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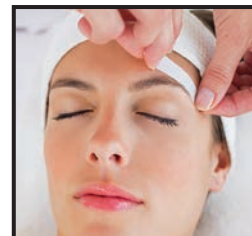
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Karl Carter looks ahead

BY JENNIFER HOLTON

Karl Carter says he tries to keep an open door policy from day to day, but the Buckingham County Administrator admits sometimes, it's hard to maintain.

"My predecessor would come in sometimes and say I'm going to close my door so I can get stuff done," Carter laughs. "I am finding you've got to answer staff questions, because that's important but at the same time I have deadlines, so at some point you've gotta shut your door and tell yourself I've gotta get this done."

As the assistant county administrator prior to this role, Carter says that job more than prepared him for this one, which he stepped into in July 2021. Since assuming the position, Carter has taken on big issues such as gold mining and solar farms - the latter more polarizing than the former - but more on that in a bit.

His day, which begins around 8 a.m., kicks off with conversations with staff members discussing top issues. If there is a board meeting the prior evening, Carter will run down the list of issues that were voted on, and delve into research.



Karl Carter

BUCKINGHAM

It's a rabbit hole he's always more than willing to fall down into.

"During that period, I hold all of my phone calls until the afternoon," he says. "I've learned that once you try to research something, if the phones are going off, you'll never finish it if you get disrupted. So I'll return all of my calls in the afternoon."

A believer in the notion that there is no "I" in team, Carter says one of the things that's helped him accomplish day-to-day tasks was his staff, most of which have

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been with the county for years. He says they make his job a lot easier.

“No one person can run this county or any county,” he says. “If you try to do that, you’re insane trying to take care of everything at one time.”

One of the top issues he has had to take on is one that predates his time as county administrator, but he was no stranger to the debate: gold mining in rural Virginia.

In 2020, residents in Buckingham County discovered that Canadian company Aston Bay had been carrying out exploratory drilling for gold over the past year. The mineral exploration company had its sights set on Virginia and its smaller gold mines stretching from Fairfax to Appomattox counties. From day one, residents have been vehemently against it.

“I think we’re all in agreement that we don’t want gold mining in the county,” he says. “The issue comes in as how do we take care

of that properly.”

During a board meeting last summer, Carter explained that Virginia’s current law doesn’t allow for local governments to prohibit the practice of gold mining. A statewide study on the practice was completed and presented by the General Assembly Dec. 1. It stated that localities have the authority to regulate or prohibit mining through their zoning authority, something Carter says they already knew.

“We’re going to be looking at doing it through zoning,” he says. “It wasn’t surprising, it just put it in black and white for us.”

Mining hasn’t been active in the county for the last several years, something Carter doesn’t expect to change any time soon. What could come to fruition in the near future is another top issue: Solar Farms.

“I think that issue is split within the county,” he said. “We have a

strong opposition to farms, but I do have people contacting me saying they are supportive. Nothing is getting cheaper, Buckingham is going to need more revenue so we’re trying to bring in more things that help take some burden off the taxpayers for real estate so we have some other revenue streams coming in.”

Those in opposition to the issue state that the panels will degrade habitats, negatively affect property value, and be potentially harmful to one’s health, because of the industrial equipment used to store the panels’ energy.

Carter believes the technology has improved to avoid that.

“Some citizens who talk about the cadmium telluride technology that’s not safe, but all of the companies coming to Buckingham aren’t using those anymore,” he says. “These ones don’t have any chemicals that could leak and possibly pollute the water stream,

so I think they’ve come a ways with technology and I think if they could put them in safely, then I think we’re going to be supportive of it.”

Looking forward to the first few months of 2023, Carter says his day to day will focus a lot on the county budget, something that’s certainly in his wheelhouse with a finance background.

“I’m trying to find a way to keep our tax rates low and still have the required services in the county, and bring in outside revenue streams to offset real estate taxes,” he said.

He describes the position as a never-ending job of trying to bring in more revenue to keep costs down, but something he enjoys.

“The budget affects everyone and that’s something we take pride in,” he says. “We know how important it is because it’s going to touch every citizen in the county.”

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High School principal balances work and family life

BY CRYSTAL VANDEGRIFT

For Randolph-Henry High School (R-H) Principal Erin Davis, being a school administrator is something she says she never planned to be.

However, today her love for the job is very apparent from parents and students seeing her in attendance at sporting events and other school functions to constantly posting on social media how proud she is of the Charlotte County Public Schools (CCPS) and its students.

“Without a doubt, the students are

what fuel me each and every day,” Davis said. “Walking down the halls and interacting with the students energizes me and makes me excited to come to work.”

Interestingly enough, Davis never planned to become a principal; instead, she wanted to be a teacher. “From the time I attended elementary school, I always knew I wanted to become a teacher,” Davis said. “As a teenager, I found myself volunteering for things like the nursery at my church or teaching Sunday school and Vacation Bible School. These experiences solidified for me that I

wanted to work with children.

Once Davis became a school teacher, she taught middle school for eight years and taught at the high school level for three years.

“It wasn’t until I taught at R-H that I started to consider the possibility of school administration,” Davis said. “Helping to organize significant events such as after prom and banquets gave me the confidence to seek additional opportunities where I could make an impact beyond the students in my classroom.”

Davis said one of the hardest work challenges she has had to overcome was becoming a high school principal during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“During that time period, we were all doing something that had never been done before,” Davis added. “We had to be creative, innovative, flexible, and compassionate to everyone’s unique circumstances. It was challenging, yet we learned so much about ourselves and our students through those years.”

Davis says it was the time spent on the phone with parents during the pandemic that helped her to build strong relationships.

“It made me more aware of the many barriers preventing students from succeeding and managing a large staff while trying to keep ev-



Erin Davis

CHARLOTTE

everyone safe,” she said. “It challenged me to think outside of the box and pushed me to find more efficient ways to accomplish the same tasks. Many of the things we tried and learned during the COVID years ended up becoming regular practices for me. I am thankful that we have moved beyond that time, but I am also aware that it was a time of learning and growth for me.”

Davis said that R-H’s school culture focuses on a combination of fun and accountability and that the administration works to provide unique experiences for students and staff so that R-H is a great place to show up at every day.

“We have high expectations for our students and staff, but we know that our goals can be accomplished through an element of fun,” she added. “We implement spirit weeks,



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spirit months, theme days, pep rallies, trips, incentives, and games. I think that it is incredibly important to incorporate fun experiences into the workplace. Planning these activities motivates me and challenges me to think ahead and outside of the box.”

Davis said one of the best things about her job is when she gets to step away from her desk, interact with the students, and visit the classroom.

“I love to go in, sit at a student desk, and watch great instruction happen from a student perspective,” Davis said. “I enjoy sharing strategies that I used as a teacher

with new teachers in the building. I also enjoy helping lead professional development for staff members. In those moments, I get to wear my “teacher hat” again.”

It’s also the positive encouragement and the notes and calls and email she receives from not only the staff and parents but also the students.

Davis said she loves knowing that she has positively impacted someone. “Knowing that I try to deliver that same level of encouragement to others intentionally.”

A day in the life of high school principal Erin Davis is best summed up in her own words.

“I have learned that there are no “normal days in administration.” Every day is an entirely unique experience. This took some adjustment from me as I am someone who is a detailed planner. Administrators don’t have a typical clock-in/clock-out time. My day may begin with a 5 a.m. call that a teacher is very sick and needs a substitute. I might have a ballgame until 9:30 p.m. and get home to a concerning email that must be addressed before anyone arrives the next day.

A crisis that demands my immediate attention could be waiting for



Davis hiking with one of her beloved dogs.

me when I arrive at school or could pop up during a Saturday afternoon birthday party.

My husband and I laugh and say that I wouldn’t know what to do with myself if I had a normal 9-5 job. At this stage of my life, I enjoy the fast pace work that comes with leading a high school. The work is hard, but I enjoy the challenges that come with it. I have learned to be very intentional with my planning and how I schedule things that are of a high priority, and then I try also to remain flexible enough to deal with the unexpected things as they come along.”

When Davis finds some free time, she still loves to stay busy reading, taking hikes in the woods with her family and dogs, kayaking, painting and traveling.

For Davis, hard work and success come hand in hand and are something she learned from her parents while growing up on a tobacco farm. “The way my parents balanced work and family life inspires me daily to do the same,” she said. “Pele said it best, ‘Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do.’”

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What's the key to loving life? Ask Spanky

BY BRIAN CARLTON

It started in 1960. That's when James Franklin Pleasants, or Spanky to those who know him, asked his dad for a job. His dad and uncle owned Blanton and Pleasants, a general store on Cartersville Road.

"My dad said he'd send me to barber school and once I learned, I could work in the store," Spanky said.

That's exactly what Spanky did. The barber shop was the second addition to the general store. Later on came appliances, to go along with the groceries and other supplies. Pretty much within a few years, if you needed anything in the Cartersville area, Blanton and Pleasants (B & P) was the place to go.

"It was like the Walmart of the time," Spanky said.

He recalls at one point, eight families helped run the shop in some way. Now 63 years later, with his wife June, Spanky is the owner and centerpiece of the store at 2308 Cartersville Road. He's the one people come to see and come to ask questions of. And while Spanky has changed through the years, the store has as well. You might not find the same groceries as you would have 50 years ago and sure, maybe there's less of a line for Spanky to cut hair. But the reason people come, that hasn't changed at all.

"It's not just a grocery store or a hardware store," Spanky said. "It's a place people come to visit with their friends and neighbors, to get questions answered. We're not that busy anymore but time goes on."

Spanky described Blanton and Pleasants as the hub for Cartersville. If people have a question or

something they need done, they head down the road and ask for Spanky. If they need a good electrician, someone picks up the phone and calls the store to ask. If they need someone to build a house or do plumbing work, the B & P staff can point them in the right direction.

A DAY TO DAY EXPERIENCE

Every day is a bit different, Spanky says, but the beginning is always the same. He pulls up about 7:30 a.m., opens the doors, starts the coffee and checks all the cases, to see if he needs to resupply anything. The coffee is especially key, as it'll be needed pretty soon.

"We have a coffee group that comes in every morning, between eight to 12 people," Spanky said. "A lot of things come to our store. And by that, I mean we find out who needs help. If somebody is low on wood, the coffee group comes together and says 'we'll take care of that.' And the people will get the wood they need. We look out for people here."

Spanky will sit down and listen for a bit, talking with the coffee group and then the door will open and somebody else will drop in with a question that he needs to help.

He's also got his tools, just in case someone drops by and asks him to cut their hair. That line's not as long as it used to be, but Spanky said he still does it some from day to day. Nobody has a specific time, they just drop in and ask.

And it's not just people from Cartersville who drop by. On a good day, Spanky says he sees folks from Cartersville, the greater Cumberland County area and Goochland.

"We're a mom and pop operation, it's true, but we still service our community," Spanky said.

He's still using the same building that his dad and uncle did as well.



James Franklin "Spanky" Pleasants

CARTERSVILLE

The 10,000 square foot structure is a bit of a throwback, reminding people of what things were before we had Walmart, Best Buy and other big box stores.

DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN?

Another part of his day is spent greeting former employees. Back when it was a grocery store, you had students from Cumberland High bagging groceries or working in other parts of the shop. They drop by from time to time, to reflect and visit.

"We get folks coming in and saying 'I used to work at your store when I was in school,'" Spanky said. "They used to put up groceries or did something else. We get a lot of that. People have good memories of working here or just coming here. I enjoy people coming in."

Spanky said one of his goals was to make his store a destination of sorts for the area and he feels he's done that. One time a month, after the sun goes down, the community pours in. On the first Saturday of each month, he holds "Spanky's After Dark," turning the back of the general store into a music venue.

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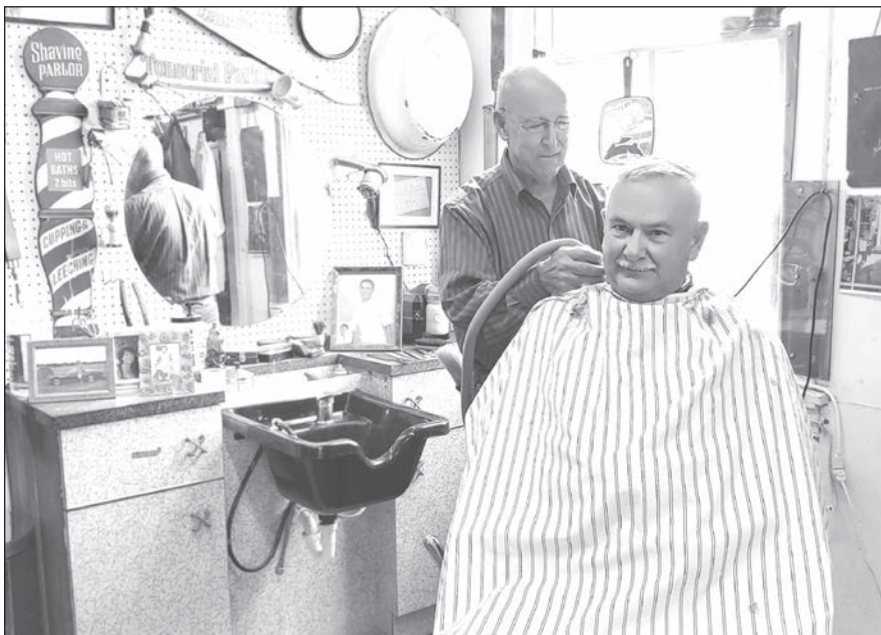
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Spanky isn't just the owner of Blanton and Pleasants. He's also their resident barber.

"It draws people in from Goochland County and Powhatan County and you just come in, sit, listen to the music and relax," Spanky said.

Sometimes he brings in groups to perform and others, it's open mic night, with the stage turned over to anyone who wants to get up and sing.

WHERE DOES THE NAME COME FROM?

Now yes, his name is James Franklin Pleasants, but if you walk through the doors and ask for James, it's not likely they'll know who you mean. Everyone around the place calls him Spanky, a nickname that dates back 79 years.

"My name was James Franklin and so, growing up, everybody called me Franky," Spanky said. "But my sister was tongue-tied one day and she called me Spanky instead. And that name just stuck. Now everybody just knows me as Spanky."

Spanky said he can't see a day when he steps down from running the store. He's

happy, enjoying the people he gets to visit with and what he does every day.

"We're still here, still paying the bills," Spanky said. "June and I, we just come up here every day and enjoy life."



James Franklin Pleasants, aka Spanky, is the owner and operator of Blanton and Pleasants, a general store on Cartersville Road. He's pictured here with his wife June.

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A 'chronic volunteer' helps in the community

BY RACHEL AUSTIN

Cameron Patterson isn't originally from Farmville. However, when he came to attend Longwood University in 2005 he had no idea the opportunities that would come from this decision.

Patterson chose to stay in Farmville because it "felt like a place to plant roots," now he wears two hats when it comes to his career here. He works at Longwood University as the vice president of student affairs and also serves as the executive director of the Robert Russa Moton Museum, which is a partner of the university. He started his career working in student affairs after college before joining the museum in January 2017.

"Sometimes folks in life are lucky enough to find one place they enjoy working at," said Patterson. "I'm

fortunate enough to have two places I enjoy working at and being involved in."

Juggling both roles, Patterson splits his time between the Longwood campus and the museum. Fortunately, he has a great love for both roles.

TIME AT THE MUSEUM

A day in the life of a museum professional requires a lot of administration work and work with the Board of Trustees and the Moton Council. As executive director, Patterson works closely with the board and council to gain financial support along with outreach, upkeep of the building and making sure the staff has what they need.

"I still think the best place to be is when I have the opportunity to be in our gallery and be a teacher of history for our visitors," said Patterson.

The Robert Russa Moton Museum

is home to the former Robert Russa Moton High School where 16-year-old Barbara Rose Johns led the 1951 Moton Student Strike against the segregation of schools. This was a notable event in the Civil Rights Movement as it produced three-fourths of the plaintiffs for the historic Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*.

This past fall, Patterson was able to spend his mornings at the museum helping with the Bridge Builder Program. Working alongside managing director, Cainan Townsend, and Longwood University liaison, Dr. Larissa Smith, the Museum hosted a group of students from Prince Edward County High School and Fuqua School to teach them about the county's history as they prepare their own projects to better their community.

Patterson's favorite time at the museum is when he gets to work on Saturdays, which is something most people do not prefer. Saturdays are usually reserved for the student workers to allow the full-time staff to have the day off. This usually puts him at the front desk to greet and talk to the people who come in to tour. He enjoys getting to talk to them and finding out what brought them to visit that day.

"It's an enriching experience in those moments to be able to get a sense of the impact of what you do and how it connects to the individual," he said. "If I could spend every moment giving tours I'd be a very happy man."

WORKING AT LONGWOOD

When he's not taking care of the museum, Patterson is taking care of the students at Longwood. He takes care of activities, housing, campus recreation and various other departments that affect student life.

"My job is to help to meet their needs outside of the classroom and find ways to help students enjoy their experience at Longwood," said



Cameron Patterson

FARMVILLE

Patterson. "By nature, it's more of an administrative job to support staff in the division of student affairs along with working with the students."

Patterson spends his time making sure the students at Longwood have what they need to both enjoy their time at the university and have the tools to be successful once they graduate.

As the vice president of student affairs, he enjoys the time he gets to walk around campus and have meaningful conversations with the students. He loves the opportunities he has to have a developmental conversation with students on different matters they may be facing. Sometimes it has to do with school or just their personal life that impacts their experience on campus.

As a self-proclaimed "chronic volunteer," Patterson also spends most of his free time serving with the Farmville Jaycees, the Rotary Club of Farmville, the Centra Foundation Board, the Farmville Area Chamber of Commerce and the Farmville Planning Commission.

"I'm very fortunate to be at a place in my life where I am able to devote my time in that way," he said.

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For the love of cooking and serving others

BY CRYSTAL VANDEGRIFT

LUNENBURG



Jessica Edmonds in the kitchen making the famous "Timmy Dog."

If you have ever been to Lunenburg County and stopped at Timmy's Grocery for one of the store's famous "Timmy Dogs," it was most likely made by Jessica Edmonds.

Edmonds has worked at Timmy's for nearly eight years, serving breakfast, lunch, and of course, those famous hot dogs to hungry customers weekly.

Why is Timmy's known for its famous hot dog? Edmonds says the cheese they use makes the hot dog a one-of-a-kind and keeps people coming back for more. Some may disagree and say it's the chili, but either way, Edmonds and the crew at Timmy's serve up to 45 hot dogs daily.

Edmonds says that cooking is a way of life for her and something that she has been doing since her first job working at Hardees in Chase City.

But being a cook means starting your day super early. Most of the time,

Edmonds is the first one at the store. "I usually prepare breakfast from 4:30 to 6:30 a.m. and by 8 or 8:30 a.m. I begin to prepare for lunch, and by 9 a.m. I am cooking the chicken and other side dishes.

Being a cook at a convince store can be challenging, and this day in time, it can be staffing issues, according to Edmonds, but she says she takes it in stride and gets a lot of help from her co-workers, who make the day and her job easier.

"They are always making me smile and laugh," Edmonds said. "We just have a good time."

Smiling is something that you will also see Edmonds doing and doing a lot of if you go into Timmy's. "My motto is spread love everywhere, it's a quote by Mother Teresa, and I think it is just fitting."

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Jones reflect on a first year in the president's chair

BY ABIGAIL GRIFNO

Dr. Chip Jones has worked nearly every leadership position in Cumberland County Public Schools. This marks his 19th year working in the district and his third as superintendent. But Jones wears another hat. In addition to helping students, he works as president of the Farmville Area Chamber of Commerce.

Now when you hear the name, Cumberland County doesn't immediately spring to mind. After all, Farmville is mostly in neighboring Prince Edward County. But the group Jones leads is doing things a bit differently, bringing multiple counties and communities together

to draw in tourists, businesses and new residents.

But what does a job like that entail? And how can someone juggle both that and a full-time role as county superintendent? We talked with Jones about his work in Cumberland, looking at what a day in his life is like, wearing both hats and serving as a leader in the community he loves so much.

FINDING MEANING IN EVERY POSITION

This is still Jones' first year in the president's seat at the Chamber. He was voted in during the late summer of 2022. By comparison, he took over as superintendent in 2020, having served as an assistant principal before that.

The school ties come up often, because one thing he points out is that his Chamber work, just like his job in the district, has a common feature. He wants to help the community and build connections for his students.

One thing he makes clear is that, be it school or helping the Chamber, it's hard to give a real picture of what a day in his life looks like. The reason is that no two are the same. He could be asking questions of a business one day and discussing different ways to promote the community the next.

Jones explained that leaders in the district have partnered with the Chamber before, to help understand what businesses need when it comes to employing recent graduates.



Chip Jones

CUMBERLAND

"When you think business, and you think schools, they both need each other," Jones said.

A key component of serving as president is to help "give education a voice at the table," he added. That's part of the day to day role in both cases, working on developing strong

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partnerships between businesses and schools. The goal here is to ensure that students can be assets for the future businesses they will work for and vice versa.

Part of the daily effort is also focused on building direct connections. If a student reaches out to a teacher or guidance counselor, let's say a senior in his last semester, Jones gets on the phone

"One of our students maybe wants to be a powerline worker or a mechanic, or go into the banking world," Jones said. "We can connect them to a resource to talk to."

Through this important work, he hopes to help businesses thrive and get students closer to their goals.

TAKING TIME FOR FAMILY

One key part of his daily life is his family. Jones said he makes sure each day to balance work along with his roles as a husband and father. While he loves helping students and his community, his family remains a top priority through it all.

"I make time for my work obligations, but I also step away and take time for my family," Jones said. "You don't want your work to consume you, you don't want to lose sight of your family."

He explained that his wife has multiple sclerosis, a disability that can be incredibly challenging. Jones prioritizes being able to support and help her whenever he needs to.

MAKING EACH DAY COUNT

Jones starts his days early, around 4 a.m. He's not a coffee guy, but on his way to work he always stops for a tea from Sheetz. Once he's on the school campus, he does a walk-through of the premises. It's a habit from his days working in operations, and to make sure the campus is in good condition.

After that, he'll check emails and get organized for the day. Often, when kids start arriving, he'll assist with bus duty to help "set the tone and get the day going."

Once the school day has started,

he'll attend meetings, visit classrooms, or meet with staff. In the evening, he'll attend other activities. Sometimes, that means discussing things about the Chamber. At other points, it involves events like school board meetings or sports games.

"It's important for kids to be supported in the classroom, but it's also important for them to feel supported outside of the classroom," Jones said.

As for more detail on his Chamber of Commerce work, that's mainly done in the evenings. He regularly leads board meetings, along with monthly meetings for members. Jones adds that he tries to "attend as many events as possible to support the community, the membership, and the director."

When we spoke, he was excited to gather later in the evening for his first meeting with Leadership Farmville, an educational program hosted by the Chamber that aims to teach leadership skills, build connections and community, and keep participants informed on the operations of organizations and the local government.

He works hard to balance his work obligations with his family time, and of course, time to himself. When he does have free time, he loves spending time outdoors, whether it's helping with his family's farm, hunting deer, or simply cutting the grass.

Jones works hard to motivate his students and have a positive impact. For anyone looking to be a leader, Jones said, "First, you have to have a passion." Leaders can come in many forms, from being a student leader, to a leader in your career path. For Jones, it's all about "having a drive" and wanting to help others. Jones also believes strong leaders are good advocates, "You have to be a voice for people who don't think they have one."

Jones continues to be a resource and a leader throughout his community. At the end of the day, he explained, it's just about "being a good person."



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Three Virginia State Parks invite guests pursuing outdoor adventures: High Bridge Trail State Park, 31 miles long and great for hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding; Twin Lakes State Park, an important part of Civil Rights history and a popular choice for swimming, camping, hiking, and events; and Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historical State Park. Two additional state parks within 30 minutes of Farmville include Bear Creek Lake and Holliday Lake State Parks. For those that enjoy fishing,



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McFadden guides 'tiny town' through growing pains

BY JENNIFER HOLTON

Rebecca McFadden likes to say God brought her to Pamplin City. The clerk and treasurer of the tiny town of 142 residents, McFadden was born and raised northwest in Appomattox, but for the last two years, she's called Pamplin City home, and says it's full of fascinating people.

"They're hardworking," McFadden said. "Sometimes they feel more like neighbors."

As clerk and treasurer, she works

closely with the council, which she says is very enthusiastic about the future of Pamplin City.

"It's known for being a town that is just 'passed by,'" she explained. "But recently we've done a lot of development with Main Street, the buildings here. It's just interesting to see the night and day difference from when I first started here, to today, where there are things going on all of the time."

That certainly hasn't always been the case. Nicknamed "The Ghost of a Railroad Boomtown," by the internet, Pamplin City is largely

characterized by its abandoned downtown Main Street. However, the town was once prime real estate in the 19th century. Located at the meeting points of Norfolk and Western rail lines, it was beaming with promise and possibility. Main Street, more than a century ago, was lined with hotels, banks and stores — its downfall came with the rise of the automobile, as that meant a decline in rail travel.

But it wasn't just the railroad depot that was a popular draw for Pamplin. Before the 20th century, Pamplin Pipe Factory was built, and was the world's largest producer of clay smoking pipes, producing 1 million pipes every month at the height of its success. Today, the dilapidated building is a federally designated historic site.

McFadden came into the role in August 2020, and in just over two years, she says she's seen the research and legwork that's gone into trying to update Pamplin.

"They're working toward revitalization," she said. "There's a Mr. Bubble's Ice Cream and Snack Stand at the end of Main Street. And we have several buildings that are under construction or rejuvenation, along with cleanup



Rebecca McFadden

PAMPLIN

going on. Some will be developed into businesses, and there's been talk even of possible Airbnbs."

Her day-to-day includes going through a list of upcoming projects she says is "a mile long." More to look forward to, she implies. But she says she's also looking into the past. As in, the history of this quaint little town.

"I've only got little bits and pieces here of the history that I've gleaned," she explained. "there is a museum here you can visit — that has the history of the pipe factory, the schools, churches, and pictures of Main Street in the 1920s."

Perhaps one day soon that will include pictures of Main Street in the 2020s, and the revitalization she's helped accomplish.

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Rescue volunteer finds joy helping others

BY CRYSTAL VANDEGRIFT

When it comes to working hard, Charlotte County Rescue Squad member Lauren Kunath takes the task head-on.

Kunath is employed full-time, volunteers with the rescue squad weekly, works on her family farm, and works part-time at her family's new wedding and event venue.

"My family and co-workers are who inspire me the most always to work hard and do my very best," Kunath said.

When it comes to working on the rescue squad, Kunath says one of the biggest motivators is knowing she could help make a difference in a life-and-death situation for someone. "This motivates me to stay up to date with the latest protocols and do my very best," she said. "The

CHARLOTTE

people I work with also inspire me to do the best I can at all times. You always work with a partner, so I never want to be in a situation where I let someone down."

Kunath said she first became interested in joining the rescue squad after she had several friends who were members and convinced her to put in an application. "After joining and running calls, I realized I enjoy helping people during their time of need," she added.

Her love for helping people led her to volunteer with the squad for four years.

"My favorite part about working with the rescue squad is when there is a call where you know you made a difference in someone's life," Kunath said. "It is also very rewarding when you have patients that are grateful



Kunath is pictured with her dogs.

for your help."

Working on the squad does have its challenges, Kunath says she has

had to overcome. "Learning how to work with different people can be a challenge," she said. "It's easy to get into a routine and comfortable working with one person, so it's always a bit of a challenge when you work with someone else."

Kunath described what a typical day in the life of a rescue squad worker would look like.

"Working a shift with the rescue squad usually involves checking the truck first thing. Once that's completed, there are always chores to do around the building if we're not on a call," Kunath said.

Since she has been working since she was 16, Kunath says she always stays busy, but if she were not working with the rescue squad, she would most likely be spending her days on the family farm tending the dogs, cats, horses, donkeys, sheep and cows.



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Five tries, five wins: Bal is region's top doc

BY ABIGAIL GRIFNO

Dr. Bikram Bal is a well-known and awarded doctor specializing in gastrointestinal care in the Farmville area. For the fourth straight year, Bal has been selected for the Top Doc award, a prestigious award given to the best doctors in the nation.

We talked with Bal about what it's like to be named a top doctor, and what his day looks like helping residents in the Farmville area.

FINDING A REWARDING PRACTICE

Bal grew up in a family of physicians in India, but he chose to move to the United States in 2003 for college. He completed his medical degree at Yale and then his residency at Georgetown.

He explained that his path wasn't

exactly linear, "Out of medical school, I started a residency in neurosurgery, but I realized I didn't like it and didn't want to do it for the rest of my life." At one point, he wasn't even sure if he wanted to be a practicing, clinical doctor.

But then he discovered gastrointestinal care. "It's one of those specialties where you can do a lot of procedures, and still have an active outpatient practice...the other thing I like about gastroenterology is that about 60% of my practice is preventive measures, which is preventing colon cancer...that's really rewarding."

Bal explained that no other cancers can be so actively prevented as colon cancer, which means that Bal gets to intervene before a medical issue ever becomes life-threatening. He's incredibly passionate about spreading this information so



Bikram Bal

FARMVILLE

that no one has to experience colon cancer.

CHOOSING THE PLACE TO GROW A PRACTICE AND A FAMILY

After Bal realized he wanted to be a gastroenterologist, he just had to find the perfect practice. He and his wife decided to move near Richmond, where they had close friends.

Bal said that he chose Farmville because he wanted to "provide a service that wasn't available in the area." There are few gastroenterologists in the area, and Bal is one of the most skilled. For many advanced procedures, he is one of the only qualified doctors in a 50-mile radius. Providing this specialized

care to the people of Farmville is one of the many reasons he wanted to work here.

He also loved that he got to build up the practice in Farmville, allowing him to understand the administrative side of health care. He explained, "I was able to (create) a practice built to my style."

After 10 years, he has no plans to leave. In fact, part of the reason he loves being in Farmville is the wonderful people he works with. "I have a great team of other doctors here that I can work with. The administrative team from day one has been excellent and very supportive of my work."

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A DOCTOR

Bal explained that he spends about 80% of his time doing clinical work, and another 20% doing administrative work for the hospital.

He has five busy days and most start around 7 a.m. with an administrative meeting. He then starts performing endoscopies and colonoscopies at 8 a.m., and enjoys getting to spend time with patients. On average, he does about 11 cases a day.

Most of these procedures are outpatient, which means that patients can leave the hospital soon after it's completed. Bal appreciates that the procedures are relatively fast and usually have a quick recovery time.

By 1 o'clock, he's usually finished



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with the colonoscopy and endoscopy procedures for the day — except on Wednesday, when he generally continues procedures into the afternoon.

After that, on some days, he keeps an administrative schedule where he has meetings. Three days a week, however, he goes to his office and will see patients there.

He takes appointments until 4:30 p.m., but his work doesn't end. He usually has meetings that go on until 5:30 p.m.

or even 6 p.m. For patients who have to stay in the hospital, he also makes time to check in on them either before or after his meetings.

Most days, he manages to get out of work by 6 p.m.

Despite his busy schedule, Bal still works hard to make time for his family. His wife is a lawyer in Richmond, and together they raise their teenage son. Bal explained, "if my son has a football game, or basketball game, or lacrosse, I make time for that."

Even though Bal has long days and many things to do, he said, "I really enjoy my work. I enjoy working with the team I'm in, I have a great team of nurses and colleagues...I feel rewarded with the medical care I deliver to my patients. At the same time, with the administrative duties, I've really progressed."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR BAL?

Bal balances his medical duties with other responsibilities. He also serves on several boards, including the hospital and the Centra Medical Group. He's served as medical direc-



Centra Southside Community Hospital CEO Tom Angelo presenting the award to Dr. Bikram Bal.

tor for Centra's Medical Group over the last seven years.

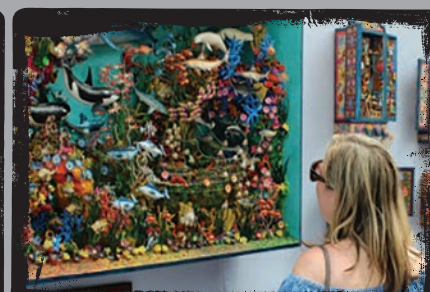
Bal will be adding another position as well. On Jan. 3, he will be taking over as the chief medical officer of the entire Centra Medical Group. It includes 55 offices and 450 providers.

This new role will mean more work for Bal and some adjustments to how he spends his time, but he couldn't be more excited.

He said if there's anything he hopes the community understands it's that colon cancer is incredibly preventable. He said, "Every year 150 thousand people get colon cancer. Fifty thousand of those people die because it has advanced. But it's 100% preventable."

He encourages individuals to begin getting colonoscopies at age 45 and to always check with a practitioner if they have any concerns.

With Bal's help, Farmville continues to be an amazing community filled with caring members. Bal is excited to continue doing this important work and can't wait to see what the future may hold.



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Kneipp loves his work at the park

BY JENNIFER HOLTON

It was initially a temporary, seasonal position that brought Thomas Kneipp to Bear Creek Lake State Park. Sixteen years later, it's become a career. The chief ranger is in charge of visitor experience at Cumberland County's state park, but his first job was in maintenance.

"Mostly doing rounds upkeep and tending to the facilities and the grounds," he said. "It seemed like an interesting job and the outdoors appealed to me, and then a full-time position came and I got it."

Today, Kneipp says, the best part of his day-to-day, is that no two days are really the same, which was part of the appeal.

"Most people in state parks wear different kinds of hats, depending on what day it is and what's going on,"

he explained.

He starts off his day, like most people: checking emails. But then, from there, it's anyone's best guess.

"I could be presenting education programs or outdoor activities, or planning those activities in advance, responding to customer requests or just information, general info for the park," he said. "Another part of my job is trail and resource maintenance so that can be just getting outdoors."

As Chief Ranger of Visitor Experience, his daily workload can also involve a lot of research - looking back into the cultural and environmental history of Cumberland.

In the 1940s, Bear Creek was a recreation area, and when it became a state park, camping was given the green light. But prior to this, Kneipp explains, there was a federal program that acquired property in the area, with the idea that the land itself

needed to be healed.

"That was because of overuse by people over the last 100 years," he said. "The soil had gotten poor, so the idea was to let the forest come back and nature kind of renew itself. The landscape around here in the 1600s was a lot different. It had higher areas and lots of forested land, and as European colonists came in, they saw it as a way to survive and used it for commerce and things like that, which dramatically changed the land. At the time people didn't realize that if you take all of the trees off the land, and it starts raining, you lose all of your nutrients; just a big natural cycle that goes on."

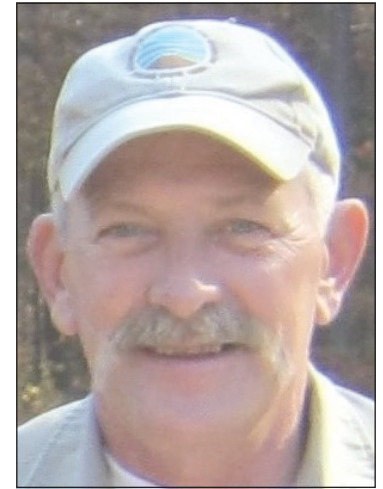
In the 1930s, he says, the federal government and the public came to understand the need to restore land.

"There became more awareness of people needing to have contact with nature."

Oddly enough, that awareness cycled through again during the pandemic.

"We got a lot of people coming for the day to just get outdoors," he said. "That's the great thing about the park; we can provide that opportunity all year-round."

Peak season at the state park used to be from Memorial Day to Labor Day, but post-pandemic, he says it stretches from spring through autumn. Still, there's always a lull in visitors during the winter, when there are greater opportunities



Thomas Kneipp

CUMBERLAND

to see wildlife like foxes, deer and bears.

"They're out there, and one of the benefits of being a park employee during the winter is you get to see those animals because there aren't as many people around," he said. "People come out to the parks to see the wildlife, but the wildlife, it's wildlife, I guess it doesn't necessarily want to see people."

This past winter, staff has been busy upgrading old campsites, installing a new bat house, and working through the colder temperatures. For Kneipp, that includes trail maintenance.

"We always want it to be comfortable for people to explore nature so they don't have to just wander out into the forest," he said. "We want them to have a safe route and a safe place to do it."

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Saving the past: Veterinarian helps preserve history

BY BRIAN CARLTON

It started one night while scrolling through posts on the internet. Dr. Heather Beach came across photos of the Dunnington Mansion and fell in love. At the time, she didn't know where it was or even what the name of the house was. All she knew is that someone had to save that house. And that's how a small animal veterinarian from the Shenandoah Valley developed an interest in creating and leading the Dunnington Mansion Foundation.

"I love antiques and old architecture and would decompress at night scrolling through Facebook groups focused on abandoned historical sites," Beach said. "Still, if 18 months

ago, someone had told me I would become the founder of a nonprofit championing the salvation of an abandoned historical mansion in Farmville, I would have thought they were crazy."

After running across the photos, Beach had questions. Why was the Dunnington Mansion abandoned? Why was it on a golf course? And what would it take to save it?

"From then on, my days were spent helping sick patients and my nights were spent researching what I now know is Poplar Hill, or Dunnington Mansion for those of us who are not local to Farmville," Beach said. "I learned about the families who owned the property and spent time gathering stories from the Dunning-

tons and Bolts."

Beach then did two things. First, she created a website to house and preserve the history of the place. After all, if the mansion turned out to be unsavable, she wanted its story to still be shared for future generations. Second, she founded the nonprofit organization that became the Dunnington Mansion Foundation. She started as the only board member, added a second and now the group is up to five. But it's a unique group in that members are fighting for a property they don't actually own.

"The investor group that owns the house has been extremely gracious in allowing us access to research the property and conduct tours," Beach said. "These tours serve to



Heather Beach

LUNENBURG

raise money for the foundation and to allow the public a firsthand look at history."

WHAT'S A NORMAL DAY LIKE?

For someone who juggles veterinary work, family and the nonprofit, there's a lot for Beach to



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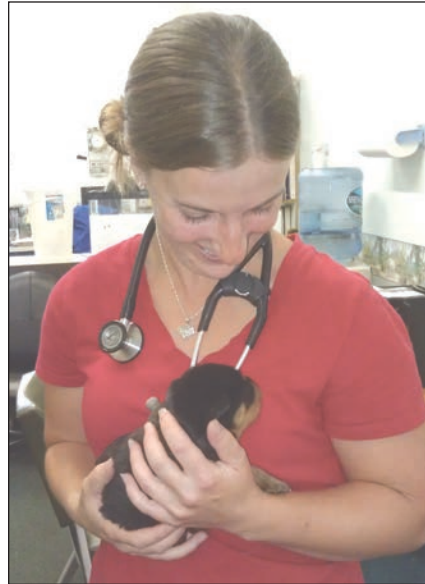
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handle. But for at least part of it, things aren't that different than most people reading this.

"I'm a working mom, so my day starts out the same as so many parents, with dressing kids, packing lunches and catching school buses," Beach said.

Then she shifts into her day job. As a small animal veterinarian, her days are divided between surgeries, dentistry procedures and exam appointments in Harrisonburg. Yes, it's a bit of a drive to get from there to the mansion and surrounding places here in Prince Edward County or at home in Lunenburg County. But Beach says she loves her job.

"I love this job for many reasons, one of which is the unexpected and dynamic nature that each day may bring," she said. "Veterinarians experience a rollercoaster of emotions on any given day. We have the elation of bringing new life into the world when performing a C-section and the heartache of helping a family say goodbye to their best friend."



Heather Beach with a puppy.

The end of the day brings the return of the mom routine, with time for dinner, baths and bedtime stories. And then, in late evening, she opens up the computer and starts conversations for the foundation.

And business, for the foundation,

is booming. In the last six months, the group formed collaborations with John Plashal Photography and with multiple classes at Longwood University.

"These partnerships have brought a tangible element to the work the foundation is doing," Beach said. "These evening-time efforts include constant communication with historical societies, professional preservation consultants, architects, structural engineers and the Department of Historic Resources."

In those late evening hours, Beach does everything from conduct family member interviews, draft plea letters and post updates on both social media and the group's main website.

"I thoroughly enjoy the different worlds that my days combine," Beach said. "Juggling motherhood, a demanding professional career and the calling to save a beautiful mansion is rewarding on all fronts. Working on Poplar Hill has also introduced an element of travel that I did not have before. The Farmville community has been welcoming and supportive of the foundation's efforts and I truly look forward to my trips there."

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Beach said there's a lot going on with the foundation. The current owners of the Dunnington Mansion



Heather Beach and John Plashal stand in front of Dunnington Mansion.

want to sell the house and land to a national development company, so she and her group's place in the mansion's future is somewhat uncertain.

"Meanwhile, we wait in the wings, hoping to partner with those future owners to bring the benefits of a nonprofit to the table," Beach said. "Should our efforts fail and the Dunnington Mansion Foundation be dissolved, all of our remaining funds will be donated to the Farmville-Prince Edward Historical Society. They have been instrumental from the very beginning in helping us launch this project. But for me, this labor of love continues and the dream of returning Poplar Hill to its former glory remains strong."



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Helping students learn to find their voice

BY CRYSTAL VANDEGRIFT

When someone thinks of a speech therapist, they might think that the individual teaches people who are deaf or hard of hearing how to speak or learn sign language.

Well, that's part of it, but that's a small part of it.

For Charlotte County resident, Lucy Wallace, she found her passion as a school-based speech-language pathologist.

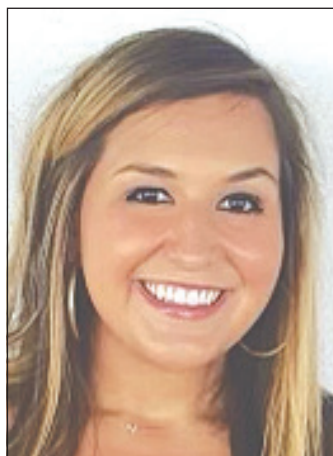
"I found the opportunity to work with others and to help support their communication skills exciting," Wallace said. "Communication is such a key element in daily life and relationships. It is

very rewarding and humbling to me that I get to work with others to help foster and strengthen these skills."

While working in a school environment, Wallace said getting to know each of her students individually and building a relationship with each one motivates her. "I believe this is crucial in developing trust and establishing goals that are important for their communication," she said. "It enables us to figure out how to work together and successfully enhance and develop their communication skills to the fullest potential."

A day in a school-based speech-language pathologist's life goes like this.

I love to start each day with scripture. "This is the



Lucy Wallace

CHARLOTTE

day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24) is a favorite of mine. My day-to-day schedule continuously varies and keeps me on my

toes ... which I love. Typically speaking, I have students scheduled to see me each day. Therapy sessions are unique and individualized. In addition to treatment sessions, I evaluate students, write reports and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), document treatment data, complete various other paperwork and participate in meetings," Wallace explained.

Working with students day in and day out is Wallace's favorite part of the job.

"I love working in a school environment," she said. "They bring so much joy and have so much wonder. It is a privilege to be able to work alongside them as they grow and learn. I also love working with such a diverse

age group, ranging from kindergarten to high school. In addition to my co-workers, I am always inspired by my students. They bring me so much joy and motivate me each day."

Though Wallace gets motivation each day from the students she helps, she learned about hard work and dedication very young.

"I am very blessed to have quite a few inspirational people in my life, both personally and professionally," Wallace said. "My dad's work ethic and dedication to his career have always inspired me, and my mom inspires me every day to never settle and to put forth my best effort. She is dedicated to serving others, which has always inspired me."



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Education means everything to Gills

BY SARAH MCCORMICK

When we think of heroes, we may think of Superman, Spiderman, police officers or medical professionals. It's not often a school Principal comes to mind. Yet, Virginia "Ginny" Gills is the epitome of the word 'hero.' Gills has worked in education since 1990, and since that time, has found a way to consistently excel in every facet of her career, as well as enhance the lives of everyone she has touched along the way.

As a young child, Gills' family imposed the importance of education upon her — and she credits that upbringing to getting her where she is today. Her mother, Dr. Maria Milian-Silveria, was a professor at Longwood University, and her father an electrical engineer, both of whom immigrated from Cuba.

"Education for my family literally

rescued us from poverty," Gills said. "My parents would have sacrificed anything for education."

A pillar in the Cumberland community, Gills says her husband is her biggest cheerleader.

A day in the life of Gills differs day to day, but one thing's for sure: it's busy. As the principal at Cumberland Elementary School, her mornings usually begin around 3 or 4 a.m.

She gets up and begins her workday replying to and sending out emails. Staff members are used to waking up to emails and notifications sent from her before the sun begins to rise — and the emails have become an inner office joke. All emails are sent and replied to before even walking out the door in the morning.

GETTING STARTED WITH SUBSTITUTES

Upon arriving at school anywhere from 6:30 and 6:45 a.m., Gills immediately heads to the substitute teacher



Virginia "Ginny" Gills

CUMBERLAND

book, where she contacts subs herself to ensure each and every class is taken care of. Being that there are sub shortages, the school finds itself competing for subs from other local schools — so she always tries to be the early bird to catch the worm. She always tries to meet the children first thing in the morning to say hello and get the day started on the right foot.

From there, Gills begins the day with the Positive Dukes Shoutout — a moment where she gets to give praise to students who receive positive referrals from their teachers for exemplifying good behaviors. She calls the student to the office, and gets to call their parents and celebrate with them.

One of Gills' favorite things about her day as a principal is where she does home visits. Unlike what one would expect from a principal or teacher showing up to a home, this is a positive visit where Gills arrives with balloons, confetti, music and a treat to celebrate accomplishments and even just to give a boost of encouragement to students who may be struggling.

"The kids say they never will forget that moment," says Gills of the visits. "The truth is ... once you have that experience, you get this fulfillment that you can't get from anyone or anything else. If I'm having a bad day, I say we need to go do some home visits."

THE CALENDAR KEEPS CHANGING

According to Gills, "The calendar changes every day. There are always unplanned things that come up. Fortunately, we have a great staff who step in and do multiple things to make everything happen."

She may have multiple meetings to attend in a day that sometimes take her out of the office, but you can always find her back in action once those meetings are over.

When she goes home at night, her work is far from over. There's more emails to attend to, and that generally takes the remainder of her evenings. "I'm sort of married to my work!" Gills laughingly says.

In her free time, she enjoys reading professional books. "I feel like I grow

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when I read others' thoughts and ideas," she adds.

THINKING OUTSIDE OF THE BOX

One thing that sets Gills apart from other principals in the area is her desire to think and act outside the box.

Gills saw the need for more space to complete more activities — for example, the school cafeteria was recently transformed into the school library — and now, the students eat breakfast and lunch in their classrooms with their teachers. This provides a dual purpose — students get that special one-on-one time with their teacher to just talk about their lives and their day, and the library can host all of the books the children's little heart's desire.

Then, there's the Collaboration Hallway. The walls are covered in white boards where kids can have engageable lessons and rotate classes throughout the day. There's also the old library, which was converted to The Little Dukes Discover STEM class, which can hold five classrooms worth of kids at once. Some of these implementations were made possible through multiple grants. "Every single nook and cranny in our school is used for something," states Gills.

It's very clear that the staff at Cumberland Elementary school is loved and cared for by their beloved principal.

"I feel an urge to take care of my staff," Gills said. "When there's a need, I want to know about it."

Additionally, Gills is open minded and loves hearing her teachers' various ideas and suggestions.

"There is no idea that a teacher could bring to me that I'd slam down," Gills said. "Part of my work every day is to support ideas of teachers and paraprofessionals. What we do here doesn't always have to look the same as another place."

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

When asked what advice Gills would give aspiring teachers, she said the key is relationship building.

"Students want to like and respect you. The No. 1 behavior management



Ginny Gills, principal of Cumberland Elementary displays some books for her students from Book Baskets.

tool is relationship building," Gills said. "It's key. Be willing to listen and observe. Pay attention to what teachers are doing who are doing well and borrow their ideas and make them your own."

The one thing Gills hopes the children take away from their time at Cumberland Elementary School is a desire to learn.

"There's no question that I want them to like to learn," she said. "I want them to also feel safe, proud, and that their needs are met. On the personal side, I want them to enjoy learning."

Gills emphasized the fact that Cumberland Elementary is a high poverty school that relies heavily on donations through the Cumberland County School Foundation. With that money, the school is able to purchase coats, shoes and other essential needs the children face in their lives. Aside from the learning aspect and ensuring a quality education, Gills ensures each child in need always has the things they need.

It's that last part co-workers and others point to. Cumberland County Superintendent Dr. Chip Jones says that Gills "applies herself in whatever she does. She gives it her 'all' and wants things to shine. (She) advocates for her school family and wants the best for everyone. I appreciate all she does for the Cumberland County Public School community and her commitment to education."



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Vincent takes on a new role

BY ABIGAIL GRIFNO

For Brian Vincent, every day is different. He's used to juggling work at Appomattox River Company, his active lifestyle and being a husband and father. He's even used to the time involved with serving as a member of the Farmville Town Council. But now, after the results of November's election, he has a new position to juggle, that of Farmville's new mayor. And while it's never easy, it's always worth it.

We chatted with Mayor Vincent to get a glimpse of his daily life and understand how he's stepping into his new leadership position.

A THOUGHTFUL TRANSITION

Mayor Vincent celebrated his swearing-in ceremony on Dec. 5, but officially took the mayoral role at the beginning of January. While

he's no stranger to leadership, he wanted to approach the transitory time with care.

"It's an interesting, somewhat delicate maneuvering," Vincent said. "You go from being on council and really participatory, to being a president of the meetings and a leader ... So making that transition is one I'm very mindful of, having served on the council and having such a great relationship with fellow council members."

Mayor Vincent served on the council for four years, which has helped him adjust.

"I had the benefit of already having relationships established with the majority of the council, and being up to speed on everything happening," Vincent said. "We are constantly planning out years ahead of time, so knowing what's coming down the pipe is beneficial."

As Mayor Vincent has transitioned

into the role, he feels grateful for all of the support from his family. He explained his two daughters and wife have been active in his political life "from the jump."

Before he even decided to run, he asked his family for their opinion. Mayor Vincent explained to them that he wanted to do the most good, wherever he can. His family decided it was worth the sacrifices involved to make the community, and even the world, a better place for all.

BALANCING NEW AND OLD ROLES

Vincent's day to day experience involves balancing positions and responsibilities.

For Mayor Vincent, there's a lot of responsibilities, and positions, to balance. One of which is his role at Appomattox River Company, a popular paddle sports company. Mayor Vincent runs with his father-in-law, who is still an active leader in the company.

At Appomattox River Company, he also feels supported by his team as he steps into his new role.

"I have a really strong staff," Vincent said. "I know that even if I miss time, they'll keep a high level of excellence."

Thankfully, much of Mayor Vincent's work can be done from anywhere due to its digital nature, which makes juggling his different roles a bit easier.

"That aspect has given me a lot of freedom," Vincent said.



Brian Vincent

FARMVILLE

Still, Vincent remains humble and recognizes it will take some time for him to find the perfect balance between all of his duties and responsibilities.

TAKING CHARGE OF EACH DAY

The new mayor tries to make the most of each hour he has in a day. Staying active has been a huge help, and he incorporates a lot of spirituality too. He explained his morning routine.

"I do daily readers on stoicism and religion, and then some quick journaling, and then I do at least 30 minutes of physical exercise," Vincent said.

After that, he helps get his daughters ready for school and drops them off. Once drop-off is completed, his schedule will vary a bit. Usually, he'll take some business calls and coordinate with his team

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SAVINGS



Brian Vincent takes the oath of office with his wife and children beside him.

before heading to his shop. He'll continue to work and take meetings until the afternoon time, when he takes a break to get in some physical activity.

Once he's done with work, he'll take care of more mayoral duties, like attending public hearings or events.

In the evening, he eats dinner with his family every day as a "foundational piece of (his) family life." After, he does some journaling and reading before putting his daughters to bed and relaxing for the night.

Every day looks different, and Mayor Vincent said some days he wears different hats. For instance, he is also on the board for the Department of Wildlife Resources. He attends various events for each of

his roles in business, leadership and as a father.

When Mayor Vincent does have some extra time, he loves spending it outdoors with his family. He loves river trips, hiking, running and mountain bike riding. His favorite times are when he has the opportunity to get into a "meditative rhythm" in the beautiful outdoors.

While he stays busy, he doesn't mind one bit. He said, "It's a constant juggle, but I really believe in doing the most good for the most amount of people. I take every role very seriously."

Mayor Vincent is continuing to work hard to make Farmville the best it can be. He's excited to serve the community as he transitions into his new leadership role.



Brian Vincent enjoys being in the great outdoors during his down time.

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Thomas looks to build more than a program at Central

BY MATTHEW HATFIELD

He was a member of the last state championship team at Central Lunenburg in 1992 and the 1993 squad that finished runner-up to Giles for the title. His current team didn't do too bad this year either. Chargers coach Will Thomas is coming off a year to remember on the sidelines. Lunenburg went 11-1, enjoying their first unbeaten regular season in 27 years.

"When we have really good players, we win some games. When we don't have as much talent, we don't win as many," Thomas declared in surmising the performance. "This past year, we had a group that played together since Little League and kept getting better. Those kids loved the weight room, and the other piece was they were absolute, natural-born leaders. When you have a couple of leaders — and they refer to them as 'dogs' sometimes in the NFL — it matters. When it's hot outside or cold outside, it doesn't matter to them."

So what's a day — hot or cold — in the life of Thomas like? On the go.

"In season, I probably wash about 12 loads of clothes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It's a lot of work," replied

the man that teaches history during the first semester of the school-year at his alma mater and a weight training class for second semester.

"In the weight training classes, you certainly want to have football players and athletes in general. In every class, I have at least six girls and most of the girls are athletes, whether it's basketball, volleyball, cheerleaders. I also do the morning announcements. I always play older music and they don't normally hear. But I only do it three days a week because I don't want to give them too much."

WHAT'S THE OFF SEASON LIKE?

It's the non-football playing months when the development truly begins for Lunenburg athletes.

"The off season for us is a little bit different than anywhere because we have so many kids playing different sports," Thomas said. "A great deal of our kids are playing basketball, which is good because you want them doing different things. A lot of our kids also play baseball and track. Between that and many of the colleges stopping by — like your Hampden-Sydney, Ferrum and other places trying to get the seniors — it still stays busy. As for the juniors, we're making sure they're taking

SAT's if they want to go to college."

Nonetheless, the weight-room is where the transformation process starts for an up-and-coming Chargers football player.

"We concentrate a lot on lifting to try to get them bigger because most of them need to gain a little size. Right now, we have a limited number of folks and go about twice a week. When track is over, we usually go about three times a week. I have a lot of them in my class that I see every day, and those are the ones who experience the most growth," Thomas explained.

"Doing weight training, you have a direct hand whether these kids do well or not. It's amazing how much they change, especially if you get a kid as a sophomore whose first max is 165 and by May they're doing 225. It's been a blessing."

Since a 1-9 finish in 2008, Lunenburg has produced 12 winning records in the past 14 seasons with 11 playoff appearances. What's been the difference? Along with strength and conditioning, taking notice of what those enjoying success are doing.

"We try to get kids early to play J.V. and fall in love, especially those eighth graders the past 4-5 years. We've always asked how can we get better and compared to what did Goochland when they were in our district. We tried to adopt a lot of things they did because they weren't good on accident," Thomas pointed out.

'YOU GET WHAT YOU GET'

"It's not like a private school or Kirby Smart and those (college) guys where we can recruit somebody from somewhere else. You get what you get, which I'm happy about, but



Will Thomas

LUNEBURG

with that, it's about developing these kids. We're going to get you bigger, faster, stronger, and we're going to work on our young kids."

The implementation of eighth graders being able to compete on the junior varsity level has helped in that process immensely for programs like Lunenburg.

In his first 13 years, Thomas had only three freshmen compete on the varsity level. Over the past three seasons, the Chargers have had six freshmen start on varsity.

"It has been phenomenal because they had that extra J.V. year," Thomas says. "Plus, we've had really good eighth graders to play J.V. Guys like Connor Mattox and Seth Bishop physically were different as eighth graders."

Thomas, 46, has three children — two daughters and a son — and a wife. Beyond football, he does carve out time for family activities, both sports and non-sports related.

"I stay busy and have plenty to do. I enjoy R.V. My kids like to ski. I've tried it a few times and failed miserably," Thomas quipped.

"I don't mind falling down. My biggest fear is going down that mountain at my size, hitting somebody else and hurting them. I've got to find the time to go when there's not too many people."

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For Trent, hard work pays off

BY BRIAN CARLTON

CUMBERLAND

The first year, there was barely a team. When Cumberland High Lady Dukes Coach John Trent took over the program, some days there were no backups, no players to substitute in.

“My first year, I only had seven girls,” Trent said. “Some games, we had five. The young ladies just didn’t want to play.”

Flash forward more than five years later and Trent has built a championship team, a group that went 20-1 this year, winning both the regular season and the James River District Basketball Tournament.

Trent is quick to thank God for this year’s results and more than that. He’s thankful to have an opportunity to coach, thankful he’s been with this group since Day One.

“I thank God for the opportunity to have them for five years,” Trent said. “I started out with these girls when they were in eighth grade. A whole lot of coaches don’t get that opportunity. This year’s results, this is five years of hard work showing.

This is five years of the girls putting in effort and dedication.”

Trent also deflects credit when it comes to being named James River District Coach of the Year.

“It means a lot, but the girls deserve the credit for that,” Trent said. “They played every night. They gave their all every night. If it wasn’t for these young ladies and their work, I wouldn’t be getting any awards.”

Coaching women’s basketball wasn’t originally the plan. In fact, Trent got started working with a completely different sport.

“I started out coaching youth league baseball,” Trent said. “I had been doing that for a while and ran into someone I knew at New Life Academy in Farmville. I had known the lady since the 90s and she said she knew that the school needed a basketball coach and suggested I apply. I did and just never looked back. Over time, I just developed a love for the game of basketball, of teaching basketball.”

Soon after, he learned Cumberland High was in need of a girls basketball coach and applied for that



Cumberland High Lady Dukes Coach John Trent holds up both his Coach of the Year Award and the championship for the James River District Tournament.

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position. Five years later, here we are.

“It’s been a blessing, a true blessing to work for Cumberland,” Trent said.

At the same time, Trent says he’s constantly challenged by the job and his players.

“It is a challenge, every year,” Trent said. “Dealing with young ladies is a challenge.”

JUGGLING CONSTRUCTION AND SPORTS

Trent wears many hats. He’s a husband, a father, a basketball coach and a business owner. And each day, he juggles all of those responsibilities in some way.

When he wakes up each day, Trent says he first thanks God. He says thanks for a day of life, thanks for the jobs he has, the family he has and all the opportunities he’s been given.

Then he starts focusing on the first part of the day ahead. That involves working on projects with his company Trent Construction.



Coach Trent is pictured here with his team after they won the James River District Tournament.

“I do a little bit of landscaping, a bit of other construction people need,” Trent said.

That makes up the first part of his day, stretching beyond lunchtime. Then, after his day’s project is done, Trent switches gears and puts on

his coaching hat. That means preparing for practice, looking ahead to the next opponent in season or answering questions from potential players and parents.

“A coach should always have ‘how should I make my team better’ on his mind,” Trent said. “I don’t ever want to let anybody down. I always have to prepare myself for what we’re going to face next or what’s happening next.”

Then after practice or the game of the day, Trent heads home to spend time with his wife and two sons. Trent says above all, he’s thankful for their support, especially from his wife. She’s not able to come to games, because of her shifts in the pharmacy department at St. Francis

Hospital. But she supports him and the team.

“I just want to publicly tell her thank you, thank you for putting up with me coming home at all hours when we have away games, thank you for supporting me and the girls,” Trent said.

He and his wife have been together for 18 years and married for 16.

As for how he juggles everything, Trent says it’s a work ethic he picked up at a young age. It’s something he hopes to impart to his players as well.

“My mom and daddy weren’t the richest parents, but they taught me and my brother that you have to work for something if you want it,” Trent said.



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After nearly 60 years, Watson says goodbye

BY BRIAN CARLTON

A nearly 60-year career will come to a close in Prince Edward County over the next few months, as Hunter Watson says goodbye. For the last 38 years, he has operated Davenport & Co. LLC's Farmville branch, helping people make investment decisions. Before that, he operated and owned part of FW Hubbard Insurance Agency in town. Now Watson says he just feels that it's time to turn the reins of the business over to his sons, Brad and Cannon.

"I just felt like I was getting pretty old and I should probably step aside," Watson said.

But as he prepares to do that, Hunter Watson reflects on what he's built in Farmville. In 1982, he joined what was then known as Hunton Financial Services. This was long before people could get stock quotes just by searching a computer. In fact, his own office at Hunton didn't get quote machines, computers dedicated to quoting stocks for clients, until 1985. But over time, he did the key thing for an operation like this, he built trust.

"It's a trust business," Hunter says of investing. "You have to be careful not to promise things that you're not sure you can deliver

on at all and to be realistic about everything. (Also) to discourage people from investing in things that are really risky."

Hunton eventually became the Farmville branch of Davenport in May 1990 and has remained such ever since, a place where as of this past year, three generations of the Watson family, including Hunter,

his sons Cannon and Brad, and Brad's son Thomas, all work.

"I always had a few stocks, buying a couple of things here and there," Hunter said. "(But) from the moment I touched (the investment world as a job), I thought, this is for me."

MANAGING RISK

From the beginning, that last part's been the hardest, as people read or hear about

a specific stock and want to jump on a trend. But Hunter and his staff have successfully kept their clients out of unstable situations over the decades.

"A lot of people (say) 'your job is to make me money,'" Hunter's son Brad, now the managing director for the Farmville branch, says. "I tell them no, (our) job is to keep you from financial disaster, maybe get you some income to supplement your lifestyle with. I have found over the years if you can avoid financial disaster, you'll do pretty well in the investment business. One day, the music stop(s)



Hunter Watson

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and you have a million people looking for a chair and there are four chairs.”

That’s been his dad’s talent, Brad said, to help clients steer clear of the ‘musical chair’ situations. Over more than three decades, that’s what Hunter Watson has done. And it’s been through simply being willing to have conversations with people.

“He’s done a very good job of making sure he stays in contact with people,” Brad said. “People entrust their money to us and (when) things are going right, they don’t always (want) to hear from us. (But) when things are going wrong, they want to hear from us right away.”

What Hunter did, and what the rest of the Farmville branch continues, Brad said, is to not wait until there’s a problem to talk with clients. Instead, they talk on a regular basis, explaining what’s going on.

WHAT’S A REGULAR DAY LIKE?

Hunter’s day-to-day routine hasn’t changed much in the last 30 years, with the exception, he acknowledges, of when he arrives at the office.

“These last few years, I’ve come in about 9:30 a.m., I haven’t come in as early as I did in the past,” Hunter said.

But once he’s in the office, he starts out by

looking at what the market has done over the last 24 hours. Has it dipped? Increased? What’s causing the changes? The goal here is to get a solid grasp of not just what the market is doing but why, to make good decisions. Part of that for Hunter involves reading a lot of newspapers, including the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Richmond Times Dispatch* and *The Farmville Herald*, among others.

“I’m a newspaper reader,” Hunter said. “I read a lot of papers (and feel) I’m a little better prepared (as a result).”

Then he also goes through information from their sister branch in Richmond, before starting to work with customers on the day. Hunter said that while technology has changed over the years, a lot about his day to day operation hasn’t.

“A lot of things haven’t changed (like) trust (and) service,” Hunter said. “Things like that remain essentially the same. It’s a people business. You need to see people, a lot of people and treat them properly.”

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

So once he retires, what will change for Hunter Watson? He wants to try a couple things.

“I’m gonna try playing golf again,” Hunter said.

“I used to play a good bit. I’m gonna hit some balls and see if I can play well enough to enjoy it. I’ll read quite a bit, I may visit a few libraries and travel.”

One goal for him is to get back to Yellowstone National Park, which he’s visited before. He also likes the idea of doing some foreign travel over the next few years, but isn’t sure that’s in the cards.”

Once his dad retires, Brad said things will be different around the office, as some roles will change.

“It’s been great to have him here with his experience,” Brad said. “When I first started in this business, I think people (felt comfortable) knowing he was here to kind of make sure I didn’t go off the rails too much with my inexperience. Now within the next six months, my son Thomas, who works in the Richmond office, will be working with us. Now I get to be the one to make sure he doesn’t go off the rails.”

That transition, almost a changing of the guard, is something Hunter is happy to see as he gets set to call it a career. He also offers advice to people in any career, as they’re starting out.

“Try to be as prepared as you can,” Hunter said, regardless of what job it is.

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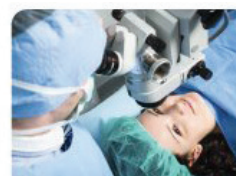
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Clinic director helps provide free services to all in need

BY RACHEL AUSTIN

Pat Payne starts her day like most with a cup of coffee and letting out her dog at her home in Rice. She then drives only a few minutes down the street to Farmville where she and her team of volunteers help members of the community who need it.

Payne is the director at the Heart of Virginia Free Clinic. The clinic provides free services to those at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and cannot afford to purchase health insurance. The majority of the patients have employment without benefits but some are those facing temporary unemployment.

After working as an emergency room nurse for 17 years, she decided to open a clinic to provide primary medical care for the nine counties of Prince Edward, Cumberland, Charlotte, Buckingham, Nottoway, Lunenburg, Amelia, Appomattox and Mecklenburg. Working in the emergency room, she saw many come in whose visit could have been prevented if they had access to regular checkups. Now, she uses that experience to

help people get the care they need.

“We have a great team and a very dedicated staff. If someone calls out sick we cover for each other. They don’t get paid what they are worth but they don’t seem to care,” she said with a laugh. “We’re a happy little place here.”

THE CHANGING SCHEDULE OF THE CLINIC

Each day of the week is a little different at the clinic as something new is on the schedule each day. The clinic is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and, according to Payne, Tuesdays are the “main event” as many clients come for their appointments that day. Wednesdays are when the volunteer pharmacist comes in and the doctors usually interview new clients on Thursdays.

On the days the clinic is running so is Payne. She is making sure everything is running smoothly. She makes sure the volunteer nurses are in and checks in with the doctors and lets them know about any patients coming in that day. Due to the clinic running on volunteers, most with full-time jobs, sometimes Payne steps in to cover whatever hole pops up that

day. She does it all from trash collecting, bookkeeping, blood work, EKGs, x-rays and whatever the doctors may need.

“Got my fingers in everything here,” said Payne. “I call the plumber, do the dishes. I’m kinda the whatever.”

Laughing, Payne made the comparison to the movie “9 to 5” with Dolly Parton as the staff has to make their own schedules sometimes and does what they can to make it work. When not helping others, she greets the clients as they come in, answers the phone and floats around to see if anyone needs anything.

FOCUSING ON THE CLINIC

Mondays and Thursdays for Payne is when she catches up on administrative work. Her main focus as the director is fundraising and looking for grants for the clinic. According to her, the contributions come from individuals and foundation grants, gifts from civic clubs and churches and fundraising events with some coming from the counties the clinic serves.

Through different grants and donations, in the past 10 years, the clinic has been able to provide 14 sets of dentures funded by grants from the Lutheran Church and Hampden-Sydney student efforts, 285 free mammograms funded by grants from the Susan G. Komen Foundation and 350 dental exams, 52 glucometers given to monitor blood sugar and \$148,000 worth of lab tests from Centra Health.

“I know that every Tuesday we save a life,” she said. “If we weren’t here, no one would see them until it was too late. The emergency room is not the place for chronic care.”



Pat Payne

FARMVILLE

She also serves as the unofficial speaker for the clinic for different events. These range from thanking organizations for their support to spreading the word about the clinic. Knowing how much people need these services, she does what she can to make sure the word gets out that they are here to help.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

While at the clinic, the list of what she doesn’t do is most likely shorter than the list of jobs she takes on during the day. However, her favorite part is seeing the positive change the clinic is doing and making connections with those who come in the door.

“No one calls me Ms. Payne, I’m Pat,” she said speaking on the one-on-one relationships she has built with the clients.

Many of them tell her that they don’t know what they would do without the clinic. Others are excited to show off their new glasses or dentures that have drastically improved their life and never expected to receive.

“They’ll come in and say, ‘hey Pat, you like my new teeth?’ and it’s like they’re a whole new person,” she said. “Giving them free medicine and care when you know without it they would have real problems makes it worthwhile.”

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