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Former county manager under investigation

Short stint in Wythe County, Virginia over

Millie Rothrock
Wythe Enterprise

This article is provided compliments of the Wythe Enterprise.



COURTESY PHOTO

Allen Lamberson

Wythe County Public Information Officer Jeremy Farley sent a press release stating that County Administrator Allen Lamberson's employment with the county ended at 5 p.m. on Sept. 3.

The evening before Allen Lamberson was introduced as the new Wythe County administrator, a juvenile reported to the Wytheville Police Department that a

man driving a blue van and matching Lamberson's description tried to pick him up after football practice at George Wythe High School.

Also during the incident, according to police scanner records, the man identified himself to the student as Frank Sanders.

A police investigation into the matter is ongoing.

The incident occurred about 7:35 p.m. on Monday, Aug. 24. The Wythe County Board of Supervisors officially welcomed Lamberson as the new county administrator the following morning.

On the night in question, after receiving at least two reports of a suspicious blue van in the area, Wytheville police officers pulled the van over near the high school and, using the vehicle's North Carolina license plate number, identified Lamberson as the owner of the van.

Lamberson is a former county manager of Madison County, North Carolina.

The Wytheville Enterprise has requested all 911 calls and county emails regarding the case, but the county has refused to turn them over, saying they are part of an ongoing investigation.

After the newspaper requested information, the Wytheville Police Department issued a press release that confirms officers are investigating separate reports of a blue van driving in a suspicious manner near Scott Memorial and the high school.

The press release said that at approximately 7:34 p.m., officers were dispatched to the middle school after someone reported the van there. When officers arrived, the van was gone.

The police then received a second call concerning the blue van in the vicinity of the high school.

"While officers were speaking with witnesses in the area, the witnesses pointed to the blue van and stated to the officers, 'That was the van in the area,'" the release said.

Police stopped the van and checked out the driver. The release said information was gathered and the case has been turned over to investigators.

The release didn't identify the driver of the van.

However, according to police scanner traffic captured during the incident, the vehicle belongs to Lamberson.

Copies of the scanner traffic are on the website Broadcastify.com, which archives scanner feeds from across the country.

According to the scanner information, a 911 caller became suspicious of the van and started to follow it in the areas of West Spiller Street and West Lee Highway. However, the caller eventually lost track of the van as police headed in that direction.

In a separate 911 call, a person reported-

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Helping neighbors ONE HOME AT A TIME



PAUL EGGERS / PAUL@NEWSRECORDANDSENTINEL.COM

Madison County Sheriff's Office personnel pose alongside CHC staff after completing a Neighbors Helping Neighbors workday.

Paul Eggers
paul@newsrecordandsentinel.com

Maintaining a safe, comfortable and efficient home can be quite a challenge for many Madison County residents. While securing a deck or replacing a roof may be a do-it-yourself job for some, those same repairs can prove too physically demanding or too costly for others. The Community Housing Coalition (CHC) helps fill this gap for many in need of all kinds of home repairs across Madison County by teaming its expert staff with volunteer groups from across the county and around the country.

CHC's Neighbors Helping Neighbors program focuses on putting local volunteer groups and individuals to work for a day on homes needing repairs. On one Saturday each month, a crew takes on smaller jobs at a home that can be completed in an afternoon. CHC provides the materials, tools, on-site supervision and additional support for the volunteer teams as they work on projects like digging French drains, pressure washing a home, building a new set of steps and installing new posts for a porch. "Tasks completed on the short workdays often help pave the way for more complex projects that need to be addressed at a home," said June Trevor, CHC Volunteer Program Coordinator.

By teaming with other organizations within Madison County, CHC helps others understand the housing challenges some residents face. "Neighbors Helping Neighbors is very important for raising awareness of home repair needs in our community," Trevor observed.

CHC has teamed with volunteer groups including



PAUL EGGERS / PAUL@NEWSRECORDANDSENTINEL.COM

George Austin with CHC assists Sgt. Francy Denton and Officer Will Martin with a home improvement project.

"For us to be out there that day was great. It's special to help someone and be a part of something positive."

MICHELLE QUINTERO
MADISON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Mars Hill University and the Marshall and Mars Hill branches of Wells Fargo Bank. More than 40 volunteers have contributed over 350 hours to projects across the county. "Workdays help us in growing a local volunteer pool, gaining skills to address home repair needs year-round," remarked Trevor. "Volunteers we meet through work days become great ambassadors for CHC in the community."

In August, the Madison County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) joined CHC to work on a home near Anderson Branch. "We knew the client from our elderly call list," said Administrative Assistant Michelle Quintero, who helped mobilize the volunteers. "For us to be out there that day was great. It's special to help someone and be a part of

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Wechtel nominated to replace Baker



COURTESY OF MATTHEW WECHTEL

Matthew Wechtel, pictured here with his wife Kelli, has been nominated to serve as County Commissioner through November, 2016.

County Commissioners must approve Republican pick

Paul Eggers
paul@newsrecordandsentinel.com

The Madison County Republican Party Executive Committee nominated Matthew Wechtel to complete Jim Baker's term as County Commissioner. Baker resigned his post after Governor Pat McCrory named the former Superior Court judge and assistant district attorney to the North Carolina Board of Elections.

The remaining four County Commissioners must approve Wechtel's nomination before he can officially take his seat. That procedural step is expected to take place before the next Board of Commissioners meeting on Sept. 8 at A-B Tech.

"My goal is to try and get some unity," said Wechtel, the former Madison County Republican Party Chairman. "It is no secret that the Board of Commissioners has been highly divided recently. I hope Chairman Brigman and Commissioner Rice will be willing to work together. I haven't seen much of that."

Wechtel identified a lack of funding as the biggest issue facing the county. While rejecting the idea of raising taxes to drive revenue growth, Wechtel instead expressed hope economic development could help county finances. "We need to bring retail and production facilities into the county to spur growth," he observed.

According to current Madison County Republican Chairman Jesse Sigmon, several individuals submitted their names for consideration to the seat. "Matthew is qualified by his work and his education," Sigmon shared. "He will bring a lot of energy to the table. It will take someone who is cooperative and Matthew will fill that role."

Sigmon stated that Republican party leaders wanted the individual who would assume Baker's seat to run for re-election as an incumbent in November of 2016. Wechtel voiced a willingness to do so. "It would be my

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Kathryn Parham Brickey in concert

Staff Reports

Kathryn Parham Brickey grew up in the mountains of Western North Carolina learning fiddle tunes from the greats of the region including Roger Howell, Arvil Freeman, and Bobby Hicks. When college came around, she attended East Tennessee State University where she fiddled and sang in the Bluegrass, Old Time, and Country Music Program. She participated with the program for 4 years playing venues such as the Carter Family Fold, Bristol Rhythm and Roots Reunion, and the Down Home Johnson City (TN).

Now she has completed her first solo CD featuring her award winning fiddling and her

spectacular singing voice. "We are honored to present Kathryn in concert at Ebbs Chapel on Sunday, Sept. 13 at 4 p.m., remarked Laura Boosinger, director Madison County Arts Council. "Folks are used to seeing Kathryn alongside Roger Howell and Bobby Hicks at the Zuma jam, or on the stages of The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival and The Lunsford Festival. This is her first foray into being her own band. It's exciting to watch!"

Kathryn is the 2012 recipient of the Bascom Lamar Lunsford Award. Master fiddler, Roger Howell, is quoted, saying, "Kathryn represents what we're in this for. She is the future. She has the grace, the style, the obvious talent, and she

KATHRYN PARHAM BRICKEY IN CONCERT

- » Sunday, Sept. 13, 4 p.m.
- » Ebbs Chapel Performing Arts Center
- » Tickets are \$15 plus tax

understands where it comes from."

"The Sweetest Flower" is her debut album. It was recorded at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City. It includes bluegrass, old time, classic country, and gospel songs. For tickets or more information contact the Madison County Arts Council at 649-1301 or www.madisoncountyarts.com



Kathryn Parham Brickey

COURTESY PHOTO

Advancing the conversation on drugs

Community forum highlights resources, solutions

Paul Eggers

paul@newsrecordandsentinel.com

A community forum at the Madison County Courthouse on Tuesday, Sept. 15, from 5:30-7:30 p.m. will put education, understanding and awareness of all aspects of drug and mental health issues here locally at the forefront. Speakers from the county Health Department and local treatment centers will offer information on the resources available to anyone impacted by mental health or substance abuse issues. All residents are invited and encouraged to attend.

"We hope to educate the citizens of Madison County that there are additional resources in their county," said Travis Herman, Community Relations Representative with October Road, Inc. October Road has provided mental health and substance abuse services in the county since 2008. Representatives from Mission Hospital, RHA, Smoky Mountain LME/MCO and other centers will join October Road spokespersons at the forum.

"Attendees will walk away with in-

formation and contact points for a variety of support services ranging from mental health and substance use treatment to primary care and parenting support services," Herman added.

Awareness within Madison County of the challenges drug use and abuse currently pose is growing. According to an informal poll conducted by *The News-Record & Sentinel*, more than half of the county residents acknowledge that the county does have a drug problem.

Organizers of the public forum hope the event will provide a springboard to help the community get ahead of the problem. "These events are important because it reduces stigma and encourages folks to reach out to the resources that are available," stressed Herman. "We are also then able to have honest discussions about continued areas of need."

The Community forum will take place on Tuesday, Sept. 15 at the Madison County Courthouse from 5:30-7:30 p.m. For more details, contact Mark Cody, Clerk of the Court, Madison County, at 649-2200; Olaf Goddard, Magistrate Judge, Madison County, at 649-1950; or Ashley Edmonds, Community Outreach Specialist, Smoky Mountain LME/MCO at 800-893-6246 ext. 5324.

Back to Church Sunday

Calvary Worship Center joins 30,000 churches to participate

Staff Reports

"Back to Church Sunday," part of a national movement of churches across America, will be held at Calvary Worship Center, 101 Calvary Drive, in Marshall on Sunday, Sept. 20.

"It's about time to reach out and invite your friends and neighbors to church!" states Pastor Rusty Smart, Senior Pastor of Calvary Worship Center. He continues, "People need to know that there is hope and a community of people, like our church, who will love them and do life with them." Calvary Worship Center is joining the National Back to Church Sunday movement to help "Invite America Back to Church" on Sunday, Sept. 20.

According to Lifeway Resources, 87% of people believe in God. Yet only 27% of those surveyed individuals attended church in the last 7 days. In addition, 82% of people who don't attend church say they would attend if invited by a friend, yet only 2% of Christians ever invite someone to church.

Did you know that most people who have dropped out of church haven't lost their faith in God—they simply fell out

of the habit of going to church? Some moved, had a change in life circumstances, or had a falling out with their former church and simply drifted away. Most often, life just became too busy. We encourage you to step out in faith and invite someone to rediscover church. We are planning a special service on Sept. 20 so that our new guests will feel welcome and comfortable. Inviting a friend is a simple gesture that could change someone's life. "Our church is not a museum of saints - it is a hospital for sinners," says Pastor Rusty. By participating in this national movement, we will be joining thousands of other churches across America in helping invite everyone to church. Our church is one of the 30,000 churches representing 120 denominations that are expected to invite over 3 million people to church this year.

Calvary Worship Center is located at 101 Calvary Drive in Marshall, across from Ingles Gas. For more information, go to www.calvaryworshipcentermarshall.org or call 649-1073.

JAM

Kids playing old-time music

Ben Owen

On Friday, Aug. 28, I had the opportunity to show traditional music to Madison County Public Schools. I joined my mom, Sarah Owen, and my sisters, Emma and Iris, as well as Laura Boosinger, director of the Madison County Arts Council, to promote JAM and the learning of traditional music in Madison County. I visited four schools: Hot Springs Elementary, Mars Hill Elementary, Brush Creek Elementary, and Madison Middle School. This gave me a whole new chance to have fun playing old-time music, for I don't usually play in schools.

JAM is an organization that is devoted to teaching kids how to play old-time music. Old-time music is the basis for a lot of other forms of music, like bluegrass and rock-n-roll. An old-time band usually consists of a fiddle, a banjo, a guitar, and an upright bass. This kind of music is a really good accompaniment for traditional dance, which we also teach at JAM in the form of clogging. My mom and my sisters did a clogging routine as a part of



Junior Appalachian Musicians®

our school shows.

One of the questions asked while we were at the schools was, "Is playing an instrument hard?" It all depends on how hard you practice. When you first start out, it may seem hard, but as you practice, it gets a lot easier. I have watched friends of mine at JAM start out without a bit of knowledge about the instrument they play, and in a semester or two, they're ready to play in a string band! String band class at JAM is really fun for me because I get to play the songs I like and see my friends. I came to JAM when I was seven, and had enough knowledge about the guitar then to go straight into String Band.

JAM meets at 3:45 p.m. at the Arts Center in downtown Marshall on Thursdays, where the kids start out with a 15-minute sing-along. Then they split into 5 different classes: fiddle, banjo, guitar, clogging and string band (reserved for more advanced students who are looking to learn how to play with other kids in a band). Classes for the day are over at 5 p.m.

If you are interested in coming to JAM, call the Arts Council at 649-1301 or email laura@madisoncountyarts.com. The fee for one semester, or twelve weeks, is \$60.

Lamberson

Continued from Page 1

ed that a juvenile walking near the school said a man in a blue van tried to pick him up near West Spiller and 26th streets.

Football practice was letting out at the time and the police alerted coaches to the situation.

The suspect was identified as a male, approximately 160 pounds, in his late 40s or early 50s, with glasses and a mustache.

According to the scanner report, the van driver told someone - it is not clear who - that he was at the school to pick up a second juvenile. A police officer asked dispatch to contact the school resource officer to identify the second juvenile.

The scanner traffic concluded with police pulling the van over and identifying the license plate number, which matches Lamberson's plates. Lamberson drives a large, dark blue van with tinted windows.

After the Wytheville Enterprise sent Freedom of Information requests to the county asking to see the 911 calls and emails, the Board of Supervisors called a special meeting to discuss personnel. The meeting was held one week after the incident, Monday, Aug. 31, at 5 p.m. The supervisors, along with County Administrator Cellel Dalton, who retires Sept. 15, met for 90 minutes, from 5 to 6:30 p.m., before calling Lamberson into the room. He spoke with them less than

10 minutes; the meeting adjourned at 6:37 p.m. and no action was taken.

Before the meeting, the Wytheville Enterprise asked Lamberson to comment on the police investigation into the episode involving a blue van. He declined, saying he would speak after the meeting, but he left the meeting without speaking with the reporter.

The newspaper reached out to Lamberson again Thursday morning, leaving a message with a county secretary, receptionist and an email to county public information officer Jeremy Farley, saying that a reporter needed to speak with Lamberson by 1 p.m. concerning the investigation.

After the deadline, Lamberson sent word through Farley that it would be inappropriate for him to make statements to the press at this time.

In a 4-3 decision, the Wythe County Board of Supervisors voted on Aug. 19 to hire Lamberson, a 20-year Navy veteran, to replace Dalton. Supervisors Tim Reeves, Joe Hale, Steve Willis and Artie Hall voted to hire Lamberson. Supervisors Gary Houseman, Coy McRoberts and Gene Horney voted against it.

Lamberson's salary is \$101,850 a year.

According to his LinkedIn profile, Lamberson served as the county manager in Madison County, North Carolina, for 22 months. In December 2014, county commissioners voted to dismiss him.

Lamberson and Wythe County officials said that his dismissal was political in nature.

CHC

Continued from Page 1

something positive."

MCSO personnel not on duty worked alongside CHC professionals Jake Owen, George Austin and Christopher Watson in stabilizing the home's deck and painting a bathroom. "It was really a great experience," Quintero said. "The feeling this work gives you is well worth your time and effort."

The beneficiary of the work, who preferred to remain anonymous, appreciated the time and efforts the MCSO and CHC volunteers invested into the home. "It's just fantastic. There's is no way I could have done these repairs myself. There's no way I could have afforded to pay for them. I am just so grateful," said the homeowner.

CHC launched the Neighbors Helping Neighbors program in February of this year and it is a key initiative for the Mad-

ison County nonprofit going forward. The nonprofit has work days planned through 2016 and looks forward to teaming with new local groups. "The Neighbors Helping Neighbors program uses a 'barn-raising' model that empowers and supports folks in achieving and maintaining safe and affordable housing," CHC Executive Director Christopher Brown commented. "This approach naturally fits the resilience and strength of Madison County and exemplifies our truly sustainable community."

To learn more about Neighbors Helping Neighbors workdays, drop by the rooftop deck of the SECU Building in downtown Marshall on Thursday, Sept. 10 between 4-6 p.m. for refreshments and networking. The free information session will offer ways to get involved in the Neighbors Helping Neighbors Saturday home repair workdays. Contact June Trevor, Volunteer Coordinator at 649-1200 or june@chcmadisoncountync.org to learn more.

Election judges needed

Paul Eggers

paul@newsrecordandsentinel.com

Republican election judges are still needed for the Spring Creek and Sandy Mush precincts. The positions are appointed at each precinct for 2-year terms. The judges are selected from lists given to the local Board of Elections by county political chairs.

With as many as five elections possible from November 2015 through November 2016, election judges will play a key role in ensuring fair and impartial votes. Responsibilities include maintaining peace at the polling place, hearing challenges of registered voters and taking inventory of ballots.

"Precinct judges bear the heavy responsibility for holding fair, accurate, and honest elections at their respective

precincts," said Kathy Ray, Director of the Madison County Board of Elections. "Madison County has been blessed to have the most dedicated, hard working, and respectable community members serving as precinct judges. They endure long arduous hours of training and serving at the polls to provide the highest quality of election services for Madison County voters. They are to be commended for the quality of their work and their faithful and dedicated service."

Those interested in the judge positions should contact the Madison County Republican Party Chairman Jesse Sigmon at jfsigmon@gmail.com.