



How did the Carolina Panthers fare in the early wave of NFL's free agent frenzy?

THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY SINCE 1906

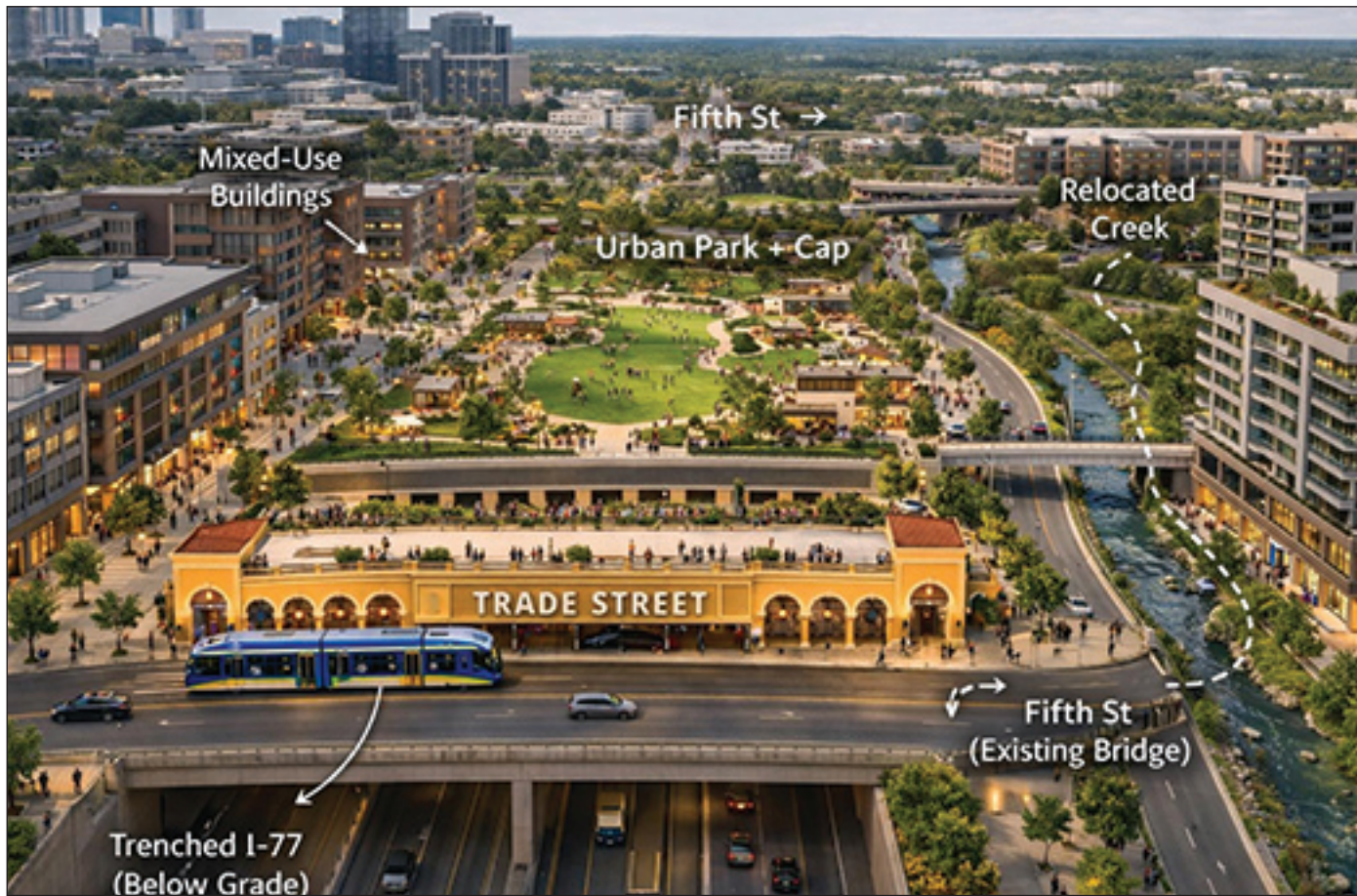
# The Charlotte Post

WEEK OF MARCH 19, 2026

VOLUME 52 NUMBER 28

WWW.THECHARLOTTEPOST.COM

\$1.50



SUSTAIN CHARLOTTE

An artist's rendition of a reimagined I-77 South in Charlotte includes a trashed thoroughfare and reconnected neighborhoods. Sustain Charlotte is inviting submissions that would replace the North Carolina Department of Transportation's elevated lanes concept.

## Want to reimagine I-77 South? Put idea to paper

### Advocacy group invites community to submit alternatives to state toll lane plan

By Herbert L. White  
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

As North Carolina looks to add toll lanes along I-77 South, an advocacy group is asking the public for design alternatives.

Sustain Charlotte has launched of "Reimagining 77 South: A Vision for Repairing and Reconnecting Charlotte," for residents, designers, and students to suggest new options for the corridor that reconnect neighborhoods, improve mobility and create healthier public spaces. The state's proposed project has been temporarily paused.

April 6 is the deadline for idea submissions and professional experience is not

required. Hand-drawn sketches are welcome. Selected submissions will be displayed at a free public exhibit on April 13 at the Dubois Center at UNC Charlotte Center City, as part of a free public event called How the Cities We Build Shape How We Live, featuring Charles Montgomery, the author of "Happy City."

"For decades, highways built through cities divided neighborhoods and limited opportunity," said Shannon Binns, founder and executive director of Sustain Charlotte. "This challenge invites local residents to

imagine what it could look like to repair past harm and reconnect our communities, as so many other cities have already begun to do."

NC DOT announced earlier this month it will delay release of the first Request for Proposals for the \$3.2 billion project until June in order to conduct community meetings. Final design of the project isn't expected until the end of 2027 at the earliest and construction would begin in the early 2030s.

Eradication of the all-Black Brooklyn neighborhood in Second Ward in the 1960s and disconnection of Black communities in west Charlotte - fueled by

Please see **WANT** | 2A



Binns

## EV funding fight hits home along I-77 corridor

By Will Atwater  
NORTH CAROLINA HEALTH NEWS

Ron Ross, 70, has spent decades in Charlotte's Historic West End watching traffic thicken on nearby I 77 and working alongside his neighbors to fight for cleaner air and a healthier future — one that includes electric cars.

Now Ross and his neighbors are battling a North Carolina Department of Transportation plan to add elevated toll

lanes along I 77 South, a proposal critics warn would burden communities along the corridor with higher levels of air pollution, including particulate matter and carbon monoxide. The push to expand lanes along this already-busy interstate, Ross said, only intensifies the need to promote zero emission vehicles.

Last month, state Sens. DeAndrea Salvador (D-Mecklenburg) and Caleb Theodoros (D-Mecklenburg), whose districts

include the I 77 South corridor, wrote Gov. Josh Stein asking him to pause procurement on the express lanes project, saying the state is moving ahead without enough transparency or analysis of how more lanes could affect nearby residents' health and risk of being displaced.

Against that backdrop, and despite the loss of rebates that once helped people

Please see **EV FUNDING** | 3A



SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION

State Rep.-elect the Rev. Rodney Sadler (center) speaks last week during a rally of airport contract workers across from Charlotte Douglas International Airport. Charlotte City Council member J.D. Mazuera Arias is on the left.

## Airport workers target lease deal for better pay, support

By Herbert L. White  
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

There are days when Victoria Copeland's job pushes her to the point of exhaustion.

A wheelchair agent at Charlotte Douglas International Airport, Copeland helps American Airlines passengers with mobility get to their flights safely. The pay and work conditions, she insists, aren't keeping pace with job demands.

"I love helping passengers, but the job can be physically draining," Copeland said. "We are understaffed because the wages and benefits don't match the workload. I've seen passengers wait up to an hour for assistance because we don't have enough wheelchair agents. Sometimes we even have to push two passengers at the same time so they don't miss their flight. By the time I get home, my body just crashes."

Copeland and her colleagues are recruiting elected officials to leverage their demands for better pay and bene-

Please see **AIRPORT** | 2A

## County infant mortality gap persists

By Herbert L. White  
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Mecklenburg County birth outcomes are improving, but racial disparities persist.

A study on infant mortality published by the public health department found that non-Hispanic Black babies are still at increased risk of birth complications and death in their first year compared to their non-Hispanic white peers.

From 2014-23, the overall rate of infant mortality fell to 5 deaths per 1,000 births, which is better than the national rate of 5.6 and North Carolina's rate of 6.8. When accounting for race and ethnicity, mortality rate from 2021-23 was 8.8 for Black infants, 4.8 for their Hispanic peers and 2.4 for white babies.



Scott

"Mecklenburg County has a vision that all babies in our county are born healthy and reach their optimal potential," interim public health director Dr. Kimberly Scott said in a statement. "Unfortunately, every year about 70 infants in Mecklenburg County die before celebrating their first birthday and Black babies are over three times more likely to die. It shouldn't and doesn't have to be this way."

Among the findings:

Please see **STUDY** | 2A

## Piedmont neighbors push against data center

By Herbert L. White  
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Stokes County residents are joining the growing list of North Carolina communities to resist a data center they say will put cultural sites and the environment at risk.

A lawsuit filed last week in Stokes County Superior Court by community groups and residents against the county aims to protect the Dan River corridor from the rezoning of 1,845 acres to accommodate Project Delta, which plaintiffs contend will cause pollution and disrupt cultural assets and increase pollution.

Stokes commissioners overrode the county's planning board's recommendation to deny the rezoning by a 3-2 vote in January before an operator was identified or details about the project's scale and infrastructure were disclosed to the public. The county, which is located north of Winston-Salem on the Virginia border, approved opening more than a dozen mostly rural sites to potential future centers.

"Our foreparents are buried on the data center site," said Robert Hairston, board chair of the National Hairston Clan, one of the plaintiffs. "Not history in a book — real people, in the ground, and it bothers me deeply to think of those gravesites as being disturbed. We strive to be good stewards of that land so their families can always come back to them. If they were your foreparents, would you want them moved? Run over? When you walk that land now, you

Please see **PUSHBACK** | 2A

**STAY IN TOUCH**  
Snapchat: thecharpost  
X: @thecharpost  
Facebook: The Charlotte Post  
Instagram: @thecharlottepost



#PaperThursday

INSIDE  
Sports 5A  
Life 1B  
A&E 5B  
Classified 4B

Digital edition:  
www.thecharlottepostnewspaper.com  
To subscribe: (704) 376-0496 or online  
http://tcppc.com/Subscribe



## Want to remake I-77 South? Put it on paper

Continued from page 1A

urban renewal and highway construction initiatives - has been a rallying point for opponents of the toll lanes. State Sens. DeAndrea Salvador and Caleb Theodros, who each represent communities that would be impacted by the planned elevated toll lanes, have appealed to Gov. Josh Stein to stop the project.

The impacted communities stretch from John Belk Freeway to Brookshire Boulevard between Third and Fourth wards in Uptown from Wesley Heights, Seversville, and McCrorey Heights and other historically Black neighborhoods in west Charlotte.

People can submit visual concepts that reinterpret how the corridor

would serve neighborhoods and the environment while accommodating growth. Ideas can include freeway caps or tunnels, parks and greenways, new walking and biking connections, restored waterways, or other approaches that reconnect communities and improve quality of life.

The organizers cite instances where other cities across the country are transforming highways and the neighborhoods they once divided. Freeway caps and similar projects have already been built in more than 60 cities, with nearly 20 more proposed or in the development stage in Dallas, Texas; Seattle, Washington; Denver, Colorado and Phoenix, Arizona.

On The Net  
sustaincharlotte.org/reimagining-i77-south-charlotte



Chad Bailey leans against the fence at the Baileytown cemetery in Stokes County, North Carolina. The cemetery sits on property county commissioners rezoned for a data processing center.

## Pushback against data centers expand across NC

Continued from page 1A

can almost hear and feel that they were there. They deserve to rest in peace, and we will not let that be taken from them."

Stokes County officials acknowledged the lawsuit in a statement.

"We recognize that land-use decisions can have significant impacts on residents, and the County remains committed to transparency, public participation, and the fair administration of all zoning and planning processes," the county said. "Stokes County will not comment on specific allegations contained in the complaint at this time, but will provide additional information when appropriate and permitted."

Hyperscale data centers like Project Delta are specialized facilities that house computer systems, servers, and store infrastructure to manage, store, and process digital data for cloud computing and artificial intelligence workloads. They consume massive amounts of electricity to support thousands of servers and water for advanced cooling systems that prevent overheating. Because they operate continuously, their presence also generates constant noise and pollution.

In addition to residents suing to stop the project, plaintiffs are cultural and environmental nonprofits National Hairston Clan; Charlotte-based CleanAIRE NC; Dan River Basin Association; and 7 Directions of Service. They argue Stokes commissioners acted without procedural safeguards, required by North Carolina law, and want both zoning results struck down.

"Projects like hyperscale data centers can bring significant air pollution from the large arrays of generators needed to keep them running," said Jeff Robbins, CleanAIRE NC's executive director. "Communities along the Dan River - including historically Black neighborhoods like Baileytown and families such as the Hairstons and Baileys with generations of roots, churches, and cemeteries here - deserve real protection for their air, their health, and the places that hold their history."

More North Carolina communities are pushing back against data centers. Apex unanimously voted last week for a one-year moratorium. Chatham County, Gates County and the town of Canton in Haywood County have done likewise.

In Stokes County, residents have turned to the courts.

"For Indigenous people of this region, the Dan River corridor is not just land - it is a living cultural landscape tied to the Saura and other Siouan-speaking nations who have lived along these rivers for centuries, said Crystal Cavalier-Keck, co-founder of 7 Directions of Service. "Our organization was founded to protect

sacred places and defend the lands and waters that hold our ancestors' stories. Data center development that threatens burial grounds, cultural sites, and the river itself is not just an environmental issue - it is a threat to Indigenous heritage and the responsibility we carry to care for these lands for future generations."

Stokes commissioners amended the zoning ordinance to add data centers as a permitted use throughout heavy manufacturing districts, extending the possibility of facilities to more than a dozen largely rural sites across the county.

"The Dan River watershed is one of the most important natural resources in this region and decisions that could affect it should be made with careful study and public transparency," said Tiffany Harworth, executive director of the Dan River Basin Association. "For projects of this scale, municipalities need to carefully evaluate potential impacts on both the citizens they serve and the environment, while ensuring residents have meaningful opportunities to engage in the planning process and a voice in the final outcome."

Plaintiffs contend in the lawsuit that Stokes commissioners never properly provided notice of the zoning changes, failed to assess the center's environmental impacts such as noise, air quality, water, and sacred sites tied to Saura tribal history and Hairston Plantation, where descendants of people who were enslaved there still live and maintain nearby cemeteries.

Project Delta developers contend the campus will pump \$20-40 million into the county's annual tax base, more than three times what Duke Energy, Walmart and RJ Reynolds contribute combined.

"It's almost impossible to visualize the sheer scope of this project," said Anne Harvey David, chief counsel for environmental justice at Southern Coalition of Social Justice. "That the commission approved it without full consideration of the impacts on the community - particularly on the Hairston Clan, Bailey family, Saura tribal descendants, and other residents whose rural lives will be forever altered - is another instance of burdening the historic Walnut Cove community for the purported benefit of Stokes County."

"Zoning law exists to protect communities from exactly this kind of rushed and ill-informed decision."

Said plaintiff Tim Mabe: "We live in a house built 40 years ago by the hands of our family, surrounded by our relatives, on land we've been on for three generations. We grow our own food and live a life we cherish on this land. This project and rezoning threaten not only our ability to exist here but also the meaningful existence of the community we love."

## Study: Mecklenburg County's infant mortality race gap persists

Continued from page 1A

Perinatal conditions are the leading cause of infant deaths, accounting for nearly half of fatalities. Birth defects are the second leading cause.

Sudden unexpected infant deaths, or SUIDs, are the top cause of injury-related deaths and the third leading cause of deaths overall.

High blood pressure is a common maternal health risk factor before and during pregnancy.

One out of five pregnant mothers receive inadequate prenatal care, meaning they start care after the fourth month of pregnancy, or complete half or fewer recommended care visits. Hispanic women have the highest rates of inadequate care.

"It takes a community effort to reduce infant mortality and keep moms, moms-to-be, babies and families safe and healthy," said Dr. Elisabeth Pordes, Meck-

lenburg Public Health's senior health program manager for the Prenatal to Five Initiative. "In uncertain times, a unified, unwavering commitment to improving infant and maternal health is more necessary than ever."

The report recommends addressing social determinants of health to improve birth outcomes in addition to:

- A focus on eliminating disparities while improving health for all

- Taking a community-inclusive approach to healthy pregnancies

- Building infrastructure to improve preconception and prenatal health with community leaders

- Amplify evidence-based interventions like group prenatal care, home visit and care management programs, team-based care that includes doulas and midwives, breastfeeding and safe infant sleep initiatives

## A computer on every lap? NC schools rethinking access

By Kate Denning

CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

Due to exhausted funds and concerns about excessive computer-screen time, some North Carolina public and private schools are considering reversing course on one-to-one device access and scaling back on in-class use.

Districts across the country received billions in federal funding during the pandemic, hundreds of millions of which went toward purchasing technology for students to complete work at home in North Carolina. This is also when one-to-one access, where each student is assigned a personal device to be taken home as opposed to classrooms sharing a communal set, became more common.

Krista Glazewski, the executive director of NC State's Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, said districts are likely facing a costly issue with those pandemic-era devices reaching the end of their life cycles.

Schools nationwide have reported they tend to replace the laptops every three to five years, though Google is making attempts to extend the lifespan of their Chromebooks, the typical device brand that districts have purchased en masse in recent years. Now, six years since the pandemic's onset, those devices are nearing or well past the time to be replaced - a cost for which many districts are ill-equipped today.

A survey by the NC Department of Public Instruction found that more than half of the individual public and charter school respondents said they had no funding source to replace the laptops once they broke down for good.

In a 2025 committee meeting, Superintendent Robert Taylor of Wake County Public Schools System said the county's one-to-one program launched during the pandemic is something Wake County, the largest school district in the state, can no longer afford.

A spokesperson for WCPSS told Carolina Public

Press the district is currently in conversation about its anticipated needs over the next several years in areas like technology, security and building renovations. The district's next step on devices is part of those deliberations, and a decision is to come in the near future, though an exact timeline isn't set.

The maintenance of the devices is becoming increasingly costly in general, Glazewski said, but the bulk of the burden often falls on smaller, rural districts that don't have as many resources for repairs and upkeep. Some districts, like Nash County and Durham Public Schools, address that by charging a yearly technology fee to cover minor damage and support overall device sustainability.

Carolinas Academic Leadership Network President Bryce Fiedler said he became aware of the cost burden when WCPSS raised concerns about the laptops' affordability last year. An often unnoted aspect, Fiedler said, is that public schools are also facing widespread decreasing enrollment in the state, which is directly tied to how much money schools receive.

While the finances are undoubtedly burdensome, Fiedler finds the disadvantages to learning when classrooms rely on the devices to be the most important.

Several studies have yielded clear results that children learn better via paper than digital devices, specifically when it comes to reading, which North Carolina students have struggled with since the pandemic.

"Digital learning is not done as effectively, or at least the brain doesn't retain information as well as it does through paper-based learning," Fiedler said.

Possible remedies could look like other districts following the lead of Burke County, Fiedler said. In the summer of 2025, the school board passed a resolution urging teachers to prioritize pen-and-paper learning in hopes of devel-

oping more balance between the technological and the traditional.

Less than a year later, parents and educators report improvements in reading comprehension, knowledge retention and homework-related stress, as well as higher test scores overall, though the district noted there are other variables at play in addition to decreased technology use.

Other suggestions by Fiedler besides purely emphasizing pen-and-paper work include focusing on mitigating factors like returning to the computer lab model or confining laptop usage to the classroom rather than students being reliant on an assigned personal device at all times. It's also critical to consider the ways technology use can impact different age groups and to acknowledge at which points it becomes necessary.

"It should be balanced, strategic, if not completely a pull back from providing laptops for elementary students," he said.

"We should look into tech-based electives based on student interest as they get into middle school and high school. But the idea that one-to-one has to start as early as elementary school, we're finding for financial reasons and learning reasons is just not feasible right now."

Broadly speaking, state lawmakers and school districts are more focused on managing cellphone use in school, Fiedler said. He feels there is more pushback against suggestions that schools scale back on laptop device use simply because "technology" and "learning" have become seemingly synonymous.

"The learning today is so dependent on computers and devices in the schools, so it would be a bigger lift to disentangle schools from relying so heavily on these devices than it would be to pass something like cellphones bans," he said.

"We would encourage schools not to defer on this too much. There's not a lot of time to waste."

Some private schools are already there - not due to Please see **SCHOOLS** | 3A



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Ron Ross at an EV charging station in Historic West End. Ross is an advocate for EV chargers along the Beatties Ford corridor, which is working to attract new investment and green infrastructure.

## EV funding fight hits home along Charlotte's I-77 corridor

Continued from page 1A

afford EVs, Ross has kept working to spread awareness, saying it "doesn't preclude us from sharing with the community, informing them of the advantages of purchasing electric vehicles" — changes he hopes will help improve the air in his neighborhood.

The West End, where Ross lives, is a historically Black community that lost homes, businesses and community institutions to highway construction during the urban renewal era that started in the 1960s. Now the area is working to attract new investment and promote green infrastructure. The district sits near one of the busiest stretches of I-77 South, where about 160,000 vehicles travel daily and emit tailpipe pollution that drifts over homes where thousands of people live.

### National funding fight, local consequences

As a member of the Historic West End Green District, Ross has worked with the City of Charlotte and other partners to bring electric vehicle charging options, including a Pole-Volt charger at The Ritz at Washington Heights, a popular park and gathering spot in the neighborhood.

The National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure program aims to help by funding a nationwide network of public charging stations to make driving electric more practical. In January, a federal judge blocked the U.S. Department of Transportation from withholding NEVI funds, clearing the way for the program to move forward so more communities can see new charging stations built along major roads.

The Southern Environmental Law Center was among the legal groups representing a coalition of states and advocacy organizations that intervened in the lawsuit to defend the program, including North Carolina-based CleanAIRE NC and the West End Revitalization Association.

"Tailpipe pollution is a public health crisis — fueling asthma, heart disease, and respiratory illness in communities already overburdened by environmental harm," wrote Jeff Robbins, executive director of CleanAIRE NC, in a statement released when a national coalition of groups filed their lawsuit.

The clash over EV charging money and Clean Air Act protections highlights a broader decision point for the country. One path speeds the shift to cleaner vehicles and offers some relief for communities living next to highways. The other doubles down on fossil fuels and slows cleaner energy, a course scientists and environmental advocates warn will intensify climate driven extreme weather and the health risks that come with it.

"For people across the nation, this decision clears the way for long-delayed EV charging to finally be built," said Megan Kimball, a senior attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center, in a statement released after federal judge Tana Lin made her ruling. "NEVI-funded stations will make long trips and everyday travel safer and more reliable — especially in places that have too often been passed over for infrastructure investment."

Andrew Whelan, communications director at CleanAIRE NC, said federal air quality regulations play a vital role in protecting communities like the Historic West End.

"Federal standards provide the legal floor that prevents vehicle manufacturers from producing dirtier cars," he said. Without those protections, he warned, "cars and trucks become less efficient and more polluting."

"A warmer climate leads to higher formation of ground level ozone or smog, which is a very dangerous air pollutant," Whelan said. "Vehicle exhaust also emits high levels of fine particle pollution, also known as PM 2.5 or soot — and PM 2.5 is our nation's deadliest air pollutant."

### Highway pollution and public health risk

Tiny particles such as PM 2.5 — matter small enough to penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream — are linked to asthma

attacks, heart disease, stroke and premature death, especially in children, older adults and people with respiratory or cardiovascular illness.

"When we talk about air pollution, we're talking about the air that fills a child's lungs on the playground or drifts through a bedroom window — especially for kids who live near power plants, factories, highways and port," said Afif El-Hasan, a doctor and asthma specialist, during a national media call on toxin exposure. "Anything in the air that's not supposed to be there creates a risk for their health."

On busy roads, a large share of those particles are produced by tailpipe emissions. Exhaust from internal combustion engines is a cocktail of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, along with fine particulate pollution that harms people's hearts and lungs. Taken together, cars, trucks, motorcycles, boats and other vehicles make transportation one of the largest contributors to U.S. climate pollution.

As temperatures rise and extreme heat becomes more frequent, communities already burdened by highway traffic, such as Charlotte's Historic West End and Durham's Hayti neighborhood, face compounding risks: more days with unhealthy air, higher energy bills and greater strain on people with existing health problems.

Those mounting health and climate risks, in recent decades, have been driving state and federal efforts to get more electric vehicles on the road.

### Policy efforts to promote EV adoption

At the federal level, programs like NEVI and the Environmental Protection Agency's \$5 billion Clean School Bus Program established under the Biden administration were designed to speed a shift away from fossil fuels by expanding charging infrastructure and helping school districts replace diesel buses with electric models, with extra support for low income, rural and Tribal communities.

In addition, North Carolina received more than \$92 million from the national Volkswagen Clean Air Act Civil Settlement and, between 2018 and 2024, used nearly all of it for grants and rebates to clean up transportation. However, no new grant rounds are expected, according to the state Department of Environmental Quality. More than \$41 million went to replacing older diesel school buses with cleaner diesel, propane, and 48 electric buses in 22 counties and for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The upgrades are expected to prevent about 10,220 tons of greenhouse gases and 165 tons of nitrogen oxides over the buses' lifetimes, according to NC DEQ data.

The settlement also helped expand charging infrastructure by funding both DC fast chargers and Level 2 stations, including more than \$1.7 million for state agencies to install 151 Level 2 ports that can serve fleet, employee and in some cases public vehicles, with 30 projects still in progress.

NEVI's national clean energy initiatives align with goals established by former Gov. Roy Cooper. His 2018 Executive Order 80 directed state agencies to cut greenhouse gas emissions and increase clean transportation. The order included a goal of at least 80,000 registered zero emission vehicles by 2025. The state reached that milestone two years early, surpassing 80,000 ZEV registrations in November 2023.

Cooper later expanded those ambitions with Executive Order 246, which calls for 1.25 million zero emission vehicles on North Carolina roads by 2030 and for ZEVs to make up half of new car sales by the end of the decade — a shift advocates say will depend not only on private car buyers, but also on public fleets such as state vehicles, city buses and school buses.

As of 2024, there were more than 100,000 plug-in hybrid and battery electric vehicles registered in North Carolina and more than 4,400 EV charging ports, according to the Governor's Office.

## Schools rethink students' access to computers in NC

Continued from page 2A

funding but rather as a quest for, in the words of Thales Academy, freedom from digital dependency.

Thales is a network of private schools that teaches a classical curriculum at more than 10 campuses across the state, as well as two in Virginia and Tennessee. The school announced in December it was removing "devoted digital devices" from its high school classrooms after it saw enhanced critical thinking, heightened lesson engagement and strengthened human relationships in its junior high students after first scaling back use among those grades.

"While there are certainly benefits to be found in digital devices, the benefits we see for our students when we remove dedicated iPads from the classroom far surpass the benefits of the devices' utility," the announcement read.

"... As we have heard overwhelmingly positive feedback from our junior high families and teachers about the change this year, we hope that our high school families and teachers will experience the same next year as we help our students move away from digital dependency toward a foundation more firmly rooted in human interaction and connection and the development of our most powerful human devices."

This differs greatly from Thales' approach to technology just a few years ago. A webpage no longer available on the site stated as recently as 2021 the school assigned students an iPad for daily use on and off campus.

"iPads are used throughout the school day, providing an avenue for collaborative and innovative learning. Technology is engrained in the Thales Academy education model, with Apple TVs in every classroom and computer labs outfitted with Apple iMacs to complement the iPad and create a seamless transition between devices for enhanced learning," the site previously read.

"Students gain competent technical skills throughout their time at Thales

Academy and graduate prepared to take on an ever-progressing technology filled world."

Even as schools pull back on device reliance — whether out of necessity or in a deliberate return to analog practices — that can still look like educational innovation, Glazewski said.

"Such that you can have devices in classrooms and not see much innovation happening, you can have limited devices in classrooms and see a lot of innovation," she said.

"From my perspective, innovation really happens at the intersection of pedagogy, resources and student engagement. With that in mind, sometimes a resource for innovation is a device, but sometimes it's the way that a teacher is bringing pedagogy and local resources and field trips and speakers and all the richness of a full classroom experience to bear for students."

Although technology might not be needed for innovation, and educators have valid concerns about their students being overexposed to screens during and after school, Glazewski does worry about digital divides growing as a result of financial burdens and changes in trends.

As educators weigh different priorities and educational trends change over time, leaders should be aware of how the shifts affect students with various backgrounds.

"We want to give special attention to where we may be inadvertently creating new digital divides in the context," she said. "I like to really point to, 'How are decisions being made? Are some students experiencing lower access at higher rates than other students? And if so, what does that look like?'"

"Because we want to make sure that there's equal opportunity for all students to experience the benefits of rich pedagogical, exciting, engaging classrooms without and ensure that all students get to experience that, and that there is not a particular group that is experiencing harm more than others."

**The Creatives:**  
A podcast about  
Charlotte's most  
creative people

On SoundCloud, Apple  
Podcasts and Spotify

## FOR SALE RARE FIND!!

Prime investment opportunity for current use as a church or redevelopment.

2670 Dr Carver Road  
Charlotte, NC 28208

- ✓ 4+ acres within city
- ✓ Within minutes of Charlotte Douglas International Airport and Center City
- ✓ Includes multi-purpose space and gym
- ✓ Zone N2-B
- ✓ Possible Charter School

**FW FRED WARREN REALTY**

**704-606-2627**

## The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

Gerald O. Johnson | CEO/PUBLISHER

gerald.johnson@thecharlottepost.com

André P. Johnson | CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

andre.johnson@thecharlottepost.com

Herbert L. White | EDITOR IN CHIEF

herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

Published weekly by The Charlotte Post Publishing Company Inc., 5118 Princess Street, Charlotte, NC 28269 (USPS #965500). Subscription is \$65 per year. Periodicals postage paid at Charlotte, NC. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Charlotte Post, PO Box 30144, Charlotte, NC 28230

# Send in the clowns from MAGA

Judy Collins' 1975 song, "send in the clowns," is a classic. It speaks into the foolishness of humanity, ultimately acknowledging that the clowns are already present. We have clowns in spades!



LIB CAMPBELL

Question is, will democracy survive the clown show of the Trump administration? Anne Applebaum, David French and Tim Snyder

say we will survive, but we will be forever altered. The depth and breadth of the Trump administration's damage will be hard to clean up. The latest is punctuation on the problem that is Donald Trump. An unprovoked war in Iran is already raising oil and gas prices. American casualties are rising, and there will be more. American civilians in Iran are scrambling to get out.

Tariffs have raised food costs. Programs for underserved populations have been cut. If that weren't enough, the cruelty continues in our immigration crackdown.

What are we to do? We can work to elect people with common sense and moral conscience. Before that, we must mount a vocal, loud, bellicose resistance to wrongdoing we see with our own eyes. The clowns distract attention from the main thing. They influence us to ignore what we see and instead believe what they tell us we see. We are so gullible!

Even the self-righteous piety of the MAGA Christians is nauseating. Nowhere in the Bible is exhortation to harm marginalized people in the ways they are being harmed today. Cutting social programs, deleting programs that feed the poor, serving up a false

history is part and parcel of the clown show.

Midterm elections are ongoing and there are signs that Democrats are winning seats. If enough change comes to the congress, impeachment would be a viable option.

Autocracy is not a pretty thing. Yielding power to a mentally diminished leader is increasingly dangerous. Trump's cognitive decline is hard to hide. Comprehension and communication skills are obviously impaired. Trump is a laughingstock to us and to the world who don't take him seriously.

The question is, who are the adults in the room? Who are the loyal leaders who are finally admitting that Trump is leading us down a dangerous path?

There was a time in America when character mattered. Sadly, that is no longer the case.

Kash Patel partying and drinking with the men's

Olympic hockey team cost a lot of money. Kristi Noem has been a disaster from the beginning. Pam Bondi must have some damning information against Trump, information she is using as blackmail.

Righteous indignation is not enough. The pressure of resistance will eat at people who have been more interested in keeping a job than in doing it.

In Galatians, Paul tells us that we cannot fail in doing good. Keep up the good fight. Democracy is worth it. America is worth it. We may not be able to do everything, but all of us can do something.

Step it up, ye righteous. We are in this for the long haul.

Lib Campbell is a retired Methodist pastor, retreat leader, columnist and host of the blogsite [www.avirtualchurch.com](http://www.avirtualchurch.com). She can be contacted at [libcam05@gmail.com](mailto:libcam05@gmail.com)

## Paying today for hamburger tomorrow

Remember the old Popeye cartoons? J. Wellington "Wimpy" was a moocher who repeatedly promised, "I will gladly pay you tomorrow for a hamburger today."

But the reverse is true when considering property taxes. Property owners are paying taxes today on an anticipated payday in the future.



TOM CAMPBELL

Our legislators opened a can of worms when they agreed to discuss and offer possible reforms to property tax laws. With income, sales and use taxes or many other forms of taxes the payment is required when the transaction is conducted. That isn't the case with real estate taxes. Cities and counties are creations of and are subordinate to the General Assembly. The legislature has almost total control over what they can do and how they generate revenues. The two primary revenue sources are sales taxes, accounting for approximately 18% of total revenues, and property taxes, amounting to about 50%.

The state has an established sales tax rate of 4.75%, with cities and counties authorized to levy an additional 2.75%, either by having a voter referendum to approve the addition or by getting authorization from the General Assembly. With property taxes there has been a general "rule of thumb" that taxes would be imposed at around \$1.50 in taxes for every \$100 valuation in property; that amount can be exceeded to help retire voter-approved debt.

North Carolina law requires all counties to conduct real property revaluations at least every eight years to reflect current market values and more accurately assess property taxes. About half of our 100 counties do so every four years to offset the "sticker shock" from big tax increases and ensure values more closely align with the marketplace.

Locally elected government officials say they are caught between a rock and hard place. Population growth and rising costs put pressure on them to fund law enforcement and public safety, jails, water and sewer treatment plants, schools, public health services, recreation and employee salaries. State law requires they must operate with a balanced budget. Property taxes are one variable with which they can have some discretionary authority to meet these demands.

But according to a recent report from the NC Chamber, total county revenues in our state grew over 35% over the decade ending in 2023. Most of those increases (approximately 80%) came from sales and use taxes and can be attributed to strong consumer spending, as well as significant population increases. But property tax revenues grew by about 15% during the period.

According to a presentation from the Tax Foundation home values in our state have grown faster than the national average. Between 2018 and 2023 real property values rose an average of 12.26% and property tax revenues increased by 5.27%, suggesting the counties offset more than half the valuation increase by reducing rates, however in 64 of our 100 counties the growth in property tax revenues exceeded the growth in real estate values.

Property owners are complaining about the large increases in property taxes they are being assessed and our lawmakers are listening.

Other states have instituted property tax reforms. Some of the proposed solutions include capping annual increases in assessed values at perhaps 3-5% or instituting targeted tax relief programs, such as increased homestead exemptions, limiting taxes capped as a percentage of homeowner income or even deferrals for seniors.

One reform that seems to be gathering popularity is called "levy limits," in which total revenue growth from existing properties would be capped.

As might be expected, each of these proposals has advantages and disadvantages. Lawmakers will be tasked to consider how to prevent property owners from having frequent large tax increases while not putting local officials in the box of being unable to meet county needs. It is probably out of the question that the legislature might offer counties some additional sources for revenues to take some pressure off property taxes. Perhaps lottery proceeds?

We don't expect much will come of these proposed property tax reforms this year. For one thing it is an election year and all 170 of our legislators will be standing for election. Further, a legislature that cannot even pass a state budget is unlikely to come together to tackle and resolve an issue with such significance this year.

Tom Campbell is a Hall of Fame North Carolina broadcaster and columnist who has covered North Carolina public policy issues since 1965. Contact him at [tomcamp@carolinabroadcasting.com](mailto:tomcamp@carolinabroadcasting.com)

## What spring hides in plain sight from us

Spring arrives this week, and the world feels alive again.

Trees fill out. Birds return. The air softens. It is the season when nature tells us life is coming back. But this spring also arrives with a number most Americans have barely heard.



BEN JEALOUS

This winter, scientists counted just 12,260 western monarch butterflies along the California coast. In 1997, the first formal count found roughly 1.2 million. In 2022, the count was 335,479. That means the western monarch population today is about 1% of what it was a generation ago — and only about 4% of what it was four years ago.

You do not need advanced science to understand that. You only need subtraction. And yet most Americans have heard almost nothing about it. That silence says something im-

portant about how environmentalism changed.

There was a time when the country knew these stories.

When bald eagles were disappearing, the news was everywhere. Environmentalists shouted it from the rooftops until the whole country knew. People rallied. Laws changed. The birds came back. When whales were being hunted toward extinction, the world knew. Environmentalists raised the alarm again. People rallied. Hunting slowed. Many whale populations began to recover.

For years, environmentalism asked people to protect what they loved.

It was a movement built less on fear than on love — on the simple belief that some things were worth saving before they were gone.

Thirty-five years ago, 78% of Americans said they considered themselves environmentalists. Around that same time, western monarchs still numbered in the low millions. Then

the movement began speaking more about climate change. The science behind that shift was necessary and important. But the public language changed too.

Instead of simple subtraction, we asked people to think more in terms of carbon concentrations, atmospheric models and long-range projections built from advanced physics.

At the same time, we talked less about habitat loss, species decline and the wild things people could still see disappearing. We thought we could make the conversation more complex and still hold everyone.

We did not. Today, the share of Americans who identify as environmentalists has fallen to 41%.

Meanwhile, the losses keep growing.

Scientists say species are now disappearing at more than 100 times the normal rate. That is why many believe we are entering the early stage of a sixth mass

extinction. What makes this one different from the five before it is simple: nature caused the others. This one is being driven by us, mostly through habitat destruction, along with overuse, pollution, invasive species and climate change.

We still need to talk about climate change. It is real and urgent. But if we want to build a stronger movement, we also need to talk again in the language that has always moved people most.

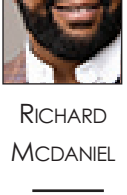
Environmentalism first became powerful by appealing to people's love for wild things and wild places. People still care deeply about wild things and wild places. People are still moved more by love than fear.

And subtraction is still the math most people understand best.

Ben Jealous is a professor of practice at the University of Pennsylvania and former president and CEO of the NAACP.

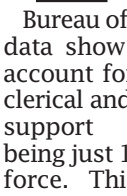
## Wes Moore's AI warning to Black America

When Amazon cuts 30,000 jobs and Black workers hold nearly 20% of the roles being eliminated while making up just 13% of the workforce, that is not a coincidence.



RICHARD MCDANIEL

That is a pattern. And it is accelerating. The layoffs are part of a broader AI driven economic shift that is already reshaping who works, who advances, and who is left behind. And by every measurable indicator, African American workers are among the most exposed.



KEVIN HARRIS

Bureau of Labor Statistics data show Black workers account for nearly 20% of clerical and administrative support roles despite being just 13% of the workforce. This matters because African Americans remain overrepresented in the exact job categories AI is replacing. Amazon diversity reports show Black employees make up a large share of fulfillment and support roles but less than 8% of technical positions.

Across many of Amazon's core business units including warehousing, logistics, and transportation, Black workers are overrepresented by as much as 30-40% in certain metro areas, while remaining significantly underrepresented in software, data science, and AI engineering roles.

The economic consequences of such disparities are severe. The median Black household has \$44,900 in wealth, compared to \$285,000 for white households, according to the Federal Reserve's latest Survey of Consumer Finances. And Black workers who experience layoffs take longer to find new jobs and face larger post-layoff wage penalties than white workers with similar credentials.

AI-driven displacement threatens to widen these gaps. A 2024 report from the National Bureau of Economic Research found workers displaced by automation experience earnings losses of 20-30% lasting more than a decade, with the steepest losses concentrated among Black workers without access to retraining or internal mobility.

Meanwhile, corporate investment in reskilling lags far behind automation spending. The World Economic Forum reports that while 60% of companies expect AI to eliminate roles, fewer than 25% have retraining pipelines tied to guaranteed job placement. Amazon's own upskilling programs reach only a fraction of the workers most at risk.

Lawmakers should respond aggressively to reduce harm to Black workers. Maryland Gov. Wes Moore, the nation's only Black governor, understands the threats AI can pose for African American workers.

In his State of the State address, Moore pointed directly to artificial intelligence as one of the

defining forces reshaping the economy, arguing that AI will determine who has access to opportunity in the next generation and who is left behind. Moore framed AI not simply as a technological breakthrough, but as a workforce challenge that demands intentional public investment, emphasizing that states must prepare workers for AI-driven change rather than react after jobs disappear.

He stressed that innovation without inclusion will deepen inequality, and that the government has a responsibility to ensure emerging technologies expand opportunity rather than concentrate it.

Moore's remarks underscore the stakes for Black America. If AI policy focuses only on productivity gains while ignoring who occupies the jobs being automated, displacement will fall hardest on Black communities already facing structural barriers to wealth and mobility. His call to align education, workforce development, and economic growth around emerging technologies underscores the need for targeted investment in institutions that serve Black workers at scale, particularly HBCUs.

HBCUs produce nearly 25% of Black STEM graduates despite receiving a fraction of the funding of predominantly white institutions, and they already serve as trusted on-ramps for first-generation and working-class students into high-demand fields. With targeted investment, HBCUs can rapidly expand programs in data analytics,

machine learning, cybersecurity, and cloud engineering, and applied AI.

HBCU partnerships can build paid apprenticeships, AI co-ops, and credential pathways that move Black workers from declining roles into growing ones, rather than leaving them to compete in an unequal labor market after displacement.

Every dollar invested in AI labs, faculty, research partnerships, and employer-linked training at HBCUs reduces the risk that Black workers will be permanently locked out of the next economy.

And we must remember that Black representation matters in AI. Currently, less than 5% of American AI professionals are Black. This lack of representation shapes which jobs are automated, and which are protected. If African Americans are excluded from AI design, they will be disproportionately left out of its benefits.

Amazon's layoffs are already history. The question now is whether our policy response moves as fast as the technology did or whether Black workers are still waiting for help when the next round of cuts comes.

Kevin Harris and Richard McDaniel are Democratic strategists with over 100 political campaigns between them, including the past five presidential elections and several congressional races. They co-host "Maroon Bison Presents: The Southern Comfort Podcast."

# Sports

THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2026



CAROLINA PANTHERS

Carolina Panthers coach Dave Canales greets linebacker Devin Lloyd and his parents Ronyta Johnson and Joe Lloyd, March 11, 2026, at Bank of America Stadium. Lloyd moved to Carolina from Jacksonville, where he earned second-team All-Pro in 2025.

## Panthers prioritize defense buildup

Carolina targets answers at edge in signing Jaelan Phillips and inside linebacker Devin Lloyd

By Jeff Hawkins

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Dashing in front of Kansas City Chiefs wide receiver Juju Smith-Schuster on Oct. 7, Jacksonville Jaguars linebacker Devin Lloyd snared a Patrick Mahomes' pass near the goal line.

Cradling the interception and sidestepping Mahomes' lunging tackle attempt, Lloyd raced 99 yards downfield, 116.8 total yards and, at his quickest pace, accelerated to 18.92 mph on the career highlight pick-six.

The Carolina Panthers, who enjoyed elite inside linebacker play through

much of the franchise's 31-year history, entered the offseason needing to add an All-Pro caliber playmaker to patrol the middle of the 3-4 base formation.

After a series of nomads falling short recently of legends like Sam Mills, Dan Morgan, the team's current general manager, Jon Beason and Luke Kuechly, Lloyd agreed last week to a free agent deal that potentially upgrades a glaring hole.

Lloyd and former Philadelphia Eagles edge Jaelan Phillips highlight Morgan's initial free agent moves to open the

2026 NFL business year. Lloyd, the 2022 No. 27 overall draft pick by the Jaguars, earned an 88.4 defensive grade, per Pro Football Focus. He was rated fourth best among linebackers last season. The second-team All-Pro pick registered 28 quarterback pressures, 18 hurries and nine hits - top three among linebackers in each category.

Despite finishing 8-9 in the regular season, the Panthers posted their eighth consecutive losing season but won the NFC South title and pushed the Los Angeles Rams to the edge in a wild-

card loss. For Carolina to take the next step, Morgan said in January that enhancing the Panthers' defensive skill set would remain his top priority.

"We love (defensive coordinator Ejiro Evero's) defense," Morgan said. "It's a really aggressive defense. I think as we continue to add players, I think that you'll see this defense kind of come together."

"We made a lot of improvements on the defensive side of the ball (in 2025) and we'll continue to get better and add pieces. We're up for that challenge."

Please see **PANTHERS** | 6A

## Devils earn due after resilient ACC tourney run

By Cameron Williams

cameron.williams@thecharlottepost.com

Winning the ACC basketball tournament is becoming an annual rite for Duke coach Jon Scheyer.

The Blue Devils won it for the second straight year and third in four by beating Virginia in the title game 74-70. Since taking over for Hall-of-Famer Mike Krzyzewski after the 2021-22 season, Scheyer has emerged as the dominant coach of the conference's top program. The Blue Devils (32-2) conquest of Virginia (29-5) was achieved despite missing a pair of starters due to injury.

"I think the first year or two, you're just trying to survive," Scheyer said. "Just straight up, you're just trying to survive, right? I think I've tried to really explore these last two years and what my purpose is with this. The wins are incredible, but to share these moments with our players is the best. But, if you can't develop relationships, I think that's most important."

One of Scheyer's best relationships is with sophomore Isaiah Evans, who was a five-star recruit at North Mecklenburg High. As a

Please see **DUKE** | 6A



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

North Mecklenburg High alumnus Isaiah Evans holds aloft the ACC basketball championship trophy after Duke beat Virginia 74-70 in the tournament final March 14, 2026 at Spectrum Center. Evans led Duke (32-2) with 20 points.

## Revamped basketball showcase in Virginia

Lonnie Blow is off the ledge. Blow had been walking the tightrope ever since Virginia State lost in the CIAA Tournament semifinal to Bluefield State. The Trojans were hoping to defend their championship that Fayetteville State eventually won.

But Blow is back on solid footing now. "I got hungry on the ledge," he said.

He also has to get back into coaching mode, as both the Trojans women's and men's teams will participate in the Black College Invitational Championship March 27-28. They really had no choice. Virginia State is hosting the BCIC after its inaugural year at Bojangles Coliseum in Charlotte was a bust.

According to its website, the two-day tournament is basically a battle between the CIAA and SIAC. Four games will be played on Friday (two women and two men), and the winners meet for the championship on Saturday.

No HBCU Division I teams accepted an invitation last year. Guess BCIC founder Wes Bellamy, who is also a Virginia State department chair, got the message. The BCIC may give teams a second life, but it's also an inconvenience.

Just as athletics directors start evaluating their coaching staffs once the season is over, so do head coaches with their rosters. Coaches know which players won't return once the clock strikes 0:00. The humane thing to do is meet as soon as possible and give them two words of pertinent advice: transfer portal. Then hit the road recruiting; unless, of course, the AD calls first.

"There are some players you can't wait to get rid of," said an SIAC coach who asked not to be

Please see **REVAMPED** | 6A



BONITTA BEST

## International duty part of job for Ascent players

By Herbert L. White

herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

The Carolina Ascent return to the pitch for Gainbridge Super League competition, but five players were busy with national duty during the two-week international break.

Midfielder B Hylton scored her first goal for England's U-20 team while defender Jill Aguilera continued her tear in Concacaf qualifiers for Puerto Rico, while Ascent teammates Sydney Martinez



Hylton



Aguilera

(goalkeeper) and Maria Tapia (forward) added major contributions. Ascent forward Stella Spitzer added a strong out with the United States' U-16 team.

Hylton had a big three-game stretch for England's U-20s in preparations for the U-20 Women's World Cup with a three-match set of friendlies in Alicante, Spain.

After playing in a substitute role in England's 3-1 loss to Spain on Feb. 28, Hylton started against the Netherlands on March 3 and

scored her first international goal from outside the 18-yard box just before halftime in the Young Lionesses' 1-0 result. Hylton played 85 minutes.

She also started the final match of the trip against Mexico, playing 45 minutes in England's 4-1 win.

Aguilera tallied five goals over a two-match run in Concacaf qualifying.

She opened with a hat trick and assist in Puerto Rico's 10- pasting of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines on Feb. 27. Aguilera continued her form against U.S. Virgin Islands with

Please see **ASCENT** | 6A

## Second Ward High coach earns hall of fame recognition

By Richard Walker

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

As an All-CIAA quarterback at North Carolina Central, Robert "Al" Montgomery stood out.

At 6-foot-4, 235 pounds, that physical stature also gave Montgomery a presence as a coach and physical education teacher at Charlotte's Second Ward High.

"He absolutely had a presence in any room he entered," said Mecklenburg County commissioner Arthur Griffin, a 1965 Second Ward graduate. "Not

only was he a coach but he was a physical education teacher. His physical stature created respect, but he also was as kind as a big teddy bear. He had a big voracious belly laugh that you could hear all over the football field or the gymnasium.

"And, as a teacher, he taught about grit and persistence and determination and was a classic teacher of those traits. He was always trying to get the very best out of you, whether it was on the football field or in physical education activities."

Montgomery, a three-sport athlete at Highland High in Gastonia, was a star before he became "Big Al" the legendary coach. On May

4, Montgomery will be inducted to the Gaston County Sports Hall of Fame alongside Danny Anderson, Steve Culbertson and Hester Martin Haynes. Tennessee basketball coach Rick Barnes will be the featured speaker at the Gastonia Conference Center.

A 1953 Highland High graduate, Montgomery was a three-sport standout in football, basketball and baseball who helped the Rams win two state titles in baseball (1951 and 1952) and advance to championship games in football (1949) and basketball (1952). He enrolled at NCCU (then North Carolina College) and was starting quarterback

Please see **MONTGOMERY** | 6A



Montgomery



CAROLINA PANTHERS

Carolina Panthers general manager Dan Morgan (left) addressed the team's need for pass rushers by signing outside linebacker Jaelan Phillips (center) to a free agent contract last week. The Panthers also signed a pair of left tackles in Rasheed Walker and Stone Forsythe to address depth at that position.

## Panthers address major needs in free agency

Continued from page 5A  
Seeking additional playmakers

One season removed from the Panthers establishing a dubious all-time record of surrendering 534 points, the defenders remained healthy enough to finish No. 16 in total defense (327.2 yards per game). Still, the unit's pass rush remained a weak link. Since 2023, they posted team sack totals of 27, 32, and 30.

Enter Phillips.

A day before Lloyd agreed to join the Panthers on a three-year, \$45 million deal, Phillips became the first to join the fold. At the start of early tampering period, Morgan created early buzz by landing the former Philadelphia Eagles standout on a four-year, \$120 million contract.

Considered to be one of the top outside linebackers on the free-agent market, Phillips, the 2021 No. 18 overall pick by Miami, compiled 28 sacks in 63 games. Injury concerns continue to hamper his career.

Reports suggested Phillips and Lloyd were Morgan's top free-agent targets.

Here are other moves Morgan executed to start reshaping the roster before next month's draft.

Kenny Pickett signed a one-year, \$7.5 million deal to replace Andy Dalton as Bryce Young's backup.

Young received a familiar skill reinforcement with the signing of receiver John Metchie III. Can Young's main target from his 2021 Heisman Trophy-winning season at Alabama

provide a spark?

• Luke Fortner signed a one-year, \$4.75 million deal to assume the starting center position after Cade Jayes bolted for the Detroit Lions.

• With last week's unexpected retirement of Yosh Nijman and Ikem Ekwonu recovering from a ruptured patella tendon, one of Morgan's main offseason missions is to reinforce the left tackle position. It started with the depth signing of Stone Forsythe for one year, \$2 million. After yielding 11 sacks in 13 games with the Las Vegas Raiders last season, Forsythe ranked last among 89 tackles, according to PFF.

Morgan also added a potential starter at left tackle, landing Rasheed Walker on a one-year deal that maxes out at \$10 million. The former Green Bay Packers mainstay logged a 93.8% pass-block win rate last season, 11th best in the league. Morgan also could utilize the Panthers' No. 19 overall draft pick to further stabilize the position.

Internally, receiver David Moore, tight end James Mitchell, linebackers Thomas Incoom, Trevis Gipson and Claudin Cherelus; and defensive backs Isaiah Simmons, Robert Rochell and Akayleb Evans re-signed.

So did safety Nick Scott, who agreed to a one-year deal after tallying 111 tackles (second on the team) in 17 starts last season.

"We're looking forward to putting a free agent plan together, setting the draft board and getting this thing going," Morgan said.

## Revamped BCIC moves to Va.

Continued from page 5A

named. "After you discover who they really are during the season, you don't want to be around them anymore."

The BCIC delays that routine for teams that sign on. A coach certainly can't say, "I'm cutting you from the team after you play in this tournament. Let's go win it."

Blow said he generalizes the suggestion a few weeks before the season ends, so no one feels targeted, and players can make their own decision before he does it for them.

"I tell them the season is almost over. If they're not happy or looking to make a change, then they need to get in the portal as soon as possible," he said.

We got next

Next season CIAA basketball will follow in the footsteps of its football colleagues and eliminate divisions. Yep, no more Northern and Southern winners. Teams will be ranked from No. 1-12. And every-

body will play twice.

"This eliminates having to play so many North Carolina Christian schools," Blow said.

You know, those schools (bless their hearts) that walk into the gymnasium down by 20 points before the game even starts. Hey, it's not all the CIAA's fault. Opponents shy away from scheduling good conference teams. Yeah, they'll visit Elizabeth City State but won't travel to Virginia State.

Think West Liberty will return to Virginia Union again in the next century after losing to the Panthers?

Blow said most coaches have been wanting this for a long time. It will help with strength of schedule while still allowing space for nonconference opponents and a tip-off classic or two.

It's a whole new sports world.

*Bonitta Best is sports editor at The Triangle Tribune in Durham.*

## Ascent thrive during international play

Continued from page 5A

a pair of goals to bring her tournament total to nine in three matches.

Tapia got scored her first international goal in the 41st minute as well as an assist against USVI in a 9-0 romp to remain first in their group.

Martinez started in goal and made a save for her second straight clean sheet in all competitions.

Puerto Rico's next qualifier is against Mexico on April 18.

U.S. U-16 forward Spitzer started against Spain and England in the UEFA Development Tournament in Türkiye. The Americans beat Denmark and England in the three-match series. Spitzer, who was a substitute against Denmark, played 147 minutes across the three matches.

## Duke takes resilience tour into NCAA tournament

Continued from page 5A

freshman, he was a role player on a roster where every starter was taken in the 2025 NBA Draft. As a sophomore, Evans stuck with Duke, moved into the starting lineup and became a major contributor.

"For Isaiah, it was probably uncommon at the end of the year," Scheyer said. "You got a McDonald's All-American who doesn't play as much. We had a really talented team. He could have transferred easily, could have gone pro, but to be able to double down on each other going through this whole year, to be able to share these moments with Isaiah. We've been through so much together, so for me, that's what's most important."

Evans had a game-high 20 points but didn't score his first basket until late in the first half.

"I really felt like I had to just let the game come to me," Evans said. "I feel like I do more harm than good when I'm trying to force myself to heat up. So, again, it just happened naturally. I got two layups, then I got a three and then things just naturally came into place."

Cayden Boozer led the Blue Devils in the absence of starting point guard Caleb Foster with 16 points, four assists and five rebounds in a team-high 40 minutes against Virginia.

"We had complete confidence Cayden was ready to do this and to take this to the next level," Scheyer said, "but to answer it in this moment, against the teams we've played in the ACC tournament, I just think that's something inherently that he has where he's he was born with that. He was born with that confidence and in that competitiveness."

Cayden's brother Cameron, the ACC player of the year, had an uncharacteristic result for the tournament MVP with 13 points, eight rebounds and eight assists. For a player who can "put up 20 and 10 in his sleep," as teammate Nik Khamenia described him, it was a tough outing. The assignment of guarding Cameron's was Virginia's Ugonna Onyenso, who set a tournament record for blocked shots in a game with nine.

"Well, I definitely got frustrated," Boozer said. "First of all, I have to give props to [Onyenso]. He is a great defender and a great shot blocker. I think there is a lot to learn from this game. I just want to keep attacking, figure it out and find other ways to win. Obviously, my shot wasn't falling, and I wasn't getting in a rhythm but just had to find a way."

Duke — ranked No. 1 in the nation — will likely be the NCAA tournament's No. 1 overall seed when the brackets are revealed. Scheyer is optimistic about the possibility of Foster returning. Center Patrick Ngongba is making progress with his foot injury, but Scheyer didn't indicate a timetable for return.

"Caleb's gonna be a little while still," Scheyer said, "he's progressing. As far as Pat goes, he's been doing his therapy, working with the medical team, and there's just benchmarks. He just has to continue to take it day by day to see how he can handle the next step and when that soreness goes away. I can tell you he's improving."

Another ACC trophy in hand, Scheyer and the Blue Devils have more business — and goals — to pursue.

"We're not done yet," he said. "Just so everyone knows, we're not done yet."



SECOND WARD HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Second Ward High football coach Robert Montgomery with running back Jimmie Kirkpatrick (left) and quarterback Andrew Watson won the 1964 North Carolina High School Athletic Conference state title.

## Montgomery earns recognition in Gaston Sports Hall of Fame

Continued from page 5A

on the Eagles' CIAA championship teams in 1953, 1954 and 1956 and earned All-CIAA in 1956. In 1984, the school honored Montgomery with induction on the NCCU Hall of Fame.

After college, Montgomery served in the Army from 1958-60 before being invited to a tryout for the first-year AFL's Boston (now New England) Patriots as an end. After being released, he was hired as an assistant coach at Allen University.

In the summer of 1961, Montgomery was hired at Second Ward, Charlotte's oldest Black high school, as head football coach and physical education teacher. At Second Ward, he inherited one of the school's two eventual NFL players — defensive back Randy Staten — and would soon coach one of the greatest breakaway runners in North Carolina high school history. That player, Jimmie Lee Kirkpatrick, would help Montgomery's Tigers win the 1963 state title with an 8-0-1 record.

"I knew about Big Al before I got to Second Ward because he played local baseball and he was one of the best athletes around," Kirkpatrick said. "When I got to Second Ward, we were coming off a tough year (0-8-1) the year before. I don't know that he knew a lot about me, so it was important to make a good impression. And we turned it around. I really respected coach. He had a great sense of the game, and I learned a lot from him."

Kirkpatrick would go on to greater importance in local and state history by being among the first Black players to integrate formerly all-white schools. In the process, he left Montgomery and Second Ward behind to play at Myers Park.

In 1965, while Kirkpatrick was leading the Mustangs to an 11-0 record and a state title, Second Ward slipped to 5-4 after back-to-back conference titles. Even more devastating was the decision that Second Ward would be closed after the 1968-69 school year when Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools fully desegregated.

But Kirkpatrick says his coach never questioned his decision to leave for Myers Park.

"He was always very supportive," said Kirkpatrick, who went on to play at Purdue and presents an annual award to top Mecklenburg County student-athletes in his honor at the Duke's

Mayo Bowl. "Over the years, every time I'd come home, I'd look him up."

Montgomery's coaching career ended after the 1967 season and he finished a 31-year career in CMS as a driver education teacher at West Mecklenburg, Garinger, West Charlotte and South Mecklenburg.

"That was kind of unfortunate because I was hoping he'd get another chance to coach again," Kirkpatrick said. "I do not know if he didn't want to or anything like that. But just knowing coach and how competitive he was, I felt like he would've wanted to coach again."

Griffin, who leads the Second Ward High School National Alumni Foundation, said the school had a collective mourning when Montgomery died at 74 after an extended illness in 2008.

"He was always coaching and nurturing his students and his athletes," Griffin said. "That's why the memories of Big Al are etched with me for a lifetime. Even though he was on the athletic side of things at the school, the skills that he taught you were transferable to the academic side — and in life."

"He was always very supportive," said Kirkpatrick, who went on to play at Purdue and presents an annual award to top Mecklenburg County student-athletes in his honor at the Duke's

