

Four topics dominated the news last year

Four main topics dominated the news in Franklin County during an unusual 2021 — COVID, water supplies, broadband and an emergency radio system.

None of those issues would be resolved during the calendar year, however.

Here's what did happen:

JANUARY

The year began with the effort to vaccinate the most vulnerable populations against COVID and drive-through clinics became the order of the day. Because supplies were short and the vaccine so new, the first effort was focused on those 75 and older with Health Department Director Scott LaVigne saying that "We're going to do all we can to get the vaccine in the arms of as many people as we can."

•Also early in the year, Franklin County School officials presented commissioners with a facility needs survey that outlined nearly \$70 million in improvements over 10 years.

"This helps us prioritize our needs in the coming budget years," Dr. Larry Webb told commissioners.

•Down Bunn way, buzzards were bugging Bunn so the school system had a propane cannon installed atop the roof of the Bunn High School gymnasium, hoping the intermittent booms would keep the birds from continuing to destroy the roof.

•Franklin County public school students returned to the classrooms under Plan B which involved two days a week of face-to-face classes and three days of virtual work from home. Students were split into two groups so that half of students were in classrooms at any one time — and on Wednesday no students attended school so that cleaning of classrooms could be intensified.

Nearly 40 percent of county students were attending virtual-only classes via the county's Virtual Academy, thanks to COVID.

•Centerville lost its long-time health care provider with the retirement of physician's assistant Sandi Reed, which prompted the closure of her medical clinic there.

•Some local officials were left wondering "are we like what we saw?" They were referring to the horrific events on Jan. 6 when insurgents smashed their way into the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C.

•By mid month, Franklin County had ramped up its vaccination plan, inoculating more than 1,000 during its clinics.

"We're averaging 185 vaccines an hour and we had one hour where we recorded 220 vaccines," Health Director Scott LaVigne said.

•Two companies revealed plans to bring or expand broadband services. Commissioners agreed to pay Open Broadband \$76,000 — on a seven-year contract agreement — to deploy wireless broadband to unserved and under served pockets of Franklin County and CenturyLink it would spend nearly \$4 million to extend fiber-to-the-home service to nearly 2,000 homes — a bulk of them in northeastern Franklin County.

•Franklin County commissioners agreed to pay more than \$83,000 for another a long-term water solution but by the end of the year still nothing had been done to find new water.

•A major story in *The Franklin Times* revealed an almost-forgotten study of the Tar River Basin by the Army Corps of Engineers that proposed four dams along the waterway both for flood control downstream and to provide a source of water here.

Again, by year end, nothing had been done with that information, either.

FEBRUARY

•Franklin County got back in the first-dose vaccine business. After exhausting its available first doses the week of Jan. 18, Franklin County was administering 900 first dose vaccinations a week.

"We were doing 3,200 vaccinations a week [prior]," Franklin County Health Director Scott LaVigne told commissioners.

"To receive 900; that sums up what we're dealing with as far as the community demand and our ability to get it to them," LaVigne said. "Our folks 65 and older are seeking it out and we very much want to give it to them, but there are three issues [for why we can't]: supply, supply, supply. We're waiting for it from the federal level and the manufacturing level."

•If you had asked, Louisburg pharmacist Ted Gupton would have told you that he'd "been living the dream" for the last five decades, splitting his time between Louisburg's Main Street and the family farm in White Level — and most importantly, doing all he could to help his customers and turn many of them into friends.

But the dream changed dramatically in February when Gupton retired and closed Harris Pharmacy in downtown Louisburg,



LINING UP FOR VACCINE. Health Department Deputy Health Director Johnny Alston directs traffic during the Franklin County Health Department's drive-thru COVID vaccine clinic. At left, a COVID vaccine being administered, a crucial step to ending the pandemic.



MARCH

•The State Democratic Party named its new chair, concluding Black History Month by naming its first African American as leader — Franklin County resident Dr. Bobbie Richardson. Richardson, a former state legislator and previous vice chair of the state party, was selected to lead the party as chair.

•The Franklinton community mourned the loss of Lester Wilder — often referred to as "Mr. Franklinton" — who passed away at 71 following a long illness. Wilder, who was a popular coach, mentor and community leader, was a Franklinton native who came home to teach, coach and play a huge role in the lives of countless students, both athletes and those who didn't play sports.

•Franklin County elementary school students were given the option of heading back to the traditional classroom for four days a week beginning April 12 following a decision by the county board of education. The move followed a state mandate that all North Carolina school districts must operate under Plan A or B, eliminating the option for Plan C or remote learning only.

But Franklin County parents of elementary-age children still had the option of keeping them enrolled in the Virtual Academy (remote learning only) although they were asked to make that commitment through the remaining two months of the school year.

Continued on page 10



A COMMUNITY'S LOSS. Lester Wilder — often referred to as "Mr. Franklinton" — died Feb. 28, 2021, at 71 following a long illness.



DOWNTOWN BUSINESS CLOSED. Louisburg pharmacist Ted Gupton retired in February 2021, after 50 years, when he closed Harris Pharmacy.

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MARCH (continued)

Students could continue to attend under the two-day Plan B option -- but parents were being asked to commit to that choice through the end of the year. Students had been able switch back and forth from virtual to face-to-face classes at will.

- Franklin County Schools were operating under Plan B which means that students receive classroom instruction two days a week and study remotely three days a week.

- James Scott Perry had long had a special place at Franklinton Elementary School but it became official, he's their hero. Perry's regular job is head custodian at the school but he has assigned himself a lot of other duties, including helping kids tie their shoes, rescuing the ones who forgot their lunch money, rewarding kids, walking them to class, giving them "high fives," and encouraging those with behavioral or developmental needs. He was named a 2020 North Carolina School Hero by the North Carolina lottery's School Heroes Program. Perry — and the school he loves — each received a \$10,000 prize. And in case there is any doubt about what Perry would do with his money, he said simply it will allow him to "be a blessing and give it to others!" Perry also was recognized by the Franklin County Board of Education.

- A nationwide distribution chart indicated Franklin County and its municipal governments were to pull down more than \$16.2 million to help offset losses incurred by COVID-19.

- The Franklin County Board of Education agreed that all the district's schools would be open for four days a week of face-to-face classroom instruction beginning April 12. Included in the return to the classroom were all EC students in the system.

- Franklinton commissioners took several actions they expect will change the face and fortunes of downtown.

First, they set appearance standards for downtown buildings, essentially requiring that they fit into the current motif of the town — based in earth tones, nothing outlandish.

Next, they approved ordinance amendments that will regulate alcohol sales and food truck setups during special events — most of which happen downtown.

Then, in order to bolster downtown commerce, they:

- Eliminated requirements that downtown businesses provide parking spaces themselves, understanding that parking in downtowns is often provided by the town;
- Agreed that any alcohol sale or consumption downtown be regulated by town permit, allowing staff to determine reasonable conditions to allow such activity, such as consumption along sidewalks;
- Agreed to seek agreement with the state to allow the permitting of sidewalk dining;
- Eliminated the town-imposed requirement that no establishment can serve alcohol within 50 feet of a church or school;
- Revised the town's noise ordinance, allowing amplified sounds up to 10 p.m., Sunday through Thursday, and up to midnight on Fridays and Saturdays.

APRIL

- Mike Jones's family lost their farm in the 1950s, leaving them as tenant farmers and leaving him with a longing to get



OFFICIALLY A HERO. Franklinton Elementary School's James Scott Perry was named an official hero for his efforts at the school and in the Franklinton Community last year.

back to a family tradition. Back in 2004, he was able to feed that desire when he, Suzanne Jones and their kids started MAE Farm in Louisburg.

Since then, he's figured out innovative ways to raise livestock, important ways to mentor and support fellow small farmers, and significant ways to bolster his community.

The Cooperative Extension at N.C. A&T State University named him Small Farmer of the Year — the first Franklin County farmer to be so recognized since 1992.

"... He's a faithful supporter of small farmers in the region and his store at the state farmers market in Raleigh sells not only his own products, but those of other small farmers," said Morris White, Cooperative Extension at A&T State University's Eastern Regional Extension Director.

- Franklin County's solid waste service came under attack for not being so convenient. During a county commission meeting a White Level resident expressed exasperation about the county's operation of its convenience centers and transfer station. During recent trips to convenience centers in northern Franklin County, he said attendants there said residents were limited to bringing no more than five or six bags of trash, each day.

And, anyone who brings their trash in via a trailer has been told they can't use the convenience centers and have to take their trash to the transfer station — which costs a fee to use.

Beyond that, he said the trash compactors are often full, meaning residents, many of whom are elderly or may have physical limitations, can't reach the remaining, higher trash bins.

The centers are not Americans with Disability Act compliant, he asserted.

- Franklin County courthouse staff welcomed a new magistrate while saying goodbye to a man who spoke truth to his law enforcement career for nearly 30 years.

Clerk of Court Shelley Dickerson swore in Kiel Gunter during an April 1 ceremony, moments before she and Chief District Court Judge John Davis presented James Arnold with a plaque for his years of service — recognizing the outgoing chief magistrate.

- The Franklin County Board of Education went on record unanimously Monday night in its opposition to a request to move the proposed Wake Preparatory Academy

(a charter K-12 school) from Wake Forest to Franklin County.

At issue are two main concerns: 1) The potential resegregation of schools as a result of expansion of charter schools in the county and 2) Finances, since dollars follow students from traditional public schools into charter schools.

Currently, Franklin County young people are attending 31 charter schools, (two in the county), and in the coming year.

Over the last five years, the amount diverted from traditional public schools in the county had climbed from about \$1.5 million to a projected \$4 million in the current fiscal year.

- COVID-19 suspended the Miracle League of Franklin County's 2020 season, but the spring 2021 season kicked off with baseball and an Easter egg hunt. It was also the first time visitors got a look at the newly finished field house, equipped with a concession stand, public restrooms and a family room.

- The Franklin County commissioners were set to update the Unified Development Ordinance, a document that will rezone nearly half of the county's 36,000 properties. Planning staff, though, said the change would not be earth shattering. "Currently, there are about 36,000 properties under county zoning," County Planning and Inspections Director Scott Hammerbacher told commissioners during the board's April 5 meeting.

"We're going to rezone 16,000 of them," he said.

MAY

- The Franklin County commissioners had a plan to rezone the county and held a hearing to gauge public sentiment. And, property owners let them have it.

"Redistribution of wealth and some

retaliation is what this [Unified Development Ordinance] is all about," said Youngsville resident Frank Winstead. "Sixteen thousand changes are buried in that proposal.

- Demand for COVID-19 vaccination was waning, county health officials said. However, not nearly enough people in Franklin County had been vaccinated to trigger herd immunity. An examination of virus numbers amongst the young suggested that a variant of the virus has infiltrated Franklin County;

- Franklin County management said they would address concerns raised by residents who questioned the county's plans to update the Unified Development Ordinance.

- The Triangle North Executive Airport's Advisory Board heard from two disgruntled tenants during its Tuesday meeting. The lack of any real resolution highlighted the board's lack of any real authority.

- Franklin County commissioners committed to spending more than \$5 million for new equipment and resources to bolster its beleaguered emergency communications system. The fix includes the prospect of accessing VIPER, a system used essentially statewide, as well as plans to improve voice and pager service throughout the county.

Representative with Tusa Consulting presented the findings of a months-long needs study to county commissioners that echoed the sentiments of a lot of the system's critics: Coverage problems, audio quality issues and interoperability issues.

Franklin County relied on a roughly \$11 million Harris Communications' emergency radio system that showed signs of trouble from the time it was installed in 2012.

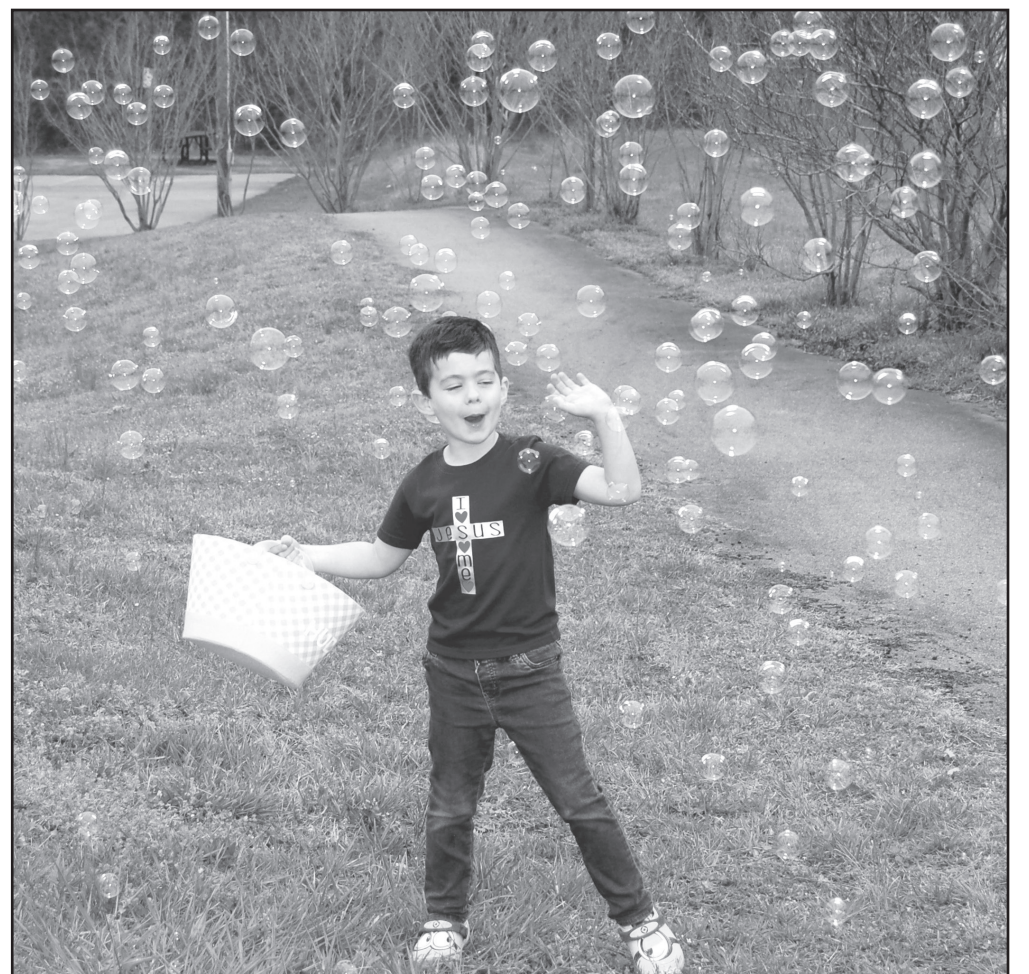
A nearly \$2.5 million upgrade went live in the spring of 2019, however, flaws remained, end users had told county commissioners.

- Franklin County commissioners held off on updating the Unified Development Ordinance — hoping the extra time would allow them to iron out remaining wrinkles.

The county faces an approaching deadline to update the zoning and regulation document to comply with General Statute 160D, which is designed to combine and modernize state enabling legislation for development regulations enacted by cities and counties.

- County Manager Kim Denton presented commissioners and the public with a 2021-22 budget that proposes to spend \$95.7 million while reducing the tax rate from 80.5 cents per \$100 of valuation to 79.5 cents per \$100 of valuation. That reduced property tax about \$10 per \$100,000 of valuation.

Continued on page 11



TIME FOR ACTION. Young Hudson was ready for some fun and sun outside after a long, wet winter made even worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. And, he discovered, batting floating bubbles was at least as much fun as hunting Easter Eggs, although there was no reason a lad couldn't do both at Youngsville's Easter Egg Hunt.

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JUNE

Franklin County public schools began the first of a procession of public graduations when dozens of Franklin County Early College High School students received high school diplomas and college degrees.

The milestone and ability to celebrate together was not lost on Principal Dr. Erica Shoulders-Royster.

"... You persevered despite the challenges you faced and overcame every unexpected obstacle that a worldwide pandemic could present to you," Shoulders-Royster told the 32 students who, in five years, graduated with at least a high school diploma and college credits; 19 of whom also earned an Associate in Science Degree and three of whom received an Associate in Arts Degree.

•The dispute between Franklin County Schools and a for-profit group promoting a proposed Wake Preparatory Academy heated up and threatened to even more confrontational if the North Carolina Board of Education approved the new charter school.

The state school board was expected to make a decision soon about the proposed 1,600 student charter school, which organizers are proposing to build just inside Franklin County along the west side of U.S. 1.

The Franklin County School Board was opposed to the creation of the new school and has suggested that it could cause the "resegregation" of education in Franklin County.

•The request from Wake Preparatory Academy — a charter school — to move into Franklin County was approved by the North Carolina Board of Education. The approval came on a unanimous vote and with virtually no public discussion of Wake Prep's proposal or credentials or of the opposition and questions raised by Franklin County school officials.

•Franklin County commissioners approved a \$95.7 million budget that dropped the tax rate, axed a proposed new sheriff's office supervisor position, raises water and sewer rates and provided better pay for employees.

While cutting the lieutenant position in the sheriff's office drew concerns from at least three commissioners, the budget was approved unanimously.

•By split vote, the Franklin County commissioners updated its Unified Development Ordinance — which includes a countywide zoning rewrite.

•Franklin County Class of 2021 took wing early in the month in the face of a global pandemic and graduating senior Julia Perry put the year in perspective for many: "... While this year has been challenging, it has not all been negative," the Bunn High valedictorian told the graduating class of 173.

"We have grown and learned from our experiences," she said. "If you are here today you are healthy and you are preparing to accomplish one of the biggest milestones in life: Graduating from high school."

"In all honesty, being virtual for most of the year has enabled us to put a twist on several senior traditions," Perry said. "For example, when has it ever been this easy to have a Senior Skip Day? All you had to do was complete an assignment by 11:59!"

"Also, the last time it was this easy to wear your pajamas to school was on Polar Express Day in elementary school."

"And let's be real, how many of you lost your phones for texting in class this year?" she said. "We have learned by now that this is a part of life, taking the bad and finding a way to make it good."

•Sheriff Kent Winstead shocked friends and supporters when he announced that for personal reasons, not politics, he would step away from law enforcement when his term expires in the fall of 2022. "I'm going to retire at the end of my term and hand the baton to the next man or woman, whichever one gets it," Winstead said following his announcement.

•With summer months in full swing, many people were more than ready to get out of their homes and enjoy friends and families on a more consistent basis.

The problem? Well, the country was still recovering from a nearly two-year-long pandemic, and the fight was far from over. According to Franklin County Health Director Scott LaVigne, only about 35 percent of the county's total population had protection which stems from getting vaccinated, leaving 65 percent of the population at risk of contracting the virus.



ALERT PARADE WAS BACK. Saturday, July 4, 2021 was a picture-perfect day for a parade as the annual Alert Fourth of July parade returned after being canceled the previous year because of the pandemic.

In short, there is a huge chunk of Franklin County's population that needs to get vaccinated, LaVigne said.

There was a continuous push back from many people who don't believe in the vaccine's ability to fight COVID-19, and also concerns over the possible effects after post-vaccination, he said.

•What was essentially a status quo budget without a lot of changes or a tax increase was passed unanimously and without discussion by the Louisburg Town Council. The budget included no tax increase and no increases in other town fees.

The tax rate remained at 45 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation. One cent on the tax rate raises about \$29,799, up about \$1,000 over the current year because of growth and building rehabilitations which have pushed up values.

•Youngsville commissioners approved an indoor gun range that the applicant said would be an asset to the community. Kurt Lieberman, who owns and operates Tar River Arms — a gun and outdoor sporting goods shop in Wake Forest — petitioned the town for a special use permit to turn an old warehouse off Park Avenue into a 20-lane gun range, training facility and retail location.

Lieberman told commissioners and concerned neighbors that the range manufacturer, Action Targets, guarantees safety. "... No bullet will leave the range facility," Lieberman said.

JULY

•The Bunn CERT Lion's Club was presented with its charter, making official their efforts to improve and bolster their community.

The Lion's Club has five primary areas of assistance, including combating diabetes, preventing avoidable blindness and improving the quality of life for those who are blind, ensuring that communities have access to nutritious foods, protecting the environment and helping those affected by childhood cancer.

With Bunn's addition, Franklin County has five Lions Clubs, one each in Bunn, White Level, Louisburg, Franklinton and Pilot.

It's Bunn's first club in at least 50 years.

For more information on the club or how to join or get involved, call Scott Strickland at (919) 497-6274, or check out the club's Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100068887054088>.

•Former Lake Royale general manager Tracy Clay filed suit against its property owners association, alleging, among other things, they created and allowed to linger a toxic work environment that forced her resignation.

The case remains pending in Franklin County Civil Superior Court.

•The Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice named Jamel James as the new warden of the Franklin Correctional Center in Bunn.

James had been the associate warden for custody and operations at Wake Correctional Center in Raleigh since 2017.

In his new position, James became responsible for all operations at the prison, which houses medium custody adult males.

•Franklin County commissioners adjusted its animal control ordinance to protect residents against deadly dogs — a pre-emptive step to keep a transplanted Garner couple from bringing their dogs to the county.

Two dogs belonging to Joseph and Amanda White killed seven-year-old Jayden Henderson and mauled her mother, Heather Trevaskis, at a home in Garner on April 27.

Wake County animals services seized the dogs and planned to put them down, but the Whites began challenging that action.

The couple had also moved to Franklin County, in the interim, and planned to bring the dogs here.

County staff was tasked with crafting changes to the ordinance to better protect residents against vicious animals.

Essentially, the ordinance change made it difficult to nearly impossible to bring dogs within the county that have killed.

The ordinance was approved by unanimous decision.

Ultimately, the change was not needed in the Whites' case because Garner's decision was upheld and the animals were put down. The ordinance does remain in effect.

•Franklin County commissioners issued a warning to Open Broadband in hopes that the company would speed up its efforts to provide Internet service in the county, focusing on unserved and underserved areas.

The threat had no teeth, though, as it did not include ramifications.

The company, at last check, had provided service to 71 customers since they received a contract with the county in 2019.

•Fire destroyed a two-story Victorian-style structure, the home of Sean and Christine Kingsley.

Fortunately, no one was injured in the conflagration.

•After COVID-19 forced a drive-thru event in 2020, Franklin County's Relay for Life — the signature fundraiser for the American Cancer Society — returned for in-person festivities.

The event was held at the Franklinton High School football field.

AUGUST

•Franklin County commissioners rejected bids for a new 911 center when they came in \$1 million over the construction budget.

Architects, staff and officials hoped that a revamped plan and six months time would generate lower bids.

By December, though, the lowest bid was \$54,000 more — for a project with a lesser footprint. Commissioners agreed to award that bid a few weeks ago.

•Organizers of the Justice Tractor Show announced that the event, which had ran for 19 years, was discontinued.

The event, featuring vintage tractors and all sorts of farm equipment, served as a fundraiser for Duke Memorial Baptist Church.

•The family of Thomas Blacknall had an historical marker erected in his honor in the 3000 block of Sims Bridge Road.

Blacknall was a former slave from Franklin County who was one of the first slaves to be freed well before the Civil War began.

He left behind a legacy of hard work that included operating a blacksmith shop prior to becoming a free man, owning around 654 acres of land and amassing a real estate value of \$6,000 - which would be around \$200,000 as of 2021.

Eight generations of Blacknall's family tree attended the commemoration ceremony.

•The Franklin County Cooperative Extension Agency hosted its 25th annual Franklin County Horse Farm Tour.

It took 26 years to do so as the event was cancelled in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

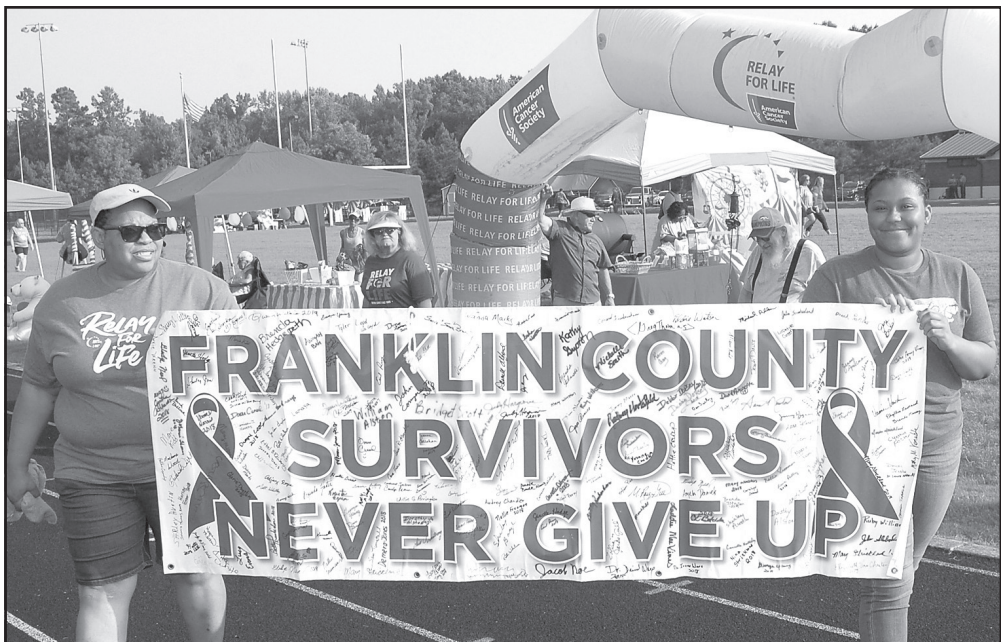
•A Raleigh man convicted in a string of crimes, including killing a Franklin County man, was sentenced to life in prison.

Authorities arrested Kendrick Keyanti Gregory in September 2015 after they allege he robbed and assaulted a 27-year-old Raleigh man, shooting him in the back and taking his wallet.

Then authorities allege Gregory killed Franklin County resident Thomas Melvin Durand inside his Mr. Pawn business on Capital Boulevard in Wake County before raping a 15-year-old girl shortly thereafter.

A Wake County jury found Gregory guilty of murder, rape and robbery on Aug. 3.

Continued on page 12



RELAY FOR LIFE EVENT RETURNED IN 2021. Franklin County Relay for Life returned in July to raise money for the American Cancer Society. Above, Sharon and Mackenzie Person proudly carry a banner signed by cancer survivors.

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AUGUST (continued)

A day later, Superior Court Judge Thomas Lock handed down the sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole.

•Youngsville named Nathan Page as its new town administrator.

Page, who spent seven years in Graham as its planning director, replaced Phil Cordeiro, who had led the town for about two years.

Cordeiro stepped down in July to go into private work and achieve a better work-life balance.

SEPTEMBER

•Louisburg police arrested a man accused of pretending to be an officer.

Police allege Robert Gary Separk was driving around in a vehicle that appeared to be an unmarked police car and was wearing law enforcement-inspired attire when he followed a motorist for 10 minutes before pulling her over.

The woman said the suspect appeared as though he was checking identification, but there was no computer system in the car.

Separk ultimately let the woman go with a "warning," authorities said.

The woman felt suspicious about the stop and alerted authorities.

Officers arrested Separk the following day. His case remains pending.

•Franklin County named Louisburg attorney Gena McCray as its new legal counsel.

McCray replaced the firm of Davis, Sturges and Tomlinson. Louisburg attorney Boyd Sturges held the post prior to McCray's appointment.

Sturges said the expectation was that his time as the county's attorney was limited.

•Bunn officials named October 1 as Willie Arnold Day.

Arnold was part of the Bunn Fire Department for 20 years and his business, Arnold Service Station, has been a staple in Bunn since 1977.

Arnold died on Oct. 24.

OCTOBER

•The United Way of Franklin County recognized Wayne Stallings and his service to the community, which included building his 300th handicap-accessible ramp with friends.

Stallings has been providing the service to Franklin County residents since he moved here in 2006.

He was recognized with the Order of the Long Leaf Pine — the state's highest civilian honor — for his work.

•A judge hired by the county to present new election districts presented four options to commissioners and the public.

Ultimately, commissioners chose the option that paired Commissioners Kelli London and Mark Speed within the same district, which encompasses Louisburg and northeastern Franklin County.

It also created an empty district as Michael Schriver was no longer in the previous Youngsville district.

Schriver remains the sole incumbent in a district that includes some of the old Youngsville district and eats up some of what is currently considered District 1.

The map was approved by unanimous decision.

•Franklinton commissioners annexed and rezoned more than 250 acres, making way for a 600-home, mixed use development that would include a charter school, as well as commercial property during their Tuesday evening meeting.

The decision came over the objections of a nearby neighborhood, which hired a law firm to present its opposition or, at the very least, a wish that the town slow the project.

The decision to annex and rezone the prop-

erty was unanimous.

•Fire crews extinguished a suspicious house fire at 111 N. Church Street in Louisburg.

In December, Spring Hope resident Gabriel Paul Ingino was charged with second degree arson and insurance fraud, as agents with the State Department of Insurance allege the 34-year-old was responsible.

•U.S. Rep. David Price announced he won't seek re-election.

His 4th Congressional District includes Franklin County.

•Proprietors of City Lunch, aka, the hot dog stand, fed first responders and the community in the days after family patriarch, Clyde Waiden, died.

He operated the restaurant with his daughter, Michelle, and wife, Sharon, who died in April.

The following month, the family decided to close the restaurant, which had been a downtown Franklinton staple for more than 70 years.

NOVEMBER

•Franklin County municipalities hosted elections and Louisburg made history, electing its first black mayor, Christopher Neal.

Neal had served on the town board before opting to run for the mayor's post.

Long-time mayor Karl Pernell opted not to seek re-election.

LaTasha Wilder also made history in Franklinton as the town's first black woman to serve on the board.

Youngsville also welcomed a new face to the board with the election of Corey Pursche.

•Franklin County sheriff's deputies and Holly Springs police arrested Michael David Barnes, 41, charging him with first degree murder and felony obtaining property by false pretenses.

On Oct. 28, deputies and paramedics responded to 137 Elsie Marie Drive, south-east of Youngsville, to find 40-year-old James McLeod suffering from an assault.

A day later, investigators said, McLeod died from his injuries, which included a gunshot.

An autopsy, investigators said, confirmed the matter was a homicide.

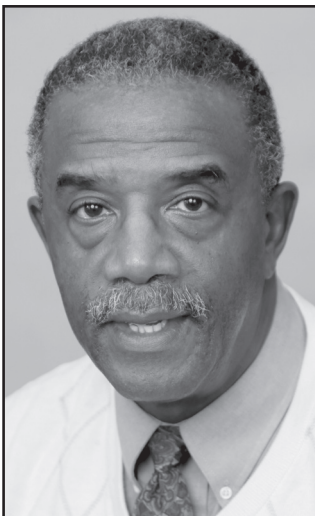
•Authorities said a vandalism near a black-owned business did not appear to be racially motivated.

On Nov. 1, the proprietors of The Jamaican Patty Shack reported that someone had

written "Get the hell out of Franklinton" in chalk on the sidewalk outside of the building. "When we first acknowledged it," Police Chief James Davis told commissioners and the public during a November meeting, "we treated it as a hate crime."

"It wasn't a hate crime," he said. "Our lieutenant sat down with the [Federal Bureau of Investigation] task force. They got involved because it attracted so much news media, but it wasn't a hate crime because nothing racial was said. It wasn't toward the restaurant. "We're still looking into it," he said. "But, it looks like it was juveniles."

•The state adopted a budget, which paid dividends for Franklin County and area infrastructure projects.



Louisburg Mayor Christopher Neal



END OF THE ROAD. The Franklinton community came out, en masse, in November 2021 as operators served their last meals at the venerable City Lunch Cafe, also known as the hotdog stand. The restaurant had been in operation for more than 72 years, with Sharon and Clyde Waiden, and one of their daughters, Michelle Ayscuse running the place. Sharon died in April and Clyde died in October, prompting the restaurant's closure. Above, Michelle Ayscuse, on steps, listens to, from left, former mayor Elic Senter, Sen. Sarah Crawford and Sheila Allers talk about the restaurant and the community after the proclamation was read on Friday, Nov. 12. (Times photo by Carey Johnson)

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With the signing of the state budget, \$1.8 million was primarily dedicated for Franklin County infrastructure projects.

All told, more than \$23 million in infrastructure money was made available to this region.

Youngsville got \$1 million to upgrade the intersection of College Street, S. College Street, Holden Road, U.S. 1A and W. Main Street — commonly referred to as Five Points.

The town of Louisburg will receive \$700,000, targeted for its Depot Hill project.

The Northeast Franklin County Revitalization Committee received \$50,000 they hope to use the money to partner with Vance-Granville Community College's small business department, starting an entrepreneur program that would work to bring business ventures to the northeast.

Beyond that, the funding might be used to help grow the organization, which seeks to develop the northeast region and recruit business and development.

Bunn and Franklinton got \$25,000, each. Franklinton Town Manager Gregory Bethea said the town is considering using the funds for sidewalk improvements.

DECEMBER

•The Louisburg Town Council accepted Merchants Metals' offer to purchase a 6.25 acre tract along T. Kemp Road — the first tract in the town's planned industrial park.

The company agreed to pay \$35,000 an acre or \$218,750.

The company plans to build a 20,000-square-foot warehouse and initially employ at least 10 people.

But another option remains open.

Merchants Metals' officials originally liked the nearby Advance Metals processing facility, which has been standing empty for about six years after being closed by the British-owned company.

However, an initial environmental assessment of the property by a company called Terracon indicated that the site might be contaminated with metals or metal dust -- and that was enough of a concern for Merchants to consider starting over with a new building.

However, a subsequent check by Terracon turned up no major contamination -- and more tests were ongoing in recent days to determine whether or not there is contamination.

If that site comes up clean, Merchants' officials may decide to buy the Advance Metals property instead of the vacant land, explained Louisburg Administrator Jonathan Franklin.

"Either way is good for us," Franklin told the board.

He suggested that if Merchants opts to buy the building, it will give the town more time to develop the industrial park tract which now is little more than raw land although the plan is to add a full slate of utilities and access roads in the near future.

The town council accepted Merchants' option contingent on the company's final decision about which property to buy.

•Youngsville continued its tradition of hosting its annual Christmas festivities, including a parade. It was the only town to hold a parade in 2020, as other towns cancelled theirs because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

They were joined in 2021 by Christmas parades in Alert, Bunn, Louisburg and Franklinton.

•First responders with an eye toward history opened a museum in Louisburg, dedicated to the area's long history of fire and police protection.

Primarily, Maude, a 1921 fire engine serves as the star attraction, however, a number of pieces of equipment that tell the story of Louisburg's fire service, as well as police protection, make up artifacts in the museum, located in the old Louisburg Rescue Squad building, near the ABC store on Bickett Boulevard.

•Louisburg recognized Karl Pernell, for his decades-long service to the town, through the fire department, the town council and, most recently, as mayor.

The police and fire training facility on Wade Avenue was named in his honor, the Karl T. Pernell Public Safety Building.

He also received the Order of the Long Leaf Pine.

•Franklin County commissioners were preparing to choose which company would build its new emergency communications radio system.

In January, the board agreed to go with Williams Communications, which offered to do the project for about \$22 million — about \$10 million less than the only other bidder on the project.

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GET BACK IN THE GROOVE

County athletes managed to excel in difficult COVID times

By GEOFF NEVILLE
Times Sportswriter

FRANKLIN COUNTY

Getting closer to being back to normal. But not quite there yet. That was the story of the 2021 Franklin County athletic scene as some order was restored for the county's three high school sports programs -- along with the one at Louisburg College.

But the year was also plagued by cancellations, postponements and incomplete seasons thanks to COVID-19.

Still, there were plenty of heroics in the county in 2021 -- and here is a look at the Top 10 sports stories from a crazy year.

10) MAC Stars

Middle school football resumed in Franklin County last fall as Franklinton, Terrell Lane, Cedar Creek and Bunn competed in the always-tough Middle Athletic Conference.

Franklinton Middle, coached by Mike Epps, went undefeated in the regular season, including a victory over runner-up Bunn.

But in the MAC Championship Game, it was the Bunn Bulldogs who won the crown for Coach Robert Pendleton as BMS edged host Franklinton in a hard-fought finale.

9) Another Encore

What Parker Haake has done as the head coach of the Bunn High School wrestling program is nothing short of amazing.

Certainly, BHS has a solid mat tradition over the past 20 years, but the Wildcats had slipped a bit before Haake took over.

Bunn won its third straight Northern Carolina Conference Team Championship in June -- an unprecedented feat for the Wildcats.

Bunn has since moved up to the split Class 2/3-A Big East Conference -- where the Wildcats continue to experience a wealth of success under Haake's direction.

8) Craig Drafted

Louisburg College's history of having players selected in the Major League Baseball Draft continued in June as outfielder Trenderon Craig was selected in the 20th Round, 587 overall by the Baltimore Orioles.

Craig immediately signed with the Orioles' organization, where he joined another ex-Louisburg star -- MLB All-Star Cedric Mullins.

Craig, who had previously signed with North Carolina State University, was the Region X Most Valuable Player last spring for the Hurricanes.

7) Rivalry Renewed

Though nothing is certain in terms of postseason projections, it was almost a certainty that a playoff spot was on the line when Bunn and Louisburg met in December in the regular season football finale for both clubs.

The game was not close as Bunn, in rather surprising fashion, dominated the proceedings with a 40-12 victory.

The Wildcats took charge of the outing from the beginning before continuing to pull away in the second half of action in the Big East Conference gridiron showdown.

Bunn went on to make the playoffs, while the Warriors were the lone Franklin County club (Franklinton also made it) not to participate in the postseason.

6) Murphy Resigns

The aforementioned contest was the highlight of the year for Bunn -- and it was also he final victory in Coach Dale Murphy's tenure.

Murphy resigned in December after four seasons with the Wildcats as a head coach.

Murphy, who coached football at BHS in some capacity for 11 years, is remaining at the school in a teaching capacity -- and will coach boys tennis this spring.

5) The New Big East

For the first time since the 1990s, Bunn, Louisburg and Franklinton entered the 2021-22 school year in the same league -- the newfangled Big East Conference.

The conference features eight teams -- four in Class 3-A and four in Class 2-A. Franklinton is in the 3-A group, while Bunn and Louisburg are in the 2-A portion.

Early returns for the county were favorable in the Big East, which will remain in its current state through this season -- and three more.

4) Volleyball Heroics

Of all the fall sports in the Big East, volleyball proved to be the most competitive one as five of the league's eight schools were in contention for the conference volleyball championship heading into the final week.

The spike season was one to remember as the competition level was intense



WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED. There will never be another coach -- or a man -- like Lester Wilder. (Times photo by Geoff Neville)



LOUISBURG COLLEGE REGION X TOURNAMENT SOFTBALL CHAMPS

and balanced. Predicting a winner heading into every match was just about an impossibility.

Franklinton ended up winning the regular season title, but Louisburg defeated LHS in a five-set thriller to take the tournament crown.

Each of the county's three spike titans made the playoffs, with Louisburg making the deepest run -- a third-round journey before a tough, five-set loss to Ayden-Grifton in Pitt County.

3) New Facility

Great Year

Louisburg High School opened its new football field in style in February, rolling to a convincing victory over Bunn in the season opener for each squad.

But that was just the beginning for the Warriors, who advanced all the way to the Final Four of the Class 1-A State Playoffs for the first time in school history.

LHS' season then ended at the hands of perennial titan Tarboro, but what a campaign it was for the Warriors under the

direction of veteran head coach Dontae Lassiter.

Quarterback Jaheim Brown led the way for Louisburg with a record-setting season, while several freshmen stepped into the lineup and made immediate impacts.

Brown is now a member of the baseball program at North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro.

2) LC Softball

Region X dynasty, thy name is the Louisburg College Lady Hurricanes.

Once again, LC proved to be a dominant force in the league last spring, rolling to both the Region X regular season and tournament championships for amazing coach Eric Lee.

LC wrapped up the tourney title in Burlington with a 9-4 decision over Pasco-Hernando in May.

The Lady Hurricanes then traveled to the National Tournament in Alabama and earned a third-place finish while closing with a sterling 48-8 overall record.

LC freshman shortstop Bri Tucker was the selection as the Region X Player of the Year.

1) A Legend Passes

Franklin County may have lost a beloved legend in February when longtime Franklinton High School teacher/coach Lester Wilder passed away.

But it is safe to say that Wilder will never be forgotten, especially in Franklinton, where he was most certainly the town's most loved person.

Plans were made to name the basketball/volleyball court at Franklinton High School in honor of Wilder -- 'The Lester Wilder Court.'

This plan came to fruition in December, when the new court was unveiled as part of a tear-jerking but uplifting ceremony that featured Wilder's family -- including a speech by his daughter, Tasha.

Coach Wilder touched so many lives in Franklinton and far beyond -- and having his name on the court at FHS is a true tribute to a special man.

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