



Village Blacksmith shares his experience with students

BY TYLER BASS

Longtime blacksmith George Cramer has spent eight years swinging his hammer and teaching others as the Village Blacksmith in his shop located off Gloucester's Main Street.

Cramer has more than 20 years' experience in blacksmithing and shares the knowledge he's gained in that time with students who take his three-day classes.

The classes start off with a day of learning. Students learn basic forging techniques and apply them to making their very own grilling set. The skills they learn and practice during the class can be taken with them if they choose to continue blacksmithing, said Cramer.

For a class, Cramer can have up to nine students split between five active forges. The forges' fuels include coal, induction and propane. The students use hand-held tools and Cramer's guidance to shape their creations.

The first item the students make is a hook from which

to hang their grilling tools, he said. Students start by drawing out the metal to lengthen it before hammering an end into a point and rounding it off. They then curl the tip of the point and hammer a bend to form the hook.

The hook is then twisted to make a spiral pattern. Then the other end is flattened and a hole punched to give the hook the ability to hang from a nail. The hook is heat-treated and then while still hot, is coated with beeswax to protect the metal from corrosion. Cramer said the simple item employs a number of basic techniques that his students can build upon.

Students work on their own projects during the remainder of the three-day class. Cramer said students sometimes come in with an idea of a big project they want to work on during the class, which gets scaled down as time goes on. He said they often don't realize how hard the work is, which he said is worth it for the end product though.

"There's nothing more sat-

isfying than making something from scratch with your hands," he said—a statement he says is something that applies to aspects of life outside of forging.

Working with metal is a creative outlet for Cramer and others who practice the craft. He said people need a creative outlet in life. For those who share his passion but don't know where to start, he broke down the essentials a smith needs to start out.

Cramer said to become a blacksmith, people need something to heat the metal, hold the metal, and hit the metal on and with. He said anvils can be expensive but so long as what you're hitting is softer than what you are hitting it on, it can work.

He said the cheapest anvil substitute would be to buy a large sledgehammer and fix the head to a tree stump. He said if you don't have smithing tongs, pliers will work just fine.

Cramer said people can buy a decent forge for a few hundred dollars, but knows of

others who have made their own forges. He said all one needs to make a coal forge is something to hold the coal and an air source to keep the heat alive. He said as a person makes and sells their creations, they can better fund their hobby.

A number of folks who take Cramer's class have moved on to continue working as a blacksmith. The classes he offers are expanding to include more specialty courses, and including other instructors who are also experts of their craft. The Village Blacksmith held an axe-making class recently with blacksmith Mark Sperry.

Cramer also has items available for wholesale and takes on custom work. He said the Village Blacksmith offer welding and repair work as well.

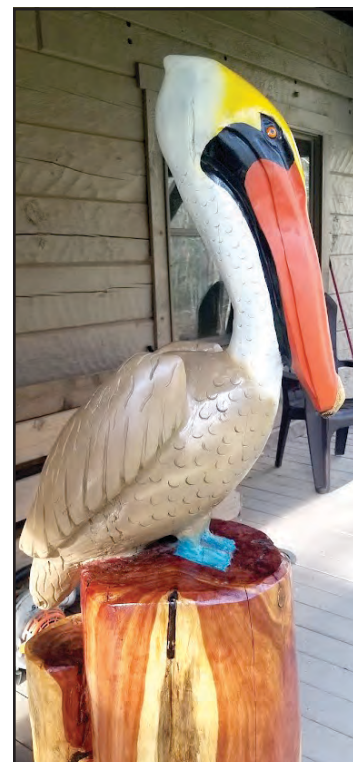
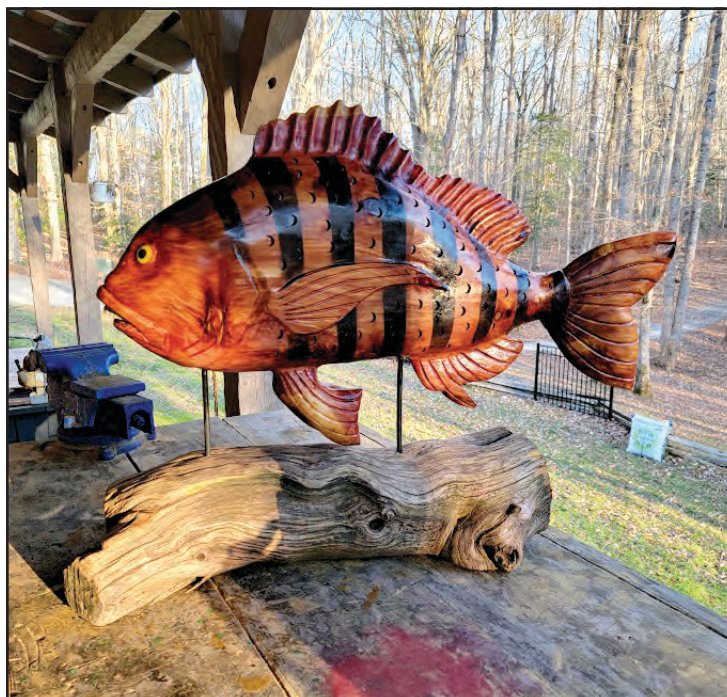
For those looking for more information about the work being done at the Village Blacksmith, its wholesale items or the classes offered by Cramer, go to gloucester-blacksmith.com or visit its Facebook page.



TYLER BASS / GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Village Blacksmith George Cramer forges a hook, one of the first items his students make when taking his class. Below, left, after drawing out the steel and hammering it to a point, he bends the point into a hook. Below, middle, the metal is often reheated in one of Cramer's forges like this induction forge. Below, right, near the end of the process, Cramer twists the hook in a vise. Above, Cramer rubs bee's wax on the hook as a final step, to protect it from corrosion.





SHERRY HAMILTON / GAZETTE-JOURNAL
Chainsaw artist Norman Jones stays busy creating carvings, large and small, in his shop in the Woods Cross Roads area of Gloucester. He does the rough carving on a platform in his backyard, as shown with the beginning of a flamingo, at right, and then moves to his front porch, where he puts on the finishing touches, as shown adjacent to the raw work-in-progress. Among the larger items he has carved are the seahorse, above, and, clockwise from top right, a fish, fox, cat, and stork.

Creating art with wooden logs and a chainsaw

BY SHERRY HAMILTON

Chainsaw artist Norman Jones of Pioneer Chainsaw Arts in Gloucester creates a wide range of wood sculptures at his home in Woods Cross Roads. An avid fisherman, he concentrates on fish, waterfowl, and other sea-related creatures, but as a hunter, he also enjoys mak-

ing woodland creatures such as the occasional bear or fox or rabbit.

Jones starts each of his pieces on a wooden platform in his backyard, cutting up a log that still has the bark intact, then roughing it out with his chainsaw. He uses only cedar for his pieces, gathering the rough logs from a variety of places, including a relative

who's an arborist, a downed tree that a neighbor might give him, or even one he sees along the roadside.

"I'll stop and ask the property owner," he said.

The piece, whether it's an 8-foot-tall flamingo or a one-foot wall plaque, is then hauled to a workbench on the wide front porch of his home at Woods Cross Roads, where the detail work begins. He carves and grinds fins and scales and ears and tails and other body parts, sometimes augmenting a piece with teeth or whiskers or claws made of pieces from a deer antler.

It takes about a week for Jones to finish each piece, using a range of tools such as grinders, rotary tools, belt sanders, and other equipment. Once the carving and sanding are finished, Jones coats each piece with marine vinyl urethane to create a durable finish. Some pieces might be painted, in part or in whole, including the eyes of various creatures.

Among the specialty pieces he has created have been fireflies, furnishings, frogs, an occasional lighthouse here, a boat there.

Jones said he carved his first piece 20 years ago, creating a bear from a log a friend gave him when he lived in Williamsburg. He was busy building a business, though, so he didn't do anything else until he moved to his seven-acre wooded parcel in Gloucester 10 years ago. He had to cut down some trees to get a satellite signal, and he ended up creating a 10-foot alligator out of one of the logs. He hasn't stopped since.

"I kind of go into a trance when I make things," said Jones. "When I start carving, I stay on it for hours ... It's hard for me to sell some of this stuff. I almost want to buy it back."

Jones primarily sells his pieces at area festivals, including the Mathews Seafood Festival or Gloucester Main Street Beer Garden. But he can also be reached at 757-869-5077, and his work can be seen on Facebook.

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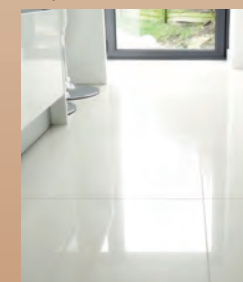
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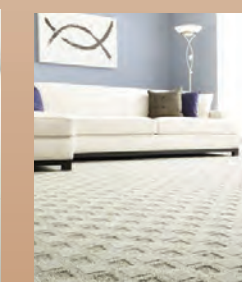
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Jerry Ligon, right, works with his granddaughters Avalyn, left, and Coralie on bagging bird seed to sell for their entrepreneurial project.



Avalyn and Coralie Ligon, from left, show off two of the chicks they purchased with some of the money they made on seed sales.

Never too young to learn financial literacy

BY SHERRY HAMILTON

Jerry Ligon of Grimstead is teaching his granddaughters, Avalyn, 8, and Coralie, 5, how to be entrepreneurs.

A retired aviation manager and pilot, Ligon spent nine years after retirement teaching seventh grade science at Thomas Hunter Middle School before retiring a second time.

During Covid, he and his wife, Cheryl, welcomed their son Chad, his wife Jennifer, and the girls, who live in Richmond, to their waterfront home on Gwynn's Island, and Ligon decided to launch a project with his granddaughters that he began with his seventh graders years ago.

Ligon purchases black oil bird seed in bulk and assists

Avalyn and Coralie in bagging the seed in gallon-sized plastic bags for sale. The three of them load the bags into a large plastic tub and take the bulk of them to two local businesses—Haskins Bayside Service Center and Woodstock Auto Repairs—where customers can purchase them at a price of \$6 for four pounds of seed. Both are at Port Haywood.

"We're trying to teach them to be entrepreneurs," said Ligon, "to find ways to make money that don't require a lot of investment."

After they've collected their earnings, Avalyn and Coralie then divide their money three ways—80 percent goes into an investment account set up for each child that Ligon controls, while 10 percent is tithed to God by contributing to the church or "doing something for someone else," and the remaining 10 percent is for the girls to spend on whatever they want.

Ligon said he doesn't place any restrictions on how the girls spend their 10 percent—they make their own determination later about whether their purchase was worth it.

As of last Tuesday, Coralie had \$1,000 in her account, while Avalyn had \$800 "because of some bad speculative investments by me," said Ligon.

As the girls grow older, they'll learn more about the numbers side of their activities and about stocks and play a greater part in making their own investments, said Ligon.

Avalyn excitedly shared information about one of the charitable projects the girls have contributed to—Water for South Sudan. She explained that the people in South Sudan have to walk a long way to get water for their daily needs, sometimes spending half a day walking and often putting them in jeopardy of being attacked.

The project, which was started by Salva Dut, a "Lost Boy" of Sudan, funds the drilling of wells in villages so that people have their own local water supply, easing their daily burden.

Avalyn was excited this year when her second-grade teacher had the class read the book "A Long Walk to Water" that was inspired by Dut's life story.

"At the last chapter, it says 'thanks for the wells,'" said Avalyn, clearly delighted that she and her sister were among those who were deserving of thanks.

Both girls also talked about some of the purchases they've made—baby chicks (that they brought, one by one, from the chicken coop to show off), supplies for gymnastics, candy, and Slime. Avalyn said she hopes to someday spend a chunk of her investment fund on a cell phone.

Asked how they like their seed project, Avalyn said, "We enjoy it," and Coralie added, "It's super fun."

For more information about Water for South Sudan, visit waterforsouthsudan.org or call 585-383-0410.



Villagers in South Sudan gather around their newly-completed well, holding a banner that thanks the Ligon family for their contribution to Water for South Sudan that enabled its construction.

Free visual arts camps this summer

Arts on Main is offering free summer visual art camps for young people ages 3-14 this summer at the gallery on Main Street in Gloucester.

During six one-week sessions, local professional artist Anne Atkinson will teach students how to create their own masterpieces using a variety of media ranging from paints to clay, said a press release.

In addition to creating, the students will learn how to study art by exploring art history as well as different artists and artistic styles and traditions.

This will extend Arts on Main's signature before-school program, Palette Pals, beyond the school year and provide a way for young people to continue learning how to study and create visual art, said the release.

The Summer Art Exploration Camps are divided by age, with topics and lessons appropriate for each age group. The camps are all held from 9 a.m. to noon. They began last week, June 19-23, with a camp for ages 3-5.

The next camp will be held from Monday through Friday, July 10-14 for elementary ages 6-10. It will be followed by a camp for students ages 11-14 from July 17-21, then by a second camp for ages 6-10 from July 31 to Aug. 4. Ages 11-14 will have a second camp from Aug. 21-25, and the season will end with a second camp for the youngest artists, ages 3-5, from

Aug. 29 to Sept. 1.

The camps are being supported by the James P. Ver-

halen Family Foundation. Students will be enrolled on a first-come, first-served basis.

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One doesn't have to be a pro to become a confident cook

BY TYLER BASS

Chef Taylor Duncan, CEO of Personal Experiences with Chef Taylor, wears his love for cooking on his sleeve, quite literally. His tattoos are a blend of nautical and culinary imagery, such as a mushroom jellyfish and a pirate ship with a chef's hat.

The York County native has years of cooking experience under his belt and has served food to countless individuals. While he's a trained chef, one doesn't have to be a professional to learn how to become a more confident cook.

Personal Experiences with Chef Taylor offers people the ability to have a meal prepared by a professional. He said his clients range from couples who want to have a special date night, to catering for large weddings. He also offers cooking classes for those looking to learn.

Duncan said cooking is his life. He first began to learn his culinary skills as a child cooking with his father. He said his dad loves cooking and would cook for the two of them when they spent weekends together. He inherited his father's love of the craft.

As time went on, Duncan said cooking was something he always fell back on when trying to find his path in life. He wasn't sure in what direction he would go until he realized food could be his future. His formal training came when he attended the Culinary Institute of Virginia. He has since made a name for himself in the area as a professional chef.

When hired, Duncan brings his own equipment, provides menus and shops for the groceries needed for the night's meal. He's cooked a number of different courses with a variety of cultural backgrounds from familiar local dishes to cuisines from other countries such as Greece and Indian.

Not everyone is a trained chef like Duncan, nor is everyone is confident in the kitchen. Some struggle to dip their toes into culinary waters. For those looking to learn, he has three recipes of differing skill levels for those wondering how to become more skilled in the kitchen.

CHAMPAGNE VINAIGRETTE

- 1½ c. Champagne Vinegar
- 3½ c. olive oil
- 1 Tbs. minced garlic



Chef Taylor Duncan offers a variety of services through his business Personal Experiences with Chef Taylor, including professionally prepared meals in customers' own homes, cooking lessons and catered events.

- 1 Tbs. blueberry jam
- 1 Tbs. whole grain mustard or Dijon mustard
- 1 half a juiced lemon
- Dash of tabasco sauce
- Salt and pepper to taste

The instructions are simple. Place all the ingredients in a blender except the olive oil. Once blended, drizzle in the olive oil and add salt and pepper to taste. This dressing goes well with summer salads, said Duncan. He said making salad dressing yourself is an easy way to save money while learning some recipe basics like controlling ratios.

GRILLED PEACH SALSA

Duncan said this is another recipe that works in the summer and can be great either at family meals or ramped up to be served at cookouts.

- 4 locally sourced peaches
- 2 Tbs. chopped cilantro
- 1 Tbs. Tabasco
- 1 each yellow onion, diced
- 2 each jalapeno peppers,

- deseeded and diced
- 2 locally sourced farm-stand tomatoes
- 1 Tbs. honey
- 1 each lime juiced
- Salt and pepper to taste.

First, cut the peaches in half and remove the pit. Leave the skin on and grill each side of the peach for 90 seconds. Once grilled, dice the peaches. Then mix the peaches in with the rest of the ingredients. This dish is recipe is for a family of four. Duncan said the salsa can be enjoyed with tortilla chips or on top of blackened fish.

BOURBON GLAZED PORK CHOPS

A more complex recipe, this dish is also a hit in the summer. This recipe is for those looking to take their cooking skills up a notch.

- 2 Tbs. bourbon (Duncan recommends Peach Wood Bourbon from Copper Fox Distillery in Williamsburg)
- 1 c. local honey
- 1 tsp. granulated garlic
- 1 tsp. cracked black pepper
- 1 tsp. salt

First preheat an oven to 375 degrees F. Then pour bourbon into a pan on high heat and ignite it. The flame will reduce the alcohol. Once the bourbon cools down, add in other ingredients and let rest for two minutes. Take four bone-in pork chops and place in a hot cast iron skillet. Sear each side for 90 seconds. Once the oven is preheated, place the skillet in the oven and let cook for 10 minutes. Remove from oven, then let the meat rest and glaze. Duncan said this dish would go well with finger length potatoes and fresh asparagus.

A FEW TIPS

To care for a cast iron skillet, like the one used in the recipe for bourbon glazed pork chops, Duncan said to never use soap or to scrub it. Ever month or so, wipe out the skillet with a paper towel and coat it in olive oil. Then place it upside down in an oven at 425 degrees F. for about 45 minutes.

Duncan said when cooking meat, two temperatures to remember: when cooking chicken are getting the meat to 160 degrees for perfect and

juicy chicken. Second, the ideal temperature for fish is 135 degrees. He said the biggest problem with cooking chicken and other meats is that people will over-cook it for the sake of caution.

For red meat, Duncan recommends using the finger check method. With an open palm, the fleshy part of the hand at the base of the thumb has the same feel as uncooked meat. With the index finger closed, it has the feel of rare meat. With two fingers close, it feels like medium-rare. Three fingers closed has the feel of medium and four fingers closed has the feel of well-done meat.

Duncan said cooking is all about trial and error. It could take a few tries, but he said once you learn a technique or style of cooking, you can apply it to every dish. He said cooking is all about style and technique. For example, he said once somewhat understands how to braise, they can start brazing everything they work with and can use the skill in a variety of ways.

A FEW TOOLS

A few items Duncan recommends for all kitchens include a microplane, juicer, horizontal peeler, a mandolin slicer and a cutting glove. He also said five ingredients that should always be stocked are coarse ground black pepper, coarse ground kosher salt, local honey, local hot sauce, and fresh lemon juice.

He said there are great resources out there to help people learn these skills, like Google and TikTok. He also recommends cookbooks, such as "The Flavor Bible" by Karen Page, "Sauces" by James Peterson and books by his favorite chef, the late Anthony Bourdain.

Duncan said if someone has an interest in cooking, they should follow that interest and don't be afraid to fail. Be willing to learn more, improve and have fun while doing it.

How to get involved with Gloucester PR&T

BY MELANY SLAUGHTER

There are many opportunities for people to get involved in their community with Gloucester Parks, Recreation and Tourism.

"We always need volunteers in lots of different capacities," said Katey Legg, Director of Gloucester PR&T. "Volunteers are literally the lifeline of Parks and Rec," Athletics Supervisor Ron Alston added.

There is something for everyone when it comes to volunteering with PR&T. According to Legg, there is a volunteer who has spent several years helping with the maintenance of Beaverdam Park for 15 hours each week "just because he loves Beaverdam so much."

Gloucester Clean Community will hand out cleanup kit supplies for those who want to help beautify the county. "We just need you to give your time," said Legg.

Another volunteer need is with the Gloucester Museum of History and Gloucester Visitor Center because it is "operated almost exclusively by volunteers." Legg said these volunteers are "very hard to come by."

The shifts for these positions are small, split into three-hour increments.

The biggest volunteer need that Gloucester PR&T faces is with youth sports. "Youth sports is one of the biggest needs and it's continual," she said.

Legg said that many people worry that they are not qualified or knowledgeable enough in any particular sport to coach a team. To curb this fear, Gloucester PR&T trains and teaches coaches before the season in their assigned sport. There are also coaches' meetings to help people feel comfortable and more secure in this volunteer role.

All volunteers need is to be consistent through the sports season, be good with children, help their team learn, and have a good time, she said.

"We're really here to help our volunteers be successful," said Legg. Alston said that basketball creates the biggest volunteer need as officials, scorekeepers and coaches are needed for four teams playing simultaneously across two gyms.

Legg said that some people wish to volunteer, but do not know in what capacity they would like to volunteer. Legg said that Gloucester PR&T is here to help prospective volunteers with figuring out their best fit.

"Give us a call and we'll help you out," said Legg. The best way to reach out to PR&T for volunteer opportunities is by phone at 804-693-2355 or by email at prt@gloucesterva.info.

For those with young children, getting them involved with PR&T athletics and activities is simple. Visit gloucesterva.info/civircrec to see a catalog of what is currently available, as well as upcoming opportunities. There are also some adult activities and park programs listed.

"We're continuously trying to grow the program," said Alston about PR&T athletics. Alston said youth involvement in PR&T programs is starting to increase again. "It went down during Covid," he said.

Though involvement for the 12-14 and 15-18 range is starting to decline, there are still enough participants to have teams for those age groups.

Positive aspects of PR&T athletics include no tryouts for those who wish to par-

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Making a difference: female coaches become local role models

Local female coaches are teaching the next generation of girls' basketball players the fundamentals of the game in a positive and supporting environment through Gloucester Parks, Recreation and Tourism athletics.

Benggio
Marika L. Benggio was born and raised in Hedgesville, West Virginia. Her passion to play basketball began at the age of seven and it has not subsided since. She played continuously through junior high and high school. In high school, Benggio made the varsity team as a sophomore.

During her sophomore season, Benggio was recruited to play on the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) travel team where she was introduced to her first and last female head coach. From that time, her life was consumed with playing basketball.

After graduating from high school, she had a short stint playing college basketball. Benggio then decided she wanted to serve her country and devoted over 20 years to the United States Coast Guard. While in the Coast Guard, Benggio participated in local basketball on various military bases.

Over the years, Benggio has had several stints acting as player and referee before she found her passion for coaching. Watching role models such as Pat Summitt from the University of Tennessee Lady Vols program ignited a fire inside of her to pursue coaching.

Once she had a daughter of her own, Benggio shared her passion for basketball with her. Her daughter began playing and quickly became a steward of the game. Benggio wanted nothing more than to show her daughter, as Summitt had shown her, that women could be a strong, positive role model to young people interested in basketball.

When asked to coach for Gloucester Parks, Recreation and Tourism basketball, she jumped at the opportunity. She looks forward to shar-



Leigh Anne Dutton, Alexi Burrell and Marika Benggio, from left, are teaching the next generation of girls the game of basketball through Gloucester Parks, Recreation and Tourism athletics.

ing her passion and making a difference in young aspiring players. It means the world to Benggio to show young girls that there are unlimited opportunities available to them.

Burrell
Alexis Burrell was raised in Gloucester and grew up being very active playing sports. She started playing basketball for fun with older brothers and cousins at a young age.

"In middle school, I fell in love with basketball thanks to Coach Henry Holmes," said Burrell.

She played junior varsity as an eighth grader and made varsity as a freshman at Gloucester High School. Burrell began coaching while in college with Gloucester PR&T. She then started coaching at GHS with the varsity girls' basketball team. Burrell knew there was a big difference between coaching and playing, but she grew to love coaching more.

"Being able to teach and shape the next generation, not only on the court, but off the court as well was fulfilling and fun," she said.

Burrell also works part-time as a recreation aid for Gloucester PR&T.

"I believe in youth sports,"

said Burrell. "It's an important way for kids to learn so many lifelong skills about themselves and a sport they love. It's even more special that I get to give back in a town I was raised in."

Burrell believes interest in women's basketball, along with women's sports in general, is at an all-time high right now in our country and it is important to support and continue to highlight that.

"This past season coaching in the co-ed 12-14 year-old league with two other women was fun and truly special being able to empower women and coaching in sports," she said.

Dutton
Leigh Ann Dutton was born and raised in Dyersburg, Tennessee. She fell in love with basketball when she was eight years old after a friend's father, a University of Kentucky alumnus, volunteered to coach a basketball team at the local community center.

Looking back, this coach's love for the support and his commitment to teaching girls how to play the game was contagious to Dutton. When Dutton tried out for her middle school's basketball team, she was cut from the final round.

She spent the summer disappointed, but was determined to practice and get better. Dutton played another season at her local community center.

In eighth grade, Dutton made the girls' basketball team and was a starting guard all season. In high school, she made the varsity basketball team as a freshman point guard and spent every spare moment playing basketball anywhere there was a court.

Dutton's high school basketball coach mentored her, not only as a player, but also as a leader. He taught her how to set goals, pursue growth and be intentional when choosing relationships and resources that would move her in a positive direction in life.

After graduation, Dutton chose to follow an academic scholarship to a liberal arts school in Maryville, Tennessee. She befriended some of the basketball players there and played pick-up ball with them whenever she had a chance. The head coach asked her why she was not playing basketball for the school. After an unconvincing dialogue of her communicating a need for a break from the sport, he sent her back to her dorm with a basketball in her hand. He told her to carry it around for a few days and if she could return it with confidence that basketball was in her past, he would leave her alone.

Only 24 hours later, Dutton was in his office asking when practice started. She walked on as a forward and was a key player in the team's run in the Division III NCAA Tournament. After a couple of years at Maryville College, she decided to transfer to UT Knoxville to focus more fully on obtaining her bachelor's degree in Business Management.

Once Dutton graduated

from college, she met her husband, Mark Dutton, and began a new chapter of her life as a parent. She now has four children, ranging in age from two to 12.

Dutton said she feels joyful and privileged to be able to use her gifts as a former basketball athlete to now serve her community through Gloucester PR&T. She coaches basketball teams and volunteers to referee games in order to give back to a sport that gave her so much life and passion.

Dutton said she believes

that basketball is not just a sport to play, but a conduit of opportunity to develop young people's identity, sense of belonging and purpose, as well. She also believes that basketball is a training ground of character, perseverance and passion that can lay a foundation for young people for years to come.

Volunteering to coach children in this community has given Dutton more than she will ever be able to repay. She said she always learns more from her players than they learn from her.

GLOUCESTER PR&T

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4C)

and everyone gets an equal amount of playing time. "Everyone can play," said Alston. "Everyone learns."

He also said that youth involved can learn discipline and hard work in an environment "where the pressure is taken off."

"Parks and Rec is for fun

and development," said Alston.

CELEBRATION
Gloucester PR&T is turning 50 this year and will celebrate this milestone birthday on July 14 from 5-8 p.m. at Woodville Park. This event is free and open to the public.

"It's to celebrate all our success, including our volunteers," said Legg.

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How to tell if you have bad water

FROM WATER PRO

Most people do not realize that water can be "bad," but the truth is, there are often a number of contaminants in it that cause negative side effects, especially in untreated well water.

Depending on the severity of the contamination, your water could also pose a potential health hazard to you and your family. Some of these contaminants include lead, arsenic, chlorine, fluoride and others.

Signs of bad water
How can you tell if your water is contaminated? Here are a number of signs to look for to determine if you have poor water quality.

- Rust or staining in your toilets, sinks and showers;
- Foul smelling water—described as sulfurous or like rotten eggs;
- Bad tasting water—often a stale or salty taste; and,
- Dry, itchy skin—after prolonged contact with water (e.g., after showering or washing your hands).

What to do
The first thing to do if you suspect your water is contaminated is to confirm that your water is bad through a water analysis test. Water Pro in Gloucester offers free testing to give you a clear picture of exactly what it is you and your family are consuming on a daily basis.

From there, a multitude of filtration and treatment options are available to correct any issues coming from your pipes. Things like reverse-osmosis filtration systems can significantly reduce the number of particulates in your water and water softeners can counteract minerals causing hardness, ensuring that every sip is of the highest quality.

If you have any questions about your water or would like some more information, call Water Pro at 804-693-7294.

HOW TO GET YOUR CHILD INVOLVED IN SUMMER SPORTS

Parks, Recreation & Tourism

Fall Youth Soccer
3yr PARENT CHILD PLAYTIME SOCCER
For age 3, as of 9/30/23.
PARTICIPANTS MUST BE 3 ON THIS DATE!
This is a parent/child program, led by a team coach. Parent on field presence is required for this program. The goal is to let kids get comfortable with a soccer ball & be around other kids & families in an athletic setting. Basic skills are taught & having fun is important so many fun based soccer drills/games will be incorporated.
Tuesday & Thursday 5:30 - 6:30pm | Abingdon & Ark Parks. Mid-September thru Mid-October (4 week season)
Deadline August 20

RUGRATS, LOONEY TUNES, JUNIOR & SENIOR DIVISIONS
Abingdon & Ark Parks on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Practice slots are 5:30pm or 6:30pm. Games are played at Abingdon & Ark Parks, mostly on Saturdays (9am-3pm) Late August to Early November
Deadline August 6

YOUTH FIELD HOCKEY DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAM
For ages 6-9, 10-13, as of 9/30/23. Each player must have a mouth piece, shin guards, protective eye wear & a stick. A fun developmental program with emphasis on skill building drills and scrimmages each meeting led by Middle school coach Brad Jeffrey. Program meets Saturday mornings. This league conflicts with soccer. Mid-September thru Mid-November. Early Bird Discount \$45 until August 18, then \$50 until **Deadline September 1**

STAR FALL GAMES
For ages 5 - 18. An athletic, games & social program for kids with special needs. Wheelchair bound kids are welcome. Children participate in basketball, games & other fun activities. Program is individualized for each participant to best help them both physically & for their enjoyment & self-esteem. Volunteers are welcome & needed. Fridays, 6:00 - 7:00pm, September 8 - December 8), Botetourt Gym, \$15 **Deadline August 27.**

Sports Summer Camps
BASKETBALL CAMP
GPRT Youth basketball camp will focus on fundamentals and both team/individual skill building. All skill sets are welcomed and encouraged as there will be a place for beginners and advanced players to learn and develop their skills. Our camps are led by volunteer GPRT basketball league coaches.
Session 1:
Boys ages 6 - 9y: 5:00 - 6:15pm
Boys ages 10 - 13y: 6:30 - 7:45pm
July 17 - July 21 Monday - Thursday
Achilles Elementary School | \$60
Deadline July 14
Session 2:
Girls ages 6 - 9y: 5:00 - 6:15pm
Girls ages 10 - 13y: 6:30 - 7:45pm
July 24 - July 28 Monday - Thursday
Achilles Elementary School | \$60
Deadline July 21

SOCCER CAMP
For ages 6-14. All ages & skill levels. Drills, games & skills, to meet players' ability levels, with the goal of fun. Led by PRT Youth League coaches and other qualified volunteer PRT coaches/staff. Location TBD (Ark or Abingdon park), 5:30 - 7:30pm,
Monday - Friday (Friday if rain no make-up), July 31 - August 4
Deadline July 24 | \$60

COACHES & OFFICIALS
Volunteer coaches & referees are needed for basketball, field hockey, tee ball, whiffle ball, softball & soccer leagues. Training is provided. Super way to support the youth of the community. For info on volunteering call Ron, 804-693-1262.

HOW TO GET PARENTS INVOLVED IN SUMMER SPORTS

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Playline 804-693-5811

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MELANY SLAUGHTER / GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Shopping organic

Want to learn how to eat more healthful? Mustard Seed Natural Market & Country Provisions can be found at White Marsh Shopping Center for all of your organic shopping needs Monday-Saturday from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. The store offers local, organic, non-GMO, gluten-free, keto, raw and vegan options for its customers. Mustard Seed also has produce, meat, poultry and dairy products. Customers can also find baked goods, as well as home and personal care and supplements at Mustard Seed. Store manager Audrey Varga, above, can help customers with their questions related to organic products. Take a look above at some of the products the store offers.



Changes go into effect for Medicare Part B

New start dates to Medicare Part B coverage went into effect at the start of 2023, but some other things haven't changed.

Beginning on Jan. 1, Medicare Part B coverage starts on the first day of the month after you sign up, if you sign up during the last three months of your Initial Enrollment Period.

Before this change, if you signed up during the last three months of your IEP, your Medicare Part B coverage started two to three months after you enrolled.

Medicare Part B helps cover medical services like doctors' services, outpatient care, and other medical services that Part A doesn't cover. Part B is optional. Part B helps pay for covered medical services and items when they are medically necessary. Part B also covers some preventive services like exams,

lab tests, and screening shots to help prevent, find, or manage a medical problem.

What hasn't changed is, if you are eligible at age 65, your IEP:

- Begins three months before your 65th birthday;
- Includes the month of your 65th birthday; and
- Ends three months after your 65th birthday.

If you are automatically enrolled in Medicare Part B or if you sign up during the first three months of your IEP, your coverage will start the month you are first eligible.

If you sign up the month you turn 65, your coverage will start the first day of the following month. This will not change with the new rule.

If you do not sign up for Medicare Part B during your IEP, you have another chance each year during the General Enrollment Period. The GEP lasts from Jan. 1 through March 31. Starting Jan. 1, your coverage starts the first day of the month after you sign up.

You can learn more about these updates at www.ssa.gov/medicare.

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- OCT. 21-Yorktown Artist Market 9-12
- OCT. 28-Yorktown Artist Market 9-3
- NOV. 11-Yorktown Artist Market 9-3
- NOV. 12-2nd Sunday Williamsburg 11-5
- NOV. 18-Yorktown Artist Market 9-3
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How to make outdoor living spaces more comfortable

(METRO) Private backyards are now go-to spaces for recreation and entertainment and great places to recharge the body and mind.

One ripple effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was more time spent outdoors, even if it was predominantly on one's own property. One-Poll, in conjunction with the lawn care company TruGreen, surveyed 2,000 American homeowners and found participants spent 14 hours outside every week in 2021, which was three hours more than prior to the pandemic. In addition, respondents admitted that time spent outdoors was therapeutic.

A separate survey conducted for the International Casual Furnishings Association found that people now spend more time relaxing, gardening, exercising, dining and entertaining outside than in years past. Though COVID-19 may no longer dominate headlines, the desire to enjoy outdoor spaces has not waned.

While enjoying outdoor living areas, homeowners can do more to make these spaces comfortable and welcoming. The following are some good starting points:

Get all lit up

Outdoor spaces can be enjoyed no matter the hour when there is ample lighting. That could be why the International Casual Furnishings Association reports those who plan to renovate their outdoor spaces list outdoor lighting as a priority. Outdoor lighting not only sheds light on entertaining spaces, but also makes spaces safer and more secure.

Increase privacy

No matter how friendly homeowners are with their neighbors, there comes a time when privacy is paramount. Fencing, whether it is wood or vinyl, or even a natural fence made from closely planted hedges, can ensure residents feel comfortable venturing outdoors to swim, take a cat nap or even stargaze in private.

Address the elements

Homeowners should note the direction their backyard faces and the typical daily conditions of the space. For example, a yard that faces southwest may get plenty of strong sun during the day, requiring the addition of shade trees, covered patios or arbors to cut down on the glare and heat. If the yard is often

hit by winds, trees or bushes planted strategically as windbreaks can help.

Sit comfortably

High-quality comfortable seating increases the likelihood that homeowners will want to stay awhile in their outdoor spaces. A seating set complete with plush chairs, outdoor sofa or love seat and chaise lounge chairs gives people more opportunity to sit and stay awhile.

Take a dip

A pool can be the perfect gathering spot on a warm day, while a spa/hot tub can bridge the gap to cooler weather. According to the Family Handyman, soaking in hot tubs can relax tired muscles after a long day, loosen up stiff joints, improve cardiovascular health and reduce the time it takes to fall asleep.

Bite back at bugs

Homeowners may want to consider using a professional exterminator to get rid of ticks, mosquitoes and other nuisance insects from outdoor spaces.

As people spend more time enjoying their properties, they can consider the many ways to make outdoor living spaces more comfortable.

How to make homes safer from fires

(METRO) Over a five-year period, from 2015 and 2019, fire departments across the United States responded to roughly 347,000 home structure fires per year. That data, courtesy of the National Fire Protection Association, underscores the significance of home fire protection measures.

Smoke detectors are a key component of fire protection, but there is much more homeowners can do to protect themselves, their families, their belongings and their homes from structure fires.

—Routinely inspect smoke detectors. Smoke detectors can only alert residents to a fire if they are working properly. Battery-powered smoke detectors will not work if the batteries die. Routine smoke detector check-ups can ensure the batteries still have "juice" and that the devices themselves are still functioning properly. Test alarms to make sure the devices are functioning and audible in nearby rooms. Install additional detectors as necessary so alarms and warnings can be heard in every room of the house;

—Hire an electrician to au-

dit your home. Electricians can inspect a home and identify any issues that could make the home more vulnerable to fires. Ask electricians to look over every part of the house, including attics and crawl spaces. Oft-overlooked areas like attics and crawl spaces pose a potentially significant fire safety threat, as data from the Federal Emergency Management Association indicates that 13 percent of electrical fires begin in such spaces;

—Audit the laundry room. The laundry room is another potential source of home structure fires. NFPA data indicates around three percent of home structure fires begin in laundry rooms each year. Strategies to reduce the risk of laundry room fires include leaving room for laundry to tumble in washers and dryers; routinely cleaning lint screens to avoid the buildup on dust, fiber and lint, which the NFPA notes are often the first items to ignite in fires linked to dryers; and ensuring the outlets washing machines and dryers are plugged into can handle the voltage such appliances require. It is also a good idea to clean dryer exhaust vents and ducts every year;

—Look outward as well. Though the majority of home fires begin inside, the NFPA reports that four percent of such fires begin outside the home. Homeowners can reduce the risk of such fires by ensuring all items that utilize fire, including grills and firepits, are always used at least 10 feet away from the home. Never operate a grill beneath eaves, and do not use grills on decks. Never leave children unattended around firepits, as all it takes is a single mistake and a moment for a fire to become unwieldy; and,

—Sweat the small stuff. Hairdryers, hair straighteners, scented candles, clothes irons and holiday decorations are some additional home fire safety hazards. Never leave candles burning in empty rooms and make sure beauty and grooming items like dryers, straighteners and irons are unplugged and placed in a safe place to cool down when not in use.

Fire departments respond to hundreds of thousands of home fires each year. Some simple strategies and preventive measures can greatly reduce the risk that a fire will overtake your home.

How to avoid food poisoning when grilling this summer

(METRO) Cooking over an open flame produces a unique flavor that is difficult to match. The smoky flavor of grilled foods is hard to resist, especially on summer nights that seem tailor-made for cooking and dining outside.

Cooking over a flame comes with certain safety risks, and those risks are easily mitigated with some simple strategies. It is equally important that grilling enthusiasts make an effort to reduce the risk of food poisoning when grilling.

Dishes used to cook indoors are routinely scrubbed clean after a good meal, but grills rarely garner the same

level of post-meal attention, which can increase the risk for food poisoning. And a less-than-spotless grill grate is not the only food poisoning risk linked with grilling. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offer these tips to avoid food poisoning when grilling in the months ahead.

—Separate raw foods before grilling. Cross-contamination can contribute to food poisoning. The CDC suggests efforts to prevent cross-contamination should begin at the grocery store. Foods should be kept separate in grocery carts and bags, and packages of raw meat and poultry should be

kept in their own individual bags;

—Keep foods cool at all times. The CDC recommends picking up meat, poultry and seafood right before checking out so the food remains as cool as possible at all times. If it is a long drive from the store to home, which can be the case when grilling foods that must be purchased at specialty stores or fisheries instead of traditional neighborhood grocery stores, shoppers can place items in insulated coolers and keep them at 40 degrees F. or below. All raw meat, poultry or seafood should be refrigerated until cooks are ready to place it on a grill;

—Thaw foods safely. The CDC notes that foods should never be thawed on a counter, even if they are in a pot or bowl of lukewarm water. Foods should be thawed in a refrigerator or by utilizing the defrost function on a microwave;

—Marinate safely. Like thawing, marinating should always be done in a refrigerator, regardless of which type of marinade is being used. When marinating foods are ready for cooking, discard the marinade and clean the dish immediately to avoid contamination;

—Routinely clean hands when handling raw meat, poultry and seafood. Cooks should wash their hands thoroughly after handling raw meat, poultry or seafood. Wet hands, lather them with soap and then scrub for at least 20 seconds. Make sure hands are dried on a clean towel, and repeat this process any time raw meat is touched;

—Clean the grill thoroughly. A grill should be given a thorough cleaning before each use. The CDC urges individuals using a wire bristle brush to thoroughly inspect the grilling surface before lighting a flame and cooking. Wire bristles can be dislodged during cleaning, and then end up on food, where they can pose a significant health hazard once foods are eaten;

—Always place cooked foods on clean dishes. Cooked foods should never be placed back on the dishes or in the containers where they were stored prior to being cooked. Doing so can lead to food poisoning and illness; and

—Cook foods to the appropriate temperature. Foods require different cooking temperatures, and cooks are encouraged to determine those temperatures for each food they grill. Utilize a meat thermometer to ensure foods are cooked hot enough to kill germs.

Safe grilling includes doing everything possible to prevent food poisoning.

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How pet parents can approach excess weight gain in dogs

(METRO) Maintaining a healthy weight is no small task. Shifting metabolisms as human beings age require routine tweaking of diets so adults can avoid putting on extra weight.

Though that is a concept many adults recognize, few may realize that dogs are vulnerable to weight gain as well. And just like their human companions, dogs who carry excess weight could be vulnerable to a host of dangerous ailments.

A veterinarian can help dog owners determine if it is time to tweak an animal's diet. In the meantime, if man's best friend seems to be putting on a few extra pounds, dog owners can look to a host of variables to determine if they are contributing to weight gain.

Treats
It is hard to resist a dog's wagging tail, and few things excite dogs more than treats. However, excessive amounts of treats can do more harm than good. In an interview with PetMD.com, Dr. Judy Morgan, DVM, noted that pets need approximately 20 to 30 calories per pound of body weight per day. So, a 20-pound dog will only require between 400 and 600 calories per day. The majority of those calories should come from healthy dog foods, not treats.

Dog owners should read dog treat packaging to determine how many calories each treat contains. The results may be shocking. If dog treats are a daily component of a dog's diet, limit their consumption and look for low-calorie treats to help dogs shed excess pounds.

Exercise
A sedentary lifestyle is as



Dog owners can look to a host of variables to determine if they are contributing to their pet's weight gain.

detrimental to dogs as it is to their human companions. The American Kennel Club notes that the amount of exercise dogs need is breed-specific. For example, a high-energy breed like a border collie will require more exercise than a low-energy breed like an English bulldog.

Preexisting health conditions all must be considered when determining how much exercise a dog needs. Dog owners can develop an exercise regimen with their veterinarians, but it is important to note that the AKC says even senior dogs need daily exercise.

Food quality
The quality of food also must be examined if dogs are putting on excess weight. Even if dogs' calorie intake is adequate and not excessive and the animals exercise

regularly, they could still be gaining weight if the quality of their food is subpar. It can be difficult to determine what is and is not quality dog food, and the AKC notes that breeds have different nutritional needs based on their size.

But if excessive treats and lack of exercise are not the culprits behind weight gain, low-quality dog food could be to blame. A veterinarian can help dog owners pick a healthful food, and during that discussion the vet will likely examine the pet to determine if the weight gain is linked to an undiagnosed medical condition.

Weight gain in dogs can contribute to a host of negative health outcomes. It is up to dog owners to take steps to ensure dogs maintain a healthy weight.



There are a number of environmentally friendly ways to get and keep a lush green lawn.

How to keep your lawn looking green

(METRO) Homeowners' fascination with a lush, green lawn is something that has developed over time and is still "growing" strong. According to a 2019 survey conducted on behalf of the National Association of Landscape Professionals, 81 percent of all Americans had lawns and 79 percent said a lawn is an important feature when buying or renting a property.

Even though lush lawns are still coveted, due to drought, the financial climate and even invading insect populations, many people are taking inventory of their landscapes and deciding if a lawn is a priority, even going so far as to reinvent their spaces with lawn alternatives.

Still, there are ways to keep properties green no matter which route is taken. Here is a look at some environmentally friendly ways to address a landscape.

Irrigate from below
There are many ways to water landscapes, but homeowners may want to take their cues from the commercial farming industry. Drip irrigation systems utilize a network of valves, pipes and tubing close to the roots of plants or under the soil. Such systems are more efficient than surface irrigation options, helping to reduce evaporation, save water and nutrients in the soil.

Water early
Scotts Lawn Care suggests watering a lawn in the morning before 10 o'clock when it is cooler and winds tend to

be calmer. This ensures water can be absorbed into the soil and grass roots before evaporation occurs. Watering midday may cause the water droplets on the lawn blades to heat up and actually scorch the lawn.

Plant a new grass type
Homeowners can experiment with eco-friendly grass seed blends that mix native grasses and may not require as much water or ideal growing conditions.

Use green alternatives
Rather than focusing solely on grass, some homeowners are turning to alternatives like clover and even moss, particularly if their landscapes do not have the most pristine growing conditions. This may reduce the need for chemical fertilizers and herbicides. The result is still a green, inviting yard.

Watch the lawn height
Mowing too frequently or at too low a height may compromise the lawn's ability to thrive. Grass cut to the proper height develops a deep root system to better locate water and nutrients in the soil. That means homeowners may not have to water as much or as frequently. Taller lawns also shade the soil and the roots, reducing some evaporation.

Compost
Leave the clippings on the lawn to break down and further feed nutrients to the lawn, helping it look greener and thrive. Furthermore, rely on supplementation with compost to reinforce the nu-

trient profile in the soil. The National Resources Defense Council says composting is the natural process of recycling organic matter, such as leaves and food scraps, into a valuable fertilizer. It does not take much to nurture compost in a yard.

Green landscapes are possible with a few tips that help conserve water and maximize natural resources.

How homeowners can turn their attics into livable spaces

(METRO) Houses typically feature various areas that are traditionally designed for storage, such as garages, basements and attics. However, with some renovation, these spaces can be transformed into livable areas.

Homeowners who would like to convert attics into livable spaces need to take certain things into consideration before starting an improvement project. While the attic may seem like it has plenty of room and is structurally sound enough to walk in, that is not necessarily so.

To be converted into usable living space, an attic must be brought up to the standards of modern building codes, according to the design experts at Board & Vellum. Retrofitting beams and insulation can eat up available space in an attic. Thus, it is best to consult an expert to see if an attic can be converted.

Furthermore, an attic that was not initially designed as a room when the house was built can add extra "load" upstairs if it is converted. That could present certain structural problems. That means a structural engineer also must be consulted to see if adding beams, flooring and drywall will necessitate other changes elsewhere in the home to accommodate the extra load.

In order to have a functional attic room, building codes will dictate that it needs to be accessible by a full-size staircase. Also, it will need to have another exit in case of an emergency so that will likely be an accessible window, according to the home information site, The Fill.

Homeowners' budgets and renovation plans will need to factor in these considerations. Homeowners also are advised to check local permits to determine what else may be required to go forward. It is best to follow the rules. Lack of a permit for work can affect the ability to sell a home down the line.

Individuals also should plan for heating and cooling upgrades as the home will need to have ductwork installed in the attic, or at the least, a



Homeowners who would like to convert attics into livable spaces need to take certain things into consideration before starting an improvement project.

stand-alone heating and cooling unit. As heat rises, an attic can get quite warm, so ventilation and comfort should be considered.

The attic will need to be wired for electricity, for lighting and other needs. Air sealing and additional insulation can space the attic space more comfortable as well. Consult a qualified electrician

and an HVAC technician and have an energy audit done to discuss needs.

Attic renovations can give homeowners more space in their homes, which can be used as offices, bedrooms or cozy corners. This is no small undertaking and all of the right steps need to be followed to ensure a legal, safe and successful renovation.

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