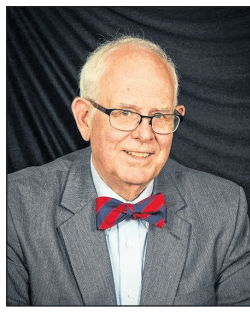


**Inside today's
OPINION**

TOM CAMPBELL

A win-win approach to higher education. **Opinion 4A**



AND...
Program at UNCP to address STEM teacher shortage
News 10A

In today's paper

SPORTS:
Postseason soccer, golf, softball, track
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THE ROBESONIAN

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Wednesday, May 13, 2026 • Issue 36, Volume 157

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A Fresh Perspective

Local NEWS

\$1.50



Photo courtesy of Lumbee Tribe
Lumbee Tribe staff hangs ribbons at the Lumbee Tribal Housing Complex ahead of Saturday's Federal Recognition Celebration at UNC Pembroke.

Tribe prepares for Recognition Celebration

Tasha Oxendine
For The Robesonian

PEMBROKE — Bows are going up, flags are flying, and new streets are opening as the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina prepares to welcome the nation to a historic Federal Recognition Celebration on Saturday at UNC Pembroke.

This historic event will take place from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. at several locations on the UNC Pembroke campus, with the main stage located between Old Main and the Mary Livermore Library. The Lumbee Tribe is proud to partner with UNC Pembroke and Chancellor Cummings to host this special event on campus. This collaboration reflects the strong, longstanding relationship between the Tribe and the university, as well as the historical significance of UNC Pembroke's beginnings to the Lumbee People. The event also underscores the importance of this

milestone not only for the Lumbee people but also to the region.

The Lumbee Tribe warmly welcomes Lumbee citizens, community members and neighbors to join in this grand celebration. This occasion marks a significant and long-awaited milestone in the Tribe's history, representing generations of perseverance, advocacy and unity. It will be a momentous day as the Tribe gathers with the broader community to honor this historic and joyous achievement.

Decorations are underway around the town of Pembroke and beyond; people across the country are putting up tribal colors to commemorate the celebration, the tribe said.

Tribal Chairman John L. Lowery said that over the past several months, the Lumbee People have witnessed one of the most historic and transformative moments in the tribe's history.

See **TRIBE** | 8A



Photos courtesy of UNCP
Chancellor Robin Cummings greets a graduate at UNC Pembroke's Graduate Commencement on Friday in Pembroke.

UNCP celebrates Spring Commencement

Ceremony highlighted by stories of resilience and achievement

Mark Locklear
For The Robesonian

PEMBROKE — Nearly three decades after beginning her college journey, Melanie Locklear Duckstein returned to UNC Pembroke on Saturday to finish what she started.

Duckstein, who has family roots in Robeson County, first enrolled at then-Pembroke State University in 1995 before leaving to serve in the

U.S. Army. Over a 24-year career, she deployed around the world before a military-related accident in 2019 at Fort Drum, New York, resulted in a traumatic brain injury that ended her military path.

"Everything I loved and everything that defined who I was — was taken away in a moment's notice," Duckstein said, holding back tears.

Returning to UNCP



Members of the UNC Pembroke graduating class of 2026 at Saturday's Undergraduate Commencement in Pembroke.

after retirement became more than completing a degree. "It wasn't about finishing a degree — it

became redefining who I am beyond a military uniform," she said.

See **UNCP** | 9A

City gets \$1.5M more for floodgate

Project on pace for completion by peak of hurricane season

Chris Stiles
The Robesonian

LUMBERTON — The City of Lumberton has received an additional \$1.5 million in federal grant money to fund the completion of the floodgate project underneath Interstate 95, which is currently under construction. The Supplemental Funding Budget Amendment was approved by City Council during its monthly meeting Monday at City Hall.

A public hearing was held regarding the amendment to the Community Development Block Grant-Neighborhood Revitalization (CDBG-NR), which adds the \$1.5 million to the previous CDBG-NR funding awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development



Chris Stiles | The Robesonian
Lumberton Deputy City Manager Brandon Love, left, speaks during Monday's City Council meeting at City Hall.

(HUD) for the floodgate project. The project previously received \$3.5 million in CDBG-NR funding, and the limit for one project is \$5 million, meaning that when the city asked for more financial assistance on the project the most additional funding that could be received was the \$1.5 million it was granted, Deputy City Manager Brandon Love said.

The project has also received \$10,878,186 from other funding sources including the

Golden LEAF Foundation, the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) and state appropriations, Love said. The floodgate is located where VFW Road and a CSX railway pass underneath Interstate 95 in West Lumberton, and is designed to stop floodwaters from passing under the interstate and into West and South Lumberton, as has occurred in past storm emergencies

such as hurricanes Matthew, in 2016, and Florence, in 2018.

Additional funding was needed to compete the project after construction delays which have largely been the result of coordinating construction times with CSX since the railway remains active and has to be shut down temporarily for some parts of construction.

"We've had sustained cooperation from CSX, it's just slow," Love said. "They have been receptive in allowing the contractor access to the track. ... They're working with us, I don't want to say anything negative about CSX; it's just slow and time-consuming."

Councilman John Cantey asked Love whether the \$1.5 million in funding will cover the remaining project costs.

"In my opinion, this will be enough funding to carry us through the end of the project, barring any unforeseen acts of God,"

See **FLOODGATE** | 8A

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TODAY'S FORECAST
Mostly sunny, pleasant and less humid

A NEWS
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Comics: 5
Classifieds: 6, 7

B SPORTS

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OBITUARIES

HELEN WILLS (LINDSAY) DAVIS



Helen Wills (Lindsay) Davis, 92, was born Sept. 1, 1933, in Red Springs, and passed away April 21, 2026. Formerly of Lumberton, she later resided in Charlotte.

Helen was a graduate of Red Springs High School and went on to earn both her BA and MA degrees from Pembroke State University — an achievement

that reflected her steady dedication and quiet determination throughout life.

A gifted painter and a devoted lover of music, Helen found joy at the piano and carried an enduring appreciation for the arts. She was also a home-maker and gardener, tending not only to what grew in soil, but to the warmth and beauty that made a house feel like home.

Helen was a member of Lumberton First Baptist Church. Her faith and sense of devotion were evident in the way she lived — through constancy, care, and a gracious spirit that made others feel welcomed and valued.

She will be remembered most for her love of family and for being the keeper of a beautiful home. In countless everyday moments, Helen showed what it means to be a loving mother — present, giving, and steadfast — creating a place where family could gather, be comforted, and feel deeply cared for.

Helen was preceded in death by her husband, Earl Lee Davis; her sisters, Lois Smith and Betty Smith; and her grandson, Heath Davis Fields.

She is survived by her daughter, Lynne Davis; her son, Earl Davis, Jr. (Sonny); her son, Robert Davis; her daughter, Donna Davis; her daughter, Lisa Fields; her granddaughter, Heather Spivey Lassiter; her grandsons, Buddy Spivey, Christopher Spivey, Matthew Fields, Tommy Russell, and Charlie Russell; and her brother, Raeford Lindsay. Also survived by 16 great-grandchildren and many great great grandchildren.

GEORGE GRANTHAM BARNES

George Grantham Barnes of Nags Head passed away on April 23, 2026. He was born in Lumberton on March 20, 1953, to the late Betty Grantham Barnes and Knox Meredith Barnes.

George was a graduate of Lumberton High School and UNC-Wilmington. After college, he began his journey with North Carolina State Parks as he took a brief job at Goose Creek until he stepped into his role at Jockey's Ridge, a position that shaped the rest of his life. George served as the superintendent at Jockey's Ridge for over three decades. From the very beginning, his passion and leadership helped the park evolve into what it is today, a natural sanctuary for both locals and visitors year after year. His love and dedication to the Ridge expanded far after retirement, as he served as a committed board member of the nonprofit organization The Friends of Jockey's Ridge where he continued to protect and promote his beloved sand dune.

Beyond the Ridge, George remained devoted to his family, friends and furry family members. At his happiest close to home, he was usually found enjoying the ocean breeze, good music and local cuisine.

George is survived by his wife, Vicki; his daughter, Katie (Waylon); grandson, Mylon; sister, Meredith (Brantley); brother, Kellar (Sherry); as well as a host of nieces, nephews, cousins and special friends.

A Celebration of George's Life is scheduled for Saturday, May 30 at 2 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church in Lumberton. A second Celebration of Life will be held on June 20 at 2 p.m. at Jockey's Ridge State Park in Nags Head.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to: Friends of Jockey's Ridge State Park, P.O. Box 358, Nags Head, NC 27959.



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ODESSA EVANS MCMILLAN



Odessa Evans McMillan (fondly known as "O.D." or "Dessa"), of Lumberton, was born on Sept. 27, 1951, to the late Mr. George Robert Evans "Papa Cool" and Mrs. Bertha Cade Evans in Lumberton, North Carolina.

Odessa was raised along with her late older brother George Evans, Jr., late baby brother

Gary Robert Evans, and baby sister Glenda "Dale" Evans Harris. At an early age, Odessa joined First Baptist Church in Lumberton, where she was a member under the leadership of Dr. E.B. Turner.

As a child, Odessa enjoyed cooking and baking for her younger siblings from recipes she learned from her mother. Odessa was known as a good helper to her grandmother Pearl, in hosting family gatherings and assumed various responsibilities as a teenager. Being around her mom and elders, she learned wisdom to navigate life at an early age. Her parents taught her a strong work ethic that served as a guiding principle in life which she modeled to her children Eric and Felicia (Lisa) at a very young age.

Odessa was educated in the South Lumberton public school system and graduated from South Lumberton Junior and Senior High (now known as Lumberton High School) where she excelled in mathematics. During her high school years, she was well known for planning school socials amongst classmates that later led to her being the primary coordinator and spearheaded the class of 1969 class reunions which she loved. Later in life, Odessa joined the softball team at Bill Sapp Recreation Center in Lumberton and was a valuable part of the team for many seasons.

After graduation, Odessa started a textile career at West Point Pepperell, a manufacturing company that produced home fashion textiles. During her career she was promoted from machinist to a laboratory fabric technician and continued to climb the corporate ladder. She retired after 35 years of employment at West Point Pepperell and later enrolled and took professional development courses at Robeson Community College (RCC) in Lumberton, an academic benefit provided by West Point Pepperell. She later returned to the workforce at Dupont where she worked as a technician for five years before fully retiring (this time for good) and became a dog mom to her Pomeranian, Gno!, who she inherited from her daughter, Felicia.

Odessa loved the outdoors and enjoyed gardening and occasionally grew her own seasonal fruits and vegetables. Odessa found community fun with friends, namely, Rose Riley, in a monthly bingo brunch. She was an avid hand dancer especially to the "Motown sound" and trained her sister Dale in hand and swing dancing.

Odessa was also instrumental in helping her daughter Felicia launch downtown Lumberton-based confectionery, Sweet Candy Café, in 2012. In 2018, the University of Phoenix, Felicia's graduate school alma mater, produced a four-day profile piece on how Odessa raised her daughter in Parkview Terrace Apartments and instilled in her core values that helped her build the success of Sweet Candy Café today. Odessa's interview and the wisdom she shared about her daughter is still featured in the University of Phoenix's online and social media marketing.

When Odessa's daughter came to visit from Maryland, Odessa could always count on her daughter Felicia getting her favorite meal from one of her favorite seafood restaurants, Village Inn in Lumberton. Additionally, Odessa could always count on her daughter never showing up empty handed during her visits from Maryland; the trunk was always full of Trader Joe's goodies, specialty coffee, and lots of confectionery — she would look and say, "Lord Lisa."

Odessa was loved by so many. She poured wisdom, grace, and quick wit (never short for words) to those near and dear. She was preceded in death by brothers George Robert Evans, Jr., Gary Robert Evans, Larry Eugene Floyd, and George Lee Thompson, and one son Eric Montreal Evans.

She leaves to treasure her memory a daughter Felicia Evans Williams (Russell Williams) of Rockville, Maryland and Queens, New York; like a second daughter Tonya Crump of Durham; like a second daughter Attorney Demetrius Worley Berry of Greensboro; baby sister Glenda "Dale" Evans Harris of Laurinburg; like a second sister and dear friend Friddi Cook Janoch (Tom) of Cleveland, Ohio; several nieces and nephews; and a host of grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Odessa was a friend to many but will forever be mom to Eric and Felicia (Lisa/Monk).

Funeral service will be Saturday, May 16, with visitation of viewing at 1 p.m. and the funeral procession at 2 p.m. at First Baptist Church, 504 West Second Street, Lumberton. Burial/internment will be at Cade Family Cemetery in Lumberton.



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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

EDITOR'S NOTE: Send your Community Calendar items to Editor Chris Stiles at cstiles@robsonian.com.

Chamber Golf Classic, 11 a.m., May 14: The Lumberton, NC Chamber of Commerce Golf Classic is at Pinecrest Country Club. Lunch is at 11 a.m., and Shotgun starts at 12 p.m. Hole-in-one prize is available, as are 4 closest-to-the-pin, most accurate drive, money board, and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Team awards. Support the Chamber and enjoy the day!

Alive After 5 Concert Series Opening Show, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., May 14: The Sand Band is opening the Alive After 5 Concert Series in Historic Downtown Lumberton on the Dick Taylor Plaza. Get in the groove for a weekly concert each Thursday for the next 5 weeks! The Sand Band is based in Pinehurst and is known for the variety of music that will reach the soul of the audience. Some seating is available at the plaza, but be encouraged to bring your own folding chair to rest between dances.

Doggie Dash, 8 a.m., May 16: The Robeson Road Runners, in support of The Robeson County Humane Society, has planned the Doggie Dash 5k/1mile Fun Run event. Only leashed, well-behaved pets are welcome. Donations for the work and needs of the Humane Society will be accepted.

Lumbee Federal Recognition Celebration, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., May 16: An invitation is extended to the celebration of a Federal Recognition Event on campus at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. Join the mini-powwow with food, festivities, a gospel sing, vendors and more. This is an occasion to remember! The celebration area is the quad between Old Main and the Mary Livermore Library.

Oeuvre d'Art en Exposition, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., May 16: Trinity Episcopal Church is hosting Oeuvre d'Art en Exposition, an afternoon of Art and Music with Mark Andersen. Well-known musician Mark Andersen will premiere his new piano suite, composed to accompany the artwork on display. The artwork exhibit will include paintings and sculptures from Mark Andersen's personal collection, in addition to work recently shown at the Robeson Art Guild.

Painted Gold Classic Horse Show, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., May 16: The Carolina Paint Horse Club hosts the Painted Gold Classic, a 4-judge APHA and All Breed horse show. The format offers multiple opportunities to earn points and placings over the weekend, with circuit awards in every class with 2+ entries, as well as division and reserve prizes for qualifying CPHC members. The show is welcoming to a range of exhibitors, whether you're bringing a seasoned horse or one just getting started.

Da Bomb Barrel Racing, 9 a.m., May 23: Summa Slamma barrel racing is happening at the Southeastern NC Agricultural Events Center! Activities begin at 9 a.m.

John P. Williamson Memorial Golf Tournament, 12 p.m., May 23: Date changed to the 23rd of May! This is the 23rd annual John P. Williamson Memorial Golf Tournament, and the proceeds from the tournament benefit the Robeson County Humane Society. Lunch is at noon. A shotgun start is at 1 p.m.; \$300 per 3-player team or \$100 per individual. See the other details on the flyer above. Sponsor a hole for this worthy cause!

Shibori Indigo Dyed Scarf Class, 12 p.m. to 4 p.m., May 30: The Robeson Art Guild is hosting a workshop for learning how to use indigo dye to create a one-of-a-kind scarf. Other items may be acceptable for dying, so visit the website listed below for more details about the workshop. The fee is \$58 for members of the Guild and \$65 for nonmembers. Seating is limited to 12, so register early.

Lumbee Tribe Veterans Stand Down, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., June 6: Veterans, mark your calendar for the Lumbee Tribe Veterans Stand Down on June 6 at the Lumbee Tribe Boys & Girls Club in Pembroke. The event, which runs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., will offer health screenings, employment assistance, housing/shelter assistance, haircuts, assistance with veterans' benefits, some great gear and much more.

ONGOING

Children's Storytime — Lumberton, 10:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. on Tuesdays and Fridays, Robeson County Public Library, 101 N. Chestnut St., Lumberton.

Children's Storytime — Pembroke, 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on the third Wednesday of the month at the Pembroke Library, 413 Blaine St, Pembroke.

Music, Rhymes, and Storytime, 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on the third Thursday of each month, Robeson County Public Library, 101 N. Chestnut St., Lumberton.

Children's Storytime — Red Springs, 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on the third Friday of each month at McMillan Memorial Library, Red Springs.

Children's Storytime — Fairmont, 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., on the fourth Tuesday of each month, at the Hector MacLean Library, 106 S. Main St., Fairmont.

Children's Storytime — St. Pauls, 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., on the fourth Wednesday at the Annie H McEachern Library, 223 W. Broad St, St Pauls.

Farmers Market: Wednesdays, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.: On Wednesdays, the Robeson County Farmers Market features vegetables grown in Robeson County and neighboring counties. Local craft vendors are welcome additions to the market, and we encourage you to take the time to get to know them. The market is open every Wednesday from 7 a.m. to noon and on Saturdays through November, or until vendors sell out.

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FEDERAL RECOGNITION UPDATE

Tribe holds meetings with BIA, ICWA

Staff report

PEMBROKE — Lumbee Tribal Chairman John Lowery shared the following on Monday in a video update on the Tribe's federal recognition transition:

"Nikki Bass of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Federal Acknowledgment Office (FAO) recently visited our tribe. Her visit was to review our enrollment processes and to discuss with us next steps related to the transition of our tribe into full federal recognition. Ms. Bass met with our enrollment department employees and talked with them about our enrollment ordinances and policies. She was impressed by our digitalized process and complimented our department on having good proce-

dures in place. We look forward to continuing our work with Nikki and her team at the BIA.

"Last week, our team held an Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) session with attorneys, judges and social workers from across the four-county territory. This training session was to bring everyone up on to speed on the requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act and what obligations the counties, the state and the tribe have towards the protection of our children. With our tribe being so large we, unfortunately, have a lot of children in the foster system and our partners and local court officials need to be working together to ensure the Indian Child Wel-



Lowery

fare Act is followed. "Recently, we set up a meeting with our local health care providers to hear directly from them regarding the health care needs within our tribal communities. This meeting really showed the engagement of our providers, and we were happy with their input and the guidance they provided us. Our tribe is blessed with an abundance of health care workers, and we must work with them as we move forward with Indian Health Services in the future.

"The Lumbee Tribe's Election Board has set a date for the constitution amendment vote allowing gaming. That date will be Tuesday, June 23. In

accordance with Tribal law, the tribal enrollment office will close at 5 p.m. on May 22 as enrollment must be closed a month prior to the election. For those wanting to update their enrollment using the online portal, you will have until 5 p.m. (Tuesday), May 12th so you will receive your card by May 22. This timeline allows our staff the time needed to process your paperwork and have your card ready for pickup by May 22. However, our enrollment office will be open for in-person updates till May 22.

"I look forward to seeing you all on Saturday, May 16, on the campus of UNC Pembroke as we celebrate our full federal recognition. Festivities begin at 9 (a.m.). See you soon!"

Trio arrested during drug search warrant

Staff report

PROSPECT — An investigation by the Robeson County Sheriff's Office Drug Enforcement Division has resulted in the seizure of illegal drugs and a firearm.

On Thursday, Robeson County Sheriff Office Drug Enforcement Division and SWAT Operators executed a search warrant at a location on the 2900 block of Missouri Road, west of Prospect. During the search a quantity of fentanyl, marijuana and a firearm was located and seized.

Michael L. Brayboy, 54, of Maxton was arrested and charged with felony possession of a schedule-VI controlled substance, manufacturing marijuana, maintaining a dwelling for a controlled substance and misdemeanor possession of marijuana paraphernalia.

Brayboy was placed in the custody of the Robe-

son County Detention Center with a \$300,000 secured bond.

Chesney L. Lambert, 23, of Maxton was arrested and charged with possession of fentanyl, possession of drug paraphernalia and carrying a concealed weapon.

Lambert was placed in the custody of the Robeson County Detention Center with a \$250,000 secured bond.

Jenine Ransom, 49, of Maxton was arrested and charged with simple possession of a scheduled-II controlled substance, maintaining a dwelling for a controlled substance, and misdemeanor child abuse.

Ransom was placed in the custody of the Robeson County Detention Center with a \$300,000 secured bond.

The three suspects were also served with outstanding warrants for their arrest.

"The Robeson County

Sheriff's Office will not tolerate ongoing drug activity in our neighborhoods," stated Sheriff Burnis Wilkins. "During the operation, one suspect fled on foot but was quickly located and detained in a nearby wooded area. Ironically, just before investigators were preparing to leave the residence, another individual arrived at the home attempting to purchase illegal drugs directly from the supervisor of the Drug Enforcement Division. Needless to say, that encounter did not turn out well.

"Homes being used to distribute, store and use illegal narcotics typically brings guns, danger, violence, and fear into neighborhoods that hardworking families call home. We will continue to aggressively monitor this property and thoroughly investigate any additional complaints received.

"If the illegal activity continues, the Robeson County Sheriff's Office will begin the early phases of pursuing a nuisance abatement action in an effort to seize and stop the criminal activity associated with this residence.

"Drugs continue to be the root of much of the crime we investigate, especially property crimes and violent offenses that negatively impact our communities. As long as this trend continues, our efforts will only intensify."

The investigation is ongoing and more arrests are likely.

Anyone with information is asked to call the Robeson County Sheriff's Office Drug Enforcement Division at 910-671-3191 or email drugs@robeson-countysonc.gov

"Under our system of justice, every person is presumed to be innocent unless proven guilty in

Trio Arrested During Drug Search Warrant

Michael Lewis Brayboy
 * Felony Manufacturing Schedule VI Substance
 * Possession with Intent to Sell & Deliver Schedule VI Substance
 * Maintaining a Drug Dwelling
 * Possession of Drug Paraphernalia

Chesney Lynn Lambert
 * Felony Possession of Fentanyl
 * Carrying a Concealed Weapon
 * Possession of Drug Paraphernalia

Jenine Ransom
 * Maintaining a Drug Dwelling
 * Misdemeanor Child Abuse
 * Possession of Schedule VI Substance

Image courtesy of RCSO

a court of law," a social media post by RCSO states. "The information contained in this post is not intended to be an expression of opinion regarding guilt. The views and opinions expressed by private citizens who may comment on this post are not adopted by and do not reflect the official policy

or position of this law enforcement agency." "The Sheriff's Office does not issue or determine bond amounts," the post also said. "This is done through a judicial official, such as a judge or magistrate, as per N.C. General Statute 15A-532. Many factors are considered when determining bond amounts."

RCSO arrests suspect in domestic violence assault investigation

Staff report

MAXTON — A domestic assault investigation has led to a suspect being charged with multiple felony offenses.

On Sunday, at 4:03 am, Robeson County Sheriff's Office deputies and investigators responded to call for service in connection to a burglary and kidnapping. The victims in the incident range from the age of 9 to 35 years of age.

Brannigan O. Luther, 30, of Maxton was arrested after fleeing from scene prior to law

enforcement arriving. Luther is charged with first-degree burglary, first-degree kidnapping, four counts of second-degree kidnapping, assault by strangulation, felonious restraint, assault with a deadly weapon inflicting, four counts of assault by pointing, four counts of misdemeanor child abuse, four counts assault with a deadly weapon in the presence of a minor, and four counts of communicating threats.

Luther appeared in district court Monday morning for his first appear-

ance and will remain in the custody of the Robeson County Detention Center without a bond.

The investigation is ongoing. Anyone with information about the case is asked to contact the Robeson County Sheriff's Office at 910-671-3100.

"Under our system of justice, every person is presumed to be innocent unless proven guilty in a court of law," a social media post by RCSO states. "The information contained in this post is not intended to be an expression of

opinion regarding guilt. The views and opinions expressed by private citizens who may comment on this post are not adopted by and do not reflect the official policy or position of this law enforcement agency."

"The Sheriff's Office does not issue or determine bond amounts," the post also said. "This is done through a judicial official, such as a judge or magistrate, as per N.C. General Statute 15A-532. Many factors are considered when determining bond amounts."

Domestic Violence Assault Suspect Arrested

Brannigan Omar Luther
 * 1st Degree Kidnapping
 * 2nd Degree Kidnapping (4 counts)
 * Felony Restraint
 * Assault by Strangulation
 * Assault with a Deadly Weapon Inflicting Serious Injury
 * 1st Degree Burglary
 * Assault by Pointing a Gun
 * Child Abuse (4 counts)
 * Communicating Threats (4 counts)
 * Assault with a Minor Present (4 counts)

Image courtesy of RCSO

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RCC set for Commencement Ceremonies

Staff report

LUMBERTON — Robeson Community College will have its 2026 Commencement Ceremonies this week, celebrating the achievements of this year's graduates.

Commencement exercises will be held on Wednesday, in the A.D. Lewis Auditorium, with ceremonies scheduled for 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Please note:
 — Tickets are required for attendance at all ceremonies.
 — A livestream of each

event will be available via Robeson Community College's official Facebook page for those unable to attend in person.

In addition, the College and Career Readiness Adult High School Graduation will take place on Thursday, at 6 p.m., also in the A.D. Lewis Auditorium.

Family, friends, and community members are invited to join in celebrating the accomplishments of Robeson Community College's graduating class, either in person or online.

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HIS VIEW

A win-win approach to higher education

Colleges and universities are under pressure from many directions, but perhaps none are more important and essential than student recruitment and retention. The competition for student enrollments is stiffening.

At its peak, in 2025, North Carolina had 120,990 high school graduates, but that number is projected to drop to 112,340 by 2030 because of the sharp decline in birth rates. Not only that, but the number of students opting out of enrolling in higher education is swelling.

Dr. Allen Guidry and Chris Stansbury of East Carolina University recently made very interesting presentation to the ECU Board of Visitors, focusing on the increased competition colleges now face to enroll students, but they said an even bigger issue is keeping them enrolled. Nationally we are told the dropout rate of first year college students is between 22-24%. ECU's goal is not just to keep students enrolled but also to achieve the ambitious goal of a four-year graduation rate of 55%.



Tom Campbell
Contributing columnist

An NBC News report indicated just 41-45% graduate within this time frame.

The university understood it needed much more data, such as understanding when and why students might drop out of school. Students face a variety of hurdles during their journey; housing issues, personal problems at home or with an instructor, a bad grade, financial, marriage or other issues. Freshmen have a brand-new environment, away from home for the first time.

Armed with better data, work groups established an initiative titled Pirate 360, an all-out effort to head off dropouts and establish success paths for each student to graduate, a major undertaking.

We were fascinated with ECU's renewed emphasis on and importance of student advisors in the retention and graduation success. With training, better aids and data, coupled with more in-person meetings with the student, the advisor can better understand students and help them identify issues, sometimes before the student even understands they have one. The advisor can help apply "triage" in ways to help the student around, over and through hurdles and stay on track to graduate.

ECU has ambitious goals and expectations for advisors. It wants the advisor to meet with the first-year student during summer orientation, helping the freshman to choose a course schedule, provide contact information and be available. The advisor then checks in with the student before week three, the so-called "drop zone," when students can drop courses. If students need help or expresses concerns the advisor helps assuage their fears, letting them know they aren't alone. The advisor is also to contact the student once again before or after mid-terms to ensure finishing the first semester strong.

Unless there are extenuating circumstances, advisors need to ensure the student enrolls in at least 12-15 hours per semester, the number needed to be eligible for financial aid and to complete the 120 hours needed to graduate in four years. Sometime the advisor needs to intervene to get a student enrolled in courses needed to stay on track.

This BHAG (big hairy ambitious goal) is exciting. It ensures the university is involved in the student's success. This exciting effort is a win-win all around. The big winners are obviously the students, but the university and the state also benefit.

The student (and parents) won't need to spend as much money if the student graduates in four years. More importantly, a UNC Return on Investment Study (ROI) in 2023 found that a graduate with a UNC System Bachelor's degree will earn median lifetime earnings of \$1.2 million more than those entering the workforce without the degree.

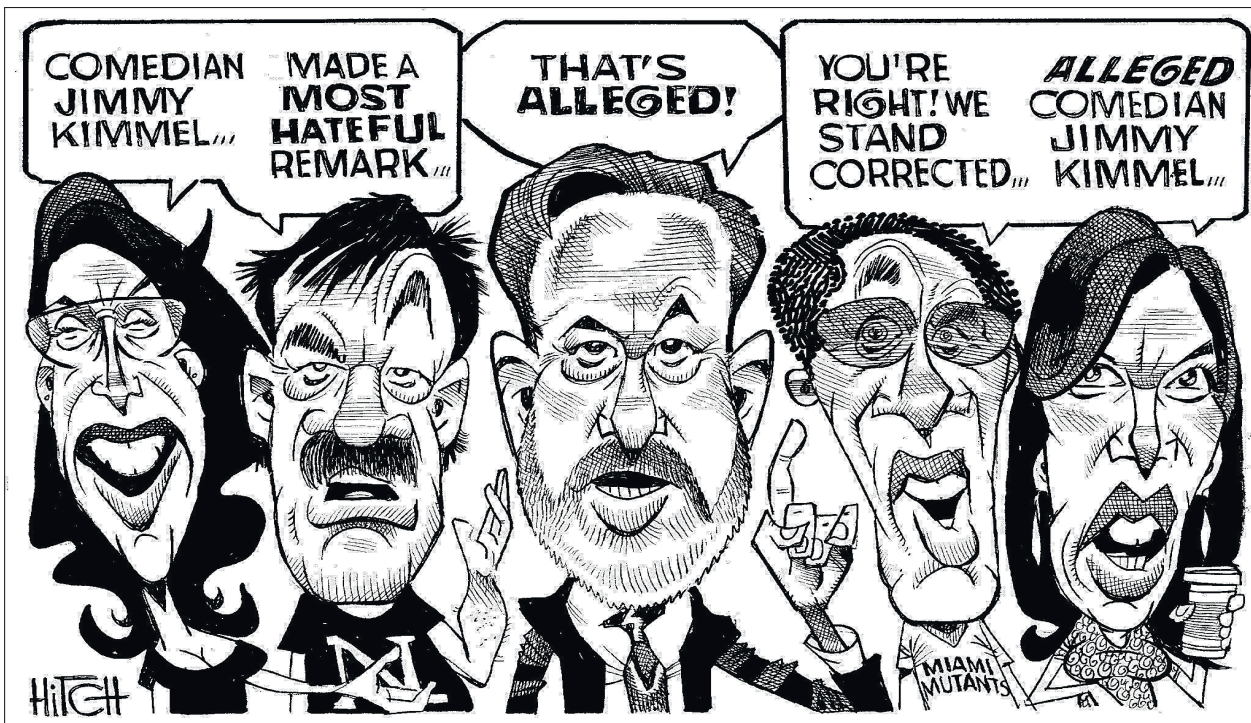
The University also wins by not having to spend as much money recruiting students to replace dropouts. Better retention and higher graduation rates ensure more state funding for the university. But the biggest payoff is the great story it can tell parents and graduating seniors: "Come to our university and we partner with you, really partner, to keep you in school and to graduate in four years."

But North Carolina is also a winner. The ROI study mentioned above shows that for every dollar the state invests the student will earn an additional 23 dollars on its investment. Higher incomes mean a better state economy and more new businesses and jobs being created.

ECU is in the early stages of implementing this new ambitious initiative. They are training advisors, gathering data and supervising the implementation of Pirate 360. But initial reports already indicate success in student retention and lower dropout rates.

We look forward to learning more from ECU. It is likely not the only institution of higher learning addressing these issues, but it promises great potential for the future of our state.

Tom Campbell is a Hall of Fame North Carolina broadcaster and columnist who has covered North Carolina public policy issues since 1965. Contact him at tomcamp@carolinabroadcasting.com.



CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF ROBESON COUNTY

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Melissa Ocean, Vice Chairman, Dist. 2, melissa.ocean@robeson.k12.nc.us

Linda Emanuel, Dist. 3, linda.emanuel@robeson.k12.nc.us

Terry Locklear, Dist. 4, terry.locklear2@robeson.k12.nc.us

Craig Lowry, Dist. 5, craig.lowry2@robeson.k12.nc.us

Crystal Weindel Monroe, Dist. 6, crystal.monroe@robeson.k12.nc.us

Bradley Phillips, Dist. 7, bradley.phillips@robeson.k12.nc.us

Tre' Britt, Chairman, Dist. 8, tre.britt@robeson.k12.nc.us

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Vonta Leach, At-Large, vonta.leach@robeson.k12.nc.us

Henry Brewer, At-Large, henry.brewer@robeson.k12.nc.us

LUMBERTON CITY COUNCIL, 910-272-1346

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Leroy Rising, Precinct 1, lrising@ci.lumberton.nc.us

Melissa Robinson, Precinct 2, mrobinson@ci.lumberton.nc.us

John Carroll, Mayor Pro Tem, Precinct 3, jcarroll@ci.lumberton.nc.us

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John Cummings, Dist. 3, 910-734-9604, district3@co.robeson.nc.us

Faline Locklear Dial, Vice Chairman, Dist. 4, 910-827-1005, falinedial907@gmail.com

Judy Sampson, Dist. 5, 910-374-8939, judy5rcc@gmail.com

David Edge, Chairman, Dist. 6, 910-258-1166, dedge53@yahoo.com

Tom Taylor, Dist. 7, 910-608-9167, district7@co.robeson.nc.us

Lance Herndon, Dist. 8, 910-733-5472.

NORTH CAROLINA (State Offices)

Sen. Danny Earl Britt Jr., R-Dist. 24 (Hoke, Robeson, Scotland), 300 N. Salisbury St., Room 525, Raleigh, NC 27603, 919-733-5651.

Rep. John Lowery, R-Dist. 47 (Robeson), 300 N. Salisbury Street, 306B2, Raleigh, NC 27603-

919-715-0875, John.Lowery@ncleg.gov

Rep. Brenden H. Jones, R-Dist. 46 (Robeson, Columbus), 16 W. Jones St., Room 1227, Raleigh, NC 27601-1096, 919-733-5821 or 919-733-5821.

UNITED STATES (Federal Offices)

U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., 310 New Bern Ave, Suite 122, Raleigh, NC 27601, 919-856-4630, or 113 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510, 202-224-6342

U.S. Sen. Ted Budd, R-N.C., B85 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington DC 20510, (202) 224-3154.

U.S. Rep. Mark Harris, R-N.C., 8th Dist., 126 Cannon House Office Building, 202-225-1976

U.S. Rep. David Rouzer, R-N.C., 7th Dist., 2333 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515, 202-225-2731.

U.S. Pres. Donald Trump, Comments: 202-456-1111, Switchboard: 202-456-1414; Leave a written message: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/>. Mailing address: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20500.

U.S. Capitol Switchboard, 202-224-3121.

White House Switchboard, 202-456-1414.

HIS VIEW

Good riddance to racial gerrymandering

RALEIGH — When the U.S. Supreme Court announced its 6-3 ruling in *Louisiana v. Callais*, placing stringent limitations on the use of race in drawing electoral districts, some friends and acquaintances of mine were shocked and outraged. The court has essentially repealed the 1964 Voting Rights Act, they alleged, forecasting grave consequences for non-white candidates running for future office.

I think they are wholly mistaken. For virtually my entire career as a political commentator, I have consistently and passionately opposed race-based redistricting. While perhaps justified in the immediate aftermath of Jim Crow to remedy state discrimination — a purpose explicitly upheld by the court in *Louisiana v. Callais* — the practice had by the late 1980s already devolved into a squalid and counterproductive system of political apartheid.

Yes, I used the word squalid. While white Democrats in states such as North Carolina had previously rigged the system to keep black candidates from winning party nominations, an alliance of black Democrats and white Republicans now began to use race-based districts to advance their own personal and partisan interests.

The entirely predictable results included a spider-like district in northeastern North Carolina, a snake-like district along the I-85 corridor, and similar outrages in other states.

Over three decades of subsequent litigation, state and federal courts upheld some racial gerrymanders and struck down others, their rulings exhibiting no constitutionally justifiable pattern. Democratic litigants typically made a "Goldilocks" argument that the Voting Rights Act required just enough packing of minority voters to ensure Democrats won the seat in question and forbade so much packing of minority voters that Republicans would be likely to win all the surrounding districts. "Puss in Boots" Republicans, in turn, condemned racial gerrymanders in some cases but embraced them in others, using whichever argument they deemed most expedient.

I enjoy playacting more than most but prefer to see it on theatrical stages, not political ones. Thank goodness the nation's highest court has basically put an end to racial gerrymandering. Indeed, an underappreciated consequence of the decision is that it will

make it easier for reformers to constrain partisan gerrymandering, too.

Voters dislike it. So do I. But when readers ask why we can't just use computer algorithms to draw electoral maps, I have in the past observed that so long as courts interpreted the Voting Rights Act to require race-conscious districts, numerical formulas wouldn't suffice, at least not in states such as North Carolina with sizable and not especially compact populations of non-white voters. If line-drawers first have to draw "VRA districts" before they can apply neutral criteria such as compactness, the resulting maps will inevitably feature weird shapes, confusing jurisdictions, and judgment calls that open the door to partisan favoritism.

In our current *Louisiana v. Callais* world, however, the case for formulaic redistricting just got a lot stronger. As my John Locke Foundation colleague Andy Jackson has argued, North Carolinians should be empowered to amend their constitution to require that electoral districts be "as reasonably compact as practicable" and forbid any use of "voter registration, past election results, the location of incumbents' residences, and any other data which could identify with reasonable certainty the voting tendencies of any group of citizens."

Who should draw these lines — or, more to the point, employ computer algorithms to generate the most-compliant maps? Some states entrust commissions with full authority. I doubt Republican lawmakers in Raleigh (or their Democratic counterparts, should one or both houses of the General Assembly change hands over the next couple of election cycles) will agree to send such a constitutional amendment to the voters.

What I do believe is feasible is something like the Iowa model. Have staffers produce the maps, establish a balanced commission to resolve any disputes in applying the criteria, and then give lawmakers the final say in an up-or-down vote without any power to amend the maps.

I will advocate this reform before the next mandatory redistricting in 2031. I may be wrong — but at least I'm consistent!



John Hood
Contributing columnist

John Hood is a John Locke Foundation board member. His latest books, *Mountain Folk* and *Forest Folk*, combine epic fantasy with early American history (FolkloreCycle.com).

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NORTH CAROLINA

ROBESON COUNTY
26 E 365

NOTICE TO CREDITORS AND DEBTORS

All persons, firms or corporations having claims against Pattie Rowland Davis, deceased, late of Robeson County, North Carolina, are notified to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before August 6, 2026, or be barred from any recovery.

All persons indebted to said estate are asked to make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 6th day of May, 2026.

Donna Davis Floyd, Executrix of the Estate of Pattie Rowland Davis, Deceased, c/o Katherine H. Davis Attorney for the Estate Huggins, Davis & Associates, LLP
 P.O. Box 1571
 Lumberton, NC 28359

5/6 5/13 5/20 5/27 2026

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The Robeson County Board of Commissioners will hold a public hearing at 6:00 p.m. on Monday, May 18, 2026 in the County Administration Center, 550 North Chestnut Street, in the City of Lumberton, North Carolina. The purpose of this hearing is to consider the following requests:

I

Case # 2026 - 963861 -Stephenson Sales & Acquisitions LLC, Orrum Twp. District 3. Consideration of a Rezone Request from Neighborhood Commercial District (C-1) to Residential Agricultural District (R-A) on a 0.61 +/- acre tract, more or less, located on NC Hwy 130 E; Submitted by Stephenson Sales & Acquisitions LLC (Applicant/Owner); Tax Parcel # 0509-01-015.

Case # 2026 - 963673 -R and R Legacy Ventures, LLC (Asa Revels), Philadelphus Twp. District 5. Consideration of a Special Use Permit to allow for the establishment of a Nonprofit for community education and outreach in a Residential Agricultural District (R-A) on 3.21+/- acre tract more or less, located on 1913 Philadelphus Road; Submitted by R and R Legacy Ventures, LLC (Asa Revels) (Applicant/Owner); Tax Parcel # 1512-02-04201.

A copy of this request is available for review at the office of the Clerk to the Board of Commissioners, at 550 North Chestnut Street, City of Lumberton, North Carolina.

THIS the 29th day of April, 2026.

TAMMY S. FREEMAN, CLERK ROBESON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

5/6 5/13 2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA COUNTY OF ROBESON NOTICE TO CREDITORS AND DEBTORS OF JERRY L HAMMONDS DECEASED
 File Number 26E000454-770

The undersigned having qualified as Administrator, of the estate of Jerry L. Hammonds, deceased, late of Robeson County, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 9th day of August, 2026, or be barred from their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate are asked to please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 6th day of May, 2026.

William Hammonds
217 Connor Dr
Red Springs Nc 28377

5/6 5/13 5/20 5/27 2026



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA COUNTY OF ROBESON IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE DISTRICT COURT DIVISION FILE NO.: 26CV001924-770

COUNTY OF ROBESON, a political Subdivision of the State of North Carolina; Plaintiff,

VS.
 ANY AND ALL ASSIGNEES, HEIRS AT LAW AND DEVISEES OF DAVID HENRY HAMILTON, Owner; and CRYSTAL GRAHAM, GUARDIAN AD LITEM OF ANY AND ALL ASSIGNEES, HEIRS AT LAW AND DEVISEES OF DAVID HENRY HAMILTON; Defendants.

NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION

TO: ANY AND ALL ASSIGNEES, HEIRS AT LAW AND DEVISEES OF DAVID HENRY HAMILTON, Owner; and CRYSTAL GRAHAM, GUARDIAN AD LITEM OF ANY AND ALL ASSIGNEES, HEIRS AT LAW AND DEVISEES OF DAVID HENRY HAMILTON; Take notice that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action, and notice of service by Publication begins the 6th day of May, 2026.

The nature of the relief being sought is as follows: foreclosure sale to satisfy unpaid property taxes on your interest in the property described as:

DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY:

Owner(s) of Record: David Henry Hamilton, Title Reference: Deed Book 677, Page 009, PIN No: 101803003, Tax Account No: 14310003, Property Location: Lumberton Township. Hestertown Rd. Lots 6-9 of Map Book 5 Page 45 - Division 1 of Troy Musselwhite Farm.

In Lumberton Township, Robeson County, North Carolina, on the east side of the Old Creek Road, and the west side of Old Hayeswood Street: Being all of Lot Numbers Six (6), Seven (7), Eight (8) and Nine (9), as shown and designated upon a map entitled, "Division No. 1 of Troy Musselwhite's Farm at Hestertown", prepared by L.T. Bryan, under date of February 7, 1942, and recorded in Book of Maps No. 5 at page 45, Robeson County Registry. AND BEING Lots Nos. 6, 7, 8, and 9, a portion of the lots conveyed from Joe Hardin to Roy Junious Hunt by deed dated December 7, 1977 and recorded in Book 424 at Page 56 of the Robeson County Registry. This property is subject to all Right of Ways and Easements of record. This the 1st day of May, 2026. Edward K. Brooks Attorney for Plaintiff State Bar No. 32602 550 N. Chestnut Street Lumberton, NC 28358 910-671-3060 x7353

5/6 5/13 5/20 2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA COUNTY OF ROBESON NOTICE TO CREDITORS AND DEBTORS OF NEAL EDWIN MUSSELWHITE DECEASED
 File Number 26E000476-770

The undersigned having qualified as Executor, of the estate of Neal Edwin Musselwhite, deceased, late of Robeson County, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 16th day of August, 2026, or be barred from their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate are asked to please make immediate payment to the undersigned.

This the 13th day of May, 2026.

Neal Anthony Musselwhite
3409 Spartina Ct
Raleigh, NC 27606

Attorney
George D. Regan, Jr. - Thorp, Clarke & Regan, PA
PO Box 478
St. Pauls, NC 28384
910-865-4059

5/13 5/20 5/27 6/3 2026



NORTH CAROLINA ROBESON COUNTY IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION FILE NO.: 26CV000882-770

NOTICE OF SERVICE BY PUBLICATION

RE: Armond Rochade Davis, Plaintiff, vs. Dominic Geronimo Ide and Gerardo Rodriguez, Defendant(s)

TO: Gerardo Rodriguez 3181 NC Hwy 20 St. Pauls, NC 28384

TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief sought is as follows:

To recover compensatory and punitive damages arising from injuries sustained on or about the 3rd day of May, 2023. You are required to make defense to such pleadings no later than the 8th day of JUNE 2026, said date being forth (40) days from the first publication of this notice; and upon your failure to do so the party seeking service against you will to the Court for the relief sought.

This the 29th day of , APRIL 2026.
 MARK D. LOCKLEAR of the Firm
 The Law Offices of Mark D. Locklear, PLLC
 Post Office Box 1045
 Lumberton, NC 28359
 (910)739-7327
 Counsel for Plaintiff

4/29 5/6 5/13 2026

NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA ROBESON COUNTY IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE DISTRICT COURT DIVISION FILE NO. 26CV001892-770 To: JULIO CESAR ROMERO PADILLA.
 Take notice that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action. The nature of the relief being sought is as follows: Plaintiff VANESSA JAQUELINE HERNANDEZ SOTO seeks permanent custody of your minor children. You are required to make defense to such pleading not later than JUNE 15th 2026, FORTY DAYS AFTER RECEIVING THIS NOTICE and upon your failure to do so the party seeking service against you will apply to the court for the relief sought. This the 6th day of MAY, 2026. By: Stacy Maynor Godwin, Esq./Maynor Law Firm, PLLC, Attorney for Plaintiff 210 South Main Street Red Springs, NC 28377 Telephone: (910) 227-2177 Email: maynorlawfirm@gmail.com

5/6 5/13 2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE DISTRICT COURT DIVISION 25CV004188-770
NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION
ANDRE ALLEN WHITE, Plaintiff,
Vs.
NATASHA PAOLA CRUZ, Defendant.
 TO: NATASHA PAOLA CRUZ
TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action in Robeson County, Lumberton, North Carolina. The nature of relief being sought is as follows: **COMPLAINT.**
 You are required to make a defense to such pleading no later than JUNE 8th 2026, said date being forty (40) days from the first publication of this Notice; and upon your failure to do so, the party seeking service against you will apply to the Court for the relief sought.
 This the 6th day of MAY, 2026
 GRAHAM LAW FIRM, PLLC
 Crystal L. Graham
 Attorney for the Petitioners
 PO Box 965
 Lumberton, NC 28359
 910.735.2876 Telephone
 910.735.2879 Fax

5/6 5/13 5/20 2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE DISTRICT COURT DIVISION 25CV004188-770

NOTICE OF SERVICE OF PROCESS BY PUBLICATION

ANDRE ALLEN WHITE, Plaintiff,

Vs.
NATASHA PAOLA CRUZ, Defendant.

TO: NATASHA PAOLA CRUZ

TAKE NOTICE that a pleading seeking relief against you has been filed in the above-entitled action in Robeson County, Lumberton, North Carolina. The nature of relief being sought is as follows: **COMPLAINT.**
 You are required to make a defense to such pleading no later than JUNE 8th 2026, said date being forty (40) days from the first publication of this Notice; and upon your failure to do so, the party seeking service against you will apply to the Court for the relief sought.
 This the 6th day of MAY, 2026
 GRAHAM LAW FIRM, PLLC
 Crystal L. Graham
 Attorney for the Petitioners
 PO Box 965
 Lumberton, NC 28359
 910.735.2876 Telephone
 910.735.2879 Fax

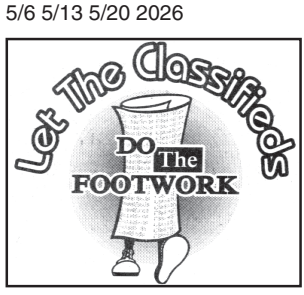
5/6 5/13 5/20 2026

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA COUNTY OF ROBESON NOTICE TO CREDITORS AND DEBTORS OF JERRY L HAMMONDS DECEASED
 File Number 26E000454-770

THIS the 29th day of April, 2026.

TAMMY S. FREEMAN, CLERK ROBESON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

5/6 5/13 5/20 2026



NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The Robeson County Board of Zoning Adjustment will hold a public hearing at 5:00 o'clock p.m. on Monday, May 18, 2026 in the Robeson County Administration Center, 550 North Chestnut Street, in the City of Lumberton, North Carolina. The purpose of this hearing is to consider the following requests:

I

Case # 2026 - 964679- Timothy F. O'Briant, Lumberton Township, District 6. Consideration of a Variance of Robeson County Zoning Ordinance Section 3.6 (h) requiring an accessory building or use shall be located no less than ten (10) feet from any property line. The purpose for this Variance is to allow for the replacement of an existing garage/storage building on a 0.46+/- acre tract, more or less, in a Residential Agricultural District (R-A), located at 56 McKensie St; submitted by Timothy F. O'Briant (Applicant); Timothy F. O'Briant & Caroline O'Briant (Owner). Tax Parcel # 1007-02-022.

A copy of this request is available for review at the office of the Clerk to the Board of Commissioners, at 550 North Chestnut Street, City of Lumberton, North Carolina.

THIS the 29th day of April, 2026.

JAMES L. LOCKLEAR, CLERK ROBESON COUNTY BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT

5/6 5/13 2026

LEGALS

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA COUNTY OF ROBESON NOTICE TO CREDITORS AND DEBTORS OF WILLIAM EDWARD LOCKLEAR DECEASED
 FILE NUMBER 26 E 474
 The UNDERSIGNED having qualified as Executor, or the estate of WILLIAM EDWARD LOCKLEAR, deceased, late of ROBESON COUNTY, this is to notify all persons, firms and corporations having claims against said estate to exhibit them to the undersigned on or before the 13th day of August 2026 or be barred from their recovery. All persons indebted to said estate are asked to please make immediate payment to the undersigned. This the 13th day of May 2026 VALERIE HARRIS 195 ADNELL DR MAXTON, NC. 28364

5/13 5/20 5/27 6/3 2026

LEGALS

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA COUNTY OF ROBESON NOTICE TO CREDITORS AND DEBTORS OF JERRY L HAMMONDS DECEASED
 File Number 26E000454-770

NOTICES

SUBSTITUTE TRUSTEE'S NOTICE OF FORECLOSURE SALE OF REAL PROPERTY

THIS ACTION BROUGHT PURSUANT TO THE POWER AND AUTHORITY contained within that certain Deed of Trust executed and delivered by Katrina Locklear dated January 22, 2025 and recorded on January 29, 2025 in Book 2500 at Page 221 in the Office of Register of Deeds of Robeson County, North Carolina. As a result of a default in the obligations contained within the Promissory Note and Deed of Trust and the failure to carry out and perform the stipulation and agreements contained therein, the holder of the indebtedness secured by said Deed of Trust made demand to have the default cured, which was not met. Therefore, the undersigned Substitute Trustee will place for sale that parcel of land, including improvements thereon, situated, lying and being in the City of Pembroke, County of Robeson, State of North Carolina, and being more particularly described in the heretofore referenced Deed of trust. Said sale will be a public auction to the highest bidder for cash, at the usual place of sale at the Robeson County Courthouse, Lumberton, North Carolina, on **May 22, 2026 at 10:00 AM.**

Address of Property: 940 Union Chapel Road, Pembroke, NC 28372
 Tax Parcel ID: 14040209
 Present Record Owners: The Estate of Katrina Locklear, deceased

The terms of the sale are that the real property hereinbefore described will be sold for cash to the highest bidder. A deposit of five percent (5%) of the amount of the bid or Seven Hundred Fifty Dollars (\$750.00), whichever is greater, is required and must be tendered in the form of certified funds at the time of the sale. The successful bidder will be required to pay revenue stamps on the Trustee's Deed, any Land Transfer Tax, and costs for recording the Trustee's Deed.

The real property hereinabove described is being offered for sale "AS IS, WHERE IS" and will be sold subject to all superior liens, unpaid taxes, special assessments and other encumbrances. Other conditions will be announced at the sale. The sale will be held open for ten (10) days for upset bids, as by law required. The sale will not confirm until there have been ten (10) consecutive days with no upset bids having been filed.

If for any reason the Trustee is unable to convey title to this property, or if the sale is set aside, the sole remedy of the purchaser is the return of the bid deposit. Furthermore, if the validity of the sale is challenged by any party, the Trustee in its sole discretion, if it believes the challenge to have merit, may declare the sale to be void and return the bid deposit. In either event, the purchaser will have no further recourse against the Mortgagor, the Mortgagee, the Mortgagee's attorney, or the Trustee.

Additional notice required for Residential Real Property with Less Than Fifteen (15) Rental Units:

An order for possession of the property may be issued pursuant to G.S. 45-21.29 in favor of the purchaser and against the party or parties in possession by the clerk of superior court of the county in which the property is sold.

Any person who occupies the property pursuant to a rental agreement entered into or renewed on or after October 1, 2007, may, after receiving the notice of sale, terminate the rental agreement by providing written notice of termination to the landlord, to be effective on a date stated in the notice that is at least ten (10) days, but no more than 90 day, after the sale date contained in the notice of sale, provided that the mortgagor has not cured the default at the time the tenant provides the notice of termination. Upon termination of a rental agreement, the tenant is liable for rent due under the rental agreement prorated to the effective date of the termination.

Posted: _____

Witness: _____
 Assistant/Deputy clerk of Superior Court

s/Franklin L. Greene
 Albertelli Law Partners North Carolina, P.A.
 Franklin L. Greene, ESQ., NC Bar # 37896
 205 Regency Executive Park Drive
 Suite 100
 Charlotte, NC 28217
 Tel: 704-970-0391
 fgreene@alaw.net

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Tribe

From page 1A

“Achieving full federal recognition is more than a legislative victory; it is the fulfillment of generations of perseverance, resilience, and unwavering belief in who we are as a people,” said Lowery. “This moment belongs to every Lumbee ancestor who fought to preserve our identity, every leader who carried our story to Washington, and every tribal citizen who never stopped believing that our time would come.”

The celebration will feature a full day of activities designed to highlight Lumbee culture, fellowship and community spirit. With almost 90 vendors, attendees can enjoy a variety of food vendors, arts and crafts, gospel



Cynthia and Timma Locklear hang Tribal colored ribbons in front of Cyna's Jewelers in Pembroke ahead of Saturday's Federal Recognition Celebration at UNC Pembroke.

Photo courtesy of Lumbee Tribe

singing, a mini-powwow, a historical panel, guest speakers and a light show, among other activities.

This Federal Recognition Celebration promises to be an occasion to remember, honoring the

Lumbee Tribe's journey, while looking forward to a future of continued growth and opportunity.

LUMBEE TRIBE FEDERAL RECOGNITION CELEBRATION

Saturday at UNCP

- 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. — Morning entertainment, Main Stage
- 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. — Kids crafts and activities, UC Annex Lawn
- 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. — Museum tours and cultural activities, Old Main
- 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. — Food, arts and crafts vendors, throughout event area
- 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. — Core program, special remarks and recognition with special guests, Main Stage
- 3:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. — Mini Powwow, Student Center Lawn
- 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. — History panel, Main Stage
- 5 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. — Evening entertainment, Main Stage
- 8:45 p.m. — Drone light show

The celebration will be held at 1369 Old Main Road in Pembroke. The special day will also be livestreamed through the Lumbee Tribe website at www.lumbee Tribe.com. Maps of the vendors will be posted on the tribal social media and website.

For more information, scheduling updates, or vendor applications, please visit the official Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina channels.

Tasha A. Oxendine is the public relations manager for the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. Contact her at taoxendine@lumbee Tribe.com.

Floodgate

From page 1A

Love said.

Love said the floodgate will not be complete when hurricane season begins on June 1, but “the lion's share of the improvements” outside of the CSX right of way will be completed this month, and “we're hopeful by the fall, by the height of hurricane season, we'll have an operational gate.”

Council also approved change orders to extend its builders risk insurance policy for the project; to extend its contract with Crowder Construction for 137 days due to the delays, at a cost of \$657,166; and to purchase additional materials and labor for \$47,034.

Farmer's Market on Plaza

Council also held a lengthy discussion about

the Robeson County Farmer's Market being held on the Dick Taylor Plaza in downtown Lumberton. The board, in April, approved for the market to temporarily move to the Plaza, since its regular site in a parking lot on West Third Street currently has far less traffic due to the Fifth Street bridge construction, but the board further discussed the arrangement during Monday's meeting at Cantey's request.

Cantey brought up safety concerns about the market, which used the sidewalks on the perimeter of the Plaza for its opening day on Saturday; the councilman said that people may drive by and ask what vendors are selling, or even stop their cars and get out, as they pass along Elm Street, and suggested that moving the market vendors further into the Plaza and further away from the



Lumberton city employees Rob Armstrong, left, and Roger Morgan Jr., right, are honored by Mayor Bruce Davis, center, for their retirement.

Chris Stiles | The Robesonian

street. After much discussion, Council ultimately arrived at that point of moving the vendors further back.

Approximately 150 to 175 visitors came to the Farmer's Market on its opening day on Saturday, which is the biggest opening day that some long-time vendors have seen, Downtown Development Coordinator Sarah Beth Ward said. That resulted

in about 50- to 75% more foot traffic downtown than on any other recent Saturday, she said.

Other business

In other business, Council:

— Recognized retiring city employees Rob Armstrong, public works director with 20 years of service, and Roger Morgan Jr., senior fire captain with 28 years of service.

— Approved the acceptance of a State Revolving Fund low-interest loan of \$2,168,790 for sewer improvements across Lumberton, which will include sliplining about 9,500 feet of sewer lines and rehabilitating the Freemans Lift Station. The board also approved a \$72,570 project with Hickman Utilities for emergency sewer repairs in three areas, totaling 1,106 linear feet of pipe.

— Approved an amendment to the Recreational Vehicle Parks and Campground Ordinance, which removes the language requiring a 2,000-foot distance from churches, but keeps the requirement for schools; adds the requirement for a City of Lumberton-approved log book; and adds a violations section. It will now be sent to the planning board for approval.

— Approved an amendment to the city's Facilities Naming Policy which

includes directives on the temporary and permanent naming of new projects, and adds a line item that a facility naming must not be detrimental to the City of Lumberton, as determined by Council.

— Approved the financing of \$504,471.31 for the purchase of two backhoes.

— Approved a resolution supporting the Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan for Robeson, Bladen and Columbus counties.

— Was advised that a Community Engagement Meeting will be held at 6 p.m. Thursday at Sandy Grove Baptist Church regarding the redevelopment of the former Scottish Packing Co. site along the Lumber River in South Lumberton. The board also allocated \$700 in Community Revitalization Funds to help the church provide food for the event.

Gas prices fuel inflation surge as Iran war continues

Paul Wiseman
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON — U.S. consumer prices climbed sharply again last month as the 10-week war with Iran delivered higher gasoline prices and more

pain for Americans. The Labor Department's consumer price index rose 3.8% from April 2025, the biggest jump in three years, and up from a 3.3% year-over-year gain in March. On a month-to-month basis,

April prices rose 0.6% from March as gasoline prices rose 5.4%, according to the data released Tuesday. The month-over-month gain was down from a 0.9% increase in overall prices from February to March, when the initial financial shock from the war hit the U.S. economy.

Labor Department figures showed that gasoline prices are up more than 28% compared with a year ago. However, the AAA motor club listed the average regular gallon of gasoline above \$4.50 on Tuesday, about 44% more than it cost last year at this time.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called consumer core prices rose 0.4% last month from March and 2.8% from April 2025, rel-

atively modest readings that suggest the energy price burst has yet to spill over more broadly into prices for other goods.

Grocery prices rose 0.7% from March to April as meat prices rose after they had declined slightly in the month before.

Prices are rising at a time when Americans are already frustrated by the high cost of living. Affordability is likely to be a key issue when voters go to the polls Nov. 3 to determine whether President Donald Trump's Republican Party maintains control of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

“Inflation is the key drag on the U.S. economy now,” Heather Long, chief economist at Navy Federal Credit Union, wrote. “There is a real financial

squeeze underway. For the first time in three years, inflation is eating up all wage gains. This is a setback for middle-class and lower-income households and they know it. They are having to cut back on spending and stretch every dollar.”

In April, average hourly wages fell 0.3% from a year earlier after accounting for inflation — the first year-over-year drop in three years.

Inflation had been dropping more or less steadily since peaking with a 9.1% year-over-year spike in June 2022, a surge caused by supply chain bottlenecks at the end of COVID-19 lockdowns and a jolt for energy prices following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. But inflation has remained above the Federal Reserve's 2%

target. Then, the United States and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28, and Tehran responded by shutting off access to the Gulf of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas passes. That has sent oil prices, and most visibly gasoline, racing higher.

The Fed, which had been expected to cut its benchmark interest rate in 2026, has turned cautious as it waits to see how long the conflict lasts and whether higher energy prices spill over into other products and cause a broader inflationary outbreak.

Trump has lambasted the Fed and its outgoing chair, Jerome Powell, for refusing to slash rates to boost the economy. Kevin Warsh, the president's hand-picked choice to succeed Powell, is expected to be confirmed by the Senate this week; but it's unclear whether Warsh would pursue lower rates given the uncertainties arising from the war — or whether he could persuade his colleagues on the Fed's rate-setting committee to go along if he tried.

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Members of the 2026 UNC Pembroke graduating class at Graduate Commencement on Friday in Pembroke.



A member of the 2026 UNC Pembroke graduating class at Graduate Commencement on Friday in Pembroke.



UNC Pembroke's 2026 Graduate Commencement on Friday in Pembroke. Photos courtesy of UNCP

UNCP graduate commencement celebrates purpose, perseverance

Mark Locklear

For The Robesonian

PEMBROKE — The 517 graduates who crossed the stage Friday night at UNC Pembroke did not arrive there by chance.

They came from hospital floors, classrooms, military service, leadership offices and communities where earning a graduate degree means more than adding another line to a resume. For many, the walk across the stage was a promise kept. A second chance taken seriously. A next step toward serving someone else.

That spirit carried through UNCP's William Howard Dean Graduate School commencement ceremony on Friday, where family members, faculty, staff and friends gathered to celebrate students who pushed through long workdays, personal loss, academic setbacks and seasons when finishing was not guaranteed.

John Herrington, a former NASA astronaut, retired U.S. Navy aviator and citizen of the Chickasaw Nation, delivered the commencement address. Herrington, who became the first enrolled citizen of a Native American tribe to fly in space, spoke less about the view from space and more about what it takes to keep climbing when life does not follow the plan.

He told graduates he once struggled in college and was suspended after his first year. A mentor convinced him to return, a decision that changed the direction of his life.

"Your struggles are temporary; your success is permanent," Herrington said.

It was a fitting message for graduates who knew something about perseverance, including Tedward L. Frazier, whose master's degree marked the fulfillment of a promise years in the making.

Frazier, who earned his Master of Social Work, served in the U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps, with deployments to South Korea, Afghanistan and Iraq. His military experience gave him a deep sense of purpose in helping others, but his mother, Shirley J. Frazier, helped shape the path he would eventually follow.

She worked as a geriatric social worker, and after she died in 2021, Frazier promised at her burial that he would follow in her footsteps.

On Friday night, he did. "This trip has been both positively demanding and incredibly rewarding," Frazier said. "I wish my mother could accompany me on this journey and watch her son keep his word."

Frazier hopes to continue serving veterans and their

dependents through macro social work, policy and planning or higher education.

Asia Tilley and Bobbi Godsey, both MSN graduates, said the program shaped the way they see leadership, patient care and their role in preparing the next generation of nurses.

Tilley, now a clinical nurse IV leader at Duke University, said the program strengthened her confidence, clinical judgment and ability to advocate for patients and colleagues.

"The program helped me view patient care through a broader lens," Tilley said, "by emphasizing teamwork, clear communication and the ways healthcare systems influence outcomes."

For Godsey, who hopes to teach and mentor future nurses, the program helped her find her voice as an educator, even as she pushed through grief after losing her father midway through her studies.

"This program didn't just grow my knowledge," Godsey said. "It strengthened my confidence, my voice and my belief that I truly belong in this role."

Other graduates carried their own stories of persistence and purpose into the ceremony.

Shaina Platt, who earned her Master of Arts in Teaching, will return to her art classroom with a stronger sense of what art can give students beyond a

finished project.

Her time at UNCP deepened her belief that students should have room to explore, make choices and trust their own ideas. In her classroom, that belief has already taken shape through a ceramics project where students created 576 bowls and raised more than \$1,500 for local food distribution charities.

James Stevens, an active-duty Army service member who earned his Master of Arts in Sport Administration, used his graduate research to examine work-life balance for women coaches in the NCAA. His leadership philosophy, shaped by military service and ROTC, is simple: develop leaders who can carry the work forward.

For Daniel Leonard, who earned his MBA while balancing an executive role, family responsibilities and a career move, graduate school was not separate from the work he was already doing. It sharpened his approach to strategy, data and leadership in real time.

"It's very easy to do difficult things when you have your priorities straight and go to work each day with a mission of servitude in mind," Leonard said.

Together, their stories reflected the broader meaning of Friday's ceremony. These graduates were not only finishing their degrees. They were

preparing to return to their hospitals, schools, military units, businesses and communities with more knowledge, more confidence and a clearer sense of purpose.

Herrington urged them to carry that purpose with gratitude.

He recalled being advised during a spacewalk to stop and take in the moment, not for a photograph, but for memory. Looking out over Earth from the International Space Station, he said he felt both small and responsible.

That responsibility, he told graduates, now belongs to them too.

"Honor those that came before you and help to make this world a better place," Herrington said.

As the ceremony ended, the graduates walked out with more than degrees. They carried the names, sacrifices and stories that helped them arrive at this moment.

And as Herrington reminded them, the next chapter is not something waiting to happen on its own.

"The future doesn't just happen to you," he said. "The future begins with you."

Mark Locklear is a public communications specialist with UNC Pembroke communications & marketing. Reach him by email at mark.locklear@uncp.edu.



Members of the UNC Pembroke graduating class of 2026 at Saturday's Undergraduate Commencement in Pembroke. Photos courtesy of UNCP



UNC Pembroke graduate Lydia Mansfield takes a photo with Chancellor Robin Cummings during Saturday's Undergraduate Commencement.



Graduate Melanie Duckstein at UNC Pembroke's Undergraduate Commencement on Saturday in Pembroke.

UNCP

From page 1A

Duckstein and her husband, Michael, traveled from Alaska, where he is stationed at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, to participate in Saturday's commencement ceremony.

"With this academic success, I found my purpose, my direction and my motivation for my next chapter of my life," she said.

Former NASA astronaut and keynote speaker John Herrington encouraged graduates to embrace resilience, adaptability and purpose as they enter the next chapter of their lives.

Reflecting on his own journey — from a first-generation college student who once struggled academically to a naval officer and astronaut — Herrington emphasized the importance of perseverance.

"Your struggles are temporary; your success is permanent," said Herrington, who was awarded an honorary Doctor of Science degree.

Herrington urged graduates to trust both their education and instincts when facing real-world challenges.

"Marry your knowledge to your common sense," said Herrington, a member of the Chickasaw Nation and the first enrolled citizen of a federally recognized American Indian tribe to fly in space.

"When things don't go as planned... be ready and be creative," Herrington added. "The feeling of satisfaction in

completing the task successfully will last a lifetime."

"Appreciate where your journey takes you... and be the change maker in a world that so desperately needs your intelligence and thoughtfulness," he said.

A total of 1,173 students graduated during Spring Commencement, including 656 undergraduates and 517 from The William Howard Dean Graduate School.

Also on Saturday, UNCP celebrated its first full cohort of 14 students graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity. Among graduates pursuing next steps, Morgan Moose will transition to N.C. State through UNCP's partnership with the College of Veterinary Medicine, while Bianka Santos has been accepted into the UNC Chapel Hill pharmacy program.

At opposite ends of the age spectrum, Patricia Brackett and Nick Smith embodied the breadth of journeys celebrated at commencement.

At 74, Brackett fulfilled a lifelong goal, decades in the making. After earning her bachelor's degree in 1974, she delayed graduate school to support her family before returning to pursue a Master of Arts in Teaching.

"It's a relief," Brackett said. "I've achieved my goal of what I set out to do... I decided it was my turn."

Now working as an instructional assistant in special education, she said her life experience sets her apart.

"I can relate to the students... I bring life experience," she said, encouraging others: "Don't listen to people who say you're too old."

Meanwhile, 19-year-old Nick Smith of Hamlet, N.C., the university's youngest graduate, is already looking ahead to the next step.

"I think it is crazy... I'm proud to say that I am graduating so early," Smith said.

A criminal justice major who earned his associate degree through early college, Smith plans to pursue a graduate degree in public administration and work in child protective services.

Smith said he wants to help as many people as possible while challenging negative perceptions about those who work in the field.

Cameron Ferguson's graduation marked the start of his next chapter as he commissions as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army.

"This moment means everything," Ferguson said. "It's not about me — it's about my family and making them proud."

A criminal justice major and track and field athlete from Georgia, Ferguson said he found direction through Army ROTC and the influence of his uncle, Lt. Col. Jamaal Kirkland, a 2009 UNCP graduate serving at the Pentagon.

"I didn't want to be a product of my environment," Ferguson said.

Now preparing to train as an Air Defense Artillery officer, Ferguson credited his support system — including his adoptive parents, Darrel and Niki Morris — for helping him reach this milestone.

"I wouldn't be here without the people who invested in me," he said.

Crossing the stage signified a pow-

erful milestone for Dayanara Portela-Velazquez — one defined by perseverance, cultural pride and determination.

"It means a lot," she said. "I am reaching this milestone as a Hispanic. I feel like I'm representing my culture... you don't see many people in my culture graduate from college."

A nursing major from Shannon and a first-generation college graduate, Portela-Velazquez said her journey required extra discipline after being diagnosed with ADHD.

"Your disability does not define you," Velazquez said. "You just have to put in more work, and it may take a lot longer."

Up next for Portela-Velazquez: launching her career as a new graduate operating room nurse at FirstHealth in Pinehurst.

For Gavin Maxwell, crossing the stage marked the culmination of years of perseverance and determination.

Born with congenital bilateral hearing loss and having undergone 12 surgeries, Maxwell refused to let his condition define him.

"It's been a motivator," he said. "I don't let it define who I am."

A transfer student who found his footing at UNCP, Maxwell excelled in the kinesiology program, earning Chancellor's List honors every semester while gaining hands-on research experience.

Now a first-generation college graduate, Maxwell will continue his journey this fall in UNCP's new occupational therapy program.

"The best way of overcoming a challenge is to get through it," he said.

UNCP launches program to address STEM teacher shortage

Adrielle Cooper
For The Robesonian

PEMBROKE — UNC Pembroke is launching a new program to help more students become licensed science and math teachers and serve in the classrooms where they are needed most.

The Burroughs Wellcome Fund (BWF) Brave Innovators of STEM Education program will recruit undergraduate and transfer students pursuing science or mathematics education and provide the financial, academic and professional support needed to help them complete their degrees, earn licensure and begin their teaching careers.

The program comes at a time when school districts across southeastern North Carolina continue to face a shortage of qualified math and science teachers, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

Through its partnerships with local school systems, UNCP has seen how difficult it can be for districts to fill these roles and how important it is to prepare teachers who understand the region, its schools and its students.

“This program reflects our deep commitment to preparing future teachers for the communities that need them most,” said Tracy Mulvaney, dean of UNCP’s School of Education. “Through the BWF Brave Innovators of STEM Education program, we are removing barriers for talented students while building a strong, sustainable pipeline of math and science teachers prepared to serve rural and underserved

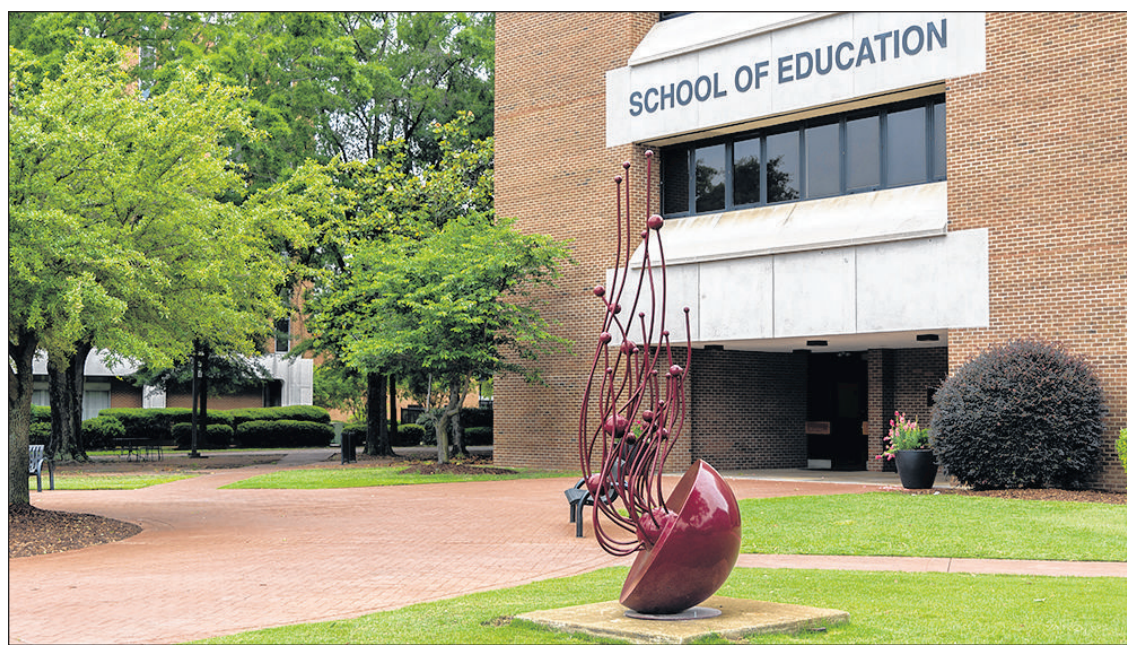


Photo courtesy of UNCP

The UNC Pembroke School of Education is launching the Burroughs Wellcome Fund (BWF) Brave Innovators of STEM Education program to support educators entering the science and math fields.

districts across southeastern North Carolina.”

For selected students, the program may cover tuition, fees, books, housing, meals and required course and laboratory materials.

That support is designed to ease some of the financial pressure that can make it harder for students to enter and complete teacher preparation programs, especially students who are first-generation, low-income or historically underrepresented in STEM fields.

In return, scholars will commit to teaching in the region the program was created to serve. For each year they receive the scholarship, students will teach one year in one of UNCP’s partner school districts, including Public Schools of Robeson County, Scotland

County Schools, Whiteville City Schools, Sampson County Schools and Columbus County Schools.

The program also pairs financial support with the kind of guidance students often need to stay on track. Scholars will receive individualized advising, faculty mentoring and monthly professional development focused on licensure readiness, STEM content, instructional practice, wellness and leadership.

They will also take part in district visits, research opportunities, conference experiences and clinical placements that connect their coursework to real classrooms.

Professor Melissa Edwards said that local connection is one of the most important parts of the program.

“Students will build confidence through meaningful classroom experiences alongside experienced faculty,” Edwards said. “Through our partnerships with local school districts, they will learn and practice in the same communities they may one day serve. This is more than a scholarship. It is a pathway that supports future educators as they prepare to answer the call to teach.”

The support will continue as students move from college into the classroom. During their first year of teaching, the BWF Brave Innovators scholars will receive school-based mentoring, stipends and support through the UNCP New Teacher Support Program, which helps beginning teachers build confidence during one

of the most important years of their careers.

Professor Hannah Clayton said that level of support can make a difference in who enters the field and who remains in it.

“By reducing financial barriers and offering targeted academic and professional support, this program not only attracts future teachers, but also helps them stay the course,” Clayton said. “For our region, where STEM teacher shortages are especially pronounced, that kind of support can make a real difference in preparing educators who are ready to enter local classrooms and remain there long term.”

For UNCP, the BWF Brave Innovators builds on a mission that has shaped the university since its founding: preparing educators to serve southeastern North Carolina.

The program is not only about filling vacancies. It is about preparing teachers who are connected to the region, supported through their training and ready to make a lasting difference in local schools.

For students selected for the program, the BWF Brave Innovators offers a clearer path into STEM teaching. For local districts, it offers a stronger pipeline of teachers who know the communities they will serve. And for the region, it is an investment in the classrooms where the next generation of scientists, engineers, health professionals and problem-solvers will first discover what is possible.

Adrielle Cooper is the communications and marketing manager for academic affairs for UNC Pembroke.

St. Pauls senior wins new car in Driven 2 Excel program

Staff report

LUMBERTON — For St. Pauls High School

graduating senior Elena Hernandez Velazquez, Monday night will definitely be one she won’t

forget. That’s the night she won a 2026 Honda Civic from Lumberton Honda in Beasley Media

Group’s Driven 2 Excel program.

Hernandez Velazquez was one of 358 seniors from Public Schools of Robeson County who qualified this year. She was so confident she wouldn’t win the car, she only told her parents she was going to be at “a school event.” When she called to tell them she won a car, they didn’t quite believe her either.

“They were like ‘No way, you’re kidding right?’” she said as she sat in the front seat of her new Honda. “I didn’t think I was going to win, so I was like ‘Why tell them?’”

Beasley Media of Fayetteville (Foxy 99, The Big 95.7 KML, My Kiss Radio, Sunny 94.3, 96.5 JACK FM, 107.7 The Bounce) awarded Hernandez Velazquez the car from Lumberton Honda for her academic and attendance achievements this school year. To qualify, Robeson County Schools students had to maintain a GPA of 3.2 for the 2025-2026 school year, and have had no



Jessica Sealey | PSRC

St. Pauls High School senior Elena Hernandez Velazquez, left, sits behind the wheel of the 2026 Honda Civic which she won at Monday’s Driven 2 Excel event at Lumberton Honda. She is pictured with Lumberton Honda General Manager Kent Locklear.

more than five unexcused absences.

Hernandez Velazquez will be heading to Fayetteville Technical Community College in the fall, and she hopes to transfer later to UNC Chapel Hill. She’s going into computer science, after she said she fell in love with the idea during the pandemic.

Lumberton Honda General Manager Kent Locklear handed her the keys to the new car, as he said he loves celebrating the students in Robeson

County.

“I’m not out here to give away a car, I’m out here to celebrate with all of you graduating seniors,” Locklear said. “What you’ve done to get to this point is incredible and I’m proud to celebrate with you all.”

Locklear also continued his tradition of awarding \$1,000 to a teacher or faculty member of the PSRC system. This year’s winner was Candice Maynor, who works in the central office.

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Sports

The Robesonian

Wednesday, May 13, 2026 • Section B



Photos by Jacob Husson | The Robesonian
Purnell Swett's Sarah Hunt (4) kicks the ball as South Iredell's Paityn Rollag (10) defends during Monday's first-round 7A state-playoff game in Pembroke.

Lady Rams fall to South Iredell

Jacob Husson
The Robesonian

PEMBROKE — The 14th-seeded Purnell Swett girls soccer team saw its season come to an end Monday as the Rams fell 5-1 to South Iredell in the first round of the 7A state playoffs. This was the Rams' third loss in their last four games to end the season.

"The game was just compositive of how the season went," Purnell Swett coach Alaric Strickland said. "The game was

just compositive of how the season went. We were flat in the first half but we played hard and fought for the second half and that's been the up and down season for us all year."

South Iredell (10-10-1), the No. 19 seed in the 7A West Region, took the lead with the opening goal coming with 31:56 left in the first half. The Vikings added insurance goals with 15:04 and 0:59 left to go into halftime up



Purnell Swett's Blakely Graham (12) and South Iredell's Jadira Cespedes (12) battle for possession during Monday's first-round 7A state-playoff game in Pembroke.

See SOCCER | 2B

LATE FRIDAY

Walk-off sends Rams to 3rd round

Jacob Husson
The Robesonian

PEMBROKE — The Purnell Swett softball won Friday's second round playoff softball game in dramatic fashion. After a long struggle against Cape Fear in which neither team could score, Angel Chavis drove in Jayla Graham with an RBI single to earn a 2-1 victory and advance to the third round.

"It takes a team (to win), runners were in place and Angel came up with that big hit to take us to round three," Purnell Swett coach Amy Lancaster said.

Purnell Swett (16-5), the No. 5 seed in the 7A East Region, played at No. 4 Cleveland in the third round on Tuesday. That game's result was unavailable at press time.

Prior to the game winner, the Rams scored

on an RBI single from Braci Woods that brought Nylah Johnson home in the bottom of the fourth inning. No. 12 Cape Fear (17-8) scored their only run in the top of the fifth when Addie Davis

doubled to bring home Karalina Tomasic.

Purnell Swett's Kamryn Locklear earned the win, pitching all seven innings, allowing only one run on

See SOFTBALL | 2B

The result of Tuesday's Purnell Swett-Cleveland third-round softball state-playoff game was unavailable at press time. For the full story, visit robesonian.com or see Saturday's print edition.



Jacob Husson | The Robesonian
Purnell Swett's Angel Chavis puts the ball in play during Friday's second-round 7A state-playoff game against Cape Fear in Pembroke.

Rams' Locklear T14 after 1st round of golf states

Staff report

PINEHURST — Purnell Swett's Logan Locklear is tied for 14th after the opening round of the North Carolina High School Athletic Association state championship.

Locklear shot a 5-over-



Locklear

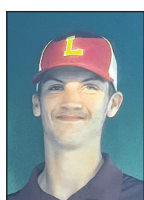
par 77 on Monday in the first round of the 36-hole championship, being played at Pinehurst No. 8.

Lumberton's Jesse Pittman is tied for 46th after a first-round 89.

Locklear is the first Purnell Swett boys golfer

to make a state championship appearance since his uncle, Ian Locklear, in 2011, and Pittman is Lumberton's first state qualifier in recent history.

Locklear reached states with a tie for fifth at the 7A Central Regional last



Pittman

week in Greensboro, shooting 4-over-par 75 in the 18-hole tournament, and Pittman finished tied for 10th with 77 to also advance.

Results from Tuesday's final round were unavailable at press time.

Red Devils' Ellerbe, Dogs' relay win at track regionals

Staff report

WILSON — Nine individual athletes and two relay teams from Robeson County advanced to the state championships, while Red Springs' T.J. Ellerbe and St. Pauls' boys 4x100 relay team won regional titles, as the North Carolina High School Athletic Association contested track regionals last weekend.

Those who advanced will compete in the state championships this week at North Carolina A&T in Greensboro. Red Springs will compete in the 4A state championship on Wednesday, while St. Pauls will compete in 5A and Lumberton in 7A on Friday.



Ellerbe

4A East Regional

Ellerbe's regional championship came in the long jump, as the Red Springs senior made a jump of 22 feet, 9.5 inches, beating runner-up Tiquavius Sivels of SouthWest Edgecombe by 8.5 inches.

Others advanced to states by finishing in the top four at regionals, or among the next four best times/scores across the remaining competitors from all three regionals in each event. Those wild-card qualifiers included several from Red Springs who advanced to states.

The Red Devils' Tamaerious Brown finished fifth in the discus at 131-4 and advanced to states. Teammate Kamarion McBryde narrowly missed advancing after finishing sixth at 131-1, while Red Springs' Elijah Locklear was ninth at 112-10.

Brown and McBryde also advanced to states in the shot put. McBryde finished sixth at 45-8 and Brown seventh at 43-7 to earn wild-card spots. Red Springs' Christopher Hobson was 10th at 40-8.

Red Springs' Naxary Johnson also qualified for states in the triple jump, finishing fifth at 40-8.

In the 300-meter hurdles, Timothy Putman advanced to states after finishing sixth at 42.88.

Red Springs' 4x100 relay team finished eighth in 44.59, but that was still enough to earn one of the four wild-card berths to states.

Other local 4A boys results included Fairmont's Nicholas Smithers, who was eighth in the 1600 meters at 5:11.89, and the Red Springs 4x400 relay, which was 12th at 3:49.84.

In the girls meet, the highest local finisher was Fairmont's 4x100 relay team, which was seventh in 54.85.

Red Springs' Takiah Patterson finished eighth in the discus at 87-2.5.

Fairmont's Celessa Chavis was eighth in the high jump at 4-4.

In the 300-meter hurdles, Fairmont's Neveah Odum was 10th at 57.55, with teammates Jalaysia Rich 12th at 1:05.97 and Chavis 13th in

See TRACK | 2B

LOCAL ROUNDUP

Pirates, Red Devils fall in soccer playoffs

Staff report

SPRING LAKE — The Lumberton girls soccer team dropped its first-round road playoff match 5-1 to Overhills Monday. Every goal came in the second half of this 7A East Region contest.

The No. 19 Pirates' (10-12) only goal came off the foot of Payton Emmanuel.

No. 14 Overhills' (8-6-4) Skylar Hayes scored three goals while Aubrey Penny and Samantha Crumley both scored one goal. Valencia Daniels had three assists while London Tetlow had one.

Lumberton lost its last two games this season. Overhills advanced to play Thursday at No. 3 Ashley.

Red Springs girls soccer eliminated by Roanoke Rapids

The Red Springs girls soccer team dropped its 4A first-round playoff match, losing 5-0 to the Roanoke Rapids Yellow Jackets.

The Yellow Jackets' Claire Walker had four goals while Sofie Wade had a goal and an assist. Sloan Bullock, Emily Young and Maggie Fowler also each had an assist.

The Red Devils (7-12), the No. 20 seed in the 4A East Region, ended their season on a three-game losing streak.

Roanoke Rapids, the No. 13 seed, will play at No. 4 Ledford in the second round.



Purnell Swett's Kamryn Locklear throws a pitch during Friday's second-round 7A state-playoff game against Cape Fear in Pembroke.



Purnell Swett's Nylah Johnson swings at a pitch during Friday's second-round 7A state-playoff game against Cape Fear in Pembroke.

Softball

From page 1B

five hits, striking out four. Chavis finished the game 1-for-4 with that game winning RBI single while Braci Woods finished 2-for-3, scoring Purnell Swett's other RBI, and Lanna Haggans and Shaniya Lewis each had two hits. "It's just amazing," Chavis said. "It's something you can't even explain." "(Getting this win) means a lot," Kamryn Locklear said. "This is the first time we've gotten into round three." This marks the first time Purnell Swett has made it to the third round of the NCHSAA softball playoffs since 2022. This was also Purnell Swett's fourth straight win, dating back to their 10-4 win while visiting Gray's Creek on April 21.

Jacob Husson can be reached at 910-816-1977 or by email at jhusson@robesonian.com.



Purnell Swett's Zaylee Hunt puts the ball in play during Friday's second-round 7A state-playoff game against Cape Fear in Pembroke.

Photos by Jacob Husson | The Robesonian

Soccer

From page 1B

3-0. The Vikings scored with 36:15 left in the game to take a 4-0 lead before the Rams' Marley McKinney got them on the board with 30:52 to go, making it 4-1 Vikings. South Iredell added one final goal with 7:14 remaining to win the game 5-1. Purnell Swett's McKinney, Maryah Locklear, Jenna Locklear, Kiley Locklear and Rylie Hammonds all played their final game as a member of the Rams (10-9-1) in this loss.

"It's been a pleasure to coach the seniors," Strickland said. "They've done a lot for the program over their four years and I really appreciate everything they've done for the program and I wish them all the best going forward." Replacing these seniors will be important if Purnell Swett wants to take the next step and become a more consistent soccer team, game in and game out. South Iredell will play Thursday at No. 3 Grimsley in the second round. Jacob Husson can be reached at 910-816-1977 or by email at jhusson@robesonian.com.

Track

From page 1B

1:07.17. Two Fairmont relay teams each finished 10th; the 4x200 relay finished in 1:56.82 and the 4x400 relay finished in 5:12.54. Red Springs' Lariza Salvador Saldivar was 13th in the 1600 meters at 7:09.98. **5A East Regional** St. Pauls' boys 4x100 relay team won the regional championship, in the meet held in Rocky Mount, with a run of 43.13. The Bulldogs beat runner-up Hunt by 0.22 seconds.

The Bulldogs' Devin Suggs finished fourth in the long jump to automatically advance to states with a score of 20-6.5. St. Pauls' Antonio Arnold advanced to states as a wild card in the 110-meter hurdles, finishing sixth in 16.18. He also ran the 300-meter hurdles and was 13th in 44.24. Suggs was also sixth in the triple jump at 40-9, but did not advance, while the Bulldogs' Aubrey Cobbs was eighth at 39-2. Malikah Locklear was eighth in the 100-meter dash at 11.55 for the Bulldogs, while Antwan McKoy was also eighth in the discus at 124-11. McKoy also finished ninth in the shot put at

43-4. St. Pauls' boys 4x400 relay team finished 10th in 3:47.27, while the 4x200 relay was 14th in 1:35.87. In the girls meet, Leah Humphrey was the lone St. Pauls competitor, participating in three events. She finished sixth in the long jump at 15-5, seventh in the 100-meter dash at 13.16 and 12th in the 200-meter dash at 27.32. **5A Central Regional** Two Lumberton girls athletes advanced to states with fourth-place regional finishes at the 5A Central Regional in Waxhaw. Ariana Alford was fourth in the 400-meter dash at 58.17.

Giselle Leach was fourth in the shot put in 34-2.5. Also in the girls meet, Lumberton's 4x100 relay team finished eighth in 50.02, while the 4x200 relay team was 11th in 1:47.18. In the boys meet, Lumberton's highest finisher was Taylor Martin, who was ninth in the shot put in 43-5.5. Martin was also 12th in the discus in 116-7. Nate Lawson finished 10th in the 1600 meters at 4:39.44, and was 13th in the 3200 meters at 10:23.63. Lumberton's boys 4x200 relay team finished 11th in 1:36.52, while the Pirates' 4x200 relay was 12th in 45.14.

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ROBESON COUNTY ATHLETIC SPOTLIGHT


PURNELL SWETT HIGH SCHOOL



LOGAN LOCKLEAR
 Golf

Purnell Swett junior golfer Logan Locklear finished in a tie for fifth at the North Carolina High School Athletic Association's 7A Central Regional last week, shooting 4-over-par 75 at Starmount Forest in Greensboro. Locklear advanced to the state championship, becoming the Rams' first state qualifier since his uncle, Ian Locklear, in 2011.

PURNELL SWETT HIGH SCHOOL



KAMRYN LOCKLEAR
 Softball, Basketball, Volleyball

Purnell Swett's Kamryn Locklear is hitting .547 in her junior season for the Rams softball team, with 34 runs scored and 15 RBIs, while also going 7-0 in the circle with an 0.68 ERA, striking out 35 batters in 41 innings. This includes a complete-game five-hitter allowing one run in Friday's second-round 7A state-playoff win over Cape Fear.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Bobby's belief made the Braves go

ATLANTA — When Sid Bream stood on second base on Oct. 14, 1992, carrying with his legs one of the most significant runs in Atlanta Braves history, he knew Bobby Cox believed in him.

Sure, there were some second-guessing why the notoriously slow first baseman wasn't being pinch-run for in the bottom of the ninth inning of Game 7 of the National League Championship Series. Legendary broadcaster Skip Caray, on the Braves radio broadcast, even suggested eventual Hall of Fame pitcher Tom Glavine be brought in to run.

But Bream knew he had the faith of his manager. That season, when Bream, bad knees and all, competed in a foot race against catcher Damon Berryhill, most of his teammates put money on Berryhill to win. Bobby Cox, though, put \$20 on Bream, who went on to win the race.

That October night 34 years ago, Bream won another race, beating the throw of Barry Bonds and the tag of Mike LaValliere after the base hit of pinch-hitter Francisco Cabrera to walk off the Pittsburgh Pirates in thrilling fashion for the National League pennant, one of five that Cox's Braves won in a nine-year span of the 1990s.

Bobby Cox, the most significant figure in modern Atlanta Braves baseball, died Saturday at the age of 84. This story from Bream, which he told as, by coincidence, I heard him at a speaking

engagement the day of Bobby's death, was one of the countless tales that has been told of Bobby's belief in his players, who never, ever doubted that their skipper had their back.

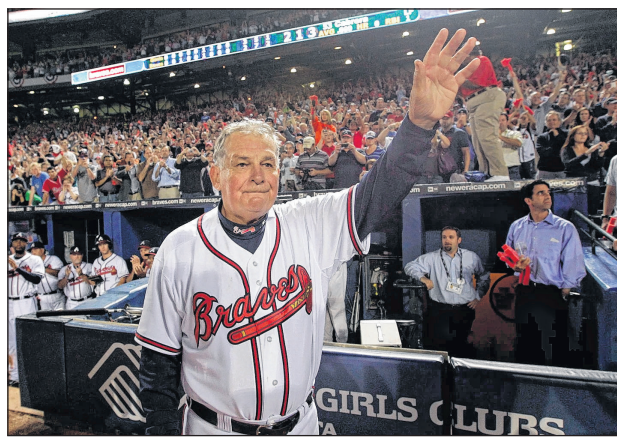
Bobby would often use a pitcher again the next day after a rough outing, or even move a slumping player up in the lineup, showing his faith in them. Multiple players have said since his death that Bobby made them

feel like better players than they actually were.

His being a players' manager extended off the field too, with players allowed to play golf during spring training so long as they got their work in. Bobby even allowed Jeff Francoeur to fake an injury in one spring training game so that he could leave early to make a tee time with Tiger Woods.

While he was perhaps the ultimate players' manager, it doesn't mean he couldn't be stern. Bobby's teams took a very businesslike approach. No music in the clubhouse. No sunglasses resting on the bill of a player's cap, lest they cover the "A" that represented a team and a city.

Andrew Jones learned the hard way in 1998 when he was benched, mid-inning, after only lightly jogging to a ball in center field. Jones, though, says it was a turning point, both in his relationship with his manager and in his career, which will be enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame this summer. Saturday, Jones



Atlanta Braves manager Bobby Cox waves to fans after a loss to the San Francisco Giants in Game 4 of the National League Division Series Oct. 11, 2010 in Atlanta.

called Bobby "my second father," and other players have said the same since his passing.

"He was a manager who felt like a teammate, a friend and a father figure," former Braves pitcher Tim Hudson once said. "I'm proud that I played for one of the best managers a player could ask for."

Respect for Bobby was league-wide. When the eventual world champion San Francisco Giants eliminated the Braves in the playoffs in 2010, ending Bobby's managerial career, Bobby came onto the warning track to wave to the applauding fans — and the Giants stopped their on-field celebration, turned towards the first-base dugout, and joined in the applause. I haven't seen a gesture like that, under those kind of celebratory circumstances, before or since.

A personal memory from Bobby's final season is the Braves clinching a wild-card playoff berth on the final day of the regular season with a thrilling, 8-7 win against the Phillies. This was the most excited I've ever seen my dad over a

Braves win (though we weren't together for the 2021 World Series clincher) — because they just had to make the playoffs that year for Bobby.

As for personal interactions with Bobby, I had only a simple one, but it was still meaningful. I was at Truist Park for Braves Alumni Weekend in 2018, and as a parade was staged on the far end of The Battery, Bobby's convertible drove by. I waved, and he waved back — not to a group of people I was in, but specifically to me. Three hours before first pitch, I could've gone home right then feeling satisfied with my trip to the ballpark.

Bobby won 2,504 games as a manager, the fourth-most in MLB history. His teams won five NL pennants and the 1995 World Series championship, Atlanta's first major professional sports title.

Bobby won a peer-voted Manager of the Year, awarded by The Sporting News, eight times during his career, twice as many as anyone else.

After a brief playing career with the New York Yankees, Bobby first

managed the Braves from 1978-81, and when he was fired by then-owner Ted Turner, who also died last week, Turner said "I'd like to hire somebody like Bobby Cox, if I hadn't just fired the guy." After Bobby spent four seasons managing the Toronto Blue Jays, Turner brought him back in 1985 as the general manager, a role in which he built the foundation for the Braves' 1990s success by signing or trading for the likes of John Smoltz, Chipper Jones, Steve Avery, Ron Gant and David Justice, among others.

Then he became manager again in 1990, and won 14 straight division titles, a record, starting in 1991.

"He never played an inning for the Atlanta Braves. He never threw a pitch and he never got a hit," said Chipper Jones, who Bobby drafted No. 1 overall in 1990 en route to a Hall of Fame career. "But he was responsible for more than 2,000 wins."

Bobby's longevity in baseball is showcased by the fact that he played with Mickey Mantle, in his last season in 1968, and managed Freddie Freeman, in his first season in 2010.

And then there's the ejections. Between the regular season and playoffs, Bobby was thrown out of a record 162 games — 41 more than the second-most, and a mark that will likely never be touched.

But while contemporary managers such as Lou Piniella or Earl Weaver got reputations as hot-heads for argument antics — and while Bobby could definitely get heated in

the moment of those arguments — you won't hear Bobby often labeled as ill-tempered. Instead, it's well-known that Bobby simply argued to protect his players. If one of the Braves felt slighted on the field and showed their displeasure to an umpire, it didn't take long before No. 6, in the spikes he wore until the day he retired, was out of the dugout and in that umpire's face.

His players unquestionably appreciated that fight.

"I hated letting him down and I think most everybody who ever played for him felt the same way," Glavine said. "I think that's why you heard so many guys, they would run through a wall for him. It's because we knew how hard he was fighting for us. So we wanted to fight for him."

For fans of a certain age, like myself, we've never known Braves baseball without Bobby Cox. Even after he retired, he was visibly around the organization until a stroke in 2019 limited his involvement. All three of his successors as Braves manager, Fredi Gonzalez, Brian Snitker and Walt Weiss, either coached with him or played for him.

Former player Brian McCann, who grew up in suburban Atlanta watching those '90s teams dominate before playing for Bobby for six seasons, perhaps summed it up best with five simple words.

"He is the Atlanta Braves," he said.

Editor Chris Stiles can be reached at 910-416-5847 or by email at cstyles@robsonian.com.

Aronimink PGA about big slopes on big greens

Doug Ferguson
AP Golf Writer

NEWTOWN SQUARE, Pa. — Justin Thomas had his caddie place hole-sized discs on every corner of the 17th green at Aronimink on Monday, all of them perched on knobs.

Whether he was chipping or putting, it was a challenge.

Aronimink is marked by its 180 bunkers that frame the landing areas, except for the longest hitters. The first official day of practice for the PGA Championship brought a reminder that accuracy this week is more about shots into the green than avoiding bunkers or the healthy rough.

These are big greens with big slopes. "Off the tee it's not extremely challenging," said Keegan Bradley, who won on a soggy Aronimink in 2018 at the BMW Championship. "But the greens get really crazy, and they are really mounded and hilly just like a lot of Northeast courses. So to put the ball in the right spot is really important."

The course was full, inside and outside the ropes, despite tempera-

tures that struggled to reach 60 degrees Fahrenheit (15 Celsius), which can happen with the PGA Championship moving to May and being held in northern part of the United States. Bethpage Black was even colder in 2019 until it warmed as the week went on, and that's expected to be the case this week.

Thomas was among the few who made a scouting trip during one of his weeks off. It was a chance to get reacquainted with a course that has fewer trees than the last time he played in 2018, and was in perfect condition. The last day for member play was Nov. 2.

"It's pretty generous off the tee," Thomas said. "I don't remember, but it feels like at some point you can tell they took out a lot of trees. The holes that feel open, the rough is healthy. But the greens have a lot of slope. It's going to be dependent on how firm and fast they can get."

There was another reason for an early trip to Aronimink. He could get in 18 holes without feeling as though he lost an entire day. That's typical in the days leading to a major championship.

"Practice rounds at the PGA are the most miserable ever," Thomas said after playing nine holes Monday morning as the first one out on the back nine. "Unbearably slow." More than the U.S. Open?

"Tied for last," he replied.

And to emphasize the importance of the heavily contoured greens, Thomas said practice rounds look like players working on the short-game area with so much chipping and putting.

"It certainly seems like it's going to be distance control on your approach shots," Jordan Spieth said. "Because if you're able to really be hitting your mid- to short irons, controlling the spin and getting it into these tiers, you can actually ... have a lot of pretty close looks for birdie if you get in the right section. If you miss the section, they are going to be really difficult to either get up-and-down or to two-putt. Just lots of pitch on the greens."

Spieth has a lot to gain this week, as has been the case since he showed up at the PGA Championship in 2017. A victory would give him the final leg of the career Grand

Slam, a feat achieved by only six players, most recently Rory McIlroy last year at the Masters.

"If I can win one more tournament in my life, it would obviously be this one for that reason," Spieth said. "But the easiest way to do that is to not try to, in a weird way. Just go out and get ready for the first hole, get a good game plan in and attack it the way it needs to be attacked."

Brandt Snedeker and Sudarshan Yellamaraju of Canada were the final two additions to the 156-man field at Aronimink. The 45-year-old Snedeker qualified by winning the Myrtle Beach Classic last week for his first PGA Tour title in eight years; Yellamaraju was added because the winner of the Truist Championship, Kristoffer Reitan, already had qualified through his world ranking.

Tom Hoge got in as an alternate when Jake Knapp was forced to withdraw with a thumb injury.

The PGA Championship strives to have the top 100 in the world ranking, and it was close until Lucas Herbert won LIV Golf Virginia and Shaun Norris was runner-up (by

14 shots) on the European tour. Both cracked the top 100. Neither is at Aronimink.

Scottie Scheffler, the world's No. 1 player and defending champion, played nine holes. That was the case for most players, with Matt Fitzpatrick being an exception. This is his first time at Aronimink, and he saw the entire course. One part stood out.

"The green complexes, yeah, for sure," Fitzpat-

rick said. "They are very severe in spots. It will be interesting to see where obviously the pins get put. There's certainly two or three holes where you can't have more than four pins."

"I look at the golf course that I just played, and it definitely favors length off the tee because a lot of the bunkers will be taken out of play," he said. "So I think for me, the greens are going to be the defense for the week."

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What's next for LeBron? He has plenty of options

Tim Reynolds
AP Basketball Writer

LOS ANGELES — LeBron James has options.

He could stay with the Los Angeles Lakers. He could decide to join another team. He could even retire and end the longest career in NBA history. He knows all this.

He just doesn't know the answer.

"I don't know what the future holds for me, obviously," James said.

His 23rd season ended Monday night when the Lakers were eliminated by the Oklahoma City Thunder. At 41, James likely doesn't have many years left to play — if any. And now he'll start the process of figuring out what he wants to do, what his family wants him to do and what's best for all parties involved.

Dwyane Wade, James' longtime friend and former teammate, was on the Amazon Prime broadcast of Game 4 of the Thunder-Lakers series as an analyst. And when the conversation turned to what James is going to do, he had some thoughts.

"That's the question," Wade said. "And I think if we all know LeBron James, he's going to take some time off and go drink some wine, go yacht a little bit around the world. He's going to spend some time with his family. He's going to sit down and try to make the best decision for the James family at the end of the day."

"And then from there, you've got to look at the picture of the Lakers," Wade continued. "LeBron, Year 24 coming back next year if he does, he wants to play for something. So, are they in a position that he can play for something and compete for something?"

Salary will be another issue. He made nearly \$53 million this season. He could command somewhere around \$60 million next season if he wanted. If he gives a team a discount to preserve flexibility, he could



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James stands on the court in the closing minutes of Game 4 of a second-round NBA playoff series against the Oklahoma City Thunder Monday in Los Angeles.

Mark J. Terrill | AP Photo

certainly afford to do so.

Wade doesn't seem to think that's likely.

"History shows that Mr. James ain't taking a lot of discounts, right? I don't think no one knows," Wade said. "I think one of the things that him and his entire team have been great at is they hold their cards close to their chest. Decisions are made by LeBron, and they all respect it. And they wait on him to decide what he wants to do."

A look at some of what James' next moves could be (and for purposes of this exercise, the realities of the salary cap, the aprons, tax ramifications and whatever James will command in salary if he decides to keep playing do not apply):

Retirement

This one doesn't seem likely even though James posted the lowest scoring average of his career — 20.933 points per game, down a teeny-tiny sliver from his 20.937 average as a rookie. Another made free throw this season would have been enough to keep this season's average from being his worst.

The pessimists, or the anti-LeBron crowd, can say — accu-

rately — that his numbers are declining. They are. He averaged 30.3 points in 2021-22, and his per-game scoring average has fallen in every season since, going to 28.9 in 2022-23, 25.7 in 2023-24, 24.4 last season and 20.9 this season.

Of course, his role has changed as well and that has some effect on the numbers. James spent much of this season as the Lakers' third option behind Luka Doncic and Austin Reaves and did so happily.

Stay with the Lakers

To be fair, this wasn't a bad season. Getting ousted in Round 2 by the overwhelming favorite to win the NBA title — the defending champion, too — isn't exactly a collapse, and Doncic not being able to play because of injury almost made the outcome expected.

The Lakers have the seventh-best record in the NBA during James' eight seasons there. Not great, not bad. But the playoffs, even with the run to the bubble championship in 2020, have not been to James' expectations. The Lakers went 32-31 in playoff games during these last eight seasons, and remember, 16 of those wins came in the bubble. Since then, the Lakers are just 16-26 in playoff games.

Good enough? It wouldn't seem so. The Lakers will have to give James reasons to stay. It's simple as that.

Return to Miami

James' jersey will sway from the rafters one day in Miami, assuming he ever actually retires and allows such tributes to finally take place. And there's no question that James still holds many people within the organization — Pat Riley, Erik Spoelstra and more — in high regard.

But it's not like James has unfinished business in Miami. He became a champion in Miami; two of his four titles were won with the Heat. He'd be welcome, of course, but it's hard to envision James saying Miami would be the place for his final act.

Return to Cleveland

Northeast Ohio is home and will forever be close to James' heart. He's still (and forever will be) beloved there, and whatever anger existed over him leaving in 2010 was washed away forever when he delivered Cleveland's NBA title in 2016.

Time healed all wounds. If James wants to go the sentimental route, he might go

home again. It would likely be contingent on the Cavaliers finding a way to keep a roster that's capable of contention.

He takes his talents to New York

The Knicks have tried and failed before to land James.

They have some serious selling points right now — among them, a good team and Madison Square Garden. That's a place James has always revered.

The bright lights of New York wouldn't scare him off. Then again, wherever James plays, the lights will be bright there, too.

Pair up with Stephen Curry again

James won Olympic gold in Paris in 2024 with Steve Kerr coaching and Stephen Curry starring at the end.

The respect James has for Curry is off the charts, and he's often raved about Kerr as well. Kerr's coming back to the Warriors, and you know Golden State will do anything it can to give Curry one more chance at a title.

Bear in mind, it's highly improbable that this would ever work financially. But if James wants to play there, the Warriors will surely find a way.

The wild scenario: James and Wemby?

The greatest scorer ever teaming up with the game's most prolific defensive player in San Antonio?

Now that would be fun.

James is one of the people who dubbed Victor Wembanyama as an "alien" and did so with the utmost of respect.

James is unlike anyone the league has ever seen, and Wembanyama might be thought of in the same way.

And even though Gregg Popovich doesn't coach the Spurs anymore, he's still there and James has always had the utmost respect for the NBA's winningest coach. James would be accused of ring-chasing if he tried this one, but then again, he knows detractors won't like anything he does anyway.

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