OMICRON: So far, variant appears less dangerous than delta, Fauci says. AT HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL: City rivals Glass, Heritage meet in early matchup.



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'This was a game changer for us'

Blue Ridge Area Food Bank aims to boost community partners' infrastructure with \$2 million in grants to network

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The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank line partners. has awarded \$2 million in grants to its network of 60 partners in 25 over the last four years.

The food bank said simply supplying partners with food is bolster the operations of its front-

BRAFB CEO Michael McKee said the \$2 million was awarded the \$674,000 in combined giving kitchens and shelters, as well as some feeding programs that work with children and seniors.

foods," he said.

McKee said the BRAFB was able counties this year, far more than mostly to food pantries, soup to increase its Agency Capacity Fund after receiving increased donations during the pandemic. He said if the food bank doesn't

no longer enough - if it is to suc- of things that really helped them partnering programs as much food insecurity in the communiceed in curbing hunger, it has to build their capacity and to serve as it's investing in its own infralarger numbers of people and structure, it won't be successful also provide healthier and fresher in its shared mission with its partners.

In the midst of the pandemic, when partner agencies needed help more than ever, McKee said the BRAFB was fortunate its donors understood the crisis that "The grants were for a variety invest in the infrastructure of its was unfolding and the impact on

ties that it is serving.

"So it gave us the opportunity to think about capacity building with our community partners in a truly transformational way," he said. "And so rather than simply make smaller grants for a freestanding cooler or freezer or a

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CITY GATHERS FOR LYNCHBURG CHRISTMAS PARADE



Senator, veteran **Dole dies** at age 98

Senate leader ran for president, served in Congress for 36 years

JOHN HANNA AND CALVIN WOODWARD **The Associated Press**

TOPEKA, Kan. - Bob Dole, who overcame disabling war wounds to become a sharptongued Senate leader from Kansas, a Republican presidential candidate and then a symbol and celebrant of his dwindling generation of World War II veterans, died Sunday. He was 98.

The crowd watches the Lynchburg Christmas Parade travel down Memorial Avenue on Sunday.

eople from the Lynchburg area lined the sides of Fort and Memorial Avenues for the Christmas parade on Sunday, Dec. 5. The parade, which was presented by the Central Virginia Business Coalition, began at City Stadium and made its way down past the Lynchburg Public Library before concluding at E.C. Glass High School.

Many different public figures from area public safety departments participated in this year's parade as well as a variety of local groups and businesses.

KENDALL WARNER PHOTOS, THE NEWS & ADVANCE

- Kendall Warner

■ More Information: For photos of the Bedford Christmas Parade, please see page A2.

and doll Sunday.

His wife, Elizabeth Dole, said in an announcement posted on social media that he died in his sleep.

Dole announced in February 2021 that he'd been diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. During his 36-year career on Capitol Hill. Dole became one of the most influential legislators and party leaders in the Senate, combining a talent for compromise with a caustic wit, which he often turned on himself but didn't hesitate to turn on others too

He shaped tax policy, foreign policy, farm and nutrition programs and rights for the disabled, enshrining protections against discrimination in employment, education and public services in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

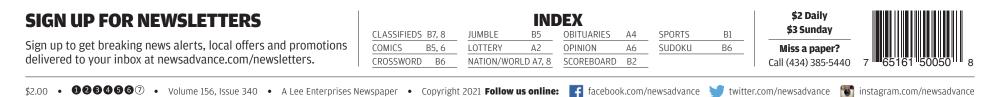
Today's accessible government offices and national parks, sidewalk ramps and the sign-language interpreters at official local events are just some of the more visible hallmarks of his legacy and that of the fellow lawmakers he rounded up for that sweeping civil rights legislation 30 years ago.

Dole devoted his later years to the cause of wounded veterans. their fallen comrades at Arlington National Cemetery and remembrance of the fading generation of World War II vets.

Thousands of old soldiers massed on the National Mall in 2004 for what Dole, speaking at the dedication of the World War II Memorial there, called "our final reunion." He'd been a driving force in its creation.

"Our ranks have dwindled," he said then. "Yet if we gather in the twilight it is brightened by the knowledge that we have kept

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VT lab hunting for omicron in Virginia

Fralin institute using genome sequencing to test for new variant

ALISON GRAHAM The Roanoke Times

Parade on Sunday.

Virginia scientists and researchers are on the lookout for the new COVID-19 variant, omi-

cron, which was detected in the the molecular diagnostics lab, as possible," she said. United States for the first time said researchers perform mutalast week.

No cases have been found in Virginia, but the molecular diagnostics lab at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute at Virginia Tech-Carilion is searching for the variant in southwest new variant is emerging in some be more transmissible than Virginia.

the latest variant.

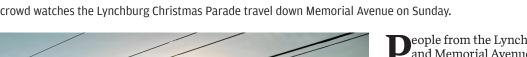
part of the world, we're pro-Carla Finkielstein, director of tected and try to catch it as soon

The World Health Organitional analysis on each positive zation designated omicron as test on samples provided to the a variant of concern two weeks institute. This helps with both ago. Preliminary evidence sugsurveillance and understanding gests there is an increased risk of reinfection with this variant. "We want to be sure that if a And early data shows it could

Please see OMICRON, Page A3

Lila Smith Kennadi Mayberry wave their Grinch during the Lynchburg Christmas Parade on

Motorcyclists drive down Memorial Avenue in the Lynchburg Christmas



Food

From A1

those things but let's think bigger."

McKee said the grant program is designed to increase the capacity of BRAFB partners so that they're not just able to distribute non-perishable canned wholesome produce and meats that are rich in protein and often too expensive for those receiving it.

The Fillin' Station Food Pantry, operated out of Timberlake that funding, including a threedoor cooler, a two-door cooler, to the pantry. a tablet and wide span storage racks.

for six years and before the pandemic, recipients would have to make an appointment and walk the three-door cooler, we're laptop, we decided let's do through the building to get groceries.

Now, the leadership of the church wanted to keep the pantry open while keeping everyone safe, so it runs a drive-thru operation every Monday.

food and food in boxes but also majority of its food from BRAFB twice per month. Tibbs said it has sourced about 140,000 pounds of food from BRAFB so far this year.

The tablets are used to check people in and the shelving is United Methodist Church in used to store boxes, but Tibbs in January. Lynchburg, received a portion of is most excited for the two new freezers, which still are en route

"That will allow us to offer different frozen meats," she said. Kim Tibbs, director of the Fil- "We have to have freezers that lin' Station Food Pantry, said the meet [U.S. Department of Ag-

church pantry has been running riculture] compliance, because between these two grants that tents and pallets. we have to meet USDA rules by being a USDA distributor. With hoping to expand our fresh food offerings to our neighbors and that will allow us to have more produce milk, butter and cheese and this will give us a place to put those items."

The Fillin' Station also re-The pantry receives a large ceived a \$50,000 grant from BRAFB to begin a capital improvement project to build an extra storage room onto the existing pantry as well as a covered walkway that will allow volunteers extra safety in the winter. Construction will begin

> "By doing this, we'll be able to maybe set up a Farmers Market style pantry where people can park and come shop," Tibbs said. "I think it'll be a huge imopportunities we've been given

the food bank has provided. It not only provides for neighbors to have different offerings from our pantry but it allows us to reach more neighbors by the capacity of expanding our freezers and coolers as well as with this frozen meat to give away. outdoor building as well."

Marian Dixon, president of the Nelson County Food Pantry in Lovingston, said withthe pantry couldn't do what it does.

"They are instrumental financially, the ability to purchase food at reduced cost, the programs that they provide every year, this grant being the most helpful," she said. "They help us with a small grant but this was a game changer for us."

With money provided by the food bank, Dixon was able pact and it's just amazing the to purchase a 12-by-6-foot walk-in freezer, a shed, new

The Nelson County Pantry, at 9890 Thomas Nelson Highway, serves people from all over the 470-square-mile county and Dixon said the new freezer allows the pantry to receive more

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"This freezer has increased our ability to provide protein meats to so many more people," she said. "We're trying to give out the partnership, of BRAFB, them enough to last them a good while."

In rain, snow or heat, the volunteers now have tents to stand under while they do registration at the pantry and the pallets allow volunteers to move dairy items in and out of the freezer.

The new 12-by-20-foot shed gives the pantry a place to store non-food related items.

"Because of all this, we have been able to double our capacity of operations," she said.

Omicron

From A1

previous variants – known as alpha and delta – but conclusive data is still not available.

Variants occur when a virus reproduces and makes a mistake in the new copy, called a mutation. When enough mutations have occurred, a new version of the virus is created. Sometimes these can be advantageous been sick for a long time health officials are interfor the virus, such as making it more transmissible.

This happened with the delta variant, which was first discovered in India in late 2020. It now accounts cases in the U.S.

South African public health officials detected

"Thank goodness the folks in South Africa were very transparent and told the world quickly when health responses. they isolated this variant," the Fralin Institute's ex-Friedlander, said. "Now we're looking for that sequencing and rapid mu- ones. The U.S. has lagged performing genome setational analysis."

The research institute's lab in Roanoke receives samples from health districts across southwest Virginia and the rest of the state. They first determine whether the sample is positive or negative for COVID-19. Positive samples are then analyzed using a rapid mutational analysis. Researchers analyze only the regions of the gene that are relevant to the variant,

to see whether all mutaare available in as soon as 12 hours.

Some positive samples are also selected to undergo whole genome sequencing, which can give a more the CDC, Virginia has secomplete picture of the virus with all of its mutations. Samples are selected based on different characteristics. If the patient has or has had a severe case, or particular area, the sample COVID-19 mutation and could be selected for further study.

for nearly all coronavirus is running between 200 shape robust public health and 350 whole genome sequences per week.

the omicron variant for the a few days to complete, so first time in late November. the rapid mutational analysis is useful to provide officials with a quick result they can use in public wait until there's millions

Labs across the country are completing genome it, we've already missed the ecutive director, Michael sequencing on positive opportunity to do anything COVID-19 samples in an about it." effort to track known variwith our whole genome ants and look out for new Research Institute started

such as omicron, and look behind other countries in quencing after months sequencing. Cancer, brain the percentage of samples tions associated with that it sequences, which can variant are present. Results affect how quickly public health officials respond to and detect new variants.

Virginia is also behind some other states as well. According to data from quenced 2.76% of its positive cases, but some other states have sequenced close to 9%.

Researchers and public ested in genome sequencif the patient traveled to a ing in order to track each determine which new variants may get a foothold in Finkielstein said her lab the region. This can help responses.

"The only way you can The sequencing can take really do that in a proactive way, to be able to respond in a timely way, is to be out ahead of it, Friedlander said. "If you of cases of omicron, and then we start analyzing for

The Fralin Biomedical

Do you have

of conducting COVID-19 testing for the state.

researchers froze positive samples and kept them in storage. The institute was is a social responsibility," interested in going back to Finkielstein said. "And I the samples to see when think it was time for some mutations happened in of us to step up and help the region. Finkielstein our community." eventually developed the rapid mutational analysis to study the samples. The ing the effect of circadian institute alerted the state rhythms on cancer and tuabout their capability to do mor growth. She has conthe rapid analysis and the tinued her research while whole genome sequencing. also running the molecular

The institute was able to diagnostics lab. submit an application to the state to complete the work and be reimbursed for the millions of dollars worth of tests being done, Friedlander said. The institute shares results with the Virginia Department of Health on a daily basis.

Friedlander said researchers involved with the lab at first set aside their normal projects and jobs to volunteer their time to do the COVID-19 testing and

and heart researchers came together to use their skills Finkielstein and other in molecular biology to analyze the samples.

Finkielstein normally spends her days study-

Friedlander said the institute received funding from Go Virginia, a business-led economic initiative, to hire full-time "I really think science workers for the lab, which has freed up more researchers to continue their work.

"You prepare your whole life and this is a moment where you need to apply everything you have learned," Finkielstein said. "I really feel like I'm contributing my knowledge as a scientist to solve an issue that is a problem in our community."





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