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FOR THE FUTURE**
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In Growing Native Project*



The News-Gazette



ISSN 2041-7000

WEDNESDAY, MAY 19, 2021

Single Copy Price \$1.00

VOL. 218, NO. 20

Masks Come (Mostly) Off

*Mandate
Removed
For Those
Vaccinated*

BY HARRISON M. BRANHAM

The universal indoor mask mandate was lifted for vaccinated Virginians by Gov. Ralph Northam last Friday, to align with new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control.

The CDC guidelines announced May 13 state that fully vaccinated individuals do not have to wear masks in most indoor settings. Exceptions to the lifted mandate include public transit, health care facilities and congregating settings.

Virginia businesses are also allowed to continue to require masks in their establishments, although a number of major retailers, such as Walmart and CVS, have already dropped their universal mask mandate in accordance with the CDC and state guidance.

Certain employees, including restaurant, retail, fitness, personal care, and entertainment workers, must continue to wear masks unless fully vaccinated, per CDC guidance.

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VMI GRADUATE Leslie Giron-Molina is all smiles after she receives her diploma in an outdoor graduation ceremony at VMI's football stadium Sunday. VMI lifted its mask mandate over the weekend in accordance with the governor's action Friday removing the mask requirement for all of those fully vaccinated. VMI has been shuttling cadets who wanted to be vaccinated to the local mass vaccination clinics this spring. For the graduation story, see page B9. (VMI photo)

Young Teens Can Now Be Vaccinated

BY HARRISON M. BRANHAM

Virginia schools cannot require students to be vaccinated for COVID-19 in order to return to their classrooms, according to State Superintendent James Lane.

Lane answered questions about vaccinating students as part of a Virginia Department of Health press conference

Thursday, May 13, following the federal approval of the Pfizer vaccine for adolescents aged 12 and up.

The Pfizer vaccine previously was approved for use in those aged 16 and older, while two other available vaccines, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, remain only approved for those 18 and older.

With young teens now eligible for the COVID vaccine, Lane said superintendents across the commonwealth are excited to work with local health care partners to get vaccination clinics scheduled in their divisions. Lane explained school clinics will be a good resource to students and families who may lack

See Teens, page 2

Sigma Nu Changes Master Plan

*New Location
For New Center
On Site OK'd*

BY HARRISON M. BRANHAM

The Lexington Planning Commission has approved an amended site plan for the Sigma Nu Educational

Foundation property to include a new location for the construction of a new conference center and lodging facility on the site.

A master plan for the Sigma Nu Educational Foundation properties, situated on the corner of Nelson and Lewis streets in Lexington, was approved in 2016. The former plan showed plans for the Sigma Nu Center for Excellence located directly behind

the existing Ethical Leadership Center building.

The new, amended master plan shows a Center for Excellence facility located east of the Sigma Nu Headquarters main building, closer to the Central Elementary School and closer to the single-family residences along the 400 block of Morningside Drive.

The conference center and lodging facility would include a multi-purpose

room, small conference room, and four sleeping pods with 20 beds each and one pod with four beds, totaling 84 beds for use in the campus facilities.

Sigma Nu Educational Foundation Chief Financial Officer Nicholas Murphy said the amendments were prompted by the organization's need

See Sigma Nu, page 4

Helping Folks Find Food

*Group Launches
New Website*

A group comprised of 11 local agencies is introducing a new resource for Rockbridge area residents who need help getting groceries but don't always know where to turn.

The group is launching a new website, RockbridgeFeeds.org. The online tool shows visitors where to

find hot meals for today and groceries for tomorrow.

"We're thrilled about RockbridgeFeeds.org because there are so many folks looking for help. This website is the only URL they will need to know to get connected to the numerous food resources available throughout the Rockbridge area," said RARA executive director

Jen Handy. "Whether you need food, know someone who needs food, or you want to help get food out into the community, RockbridgeFeeds.org makes it easy to find the info you're looking for."

The website indexes food resources in and around the Rockbridge community, provides loca-

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THE NEW ROCKBRIDGE FEEDS website is designed to help area residents find meals and groceries.

Planners Endorse Solar Array

*Supervisors
To Consider
Project Monday*

BY ED SMITH

After reviewing plans for a utility-scale solar array in Fairfield for a third straight meeting last Wednesday, May 12, the Rockbridge County Planning Commission recommended approval of a special exception permit for the project.

The proposal for a 5 megawatts solar array planned for 40 acres of James G. Alexander Jr.'s farm between Interstate 81 and U.S. 11 will go before the Board of Supervisors this Monday, May 24. Much of the discussion at last week's Planning Commission meeting dealt with how to best screen the array from U.S. 11.

The applicant, Dynamic Energy Solutions, presented revised photo simulations of different groupings of tree plantings along U.S. 11.

"I don't think you can screen it [from U.S. 11]," said Melissa Hennis, noting that the land where the solar facility is to be installed is at a higher elevation than the highway.

Robert Lucas said he thought the array could be screened adequately with the correct combination of fast-growing tall trees and ones with wider girth. No neighbors have expressed opposition to the plans, he pointed out. "I own property on the east side and I'm good with it."

"There's no way to screen it from everywhere," said David Whitmore, adding that he's not concerned about the view from the interstate. "The focus should be on [U.S.] 11." He praised the applicant for doing a good job of explaining how the project would benefit the community and in demonstrating how the views of the facility could be mitigated.

Matt Paxton Jr., the lone citizen to address the Commission, said he favors the development of renewable energy, "but it has to be carefully done. I'm not enthusiastic about [this project]. It seems to be unsuitable. It would be highly visible from both highways. I don't think

See Solar Array, page 3



INSIDE:
*VMI Honors
All of Its Fallen
In Revamped
Event/page 8*

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WEATHER

Today:
Partly Sunny
High 79
Low 51
Thurs:
Sunny
High 84
Low 57

Here Are Your 2021 Dabney Graduates

The following Rockbridge area students received degrees from Dabney S. Lancaster Community College last week:

From Buena Vista

Clara Marie Adkins, Career Studies Certificate, Science and Mathematics

Katelin Armentrout, Certificate, Advanced Health Care

Bonnie D. Branham, Certificate, Practical Nursing

Natalie Gayle Clark, Associate of Arts and Science, General Studies; Certificate, General Education

Tristen Bre Clark, Associate of Arts and Science, General Studies; Certificate, General Education

Zachary Cole Claytor, Associate of Applied Science, Forest Management Technology; Career Studies Certificate, Urban Forestry

Ashlen Taylor Hazelwood, Associate of Arts and Science, General Studies with Specialization in Administration of Justice; Certificate, General Education

Katie Elizabeth Mikels, Certificate, Practical Nursing

Trevor Lee Tomlin, Associate of Arts and Science, Science; Certificate, General Education

From Fairfield

Brittany Danielle Branham, Associate of Arts and Science, Business Administration with Specialization in Business Foundation; Certificate, General Education

Hayley Marie Jennings, Certificate, Practical Nursing

Emily Kate Mattioli, Associate of Arts and Science, Business Administration; Certificate, General Education

Kimberly P. Smedley, Associate of Applied Science, Nursing; Certificate, Advanced Health Care

Mary Margaret Vance, Associate of Applied Science, Nursing

From Glasgow

McKayla Breanne Alewine, Certificate, Practical Nursing

Erica Marie Beverly, Certificate, Practical Nursing

Jaden Alexis Harrison, Associate of Arts and Science, Education; Certificate, General Education

Taylor Nicole Mynes, Associate of Arts and Science, General Studies; Certificate, General Education

Alexis Monique Weeks, Associate of Arts and Science, General Studies; Certificate, General Education

From Lexington

Ashlee Gray Baker, Associate of Arts and Science, General Studies; Certificate, General Education

Dakota Tyler Baker, Associate of Arts and Science, Education

Jada Ann Beck, Certificate, Practical Nursing; Certificate, Advanced Health Care

Eryn Hunter Brads, Certificate, Practical Nursing

Andrew M. Cottrill, Associate of Applied Science, Information Systems Technology; Certificate, Microcomputer Operations; Career Studies Cer-

tificate, Cybersecurity and Networking Foundations

Madison Elizabeth Ford, Associate of Arts and Science, Education

Ashley Nicole Gilbert, Associate of Applied Science, Business Management

Miranda Jade Hamilton, Associate of Arts and Science, Education

Harper Renee Knick, Associate of Arts and Science, General Studies; Certificate, General Education

Guiovani Leon, Associate of Arts and Science, General Studies; Certificate, General Education

Joseph Andrew Lilly, Associate of Arts and Science, General Studies; Certificate, General Education

Erica Nicole Martin, Associate of Applied Science, Nursing; Certificate, Advanced Health Care

Sierra Nicole Moore, Associate of Applied Science, Nursing

Alexander Tobias Philbin, Career Studies Certificate, Cybersecurity

Tiffany Lynn Sloan, Certificate, Practical Nursing

Makenna Paige Smith, Associate of Applied Science, Nursing; Certificate, Advanced Health Care

Ruby Ellen Ulrich, Associate of Arts and Science, General Studies; Certificate, General Education

Savannah Leigh Whorley, Certificate, Practical Nursing

Natural Bridge Station

Katlyn Ann Critchley, Associate of Arts and Science, General Studies; Certificate, General Education

Josie Shian Cummings, Associate of Arts and Science, General Studies; Certificate, General Education; Career Studies Certificate, Early Childhood Development

From Raphine

Caroline Elizabeth Fitzgerald, Associate of Applied Science, Forest Management Technology; Career Studies Certificate, Urban Forestry

Brandy Mitchell, Associate of Applied Science, Business Management; Certificate, Small Business Management; Career Studies Certificate, Business Fundamentals

FastForward Graduates

The following graduates have completed a FastForward workforce training program through the DSLCC Workforce Solutions and Community Education's division:

Buena Vista

Quintessa Connor and Ashley Montgomery, Clinical Medical Assistant

Clyde McGuffin, Class A Commercial Driver's License

Luke Gearheart and Caleb Roberts, Core Curriculum

Collyn Knick, Core Curriculum; Electrical Levels 1 and 2

Luke Gearheart and Caleb Roberts, Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning, Levels 1 and 2

Graham Armstrong and Zachary Craft, Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning, Levels 3 and 4

Sabrina Blankenship, Karen Burch and Lacey Conner, and Kimberly McKee, Pharmacy Technician

Brittany Price, Phlebotomy Technician

Anthony King, Shielded Metal Arc Welding

From Fairfield

Richard Bernhardt, Pharmacy Technician

Mae Humiston, Gas Metal Arc Welding

From Goshen

Angela Matheny, Clinical Medical Assistant

Bert Carlson, Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning, Levels 3 and 4

From Lexington

Megan Bennington and Erica Slagle, Certified Nurse Aide

Emily Jo Cummings and Elizabeth Smiley, Clinical Medical Assistant

Cody Beverley, Christopher Sisk, and Matthew Slagle, Class A Commercial Driver's License

Dane Campbell, Core Curriculum
Hannah Hostetter, Emergency Medical Technician

Dane Campbell, Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning, Levels 1 and 2

Christy Jarvis, Phlebotomy Technician

From Natural Bridge Station

April Mazingo, Pharmacy Technician

RACS Employees Recognized For Service

Two employees with Rockbridge Area Community Services are celebrating 20 years with the agency.

Jennifer Ratliff and Rebecca Clark are both being recognized by RACS.

Ratliff has held a position at the Wellman Group Home in Millboro for her entire employment with the agency.

Heather McCormick, manager of Wellman group home, said, "Jenna is one of the most dedicated, dependable, caring people I know. She always, and I mean always, puts the needs of the clients first. Jenna stays on top of all situations at the group home, and she is my right-hand woman."

McCormick said Ratliff is always willing to bounce ideas around with her when it comes to figuring out the best and most efficient ways to care for the clients. Ratliff also takes great pride in the appearance of the group home and those who live there, she said.

"Jenna is one of the best team players and is always willing to work with her co-workers when things get chaotic at the group home," McCormick continued. "Jenna helps fill in when there are staffing issues to ensure that the needs for the clients are always met."

Wendy Mace, director of the Developmental Services Unit, added, "Jenna is a great asset to the agency and especially to the Wellman Group Home. We are all grateful for Jenna and the hard work she does every single day for the individuals we serve."

Kim Shaw, executive director of RACS had this to say about Ratliff: "We are blessed and honored that Jenna has been part of the RACS family for the past 20 years. Dedicated, compassionate, caring team members like Jenna are what makes RACS stand out."

Clark was hired in April 2001 as a part-time transcriptionist and now serves as the medical records coordinator for the CSB.

She has witnessed a tremendous amount of change in the medical records department over the last two decades. She originally worked at the Myers Street office, completing transcription of dictation for psychiatry appointments. At that time, all patient records were maintained in paper charts and archived on microfiche.

Now speech-to-text software has eliminated the need for transcription services, and patient records are digitized within a complex electronic health database. As the world of medical records has evolved over the years, Clark has mastered the ever-changing technology and laws that govern patient privacy.

Don Sherman, Clark's supervisor, said, "Her hard work and dedication are apparent to all as she coordinates the operations of the medical records department. Her positive attitude and friendly demeanor shine through each day as she manages patient record requests."

Clark honors each patient's right to privacy and ensures that records at the CSB are only shared in accordance with patient's wishes and the law. Sherman went on to add, "For 20 years, Ms. Clark has provided an invaluable contribution to Rockbridge Area Community Services, our patients and community."

According to Kim Shaw, executive director, "Rebecca is a valued member of our RACS family. Her commitment to and diligence in the medical records department is integral to the success of our organization."

First Baptist To Celebrate Graduates

First Baptist Church in Lexington will celebrate Graduate Recognition Day this Sunday, May 23, during the 11 a.m. service.

The class of 2021 includes Caitlyn Hill from Stuart Hall High School; and, from Washington and Lee University, Annjoy Gichane with a bachelor's of arts degree in economics, Celine Okome with a bachelor of science degree in business administration, Jhade Jordan with a bachelor of arts degree in history, and Temi Adeyanju with a bachelor of science degree in accounting.

For more information call the church at 463-4854.

Food

continued from page 1

tions and operating hours, and describes what to expect during a food pantry visit.

The comprehensive features of RockbridgeFeeds.org are all part of the coalition's efforts to make an impact on hunger in the area. Coalition members once worked together behind the scenes. A few years ago, they decided to join forces, understanding that there's strength in unity.

"When our local hunger relief organizations came together and formed the Rockbridge Feeds Coalition, members committed to addressing food insecurity and improving food access in Rockbridge by working together, deepening their relationships, and building their collective capacity to effect change," Handy added.

Current Rockbridge Feeds member agencies are the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, Bridge to Hope Food Pantry, Campus Kitchen at W&L, Gospel Way Food Pantry, Kingsway Help Center, Meals for Shut-ins, Natural Bridge/Glasgow Food Pantry, Rockbridge Area Relief Association, The Community Table, Valley Program for Aging Services, and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Serving Rockbridge County and 24 other counties and eight cities throughout central and western Virginia, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank brings financial support and coalition-building experience to the group's efforts to reduce hunger.

"We're grateful to be a part of Rockbridge Feeds," said Robin Swecker, part-

ner engagement manager for the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. "By working together, we can better help families experiencing hard times or who temporarily need help affording groceries during the pandemic. We share a commitment to making sure everyone in need in the Rockbridge region has enough to eat."

Community members interested in doing their part to champion hunger relief can also find ways to get involved with the agencies that make up Rockbridge Feeds. Social media users can also follow Rockbridge Feeds on Facebook and Instagram.

For more information, contact Handy at director@raralex.org, or 463-6943, and Abena Foreman-Trice at aforemantrice@brafb.org or (540) 213-8405.

County Teachers Get 4 Percent Pay Hike

BY HARRISON M. BRANHAM

The Rockbridge County School Board approved a \$32 million budget for the upcoming FY22 at the regular meeting Tuesday, May 11.

The overall site fund operating budget of \$32,787,348 reflects a \$1,279,289, or 4.1 percent, increase from last year's budget.

"Trying to improve employee salaries was a top priority for this budget season," Superintendent Phillip Thompson said at the regular meeting. "With respect to this being our primary goal and achieving this goal, it has been a challenge throughout the entire process for several factors."

Thompson said the Board was able to achieve a 4 percent raise for all teachers and staff for FY22 through increases in revenue funding. State revenues for the FY22 budget increased by \$400,123 and the school division received additional local funding support from the county in the amount of \$915,075, reflecting

an overall 6.19 funding increase to help boost RCPS salaries.

Despite the revenue increases, Thompson said the annual hike in health insurance costs presented challenges to the Board.

"It seems like it gets higher and higher every year," he said.

Anthem Insurance originally offered RCPS a renewal quote of a 17.6 percent increase. After further negotiation, the final renewal increased 13.5 percent to about \$2.6 million.

Overall, the approved instructional budget for FY22 is \$23,496,966. Administration for FY22 is budgeted at \$2,036,320, showing a \$16,254 increase. Transportation has decreased slightly for the division by about \$64,000 at \$2,686,289. Operations and maintenance costs rose by over \$147,000 for FY22 at \$2,978,784. Division technology costs also rose by over \$163,000 for FY22 at \$1,568,989. Facilities costs remained the same from last year at \$20,000.

Red Cross Blood Drives Next Week

Two American Red Cross blood drives are scheduled in the Rockbridge area next week.

Southern Virginia University is sponsoring a drive on Wednesday, May 26, from 12:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Quality Inn & Suites Lexington is sponsoring a drive on Saturday, May 29, from noon to 4 p.m.

To schedule an appointment for either location, visit www.redcrossblood.org or call 1-800 RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767). Remember to bring a government ID with you.

CLASSIFIED

A-D-V-E-R-T-I-S-I-N-G

an idea that SELLS.