

Warren/Frederick County Report

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Recipe: Homemade Chicken Noodle Soup



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BACK COVER:



INDICTMENTS



REC teams and trucks light up local holiday parades



Rappahannock Electric Cooperative employees, (L to R) Hunter Jost, Troy Jenkins, Casey Brill, Gigi Staubs, Brianna Murden and Kristin Kula had a great time handing out candy to the little ones along the parade route at the Berryville Christmas Parade on Saturday, Dec. 6.



Rappahannock Electric Cooperative employee Casey Brill hands out candy to young parade watchers in Front Royal on Saturday, Dec. 6.



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Rappahannock Electric Cooperative employees (L to R) Kristin Kulo, Brianna Murden, Niki Shingleton, Casey Brill, Aaron Clark and Jacob Roy joined their local community in the Middletown Christmas Parade on Sunday, Dec. 7, handing out candy to the little ones along the parade route.



Rappahannock Electric Cooperative employees, (L to R) Jeff Henry, Sarah Kerns, Parker Jenkins, Eric Corbin, Tim Ashby and Jack Knighting had a great time spreading holiday cheer in the Christmas in Little Washington parade on Sunday, Dec. 7.

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Rappahannock Electric Cooperative employees (L to R), Hunter Jost, Gigi Staubs, Kristin Kulo, Brianna Murden, Casey Brill and Troy Jenkins had a great time spreading holiday cheer and handing out candy to the little ones along the route of the Front Royal Christmas parade.

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The only travel trend you need to know for 2026

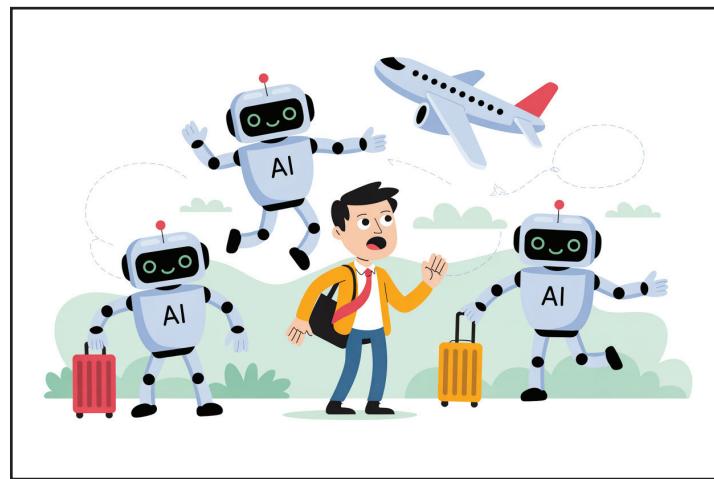


Illustration by Dustin Elliott

By Christopher Elliott

Ignore the usual year-end predictions—the hot destinations, the airfare trends, the hidden travel fees. The only thing you need to know about travel in

2026 is this: Agentic AI will touch every trip you take.

What's that? Well, think of agentic AI as the next version of today's chatbots. Generative AI summarizes but agentic AI acts. It's the difference be-

tween a map that shows the route and a self-driving car that takes you there.

These tools will do more than suggest an itinerary. They'll book flights, reserve hotels, and manage your trip—in other words, they'll put your entire vacation on autopilot.

"Travelers will ask AI to book a trip that suits their preferences," says Ross Borden, CEO of Matador Network. "And the AI will do it. This vision will become reality in 2026."

But as these autopilot vacations take off, a question remains: When a robot plans your trip, who answers for the rookie mistakes, the security risks, or the flight simply invented by an algorithm?

AI is already planning your vacations—sorta

AI is already part of the travel process, of course. Barbara Alexander recently used ChatGPT to plan trips to Scandinavia and Japan. For a 24-hour stopover in Helsinki, she asked the AI bot to maximize public transportation to get her to an overnight ferry on time.

"It took some refining," says Alexander, who works for a nonprofit in Washington, D.C. Eventually, the bot gave her a perfect schedule. "It's fun, like talking to a smart travel agent."

But Cleo Parker, a retired advertising executive from Livonia, Mich., found AI unready to take the wheel. She used Google's Gemini to plan a 12-hour road trip to a dog show in Perry, Ga. The AI bot generated a 20-page document. It looked impressive. It was wrong.

It suggested rest stops on the northbound side of the highway while she

drove south. It trusted her car's manufacturer's highway mileage claims, leaving her low on gas in Tennessee.

"You have to check the AI's work," says Parker.

So much for an autopilot vacation.

The industry doubles down on AI bots

Still, everyone seems to be betting on bots. IDC predicts that by 2030, 45 percent of organizations will use AI agents. Capgemini is even more bullish, estimating that agentic AI could generate up to \$450 billion in economic value within two years. Despite the hiccups, travel companies are pushing their chips into the pot.

Steve Hafner, CEO of Kayak, says his company is building software to plan, book, and manage trips in real time.

"We envision some travelers using

a Kayak AI agent directly," Hafner explains. "Others will rely on assistants powered by our data. As this technology grows, our goal is simple: make AI do the hard work."

The risks of relying on algorithms for travel

Should you trust a robot with your vacation? Squaremouth, a travel insurance comparison site, recently surveyed thousands of travelers about their 2026 plans. While 47 percent have used AI to build itineraries, one-third reported receiving false or misleading information.

"As AI grows, its convenience can obscure the risks," warns Lauren McCormick, a spokeswoman for Squaremouth. "We recommend proceeding with caution." She notes that most travel insurance policies won't cover you if your AI agent hallucinates a flight.

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There are security risks, too. Frank Harrison, regional security director for World Travel Protection, warns that by 2026, AI will know a lot more about you than you realize—or than you want. Convenience has a cost.

"As the digital footprint grows, so does a traveler's exposure," Harrison says. "Cyber hygiene, once a niche concept, has become a foundational duty of care."

The human element isn't dead yet

Before you fire your travel advisor in favor of an autopilot vacation, listen to Susan Sherren, founder of Couture Trips. She's seen the AI itineraries clients bring her. They often miss the subtleties of travel—the road closures in Big Sur, the unreliable Greek ferries in windy weather, or the fact that a "hiking

trip" might be a bad idea for someone with a heart condition.

"Unless you become sophisticated with your AI inputs, you're going to miss the nuance," Sherren warns.

Jessica Parker, founder of the agency Trip Whisperer, is even more blunt.

"AI tools are designed to fill rooms and chase the cheapest or fastest option, not to curate your best experience," she says. "AI can get you a room, while relationships get you the experience."

AI cannot replace everything. You want a real person answering the phone when you call your insurance company with a problem.

"In a real medical emergency abroad, no traveler is looking for an algorithm," says Nicole Perrault, COO of AXA Partners North America. "They want a human expert."

How to use AI to plan your trip in 2026

Agentic AI remains theoretical, but it will become real in 2026. If you let a bot plan your next vacation, proceed carefully.

- **Start small.** Don't ask the AI to book a month-long expedition to Antarctica. Use it for discrete tasks: finding a hotel near a landmark or comparing flight prices. Resist the urge to let it book. Take baby steps.

- **Verify everything.** As Parker discovered in Georgia, AI doesn't always know which side of the road a rest stop is on. Double-check routes, opening times and prices. AI bots are subject to what are known as "hallucinations"—simply inventing facts.

- **Guard your data.** Ensure you understand how the agent stores your credit card and passport information. "Cyber hygiene" is the new hand-washing. The last thing you need is a bot going on a spending spree with your credit card.

- **Use it for logistics, not taste.** Agentic AI excels at action. In 2026, these tools will do more than compare prices. They will monitor flights for delays and rebook your connecting flight before the first flight lands. They will negotiate refunds by analyzing the fine print of your insurance policy. They can coordinate multi-leg journeys, syncing your rental car pickup time with your actual flight arrival. But they can't tell you if the neighborhood is cool.

You may be able to book an autopilot vacation in 2026, but that doesn't mean you should. Use AI for the homework; don't let it take the final exam.

Remain in charge of your vacation. The robot is the navigator—but sometimes it holds the map upside down.

Christopher Elliott is an author, consumer advocate, and journalist. He founded Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps solve consumer problems. He publishes Elliott Con-

fidential, a travel newsletter, and the Elliott Report, a news site about customer service. If you need help with a

consumer problem, you can email him at chris@elliott.org.



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Sat. Dec 27, 2025 (6-10pm) Music Bingo/Karaoke Shen Valley Axe Throwing Co Front Royal

Mon. Dec 29, 2025 (6-8pm) Musical 5-in-a-Row Front Royal Moose*

Wed. Dec. 31, 2025 (7pm-1am) New Year's Eve Karaoke Edinburg VFW

Fri. Jan 2, 2026 (7:30-11:30pm) Music Bingo/Karaoke New Market Eagles*

Mon. Jan 5, 2026 (6-8pm) Musical 5-in-a-Row Front Royal Moose*

Wed. Jan 7, 2026 (6-9pm) Trivia/Music Bingo Shen Valley Axe Throwing Co Front Royal

Sat. Jan 10, 2026 (6-10pm) Music Bingo/Karaoke Shen Valley Axe Throwing Co Front Royal

Mon. Jan 12, 2026 (6-8pm) Musical 5-in-a-Row Front Royal Moose*

Wed. Jan 14, 2026 (6-9pm) Trivia/Music Bingo Shen Valley Axe Throwing Co Front Royal

Thurs. Jan 15, 2026 (6:30-8:30pm) Music Bingo at Winchester, Va. Elks*

Mon. Jan 19, 2026 (6-8pm) Musical 5-in-a-Row Front Royal Moose*

Wed. Jan 21, 2026 (6-9pm) Trivia/Music Bingo Shen Valley Axe Throwing Co Front Royal

Thurs Jan 22, 2026 (6-9pm) Trivia at North Mountain Vineyard & Winery

Fri. Jan 23, 2026 (7-10pm) Trivia at James Charles Winery 4063 Middle Rd, Winchester, VA

Sat. Jan 24, 2026 (6-10pm) Music Bingo/Karaoke Shen Valley Axe Throwing Co Front Royal

Mon. Jan 26, 2026 (6-8pm) Musical 5-in-a-Row at Front Royal, Va. Moose*

Wed. Jan 28, 2026 (6-9pm) Trivia/Music Bingo Shen Valley Axe Throwing Co Front Royal

Fri. Jan 30, 2026 (7:30-11:30pm) Music Bingo & Karaoke at New Market, Va. Eagles*

Sat. Jan 31, 2026 (7:00-10:30pm) Karaoke/Music Bingo at Woodstock, Va. Moose*

Mon. Feb 2, 2026 (6-8pm) Musical 5-in-a-Row at Front Royal, Va. Moose*

Wed. Feb 4, 2026 (6-9pm) Trivia/Music Bingo Shen Valley Axe Throwing Co Front Royal

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New Brocks Gap Natural Area Preserve protects rare forest



Northern white cedar forest on a bluff overlooking the North Fork of the Shenandoah River, Rockingham County. [alt:Photo of mature trees on the slope of a mountain.]

RICHMOND, Va. — A mature stand of northern white cedar trees along the North Fork of the Shenandoah River, Virginia's largest remaining example of this globally rare forest, is now protected as part of Brocks Gap Natural Area Preserve.

The state's 69th natural area preserve is located west of Broadway in Rockingham County. Most of the preserve's total 214.8 acres is owned by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation; 34.3 acres remains privately owned and is protected by an open space easement and deed of dedication. The preserve is managed by the Virginia Natural Heritage Program, whose mission is to conserve the state's biodiversity.

"The establishment of Virginia's newest natural area preserve, Brocks Gap, will safeguard the

area's outstanding ecological integrity and improve water quality for the Shenandoah River water-

Wishing all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year 2026!!

Aletha Craig

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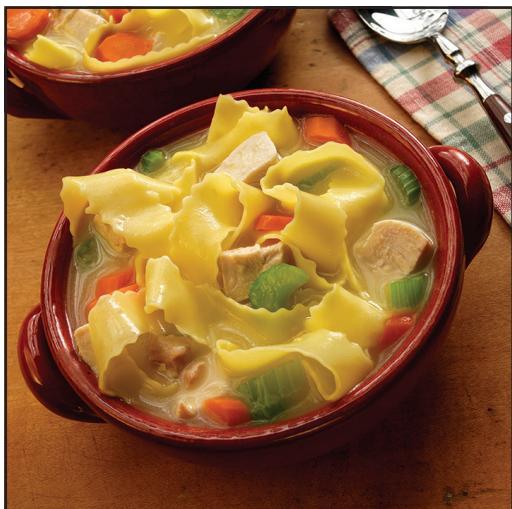
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Homemade chicken soup is ideal for cold and flu season



- 2 cloves of garlic, peeled and minced
- 8 sprigs fresh parsley
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 tablespoons butter
- Salt, to taste
- Freshly cracked black pepper, to taste
- 12 ounces wide egg noodles

For the chicken stock:

1. Rinse the chicken inside and out under cold running water. Place the chicken in a large pot, set over medium heat and add the chicken broth. Add 1/4 of the carrots, 1/3 of the celery and 1/3 of the onions. Add the garlic, 2 sprigs parsley, thyme, bay leaf and enough water to just cover the chicken. Bring broth to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for about 1 1/4 hours, or until chicken is very tender, skimming any foam from the surface of the broth.
2. Remove chicken from broth and place in a colander to drain and cool. Strain the broth through a very fine mesh strainer into a large, clean soup pot. Discard the vegetables used to flavor the stock.

For the soup:

1. Skim any fat off the top of the strained broth.
2. Remove and discard the skin and bones from the chicken and cut the meat into bite-sized pieces; set aside.
3. Melt the butter in a large Dutch oven set over medium heat. Add the remaining carrots, celery and onions and cook for about 7 minutes or until the onions are translucent. Add the chicken pieces and chicken stock, season with salt and pepper. Bring soup to a simmer and cook for about 30 minutes or until the vegetables are tender.
4. Chop the remaining parsley; add the parsley and egg noodles, stirring frequently. Cook for 8 to 10 additional minutes or until the noodles are tender.
5. Ladle into soup bowls and serve hot.

Cold and flu season arrives each year. Though there might be little people can do to avoid catching a cold or coming down with the flu, certain approaches can make it easier to get through a bout with either illness. Flu vaccinations have been found to lessen the severity of infection with the influenza virus, while rest and plenty of fluids can help reduce the length of time a cold puts people out of commission.

Knowing what to eat when combatting a cold and the flu also can help people treat each virus. Chicken soup has long been a go-to when fighting a cold, and this recipe for "Homemade Chicken Noodle Soup" from Lines+Angles makes a worthy addition to anyone's cold- and flu-fighting culinary repertoire.

Homemade Chicken Noodle Soup

Makes 8 servings

- 1 3 1/2-pound whole chicken
- 10 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 8 carrots, peeled and sliced
- 6 stalks celery, trimmed and sliced
- 3 onions, peeled and sliced

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shed and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay," said DCR Acting Director Andrew Smith. "This is an important investment to ensure that a prime example of Virginia's natural resources will be protected in perpetuity."

Sam Showalter, president of the Showalter Family Corporation, the former owner of the property, said the family has been working toward seeing their land protected

for more than 15 years. "The Clayton and Thelma Showalter family is indeed grateful to the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and several other conservation groups for helping our Family Corporation preserve forever the cedar trees and other unique aspects of our mountain farm near Brocks Gap," he said.

The preserve lies on rolling terrain on the eastern slope of Little

North Mountain, with the elevation ranging from 1,000 feet at the North Fork of the Shenandoah River to 2,046 feet atop the mountain. The site is along the North Mountain fault; a major geologic boundary defining the edge of the Shenandoah Valley.

"Along with its globally rare northern white-cedar slope forest, wetlands and karst landscape resources, Brocks Gap Natural Area Preserve falls within one of Virginia's most significant ecological cores and essential conservation sites," said Lesley Starke, chief of natural areas stewardship for the Virginia Natural Heritage Program. "Our staff is currently developing management plans with the future goal of being able to offer public access for wildlife viewing and nature study."

Funding sources for the acquisition included a Virginia Land Conservation Foundation grant

awarded for fiscal year 2023. Additional funding was provided from the DuPont-Waynesboro Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration settlement.

While the main, continuous native range of northern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) forests spans

the northeastern United States, the Upper Midwest and eastern Canada, it is found in a handful of locations in the Central Appalachians. In Virginia, there are less than 70 acres left of this type of forest, which is threatened by infestations of invasive insects.



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2025 November Indictments October Term

Eric Wyatt Smith

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges Eric Wyatt Smith, 24, of the 200 block of Virginia Ave., Front Royal, VA 22630, with three counts. COUNT ONE: In the County of Warren, Eric Wyatt Smith did unlawfully and feloniously, knowingly or intentionally possess a controlled substance listed in Schedule I or Schedule II of the Drug Control Act. COUNT TWO: did unlawfully and feloniously, while being a prisoner in a state, local, or community correctional facility, or in the custody of an employee thereof, procure, sell

or secrete, a chemical compound which the accused had not lawfully received. COUNT THREE: did unlawfully and feloniously, being under the age of 29 years, did knowingly and intentionally possess or transport any firearm after previously being found guilty as a juvenile, and being 14 years or older at the time of the offense, of a delinquent act which would have been a violent felony. Date of the offenses was on or about July 9, 2025.

Royce Stuart Grim

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges Royce Stuart Grim, 48, of the 500 block of Stonewall St., Strasburg, VA 22657, with two counts. COUNTS ONE and TWO: In the County of Warren, Royce Stuart Grim did unlawfully and feloniously, being over the age of eighteen, use a communications system, or another electronic means, for the purposes of soliciting, with lascivious intent, a person he knew or had reason to believe was a child at less than fifteen years of age, to knowingly and intentionally expose his sexual or genital parts to such child to whom he was not legally married or to propose that such child expose her sexual or genital parts to him, the defendant

being, at least seven years older than such child. The accused previously has committed one or more violations. Dates of the offenses were on May 10, 2025.

Christopher Edward Kirby

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges Christopher Edward Kirby, 40, of the 200 block of Mountain River Rd., Front Royal, VA 22630, with two counts. COUNT ONE: In the County of Warren, Christopher Edward Kirby did unlawfully and feloniously, take, drive or use a motor vehicle, having a value of \$1,000 or more and belonging to Shirley Kirby, without the consent of the owner, and in her absence, and with the intent to temporarily deprive the owner of possession thereof. COUNT TWO: did unlawfully and feloniously, knowingly and intentionally possess or transport ammunition for a firearm. Date of the offenses was on or about September 16, 2025.

Seth Albert Smith

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges that: on or about September 23, 2025, in the County of Warren, Seth Albert Smith, 25, of the 100 block of Sharon St., Harrisonburg, VA 22801, did unlawfully and feloniously possess a tool, implement, or an outfit with the intent to utilize it to commit burglary, robbery, or larceny.

Rickie Lee Alger

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges that: on or about March 27, 2025, in the County of Warren, Rickie Lee Alger, 32, of the 2800 block of Red Banks Rd., Mt. Jackson, VA 22842, did unlawfully and feloniously, knowingly or intentionally possess a controlled substance listed in Schedule I or Schedule II of the Drug Control Act.

Destiny Capri Weatherholt

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges Destiny

Capri Weatherholt, 25, of the 100 block of Wilson St., Paw Paw, WV 25434 with two counts. COUNTS ONE and TWO: In the County of Warren, Destiny Capri Weatherholt did unlawfully and feloniously, with the intention of converting goods or merchandise to her own or another's use without having paid the full purchase price, or defrauding the owner of the value of the goods or merchandise, alter the price tag or other price marking on or transfer from one container to another goods or merchandise belonging to Target and having a value of \$1,000. Date of the offenses was on or about November 7, 2024.

Karen Gwinn Greth

The Warren County Va. Circuit

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WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

There are four differences between Picture A and Picture B.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

There are four differences between Picture A and Picture B.



Answers:
1. Missing ribbon 2. Cookies in place of candy cane 3. An extra marshmallow in sugar 4. Marshmallows in cup

Court Grand Jury charges Karen Gwinn Greth, 60, of the 200 block of Church St., Front Royal, VA 22630, with four counts. COUNTS ONE TWO and THREE: In the County of Warren, Karen Gwinn Greth did unlawfully and feloniously, knowingly or intentionally possess a controlled substance listed in Schedule I or Schedule II of the Drug Control Act.

COUNT FOUR: did unlawfully and feloniously while being a prisoner in a state, local or community correctional facility or in the custody of an employee there of procure, sell secrete or possess a chemical compound which the accused had not lawfully received. Dates of the offenses were on or about September 18 and July 14, 2025.

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Kristen Ann Hylton

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges Kristen Ann Hylton, 38, address unavailable, with two counts. COUNT ONE:

In the County of Warren, Kristen Ann Hylton did unlawfully and feloniously, knowingly or intentionally possess a controlled substance

See INDICTMENTS, 10

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AZ ROC344027 AR 366920925, CA1035795, CT HIC-0671520, DC 420223000087, FL CBC056678, ID RCE-51604, IA CI27230, LA 559844, MD MHIC1125, MA 213292, MI 262300331, 262300329, 262300328, 262300318, 262300173, MN IRB10524, MT 266192, NE 50145-24, NV 88990, NJ 13VH13285000, NM 408693, ND 47304, OR 218294, PA PA179643, RI GC-41354, TN 10981, UT 10783658-5501, VT 174.0000871, VA 2705169445, WA LEAFFLH763PG, WV WV056912. *The leading consumer reporting agency conducted a 16 month outdoor test of gutter guards in 2010 and recognized LeafFilter as the #1 rated professionally installed gutter guard system in America.

HOROSCOPES

ARIES – Mar 21/Apr 20

Strange things are happening, Aries. It may be better to go with the flow right now. You might like the change that ensues, and the change in pace could be a positive.

TAURUS – Apr 21/May 21

Better days are ahead, Taurus. It's just a matter of having a little patience and waiting a little longer for things to settle down. Start a new project to take your mind off things.

GEMINI – May 22/Jun 21

Make the most of time spent with friends and family this week, Gemini. You may need to step away for a little while, so cherish this time you get to spend with those you love.

CANCER – Jun 22/Jul 22

Cancer, someone special is able to take a peek into your inner thoughts this week. Their ability to see you so personally could reinforce your outlook.

LEO – Jul 23/Aug 23

You might feel a bit melancholic as the holiday season nears its end, Leo. It's understandable based on how much has been going on. Maintain a strong social calendar.

VIRGO – Aug 24/Sept 22

Virgo, generosity is an admirable trait, and now is a good time to indulge your love of helping others. Make a concerted effort to pitch in where your assistance is necessary.

LIBRA – Sept 23/Oct 23

When one door closes, another door opens, Libra. Look at all of the positive things in your life and embrace the great changes that are coming your way. This is an exciting time for you.

SCORPIO – Oct 24/Nov 22

Scorpio, there are so many things going on right now but you can still function effectively. The pace might be hectic right now, but things will calm down soon enough.

SAGITTARIUS – Nov 23/Dec 21

Sagittarius, a relationship is blooming, Sagittarius, and you're not sure how you feel about it just yet. Take a few more weeks to work through all of your feelings..

CAPRICORN – Dec 22/Jan 20

Capricorn, you have an eye for deals, Capricorn. Even though you have been spending a lot this past month, you can't resist a discount on some post-holiday sales.

AQUARIUS – Jan 21/February 18

Aquarius, take a firm hold of your finances for the next few weeks, Aquarius. Overspending could complicate an important relationship if you're not careful. Curb any purchases for a few days.

PISCES – Feb 19/Mar 20

Pisces, you are not sure how to harness your artistic energy this week, Pisces. You might take a class or engage in a hobby that interests you. Redesigning a room in a home also might be an idea.

FAMOUS BIRTHDAYS

DECEMBER 28

John Legend, Singer (47)

DECEMBER 29

Jude Law, Actor (53)

DECEMBER 30

Kristin Kreuk, Actress (43)

DECEMBER 31

Evie Templeton, Actress (17)

JANUARY 1

Ice Spice, Rapper (26)

JANUARY 2

Dax Shepard, Actor (51)

JANUARY 3

Florence Pugh, Actress (30)

**INDICTMENTS, from 9**

Act.

listed in Schedule I or Schedule II of the Drug Control Act. COUNT TWO: did unlawfully and feloniously while being a prisoner in a state, local, or community correctional facility or in the custody of an employee thereof, procure, sell secrete or possess a chemical compound which the accused had not lawfully received. Date of the offenses was on or about August 4, 2025.

Nathaniel Clark

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges that: on or about March 12, 2025, in the County of Warren, Nathaniel Clark, 44, of the 14000 block of Lee Hwy., Centreville, VA 20121, did unlawfully and feloniously, distribute a Schedule I or II controlled substance.

David Lee Stroupe

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges that: on or about June 20, 2025, in the County of Warren, David Lee Stroupe, 49, of the 400 block of Cherrydale Ave., Front Royal, VA 22630, did unlawfully and feloniously, knowingly or intentionally possess a controlled substance listed in Schedule I or Schedule II of the Drug Control

Justin Lee Deavers

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges Justin Lee Deavers, age and address unavailable, with seven counts. COUNT ONE: In the County of Warren, Justin Lee Deavers did unlawfully and feloniously, knowingly or intentionally possess a controlled substance to wit: heroin, listed in schedule I or Schedule II of the Drug Control Act. COUNT TWO:

did unlawfully and feloniously, knowingly and intentionally possess or transport a firearm after having previously been convicted of a non-violent felony within the prior ten (10) years. COUNT THREE: did unlawfully and feloniously steal a firearm belonging to Devon Owens. COUNT FOUR: did unlawfully and feloniously, while unlawfully in possession of a controlled substance classified in Schedule I or II of the Drug Control Act, simultaneously with knowledge and intent possess a firearm on or about his person.

COUNT FIVE: did unlawfully and feloniously manufacture, sell, give, distribute or possess with the intent to manufacture, sell, give, or distribute, a controlled substance classified in Schedule I or Schedule II of the Drug Control Act. COUNT

SIX: did unlawfully and feloniously sell, give, or distribute or possess with the intent to sell, give, or distribute, more than one ounce but not more than five pounds of Marijuana. COUNT SEVEN: did unlawfully and feloniously possess a controlled substance classified in the Drug Control Act as Schedule III, to wit: Buprenorphine, with intent to manufacture, sell, give, or distribute. Date of the offenses was on or about July 14, 2025.

Tyler James Harmon

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges that: on or about December 20, 2024, in the County of Warren, Tyler James Harmon, age and address unavailable, did unlawfully and feloniously, while being a prisoner in a state, local, or community correctional facility or in the custody of an employee thereof, procure, sell, secrete or possess a chemical compound which the accused had not lawfully received.

batter A.M., a family or household member, after having been at least twice previously convicted of assault and battery against a family or household member within the past twenty years with such offenses occurring on different dates.

Stanley K Nodland

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges that: on or about June 29, 2025, in the County of Warren, Stanley K Nodland, age and address unavailable, did unlawfully and feloniously, steal, items having a value of \$1,000 or more, belonging to Robert Crump.

Xavier Davonne Roy

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges Xavier Davonne Roy, age and address unavailable, with five counts. COUNTS ONE, THREE and FOUR: In the County of Warren, Xavier Davonne Roy did unlawfully and feloniously, being a person having the custody of a child under the age of eighteen years, willfully or negligently cause or permit the life of such child to be endangered or the health of such child to be injured, or caused or permitted such child to be tormented, beaten, or cruelly treated. COUNTS TWO and FIVE: did unlawfully and feloniously, dis-

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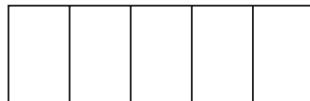
I am an actress born in Barbados on December 31, 2008. I discovered my passion for acting as a young girl, and I attended the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts. My first professional role was in the short film, "Red." Now I'm one of the "outcasts" on a Netflix series about a girl from an unconventional family.

Answer: Evie Templeton

WORD SCRAMBLE

Rearrange the letters to spell something pertaining to shopping.

T S O E R



Answer: Store

Like puzzles? Then you'll love sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your sudoku savvy to the test! **Here's How It Works:** Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle! (Answer in back.)

	2	5		3	4			
3								
4		6	3	5	1			
9	1				7			
6			8	7		9		
7	2	3	1	5	6			
1	4	8				5		
2	9	5	4		6			
			9	7				

Level: Beginner

		5	1		7			
4			3	8	9	2		
		6		1				
7	8		6	5				
					8			
1	6		4	8	7			
		1	8	4	9			
8	5	2	9			4	1	
9					8			

Level: Beginner

		5						
2	1	3				7		
7	4							
8			3	6				
					9			
6		7	4			2		
4	5		2					
		6	7	1	5			
					6			

Level: Intermediate

tribute a Schedule I or II controlled substance. Dates of the offenses were on or about May 16 and May 19, 2025.

Larry Allen Forbes II, A/K/A

Larry Allen Forbus II

The Warren County Va. Circuit Court Grand Jury charges Larry Allen Forbes II, A/K/A Larry Allen Forbus II, 500 block of Royal Ave., Front Royal, VA 22630, with four counts. COUNT ONE: In the County of Warren, Larry Allen Forbes II, A/K/A Larry Allen Forbus II, did unlawfully and feloniously, knowingly or intentionally possess a con-

trolled substance listed in Schedule I or Schedule II of the Drug Control Act. COUNT TWO: did unlawfully and feloniously, intentionally destroy, deface, damage or remove the property of Hydro Spray Car Wash Building, with the value of, or damage to, such property being \$1,000 or more. COUNT THREE: did unlawfully and feloniously while having been the driver of a vehicle involved in an accident in which an attended vehicle or other attended property was damaged, fail to report name, address, driver's license number, and vehicle registration number forthwith to the State Po-

lice or local law-enforcement agency, to the person struck and injured if such person appeared to be capable of understanding and retaining the information, or the driver

or some other occupant of the vehicle collided with or to the custodian of the other damaged property. The accident resulted in damage to property valued at \$1,000 or more. COUNT FOUR: did unlawfully and feloniously destroy, deface, damage, a front porch, belonging to Beth Vaught, with the value of or damage to such property being \$1,000 or more. Dates of the offenses were on or about May 30, May 10 and July 12, 2025.

A Grand Jury Indictment is only a charge and not evidence of guilt. The defendants are entitled to a fair trial with the burden on the government to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.



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Upcoming events with Dan McDermott

Fri. Dec 26, 2025 (7:30-11:30pm)
Music Bingo/Karaoke New Market Eagles*

Sat. Dec 27, 2025 (6-10pm)
Music Bingo/Karaoke Shen Valley Axe
Throwing Co 20 South St. Front Royal, VA

Mon. Dec 29, 2025 (6-8pm)
Musical 5-in-a-Row Front Royal Moose*

Wed. Dec. 31, 2025 (7pm-1am)
New Year's Eve Karaoke Edinburg VFW

Fri. Jan 2, 2026 (7:30-11:30pm)
Music Bingo/Karaoke New Market Eagles*

Mon. Jan 5, 2026 (6-8pm)
Musical 5-in-a-Row Front Royal Moose*

Wed. Jan 7, 2026 (6-9pm)
Trivia/Music Bingo Shen Valley Axe
Throwing Co 20 South St. Front Royal, VA

Sat. Jan 10, 2026 (6-10pm)
Music Bingo/Karaoke Shen Valley Axe
Throwing Co 20 South St. Front Royal, VA

Mon. Jan 12, 2026 (6-8pm)
Musical 5-in-a-Row Front Royal Moose*

Wed. Jan 14, 2026 (6-9pm)
Trivia/Music Bingo Shen Valley Axe
Throwing Co 20 South St. Front Royal, VA

Thurs. Jan 15, 2026 (6:30-8:30pm)
Music Bingo at Winchester, Va. Elks*

Mon. Jan 19, 2026 (6-8pm)
Musical 5-in-a-Row Front Royal Moose*

Wed. Jan 21, 2026 (6-9pm)
Trivia/Music Bingo SVAXECO

Thurs Jan 22, 2026 (6-9pm)
Trivia at North Mountain Vineyard & Winery

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weather forecast

Friday: A chance of rain, snow, and freezing rain before 1pm, then a chance of rain and sleet between 1pm and 2pm, then rain likely after 2pm. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 39. Light and variable wind becoming southeast 5 to 10 mph in the afternoon. Winds could gust as high as 20 mph. Chance of precipitation is 60%. Little or no ice accumulation expected. Little or no snow and sleet accumulation expected.

Friday Night: A chance of rain before 1am. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 37. South wind 5 to 8 mph becoming calm in the evening. Winds could gust as high as 21 mph. Chance of precipitation is 50%.

Saturday: Partly sunny, with a high near 50. North wind 3 to 5 mph.

Saturday Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 33. Calm wind.

Sunday: A chance of rain, mainly after 1pm. Cloudy, with a high near 52. Chance of precipitation is 40%.

Sunday Night: A chance of rain. Cloudy, with a low around 43. Chance of precipitation is 50%.

Monday: Rain likely before 1pm. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 61. Chance of precipitation is 60%.

Monday Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 25.

Tuesday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 36.

Tuesday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 23.

Wednesday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 43.

Wednesday Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 24.

New Year's Day: Partly sunny, with a high near 42.



Ask Stewart

Hey Stewart,

What is a New Years resolution?

— David

New Year's resolutions are personal commitments to improve oneself at the start of a calendar year, often focusing on health (exercise, eating better, losing weight), finances (saving, budgeting), personal growth (learning skills, new hobbies, reading), and relationships (family time, connecting with others).

Tips for Success

• Be Specific: Instead of "exercise

more," aim for "walk 30 minutes, three times a week."

• Start Small: Begin with easy, achievable actions to build momentum.

• Make it a Habit: Integrate new behaviors into your daily routine.

• Plan Ahead: Map out steps, like planning meals if you want to eat healthier.

• Track Progress: Write goals down and check them off as you go.

• Be Flexible: Don't let one slip-up derail you; adjust and keep going.

• Find Support: Share goals with friends or family for accountability.

I will begin 2026 by walking the Greenway Trail around Front Royal with my Tree Steward friends. When we go past Eastham Park, we will check on the 25 new trees that we planted last week.

Happy New Year!
Your Pal in the Trees,
— Stewart

The Front Royal/Warren County Tree Steward program began in 1997 with volunteers dedicated to improving the health of trees by providing educational programs, tree planting and care demonstrations, and tree maintenance throughout the community. The group now consists of over 30 active members with several interns working toward becoming certified tree stewards from our annual "All About Trees Class". Each month Stewart will answer a question from our readers. Please forward it to "Stewart" in care of:

frwctreestewards@comcast.net
and we may publish it in a future issue.

Please visit our website at:
www.treesfrontroyal.org

Rappahannock County Food Pantry
Salvation Army – Culpeper
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Western Hanover Emergency Action Team

REC provides electric service to over 184,000 connections in parts of 22 Virginia counties. With its general office in Fredericksburg, Va., the Cooperative operates and maintains more than 18,000 miles of power lines through its service area, which ranges from the Blue Ridge Mountains to the tidal waters of the Chesapeake Bay. For more information about REC, please visit www.myrec.coop. Follow REC on Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube.

Belle Grove

From December 5th to 30th, Belle Grove Plantation is decorated for the holidays and open for touring including the Museum Shop and exhibits in the Beverley B. Shoemaker Welcome Center. Open Monday-Thursday, 10 a.m.- 4 p.m., Friday-Saturday 10 a.m.- 8 p.m., and Sunday 1-5 p.m. Belle Grove will be closed on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day and will close for the winter starting December 31. Call (540) 869-2028 www.bellegrove.org, www.facebook.com/bellegrove, www.instagram.com/BelleGrove1797

Mount Holly Baptist Church youth group on parade



For the first time, the Mount Holly Baptist Church participated in Middletown's Holiday Parade on December 7 with a float organized by the members of the youth group and who presented the Nativity scene. Member of the church, Joann Bray, said, "We decided to put a float in this year to support the community. There were decorations on the float

and members of the youth group were wearing the traditional clothing of Mary, Joseph and angels. There was also the infant Jesus in the manger. A young man from Strasburg played the trumpet on the float. It was just nice!"

Mt. Holly's Deaconess Leslie Hecker described the sense of pride that was felt about the members of

the youth group participating in the parade on December 7. "It was a perfect day," she said, and added, "This was done for the first time, but I don't think it will be the last because it was fun." She emphasized that they wanted to convey the message of 'Keep Christ in Christmas' and also to wish a Merry Christmas to all!"

REC Donated More Than \$19,000 to Area Food Banks in 2025

Rappahannock Electric Cooperative (REC) responded to the increased food insecurity felt by many in our region this fall by donating \$16,000 to non-profit food banks across its service territory in October and November.

"These donations, which bring the total REC donated toward reducing food insecurity to more than \$19,000 in 2025, are an example of how the cooperative powers more than homes, we power communities," said Casey Hollins, managing director – communications and public relations.

The donations went to 18 non-profit food banks and food pantries that serve residents in 19 of the 22 counties served by REC, and ranged from \$500 to \$3,000, with \$1,000 being the most frequent amount donated.

Food Banks Supported by REC in 2025:

516 Project
Beaverdam Food Pantry
Blue Ridge Area Food Bank
Camping for Hunger
Caroline County Department of Social Services

Fauquier FISH
Feeding Greene
FISH of Clarke County
Fox Moon Farms
Fredericksburg Food Bank
Good Samaritan Food Pantry and Clothes Closet
Highland Food Pantry
Madison Emergency Services Association

January, 2026 Youth Events at Samuels Public Library

These are the events being presented by the Youth Services Department at Samuels Public Library during the month of January 2026. More information about Samuels Library and the programs and services available can be found at www.samuelslibrary.net or by

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Thursday, January 1 - The library will be closed for the holiday.

Saturday, January 3 - All Day - Our Winter Reading Program will begin. Register online or at the reference desk, all ages. Children who have someone read to them must listen to 5 books/week, ages 6-11 who read themselves must read 1/week, teens must read 30 minutes/week to get a prize. Program runs through January and February. 2:30 PM - Light up the Sky. For ages 6-11. Come learn about the Northern Lights and then "light up the sky" creating your own picture of the Aurora Borealis. Registration is required.

Monday, January 5 - 10:15 AM - Music & Movement for Babies (ages 0-23 months). 11:15 AM - Music & Movement for Toddlers (ages 2-5). Join our fun and joyful time with your little ones as we listen to music while learning some basic movements and multisensory activities designed to delight your baby or toddler. Registration

is required.

Tuesday, January 6 - 4:00 PM - Snowflakes. For ages 6-11. Hear stories about snow and then make your own special snowflake to take home. Registration is required.

Wednesday, January 7 - 10:15AM - Toddler Story Time. 11:00AM - Preschool Story Time. Come in for an enjoyable hour filled with New Year stories, exciting sing-alongs, finger plays, and a craft.

Saturday, January 10 - 1:00 PM - Chess. For ages 10-18. Come enjoy an afternoon of learning the game or practicing your skill. Registration is required. 2:30 PM - Tie-Dye T-shirts: Teens Connect. For ages 12-18. Bring your own white t-shirt and we will supply the dye and rubber bands. If you forget the shirt, we will have a bandana. Registration is required.

Monday, January 12 - 10:15 AM - Music & Movement for Babies (ages 0-23 months). 11:15 AM - Music & Movement for Toddlers (ages 2-5). Join our fun and joyful time with your

little ones as we listen to music while learning some basic movements and multisensory activities designed to delight your baby or toddler. Registration is required.

Tuesday, January 6 - 10:30 AM - Sled and Slope: Homeschool Hub. For ages 6-11. Design and build your own little sled to test on our slopes. How far will it go? Registration is required.

Wednesday, January 14 - 10:15AM - Toddler Story Time. 11:00AM - Preschool Story Time. Come in for an enjoyable hour filled with stories about Animal Tracks, exciting sing-alongs, finger plays, and a craft.

Thursday, January 15 - 10:30 AM - Grandparent Story Time. For ages 0-6. Come hear a grandparent read a few stories, nursery rhymes, and do a craft. Registration is required.

Saturday, January 17 - 11:00 AM - Paws for Reading. For ages 6-18+. Paws for Reading is a program where people read aloud to trained therapy dogs, which helps improve their reading skills, confidence, and attitudes to-

ward reading. This program provides a non-judgmental and stress-free environment, as the dogs are calm, attentive listeners who don't correct mistakes, making it less intimidating for children. Bring your own book or use one of ours! Teens and adults can come for the calming influence and doggy kisses. Registration is required.

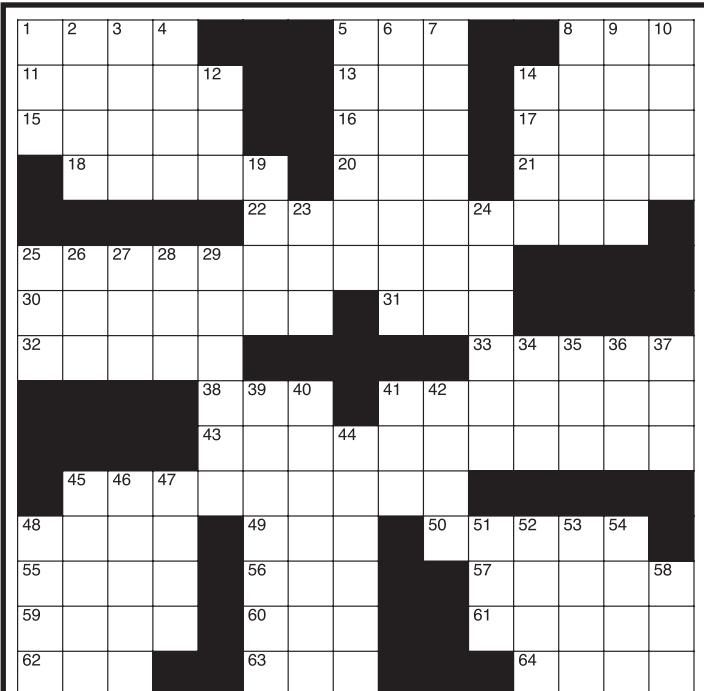
Monday, January 19 - The library will be closed for the holiday.

Tuesday, January 20 - 4:00 PM - Our Flag Story: 250th American Celebration. For ages 6-11. Listen to how an old flag is disposed of properly, see

how to fold it correctly, learn the history of the American flag, and then make your own. Registration is required.

Wednesday, January 21 - 10:15 AM - Toddler Story Time. 11:00 AM - Preschool Story Time. Come in for an enjoyable hour filled with Ice stories, exciting sing-alongs, finger plays, and a craft.

Thursday, January 22 - 10:30 AM - Grandparent Story Time. For ages 0-6. Come hear a grandparent read a few stories, nursery rhymes, and do a craft. Registration is required.



CLUES ACROSS

1. Paddles
5. Sunscreen rating
8. Very fast airplane
11. Immune responses
13. "Partner" to feather
14. New England river
15. Longest river in New Guinea
16. Midway between east and southeast
17. Israeli politician
18. Back bones
20. Consumed
21. One you can rely on
22. Dressed up gaudily
25. Representatives
30. Dog breed
31. Pitching statistic
32. Manpower
33. S. Korean entertainer
38. Outsourcing firm
41. Viceroy of Egypt under Turkish rule
43. One who removes antlers from a flower
45. Potluck dish
48. Discount
49. Airborne (abbr.)
50. Cavalry sword
55. Basics
56. Hollywood director Howard
57. Afflicted in mind or body
59. Horsley and Majors are two
60. Midway between northeast and east
61. Spiritual leader of a Jewish congregation
62. Malaysian isthmus
63. Fall back
64. Cheek

CLUES DOWN

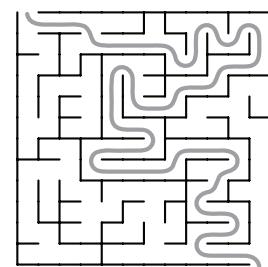
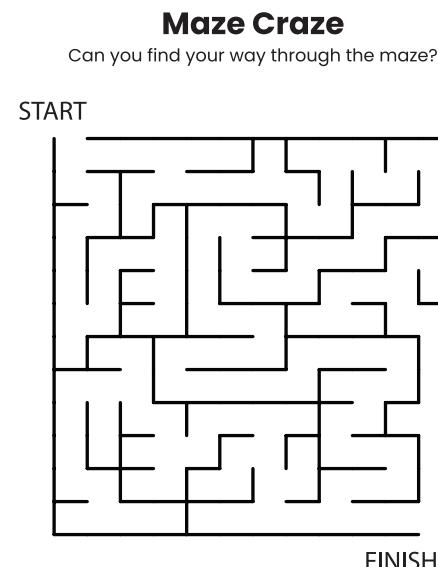
1. Former CIA
2. Baseball's best pitchers
3. __ Nui, Easter Island
4. Invests in little enterprises
5. Constant
6. Hobby
7. A place to store food
8. Short-tail marten
9. Burn with a hot liquid
10. Left his heart in San Francisco
12. Swedish krona
14. Legendary actor Connery
19. French cleric
23. Former measure of length for textiles
24. Opaque glassy substance
25. Residue of burned item
26. A place to unwind
27. Japanese honorific
28. Terminus
29. Fails to make a shot
34. Journalist Tarbell
35. College hoops tournament
36. Monetary unit of Macao
37. Of she
39. Spoke ill of
40. Elements
41. Kilocalorie (abbr.)
42. Shades
44. Poem of fourteen lines
45. Pole used in Scottish sport
46. Hollyhocks genus
47. Street name for marijuana
48. Polio vaccine developer
51. Swiss river
52. Prejudice
53. Actor Idris
54. Confederate soldiers
58. Criticize



Food FACT:

This sweetened beverage was once a bitter drink made from roasted cocoa beans.

Answer: Hot chocolate



English: Mug
Spanish: Taza
Italian: Tazza
French: Mug
German: Tasse

Get the PICTURE?



Can you guess what the bigger picture is?

Answer: Hot chocolate



Answer: Hot chocolate

Answer: Hot chocolate



Friday, January 23 - 3:00 PM - Heroes of the Garden: Wee Ones. For ages 3-5, with guardian. 4:00 PM - Heroes of the Garden: Green Thumbs. For ages 6-11. Come hear stories about the heroes of the garden. Are they working in the winter? How do they help? Don't worry parents - no live worms or insects to take home! Registration is required.

Saturday, January 24 - 11:00 AM - Squirrel Appreciation Day! For ages 5-10. Come listen to a sto- Squirrel! Sorry. Come hear a story about squirrels, do some crafts, and go on a hike at Shenandoah River State Park to find squirrels and their nests. Registration is required. 2:30 PM - Press Play. For ages 12-18. Come enjoy an afternoon of playing Nintendo video games. Registration is required.

Monday, January 26 - 10:15 AM - Music & Movement for Babies (ages 0-23 months). 11:15 AM - Music & Movement for Toddlers & Preschoolers (ages 2-5). Join our fun and joyful time with your little ones as we listen to music while learning some basic movements and multisensory activities designed to delight your baby or toddler. Registration is required.

Tuesday, January 27 - 10:30 AM - Snowball Launcher: Homeschool Hub. For ages 6-11. Learn about potential and kinetic energy as we design and test a snowball launcher. Registration is required.

Wednesday, January 28 - 10:15AM - Toddler Story Time. 11:00AM - Read with the Sheriff: Preschool Story Time. Come in for an enjoyable hour filled with Hibernation stories, exciting sing-alongs, finger plays, and a craft.

Thursday, January 29 - 10:30 AM - Grandparent Story Time. For ages 0-6. Come hear a grandparent read a few stories, nursery rhymes, and do a craft. Registration is required.

Crash Involving School Bus in Rappahannock County

Virginia State Police is investigating a two-vehicle crash involving a Warren County school bus that occurred at approximately 9:10 a.m. this morning (Dec. 15, 2025) on Route 522 in Rappahannock County.

A 1994 Ford F-150 was travelling on Route 522 when it was unable to avoid the school bus, which had pulled out from a stop sign at Chester Gap Road onto Route 522. The bus was transporting 10 elementary school age students at the time.

Eight students were transported to an area hospital with minor injuries, and most have since been released to their parents. The two others were released to their parents at the crash scene.

The driver of the Ford F-150 suffered minor injuries and was transported to an area hospital.

The driver of the school bus, William Payne, Jr., 66, of Front Royal, Va., suffered minor injuries and was transported to an area hospital. Payne has been charged with failure to yield.

The crash remains under investigation.

State expands nursing home oversight, launches public complaint portal

Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin says the state has made meaningful progress tightening oversight of nursing homes just four months after issuing an executive order aimed at fixing long-standing staffing shortages, slow inspections, and limited transparency.

The changes stem from Executive Order 52, signed in August, which directed the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) to strengthen how nursing homes are monitored and regulated across the Commonwealth. The order came amid growing concerns—both nationally and in Virginia—about staffing shortfalls, inspection backlogs, and the quality of care in long-term care facilities.

State officials say the most immediate improvement has been staffing. Since August, the Office of Licensure and Certification (OLC), which oversees nursing homes, has received more than 2,000 job applications and hired 13 long-term care medical facility inspectors. That hiring push reduced vacancy rates for those positions from more than 40 percent to just 9 percent, a change officials say should lead to more frequent inspections and faster responses to complaints.

Leadership gaps were also addressed. The agency filled senior management roles within OLC and its long-term care division, added supervisors, and expanded staffing in other inspection areas, including acute care facilities. A new Northern Virginia regional office was also created to reduce travel time for inspectors and improve recruitment and retention in one of the state's most competitive labor markets.

Beyond staffing, the state has begun modernizing how complaints are handled. In mid-December, VDH launched an online public complaint portal that allows residents, families, and nursing home staff to submit concerns digitally. Previously, complaints were largely handled by fax or email. The new system automatically generates a tracking number, giving complainants a way to follow up and reference their reports.

State officials say the portal is designed to make the process more accessible and transparent, while still allowing complaints to be submitted by phone, mail, or in person.

Transparency was also expanded through changes to the agency's website, which now prominently links to federal nursing home data showing inspection histories, survey results, and performance ratings for facilities across Virginia. That information was previously available but not easily accessible from state resources.

Youngkin framed the effort as one focused on restoring public confidence. "Every Virginian deserves confidence that their loved ones in nurs-

ing homes are safe, respected, and receiving the care they deserve," he said, pointing to faster inspections and clearer accountability as key goals.

Health officials emphasized that the reforms are ultimately about residents, many of whom cannot advocate for themselves. Karen Shelton, Virginia's health commissioner, noted that nursing home residents are often parents, spouses, or siblings, underscoring the stakes of proper oversight.

An advisory board created as part of the executive order has also begun meeting regularly. The group—made up of providers, physicians, advocates, and other stakeholders—has discussed inspection practices, value-based care models, and policy changes aimed at improving quality and resident-centered care.

Virginia's Office of Licensure and Certification oversees nearly 300 nursing homes statewide, covering close to 33,000 beds. In addition to nursing homes, the office regulates hospitals, hospice providers, home care agencies, and the state's Certificate of Public Need program.

While officials say the early results are encouraging, many of the reforms—particularly those tied to quality outcomes—will take longer to measure. For now, state leaders argue that rebuilding staffing capacity and modernizing basic systems were necessary first steps toward a more responsive and accountable nursing home oversight system.

Winchester Economic Development Authority partnering with Laurel Ridge to bolster area workforce programs

Laurel Ridge Community College Workforce Solutions is excited to partner with the Winchester Economic Development Authority on an initiative that will provide \$100,000 in scholarship funding for city residents enrolled in FastForward credential classes.

Virginia Workforce Credential Grant funding had been covering two-thirds of the cost of funding for eligible students taking FastForward credential programs—which include CDL, CompTIA, Electrical, Heavy Equipment Operator, HVAC, Mechatronics, Medical Assistant, Pharmacy Technician, Phlebotomy Technician, Plumbing and Welding—but the high demand for the programs has meant the funding was dwindling. Enrollment in FastForward programs is up more than 25 percent from last year, and Workforce Solutions has also recently launched Fiber Installer Technician and Power Line Worker programs, further straining FastForward grant funds.

Thanks to the city EDA's gift, not only will up to 25 more students from Winchester receive financial assistance to be trained in high-demand fields, but area employers will be able to meet crucial workforce needs.

"We are thrilled with the Winchester EDA's strategic decision to

invest these scholarship funds in their citizens for the purposes of developing their workforce skills while also addressing the needs of local industry and supporting local economic development efforts in the City of Winchester," said Workforce Solutions Vice President Jeanian Clark. "They are a wonderful partner to work with, and we are grateful for their vision and confidence in these programs."

Winchester EDA is proud to partner with Laurel Ridge Workforce Solutions in supporting workforce development in the city, said EDA Executive Director Jeff Buettner.

"By investing in workforce credentials and career training, we are helping residents gain the skills needed for in-demand jobs while strengthening the city's economic future," he said.

To learn more about FastForward programs, visit laurelridgeworkforce.com/fastforward, or call Workforce Solutions at 540-868-7021.

First class of Power Line Workers graduates from Laurel Ridge Community College

Laurel Ridge Community College celebrated the first graduates of its new Power Line Worker Program on Friday morning. Ten students graduated from the pre-apprenticeship course, the only one in the state north of Richmond. They all earned credentials in the following areas: Commercial

Driver's License, Heavy Equipment Operator, Power Industry Fundamentals, Power Line Worker Level 1, Virginia Department of Transportation Work Zone Flagger – Intermediate, OSHA 10 and First Aid/CPR.

"Developing this program has truly been a partnership—one that proves when businesses and colleges work together we can quickly stand up in-demand programs that help students earn family-sustaining wages," Laurel Ridge President Kim Blosser told the graduates and their families. "We also wouldn't have been able to get to this graduation today without the help of our community college colleagues, Southside and Wytheville."

For the final 3½ weeks of the 14-week program, students stayed near Southside Community College, which has a pole-climbing facility. Dominion and Rappahannock Electric Cooperative sponsored their housing costs.

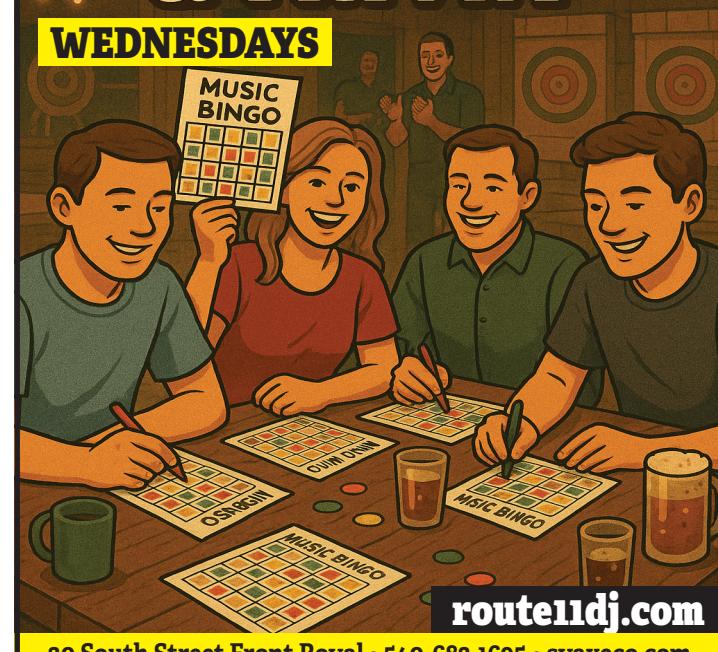
Laurel Ridge has recently erected a pole yard, and a facility that will allow the college to host the Power Line Worker program from start to finish is expected to be ready within about a year, said Dr. Blosser.

Laurel Ridge Workforce Solutions originally planned to launch the Power Line Worker program in January 2027, said program manager AnnaJane Whitacre. However, the Northwestern Virginia Power & Energy Consortium—focused on developing workforce training programs for the energy industry and made up of the college, Dominion Energy Virginia, Shenando-

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ah Valley Electric Cooperative, Altec, MasTec, NextEra Energy, NOVEC, Pike Electric, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative, River City Construction and Town of Front Royal Energy Services – asked for the program to be ready sooner, leading the first classes to begin in mid-September.

Jimmy Powers, an instructor on loan from Wytheville Community College, said he witnessed the students improve greatly during the course.

"To watch these guys – to start off and go up the pole just a little ways and to actually see some of their legs shaking and knees knocking at the beginning, and then to watch them the last day when they let all the line out and leaned all the way out – that's success," he said. "They have a skill now that not everybody in this room has. That's all because of the people who are here at Laurel Ridge and the passion they have. You're all going to make some good money, like you're supposed to. Thank you for allowing me to have the privilege to be able to come here and teach these young men."

The average starting salary for a Power Line Worker is \$70,000, with numerous overtime opportunities, according to Whitacre.

2025 Liberty High School graduate Bryan Del Cid enrolled in the program after Lisa Heiser, a FastForward career coach for Workforce Solutions, visited his school and talked about the course.

"It sounded like a really good opportunity," he said. "I thought the classes were really good. It was organized and everybody was right on track. Everything was clicking."

Graduate Dillian Adams is a 2017 James Wood High School graduate.

"I loved it, it was very helpful with all the instructors," he said. "I took the course to get a career started. I've already got a couple people I've recommended it to."

All of the students had interviews earlier this month with representatives from Dominion, NOVEC and

River City Construction, Whitacre said, and some have had additional interviews with other power companies.

Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative President and CEO Greg Rogers said he was impressed with how quickly Laurel Ridge was able to launch the program. He said safety and career longevity are important to him.

"I think we all want that," added Mark DeChristopher, system construction manager at NOVEC. "We want to find the kids who want to be in this industry, not trying it out. When it's 11 degrees outside and it's snowing and you're getting called out, you've got to be the right person."

Rogers said he was happy to have a Power Line Worker training program so close by now.

"These guys have now become lifelong learners through this process," he said. "They will never stop."

The Power Line Worker program qualifies for both FastForward and G3 funding. There will be an information session on Feb. 26, with the next class starting in mid-April. To learn more, visit laurelridgeworkforce.com/poweline.

Box Tree Moth Quarantine for Clarke and Frederick Counties and City of Winchester

Quarantine restricts movement of boxwood plants in effort to slow the spread of invasive pest

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) announces the establishment of a Box Tree Moth Quarantine for Clarke and Frederick counties and the city of Winchester.

Box tree moth (BTM) is an invasive insect pest that can significantly damage and potentially kill boxwood (Buxus species) plants if left unchecked. The caterpillars are ravenous feeders,

and heavy infestations can completely defoliate host plants. BTM is native to East Asia and has become a pest in Europe where boxwood is native. The invasive pest was first found in the United States in New York in 2021.

VDACS inspectors initially detected BTM at multiple sites in Clarke and Frederick counties and the city of Winchester in July and August 2025. VDACS staff treated all sites where the invasive pest was found during the summer and fall of 2025. Subsequent surveys carried out by the agency indicate that BTM has spread to additional locations and has become established in Clarke and Frederick counties and city of Winchester.

The Box Tree Moth Quarantine is being established to slow the rate at which the invasive insect moves from infested areas. The quarantine restricts the movement of all boxwood plants, Buxus species, from moving out of the quarantined area, unless a business or individual first obtains a permit or compliance agreement from VDACS. The compliance agreement will allow businesses to self-certify boxwood plants and require businesses to inspect boxwood plants for BTM, set and monitor traps, treat regularly during active periods, and notify recipients when boxwood shipments have been distributed outside of the quarantined areas. VDACS will issue the permits and compliance agreements at no charge to the business or individual.

To obtain a compliance agreement or permit for the movement of boxwood plants out of the quarantined area, please contact the VDACS Office of Plant Industry Services at complianceagreements@vdacs.virginia.gov or by calling 804.786.3515.

Early detection and rapid response are vital for the management of any newly introduced plant pest. VDACS encourages property owners and the general public to report any suspected damage to boxwood plants on

their property by using the agency's Invasive Species Reporting Tool. For resources on how to identify BTM damage or life stages, please visit www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/ENTO/ENTO-445/ENTO-445.pdf.

For more information on BTM, please visit www.vdacs.virginia.gov/plant-industry-services.shtml or www.aphis.usda.gov/plant-pests-diseases/box-tree-moth or contact the VDACS Office of Plant Industry Services at 804.786.3515.

VDOT Schedules January 14 Public Hearing in Front Royal for South Street Improvements

STAUNTON – The Virginia Department of Transportation will hold a public hearing concerning improvements to South Street in the Town of Front Royal. The open-house meeting will take place between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 14, at Samuels Public Library, 330 E. Criser Rd., Front Royal, VA 22630.

Citizens can come in during the meeting hours and discuss the project on a one-on-one basis with VDOT officials and designers. Written comments can be submitted at the meeting or within 10 days after the meeting date to Cameron Murie, Project Manager, Virginia Department of Transportation, 811 Commerce Road, Staunton, VA 24401-9029. Oral comments can be recorded at the meeting with the assistance of a court reporter.

In the event of inclement weather, the public hearing will be held Wednesday, Jan. 28, at the same time and location.

This project is designed to improve safety along South Street between the intersections with Hill Street and Commerce Avenue / Remount Road (Route 522). This stretch of road has many businesses and considerable



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pedestrian, light-vehicle and heavy-vehicle traffic.

Proposed improvements include the addition of crosswalks at several locations along and across South Street, upgrading existing traffic signals, and adding raised medians that can be utilized as pedestrian refuge areas. These improvements will enhance safety by reducing vehicle-pedestrian and vehicle-vehicle conflicts.

In 2023 South Street had an average traffic count of 14,137 vehicles per day. By the design year of 2050 the estimated daily traffic volume will be 16,100 vehicles per day.

The total estimated cost of this project is \$4 million, which includes \$482,000 for preliminary engineering, \$561,000 for right of way acquisition and utility relocation, and \$3 million for construction.

This project was selected for funding under the SMART SCALE process for prioritizing transportation projects. Additional information about the improvements is available on the VDOT project page.

The VDOT Customer Service Center operates 24/7 to help roadway users report potential hazards, make service requests or get information related to Virginia's transportation network. Use its mobile friendly website or call 800-367-7623.

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