



Religion
God is already there working
on our behalf see 6



Sports
Camden varsity soccer teams
win against Colquitt see 7



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Camden looking to restore field of dreams

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Camden County is excited about the return of storied football coach Jeff Herron to the Wildcat gridiron, but unfortunately the home field has seen better days. The school system wants to

change that. However, under their 50-year agreement with the Camden County Public Service Authority (PSA), which owns the stadium, it's not very clear who is responsible for what. The PSA and Camden County Schools has plans to meet in coming days to ne-

gotiate over this project and perhaps reach some clarity on how athletic fields are funded and maintained into the future. PSA executive director Joey Cason explained that the agreement brokered during the 1990s by the former Kingsland Mayor Keith Dixon, a PSA board member,

and former school superintendent David Rainer stipulated that the PSA would maintain all athletic facilities in Camden. Furthermore, the schools were allowed exclusive rights over all profit-making activities related to those athletic events. Cason said the PSA is not allowed to park a

food truck on the rec center grounds during game days to help defray its expenses. The Camden County Quarterback Club also contributed to items like lighting fixture and scoreboards in the past. They and several other booster clubs are allowed to



See **FIELD**, page 5

PSA explores changes to its structure

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Local voters approved a ballot referendum for the Camden County Public Service Authority (PSA) in 2019 to change its organizational structure and add four new members. Now the recreation authority board will be exploring further changes to the board and how it operates. At a regular meeting on Thursday, the PSA board voted to explore various changes to the recreation authority's enabling legislation.



See **AUTHORITY**, page 5

River gets good report

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A representative of the St. Marys River Management Committee reported to Camden County leaders last week that the waterway is relatively healthy. "... Our water quality is good for the St. Marys and hopefully it will remain good," said Elizabeth King, who serves on the river committee with District 5 commissioner Ben Casey, at last week's board of commissioners meeting. That's not to say that there are not some challenges, she said, especially creeks that stagnate where water levels are lower. These are also areas where woodlands are being re-developed into residential properties.

See **REPORT**, page 12



Submitted photo by Kendra Shafer
St. Marys' Riverkeeper Anna Laws shows off the clarity of the water at Horsepen Creek. The small nonprofit organization has been monitoring the creek for three years, since efforts began to clean up what was recently a very hazardous waterway for swimming and fishing.

A success story for the St. Marys Riverkeeper

Kendra Shafer
Special to the Tribune & Georgian

Every month, Anna Laws pulls on her waterproof boots and steps out of her SUV parked on the side of a road in rural Camden County. The biologist then maneuvers carefully around a homeowner's barn and newly created septic hill to access the tall pine forest behind. "I have to bushwack my way through the woods," she said. "There's no path." Her destination is a tiny winding stream, where she

dips a plastic bag in for a water sample. Triumphant, she holds it up, showing the sunlight streaming through. "Look how clear it is!" she beamed. The stream is a tributary of Horsepen Creek, which flows into the St. Marys River at the Browntown community near Kingsland. Laws samples at five sites there each month as part of her job as the head of the St. Marys Riverkeeper. The small nonprofit organization has been monitoring the creek for three years, since efforts began to clean up

The Riverkeeper has helped solve a lot of issues, obviously, because of the water quality. It's pretty good now. It was pretty bad.

Don Granger
Horsepen Creek resident

what was recently a very hazardous waterway for swimming and fishing. The group has been working with Camden County government, St.

See **RIVER**, page 12

Chase ends in arrest

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A need for speed — and weed — led to the arrest of a New York man on Interstate 95 last week for DUI and multiple drug charges. His two passengers were also arrested on drug charges. Georgia State Patrol trooper Brian Edwards clocked 23-year-old Jacob Padilla-Angelo driving 101 mph on Interstate 95 south around 4:20 p.m. Friday, March 19, according to the GSP incident report. Edwards pulled the car over

See **ARREST**, page 5

Vaccines open to 16-plus

Beau Evans
Capitol Beat News Service

The long winter of COVID-19 looks to be coming to an end in Georgia. All Georgians age 16 and older will be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine starting today, March 25, Gov. Brian Kemp announced Tuesday. The long-awaited expansion comes as Georgia is set to receive another boost in the weekly shipment of vaccines, largely due to the single-dose Johnson & Johnson

See **VACCINE**, page 5

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INDEX

OBITUARIES	2	SPORTS	7
CRIME REPORT	3	CLASSIFIEDS	8
OPINION	4	LEGALS	9
RELIGION	6		

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River

from page 1

Marys River Management Committee and the University of Georgia to make it happen.

“The E. coli levels here were off the chart,” Laws said. The problem was leaking septic tanks along the creek, which is dotted with fishing camps and older homes. Escherichia coli, or E. coli, a species of fecal coliform, is considered a good indicator of the presence of pathogens.

“We saw immediate improvements when the septic tanks were pumped by Camden County Department of Health,” Laws said. “It’s definitely a success story.”

The creek was first recognized as having problems in 2015, when the University of Georgia conducted water sampling. In 2017, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency designated a portion of the St. Marys River as “impaired,” qualifying it for federal grants. That year, Camden County received the first grant for \$204,375, and another one for \$212,000 in 2020.

“Camden County received grant funding to repair septic systems in the Horsepen Creek watershed and to date, over 20 systems have been replaced,” said Terry Ferrell, Camden County coastal environmental health manager. “Testing by the Riverkeeper has shown a decrease in fecal coliform bacteria following these replacements. This is a joint project with several government and community groups. The St. Marys Riverkeeper has been instrumental in its success by documenting water quality conditions and improvement in the area. The Riverkeeper’s ongoing support and assistance is greatly appreciated.”

During the first phase of the grant, the Riverkeeper organization was asked to help with outreach. The people living in the area had to be educated about



Horsepen Creek resident Don Granger says he is happy and relieved that the river has been cleaned up and is no longer impaired.

the need for their septic systems to be inspected — and possibly pumped out or replaced — by the county. The Camden County commission held a cookout for the residents and sent out mailers to get the word out, Laws said. It worked. The residents cooperated with the plan and had their septic systems tested, pumped out or replaced.

According to the grant’s Phase 2 summary report, “Over a three-year period, a septic tank contractor pumped out or inspected 32 systems, replacing 23 failing systems. The St. Marys Riverkeeper performed monthly water testing and the results show a significant reduction of fecal coliform bacteria present at the 5 testing sites.”

Don Granger, a Horsepen Creek resident who allowed the group to sample from his property, said he and his neighbors are very grateful that the waterway has been cleaned up. He was trying to sell his property and it helped to be able to tell potential buyers the water is now safe.

“The Riverkeeper has

helped solve a lot of issues, obviously, because of the water quality. It’s pretty good now. It was pretty bad,” he said.

In addition to dangerous bacterial levels, the Riverkeeper monitors Horsepen Creek and 45 other sites along the St. Marys River for surface water conditions such as dissolved oxygen, pH, water clarity, salinity and conductivity. The data can be found on Georgia’s Adopt-A-Stream website, as well as the group’s website at stmarysriverkeeper.org. The Riverkeeper has also established valuable baseline levels for many indicators that will be useful in monitoring the river’s long-term health.

Leaking septic systems are a problem throughout coastal Georgia and Florida, in some places causing blue-green algae blooms that can be devastating to the habitat and the local economy. The Riverkeeper organization is working to prevent that from happening to the St. Marys River. When the group’s water sampling shows increased levels of E. coli or other dangerous indicators, it immediately alerts local

agencies to find the source of the pollutants and help find solutions, Laws said.

“You need a good septic system because the groundwater is so high,” she said. “Septic runoff is one of the main threats to our river and it’s the effect of population growth and septic systems that aren’t properly maintained.” The 130-mile St. Marys River forms much of the boundary between Georgia and Florida. Forty percent of the 3,000-mile watershed is wetlands that depend on the health of the river.

“Overall this river is very healthy, and our goal is to keep it that way,” Laws said.

The organization is closely monitoring several other sites that have shown high E. coli levels, including Spanish Creek in Charlton County and Escambia Slough in



Submitted photos by Kendra Shafer

Anna Laws and other Riverkeeper volunteers take water samples at more than 45 sites each month, including this one at Horsepen Creek.

Fernandina Beach, Florida. At both sites the group is working with local and state governments and schools to pinpoint the source of the contamination and make recommendations for remediation.

Laws recalls a day last winter when she knew the Horsepen Creek project was going to be successful. When sampling one of the

roadside creeks, she noticed two little crayfish, living indicators of a healthy habitat.

“In the past, that area was covered in algae and smelled, nothing was living in the water. But now, we have these wonderful macroinvertebrates showing up. This is an example of what can be done.”

Kendra Shafer is a volunteer for the St. Marys Riverkeeper.

Report

from page 1

While new construction can easily be addressed with clear policies for septic tank standards and placement, existing properties with aging, poorly operating systems continue to pollute the river.

“Each of the four counties in the St. Marys River Management Committee ... have a few problem tributaries,” King said.

The tributaries that given Camden problems are Horsepen and Temple, she said.

When high levels of stormwater are present, that pushes the contaminants out of the creeks and farther into the river. Based on DNA testing, the biggest culprits of fecal matter in the tribu-

taries are humans and pigs.

Following a question from board chair Gary Blount of District 2, King confirmed the county is wrapping up the second of two rounds of grant funding to repair or replace septic systems along the watershed.

U.S. 17 boat ramp

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources is also working to acquire three acres at the U.S. 17 bridge to construct a boat ramp and parking area, King said. The site is one of three access points in Camden, including downtown St. Marys and Temple Landing at Brown-town.

The project at the U.S. 17 bridge would be funded by a state grant and the GDNR is hoping to move forward once the property owners establish a clear title, King said.

River partners

Working with the St. Marys Riverkeeper, which tests water quality in about two dozen sites along the river, and the University of Georgia law school, which is helping address septic systems, the committee has several projects under way.

The law school is also assisting by examining state and federal law to suggest gaps in the law that the county could address and providing assistance for the septic tank grant program.

King thanked the county for helping to do its part in supporting the work of the committee, such as participating in the Federal Emergency Management Agency grant program to buy back flood-prone properties so they are not redeveloped.

She also thanked the board for adopting the Georgia Stormwater Bluebook.

Boomers

from page 7

and O’Neal 35th (34.57) in the 50-yard free and eighth (1:01.25) and 27th (1:13.52), respectively, in the 100-yard free. O’Neal also finished eighth (3:15.66) in the 200-yard breast. Thompson took 10th (1:11.98) in the 100-yard back. In the 50-yard fly, Thompson came in eighth (31.23) and O’Neal 20th (42.27). O’Neal also finished 12th (44.48) in the 50-yard breast.

In the 11-12, Carmen Stewart came in 26th (1:50.32) in the 100-yard

breaststroke. Also in the 11-12, Addison Shearin finished 24th (45.20) and Stewart 29th (47.48) in the 50-yard back and 38th (38.28) and 36th (37.59) in the 50-yard free, respectively. In the 100-yard IM, Stewart came in 26th (1:39.87) and Shearin 29th (1:44.76).

In the 10-and-under, Kailah Thompson took second (1:34.52) and Elora Corning ninth (1:53.37) in the 100-yard breast. Payton McKnight came in 22nd (58.09) in the 50-yard back. In the 50-yard free, Kailah Thompson took second (29.41), Corning 18th (39.43), Payton McKnight 22nd (46.42) and Paisley McKnight 42nd (1:12.71).

Kailah Thompson won first (2:25.55) in the 200-yard free. Corning finished 13th (1:42.69) and Payton McKnight 18th (2:15.82) in the 100-yard IM. In the 100-yard free, Kailah Thompson claimed another first (1:03.53), Corning 13th (1:27.50) and Payton McKnight 18th (1:40.02). In the 50-yard fly, Kailah Thompson finished second (32.02). In the 50-yard breast, Corning took eighth (54.41) and Payton McKnight 14th (1:09.07). Payton McKnight also finished 13th (2:11.47) in the 100-yard back.

In the 8-and-under, Paisley McKnight finished ninth (40.21) in the 25-yard fly and 11th (28.94) in the 25 free.

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