

Happy Easter

The Baldwin Bulletin

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>> SUPERIOR COURT

Jury issues guilty verdict in 10-year-old's murder

Josh Lurie
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A young life was taken on a Sunday night in 2023 when 10-year-old Damarion Byrd was shot in the back while sleeping in his bed. Two years and a month later, a Baldwin County jury convicted two of the people responsible.

Shamonica Kiera Reaves, 35, and Rodracius Demaris Stephens, 41, were arrested March 6, 2023, and charged with felony murder. The community was left in shock. "Our entire community is upset as well as all of our deputy sheriffs and all the first



Shamonica K. Reaves



Rodracius D. Stephens

responders," Baldwin County Sheriff Bill Massee said after the arrests. "It's bad when we have anything happen to anyone in our community, but ... when a 10-year-old child is killed in

MORE **GUILTY** > A5



Shell casings are marked as evidence where 16 shots were fired into the back of the home where Damarion Byrd was sleeping.

Ocmulgee DA's Facebook page

>> GEORGIA COLLEGE



SHADIMON SMITH/Staff

Children were able to interact with and learn science lessons from the Georgia College Science Education Center.

>> DEVELOPMENT

Coopers Park project underway

Bailey Ballard
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The Coopers Park Reimagine project is well underway with the completion of a rain garden and splash pads to be built.

"The University of Georgia kind of adopted us and came up with the Oconee Heights Streetscape project. One of the students who came up with that needed a Capstone project and created a reimagined concept for Coopers Park," said County Manager Carlos Tobar.

The park is located at 105 Black Creek Rd. and is 3.5 acres. The first step of the concept plan was creating a rain garden to contain stormwater runoff and soil erosion from reaching the park's walking path. The Baldwin County Board of Commissioners, Coopers Collaborative and Georgia College & State University worked together to build the garden on Saturday, April 5th.

"The next phase will be the construction of the splash pad, which will be nearly identical to the one in Harrisburg Park. Bids were opened Wednesday, April 9. It will be built between the pavilion and the restrooms in the park," said Tobar.

The splash pad is anticipated to be complete by August.

Other improvements will include resurfacing the basketball court,

MORE **PARK** >> A2

CREATE promotes active lifestyle at ArtHealthy Festival

Shadimon Smith
The Baldwin Bulletin

The 11th annual ArtHealthy Festival was held April 12 on Georgia College's front campus by the Center for Recreation Education Arts Technology and Enterprise (CREATE), a non-profit in Baldwin that works to provide holistic and transformative opportunities to in-school youth ages five to 18 in middle Georgia.

It was free and open to the public due to sponsors like Atrium Health Navicent, the City of Milledgeville, Baldwin County Schools and Oconee Outfitters. Vendors from

out-of-town and locals brought their artwork and health knowledge to Milledgeville.

Locals were able to get free health screenings from Georgia College's Mobile Health Unit and nursing students.

"It [Art Healthy] gives access to things that some people may not have access to," said Mackenzie Dove, a senior nursing major. "There are health screenings here so they can catch things, primary prevention. It allows people to know how they are doing when they may otherwise not be able to afford to do so."

Healthcare providers like Pure

Chiropractic were in attendance, offering \$20 chiropractic visits for those at the festival, and Pruitt Health Hospice was there to inform people about the end-of-life care they provide.

Attendees also spent time learning the proper techniques of Krav Maga, an Israeli self-defense system, to protect themselves and their kids. Kids were able to release energy in the bouncy houses, by riding bikes, participating in a science lesson from the Georgia College Science Education Center and getting Kona Ice.

MORE **HEALTHY** >> A7



WEATHER

85 HIGH Friday Sunny 57 LOW

Detailed forecast / B8

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The Baldwin Bulletin

>> NATIONAL EARTH DAY

Connecting the Community to Nature

Caroline Bagwell
The Baldwin Bulletin

National Earth Day is April 22. The celebration was founded in 1970 by U.S. Sen. Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin as a grassroots movement to raise awareness about environmental issues. The founding of National Earth Day ultimately inspired the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency and key environmental laws.

At the local level, Milledgeville's Lockerly Arboretum's mission is to provide environmental education to its visitors. In honor of National Earth Day, this reporter talked with Kensey Amerson, director of Education at Lockerly, about the historic property, Earth Day and Lockerly's efforts to encourage conservationism.

Q: Can you tell us a little about yourself?
Amerson: I'm originally from Atlanta, Georgia, and I've been the Director of Education at Lockerly Arboretum since August 2024.

Q: When was Lockerly Arboretum established?
Amerson: Lockerly was established as a nonprofit arboretum in 1965 by E.J. Grassman, an executive for a Washington County-based kaolin company. While Grassman originally used the historic Rose Hill home on the property as an executive retreat, he donated the surrounding land to support his passion for horticulture and to provide a community space for people to enjoy nature.

Q: What is the purpose of Lockerly Arboretum?
Amerson: Today, Rose Hill is

a part of Lockerly Arboretum, so we serve as both a public garden and a historic home museum. The grounds are open to the public for free. We also offer guided tours of Rose Hill for \$5 per person on Saturdays. Beyond public access, Lockerly provides educational experiences for all ages.

Q: Why is working at Lockerly important?
Amerson: Educating people of all ages about the environment is incredibly important to me. Ecological connections extend everywhere, and you don't have to be an outdoorsy person to appreciate and value nature. For example, if you like having clean water from your tap, then you benefit from Georgia's wetlands, even if you never visit them. Understanding these connections is crucial, and I love helping people realize how nature impacts their daily lives.

Q: What are these educational experiences?
Amerson: Our Woods Museum features a small collection of reptiles used for educational purposes and exhibits on Georgia's geology and soils, which directly impact ecological interactions and tree diversity.

Q: What does Earth Day mean to you?
Amerson: Earth Day serves as a reminder that our world hasn't always been cared for properly, and it is our responsibility to be the best stewards we can be of this one planet we've been given. I am grateful for the conservationists before us who took the initiative to protect our rivers, streams, and natural spaces.

Q: Does Lockerly do anything special for Earth Day?
Amerson: Our annual plant sale, which requires months of preparation, will fall around the time of the holiday.

Q: Do you offer events that align with Earth Day's mission?
Amerson: Absolutely. While the plant sale is certainly connected to Earth Day, all of our educational programs align with its mission.

Q: Do you think Earth Day is an important holiday?
Amerson: Yes, but I hesitate to call it a holiday, or something to celebrate. Yes, we should celebrate our successes in conservation and the beautiful world we live in, but I often feel like holidays are viewed as a reason to take a day off because of something that happened in the past. Earth Day isn't like a former president's birthday or an explorer who has come and gone and we stop to celebrate what they've done. Earth Day isn't past; it is very much present. We still need to continue protecting beautiful places and natural resources. I think it is so incredible that Milledgeville, in a county of a little more than 40,000 people, has a 50-acre free, public garden to access. That is extremely rare. It makes me proud to be a part of a community that values natural spaces, and I hope to find inspiration from Earth Day to continue trying to connect every Baldwin County resident to Lockerly.

To learn more about Lockerly Arboretum, visit www.lockerly.org. Lockerly is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturdays.

>> EVENT



OCCC attracts big custom car crowd

Ian Tocher
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The Old Capital Car Club (OCCC) in Milledgeville held its inaugural Spring Car Show last Saturday at the Farmers Home Furniture parking lot alongside Hwy. 441, north of town. Approximately 60 custom and classic cars, trucks, and motorcycles were entered and OCCC presented winner and Top-20 trophies in several categories.

Founded in 1985, the OCCC is a registered nonprofit that conducts two major car shows each year, with the second scheduled for October during Milledgeville's annual Deep Roots Festival. Proceeds collected from entry fees and other fundraisers are donated to local charities each December.

On Saturday, Jeff Stewart of Gray (inset) won the Best '50s Entry and Best in Show awards with his 1955 Chevy Bel Air. Stewart said he bought the car in 2012 "as a basketcase." Since then, Eric and Phillip Leonhard in Smarr outfitted the classic Tri-Five with a 2005 LS2 engine backed up by an automatic transmission, "all computer controlled, just like a 2005 GTO," Stewart said. "All new suspension, power steering, air conditioning, power windows, it's a great-driving car."

CRIME

CONTINUED FROM >> A1

stated that Vassar began yelling, which led him to push Vassar. Cardona also admitted to grabbing Vassar by the collar of his shirt and punching him. A supervisor at the job site stated that he did not witness the initial altercation but did observe Cardona grabbing Vassar and punching him. Employees of Georgia Power reported that Cardona initiated physical contact with Vassar in a provoking manner, while Vassar was attempting to separate himself from the altercation. Multiple witnesses confirmed that Vassar was attempting to defend himself from Cardona. Vassar declined Emergency Medical Services at the scene, despite experiencing jaw pain. He opted to have a family member take him to the hospital for evaluation. A warrant for aggravated assault was sworn against Cardona.

Pair steal tequila from The Whiskey Tunnel

On April 12, law enforcement met with Gautam Arora at The Whiskey Tunnel, at 101

Kings Rd., in reference to a theft. Arora stated a male entered the store and took a bottle of Lunazul tequila off of the shelf by the register and walked to the wine cooler. The male gave the bottle to a female who then put it in her purse. The male and female exited the store without paying for the tequila, and left the area in a gray Nissan Altima. An officer ran the vehicle's tag and identified the registered owner as Ricari Reid. Surveillance video was able to confirm that the male in the video was Reid and corroborated the story. One state warrant was secured on Reid for theft by shoplifting. If law enforcement can identify the female, they will secure a warrant on her for the same offense.

Male harms bouncer at tavern

On April 13, law enforcement responded to the Greene Street Pool Tavern, 120 W. Greene St., in reference to an unruly crowd. The bouncer, Joshua Thompson, stated he was assaulted after he denied a group of people entry into the bar. Thompson stated there was a mixture of five to six men and women who tried to push their way

into the bar. Only one person showed identification, which led Thompson to stop the others from entering. Thompson stated the crowd already had wristbands from another business and acted like they were entitled to access to the pool hall. After refusing the group access, one of the males became irate and attacked him. Thompson stated he was able to fend off the attack before the group fled the location in the direction of Hancock Street. Thompson's neck and chest area were red with several distinct markings where fingers had scratched his skin. Thompson's shirt was also ripped at the neck and hung loose. Thompson declined Emergency Medical Services. The offender was described as being a black male in his 30s. Security footage was not available at the time due to the manager not being present. The nearby area was canvassed but due to the crowded downtown streets, an offender was unable to be located.

Unknown offender steals pallets

On April 14, an officer was dispatched to Tractor Supply, at 1859 N. Columbia St., in

reference to a reported theft. The store manager advised that on April 13 a 2020-22 white or gray Ford F-350 pulling a black trailer arrived at the store's loading dock. The vehicle's occupants loaded 200 used pallets onto the trailer. The store receives \$3 credit per pallet from a company that repurchases them and confirmed the suspect did not have permission to remove the pallets. He further advised that if the suspect is identified, he would like the individual to speak with him directly, at which point he will determine whether to pursue charges. While on scene, the manager provided a still image of the suspect's vehicle. A FLOCK camera check was conducted for 36 hours in an effort to identify the vehicle, with negative results at the time of the report.

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HEALTHY

CONTINUED FROM >> A1

There were also educational opportunities throughout the day. Attendees spent their time identifying different minerals, learning about mental illness from the National Alliance on Mental Illness, or NAMI, and learning how to administer Narcan in case of an emergency. "It's important to learn how to administer Narcan because if you're ever in a public area and someone happens to be having an overdose and becomes unconscious, then you can administer it to them and it can reverse those symptoms and bring them back to

life," said Olivia Woodard, a senior management information systems major.

The Department of Public Health was also on-site doing surveys to find out how the people of Milledgeville get around and what they hope to see that could improve the neighborhood.

Vendors were on site to connect the community with small business owners, like Chiquita Shorter who owns Teen Attack, a business geared towards educating, motivating, and empowering the youth all across Georgia.

Courtney Hitchcock, a local painter, and Jessica Whitehead, an author and photographer, were also in attendance, selling their work and meeting

other artists. "It's a great way to connect with a community and get to know people and to see what people who live here create and support them," Hitchcock said. "So it's just a great way to hang out together." ArtHealthy encouraged the community to come together to learn how to keep themselves healthy and active for a better future and life.

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Lake Country PUBLIC INTERACTION MEETINGS

Residents and users of Lake Oconee and Lake Sinclair are invited to drop in to visit with subject matter experts on a variety of topics, including aquatic plants, wildlife conservation, shoreline management, hydro-electric power, and recreation.

Lake Oconee
Tuesday May 6, 2025
Lakeside Church
5800 Lake Oconee Pkwy, Greensboro, GA
Drop in anytime between 5:00pm - 7:30pm

Lake Sinclair
Thursday May 8, 2025
Lakeside Baptist Church
1023 Milledgeville Hwy, Milledgeville, GA
Drop in anytime between 5:00pm - 7:30pm

Georgia Power