Peanut or pea, e.g.
- 44. Emotional turmoil
- 46. 2:1 and 3:1, e.g.
- 48. Defraud
- 49. Petri dish jellies
- 50. Feudal lord’s servant
- 51. Humble and docile
- 52. Frozen bowl berry
- 53. Arm bone
- 54. *The ____ Road, ancient East-West trade route
- 55. Pilgrimage to Mecc
- 58. Pirate’s “yes”

CROSSWORD

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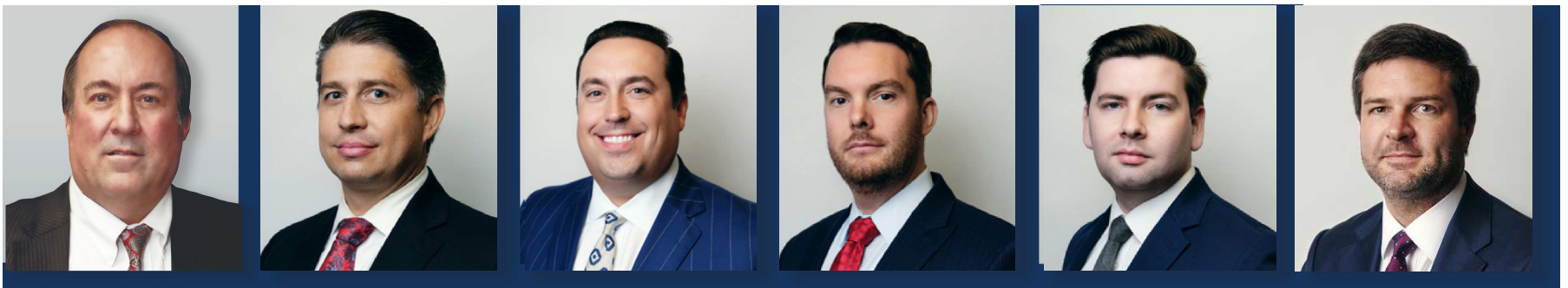


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