

He said, she said: Donte Darko and Luna Mackie in Davidson Community Players' production of "Actually" April 25-May 3.



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CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG STORM WATER SERVICES

Workers with Mecklenburg County Storm Water Services inspect the banks along Irwin Creek in Charlotte. The Irwin Creek Stream Restoration Project is restoring 5,400 linear feet of the creek from below Interstate 85 to Statesville Avenue in west Charlotte

Restoration's in the water for Irwin Creek's footprint

Infrastructure investment aims to bring the urban core's tributary back to life

By Jaslynn Vorachith and Herbert L. White

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Irwin Creek quenched Charlotte's thirst.

Its teeming springs nourished Black communities with fish and wildlife. It also was the site of swimming lessons and church baptisms. But Irwin also paid a price for Charlotte's growth. Runoff from building materials, industrial facilities and aging infrastructure, have polluted its waters, part of a long history of environmental racism that disproportionately impact Black communities.

Mecklenburg County has roughly 3,000 miles of creeks, which if laid end to end would stretch from Charlotte to

Vancouver, British Columbia, on Canada's West Coast. Most of the creeks are barely noticeable, slow-flowing rivulets.

Rashawna Huntley studies Irwin Creek.

A UNC Charlotte graduate student, she's partnering with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services to lead research through the Collegiate Water Monitoring program. Her research identified elevated E. coli levels and socioeconomic disparities along the watershed, which runs through Charlotte's crescent to the urban core.

"A lot of the Black people that stay

within Charlotte stay within Irwin Creek," said Huntley, who earned her undergraduate degree at Johnson C. Smith University. "They stay in this area, so everyone's kind of concentrated to this area. ...And that's slightly concerning, because with just the Irwin Creek watershed alone, we are behind the whole county."

E. coli, according to the World Health Organization, is "bacteria that is commonly found in the lower intestine of warm-blooded organisms" and most strains are generally harmless in a healthy human gut. But contaminated food and water can contain fecal matter, bacteria, viruses, and parasites.

Please see **RESTORATION** | 2A



Huntley

'Black Church Crawl' along NC coast promotes immersive cultural trip

By Trista Talton

COASTAL REVIEW

This year, the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor wanted to shake things up, get away from what has been their traditional meeting formula, and instead offer an up-close and personal, historically engaging experience.

The nonprofit's North Carolina Summit hosts the "Black Church Crawl," an immersive tour celebrating the history of Black churches that have housed decades of congregants in Brunswick and New Hanover counties.

The April 18 tour will allow participants to step within the walls of three historic Black churches, where speakers will delve into the stories of how these cultural landmarks came to be and their significance as spaces of faith, fellowship and community.

"Although you might live in a certain area, you might not be really invested in what's going on," said Nora Williams, Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor public relations and marketing campaign coordinator. "We wanted something that was happening in their community and something that they also could get involved in. Of course, anyone is allowed to participate, but we felt like this would be a great way for people to learn more about themselves and their history and the culture."

The North Carolina summit kicks off the first of four meetings the commission-led nonprofit holds annually in each of the states in which the corridor spans. The corridor is one of the largest of the 62

Please see **BLACK CHURCH** | 2A



QUEEN QUET

Queen Quet, chiefess of the Gullah Geechee Nation, is an advocate of preserving the barrier islands of the southeastern United States when the culture took root during the transatlantic slave trade for its original occupants. A native of St. Helena Island, South Carolina, Queen Quet is in Charlotte this week for a climate summit hosted by WFAE.

Climate change and cultural activism motivate Gullah Geechee advocate

By Charles K. Harris

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Queen Quet is on a mission to combat an imminent threat to her heritage - the land Gullah Geechee culture was built on.

"My elders sent for me to help address land retention issues," said Quet, chiefess of the Gullah Geechee Nation, a corridor of four southeastern states from Jacksonville, North Carolina to Jacksonville, Florida.

"Obeying my elders is a cultural tradition."

The Sea Islands, the birthplace of Gullah-Geechee culture, are some 100 barrier islands that hug the Atlantic coast from South Carolina to northern Florida. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration since 1950 the water levels in these areas have risen by 10 inches. Based on current trends, the

Please see **CLIMATE** | 2A

Historic school building for sale

Mecklenburg seeks buyer to preserve the Torrence-Lytle campus

By Herbert L. White

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A historic Huntersville school that was the centerpiece of a historically Black community is for sale.

Mecklenburg County and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission are seeking a new owner to preserve the Torrence-Lytle School campus. The county invested \$500,000 last year to repair the historic 1937 building, including a new roof and structural repairs.

"This is one of the last buildings from the county's 1930s effort to build high schools for African Americans," Historic Landmarks Department director Stewart Gray said in a statement. "It's important we save this building, because so many others like it have been lost."

Torrence-Lytle School - originally the Huntersville Colored School - opened in 1937 as the only public high school for Black students in northern Mecklenburg County. Its seven rooms held classes for grades 1-11 were offered and included 181 students and five teachers with three for elementary grades and two for high school.

An eight-classroom addition and cafeteria were built in 1952, followed by a 12-classroom addition in 1957. The school was also a cultural anchor for Pottstown, the historically Black neighborhood that dates to the 1890s.

Torrence-Lytle closed in 1966, 12 years after the U.S. Supreme Court's Brown v. Topeka (Kansas) Board of Education decision declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional. Since then, the gymnasium was converted into the David B. Waymer Recreation Center.

Initiative helps for formerly incarcerated

By Kylie Marsh

THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

Life isn't easy for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Dennis Gaddy founded Community Success Initiative in 2004 after seeing the struggles others faced when trying to find stability after prison.

"I saw a lot of people who were coming home who were not as fortunate as I was," he told The Tribune. Though Gaddy had a support system, he saw others finding difficulty becoming integrated back into society.

Raleigh-based CSI is a nonprofit organization focused on assisting formerly incarcerated individuals with reentry. On March 28, the organization will host its first National Speaker's Bureau in Knightdale, which brings success stories from former prisoners to inspire others.

"People who have not just turned their lives around but have done something with their lives," Gaddy said. "Written books, some have started their own businesses and

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Restoration in Irwin Creek footprint

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"If we ingest it, it can definitely make you sick, nausea, and a load of different health issues for humans," said Matthew Peine, an environmental specialist with Storm Water Services. "You can see fish kills and further effects for animals that use the water, like deer, birds, and so on."

There's also resilience and renewal in Irwin Creek's 30-mile ecosystem, from small ditches, storm drains and wooded areas that makes up a network in the heart of Charlotte. The Irwin Creek Stream Restoration Project, managed by Mecklenburg County Storm Water Services, is restoring 5,400 linear feet of the creek from below Interstate 85 to Statesville Avenue in west Charlotte by stabilizing its banks and stopping contamination from a former landfill. Grants by North Carolina Land and Water Fund and the American Rescue Plan fund the initiative.

"For our stream restoration projects, including Irwin Creek, we aim to reduce the sediment, which is our number one pollutant here in North Carolina, and just increase water quality," said Corrine Rizzo, a senior communication specialist involved in the project.

The Charlotte region relies on drinking water from the Catawba River, specifically Mountain Island Lake and Lake Norman. Wildlife habitat is also impacted by the waterway's health, which has been degraded by decades of neglect and abuse.

"Everybody who lives on our planet, the food web starts at our aquatic ecosystem," Rizzo said.

Added Taylor Mebane, an environmental specialist at Storm Water Services: "None of our streams here are graded for recreation or swimming."

Mecklenburg's creeks are polluted. Water quality is measured by MPN, or most probable number, of microorganism levels. The federal recommended maximum is 126 MPN for safe, primary recreational water contact such as swimming. Levels above 886 MPN indicate high risk.

Data from Storm Water Services and Collegiate Water Monitoring show a 2025 annual average of 145.89 MPN per 100 milliliters for Irwin Creek, while the 10-year average is 213.3.

Huntley's research found socioeconomic disparities within the watershed's footprint, indicating poverty, low education levels, and a predominantly Black population. According to her findings, Irwin covers about 5.5% of Mecklenburg and a population density of approximately 2,350 people per square mile - encompassing roughly 8% of county residents.

The disparities are found in the American Community Survey 2020 year-year estimates, which shows 32% of Mecklenburg residents are Black while 62% live in the Irwin Creek watershed.

Education attainment in the area is lower than the county average, with 86% of adults holding a high school diploma compared to 91% countywide. Poverty rates are also higher in the watershed area at 12.4%.

"They're probably more susceptible to accidentally polluting streams," Huntley said, "like running your laundry water down your driveway, is ac-

tually kind of detrimental. I (use) that example - that's what I did growing up. I didn't know our washing machine messed up, and we didn't have the money to get the plumbing fixed, so we just tossed the water outside."

Mebane contends it's difficult to tie socioeconomic factors to water quality.

"I will say environmental burden-wise, things like the proximity of a stream to a highly industrial area, or an area where they manufacture a lot of things and there's a lot of permitted facilities to discharge to streams," she said. "Of course, those streams are going to end up being more impacted water quality-wise and hydrology-wise."

In an area with both socioeconomic disparities and water quality concerns, Mecklenburg County considers the watershed a high-priority zone. Huntley's research shows that while predominantly Black neighborhoods are disproportionately affected, all of Mecklenburg is impacted as well as the Catawba River, where Irwin's water drains.

Decades of human alteration and influence are responsible for Irwin Creek's condition. In the 20th century, it was adjusted to control water flow and prevent flooding in some areas, allow predictable drainage for agriculture, and make urban planning easier. The Mecklenburg initiative aims to restore the tributary's natural character.

"As early as the 1900s, Mecklenburg County residents, industrial and farmers, were going through our creek systems and straightening out or channelizing our creeks, which helped them control where the water was going, and either kept it away from where they didn't want it to be, and moved it away from development, made it easier to predict," Rizzo said. "Over time, this erosion began to happen. Straightening a creek means the water is going to move faster. It's going to pull in sediment like the exposed soil on the creek banks and that sediment, over time, has become our number one pollutant here in North Carolina. ... That straightening created more and more erosion, and our goal is to go back through, restore it to its natural meanders or curves, different varying depths and different natural shapes so that the habitat can come back fully and the water quality can be improved."

The project keeps 1,000 tons of sediment - the equivalent of 100 fully-loaded dump trucks - out of the creek annually, Rizzo added.

Altering waterways degrades their natural cleansing systems. When water moves too fast, it creates land erosion that prevents surface water from purifying. Curvature allow the stream to move more slowly, stabilizing banks, reducing erosion, and limiting pollution. A major producer of sediment is connected to construction, which is exploding across Charlotte, one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States.

"Sediment can create a cloudiness to the water that keeps sunlight out and prevents oxygen from being aerated into the water itself," Rizzo said.

Without oxygen, aquatic life can't survive.

Sewage can enter creeks in several ways. During heavy rainfall, sewer lines

or pumping stations may overflow, while broken pipes release wastewater directly into streams. Failing septic systems can seep into groundwater or surface drains, and runoff from human or animal waste can also carry contaminants into waterways.

In addition to sewage, litter obstructs aquatic habitat and leaches toxins into water. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, "Microplastic particles are available for ingestion by a wide range of animals in the aquatic food web."

"Ingestion of microplastic particles can expose organisms to the chemicals used to produce the plastic material itself" as well as persistent organic pollutants, or POPs, that accumulate on plastic particles. Other contaminants, such as PFAS, or forever chemicals, have also raised concerns in water systems, though they are not specific to microplastics.

Another factor that makes it inhospitable for plants and animals is foams from fire extinguishers and flame-retardant chemicals that "lowers the water's ability to hold that dissolved oxygen, and it stresses the plants and the aquatic life that helps filter the water," Huntley said.

Though visually pleasing, creeks pose environmental risks. Even brief contact can expose people and animals to contamination. Flash floods affect neighborhoods as well by lowering property values and exposing people to contaminants. People also use waterways for recreation.

"How does it really impact those streams and creeks that people may be fishing and eating the fish that come out of there?" asked Jeffrey Robbins, executive director of Clean AIRE NC, an environmental advocacy nonprofit.

"I hear every day that we all have PFAS in our bodies, microplastics, and I'm thinking, 'wow, I don't think anybody really understands the significance of that. Those heavy metals that kind of stick into the air that we know that are driven by industrial transportation and transportation pollution.'"

Soot, or particulate matter emitted from fossil fuels, rise into the atmosphere but eventually return to earth through rainfall into waterways.

The Rev. Janet Garner-Mullins, an environmental justice advocate who focuses on racial equity, said pollution in burdened neighborhoods is common, such as a lack of tree canopy and an emphasis on building factories in lower income communities.

"The city or the county is giving permits to build factories," she said. "They seem to always put those factories and businesses that emit toxic fumes into the Black and brown communities."

Storm Water Services has been monitoring creeks by doing routine checks for hot spots, responding to alerts, and communicating with the community while giving the burdened community

equitable care in restoration efforts.

Positive results have been reported from earlier restoration projects such as McDowell and Little Sugar creeks that improved water quality as well as recovery of plant and animal species.

"There was a lot of turbidity in the cove that was impacting the drinking water," Sikes said. "It takes time, but they do come back. Some more rare species come back [like] the Carolina Darter Little Sugar, so the surprise is how quickly nature bounces back after the demands that we put upon it. We hope to see the same type of improvement in Irwin over time that we've seen in McDowell and Little Sugar Creek."

Huntley's collaboration with students in the monitoring program is an effort to engage with communities and empower people to make informed decisions related to environmental justice and local impacts.

"The long-term goal of this project is to have more student engagement on campus, which equals stakeholder engagement in the community," she said.

JCSU sophomore Alexander Cromwell is one of those stakeholders. The sophomore computer engineering major also minors in sustainability and his involvement with Huntley's research came from connections to the monitoring program.

"People need to start taking a little bit more care about their communities because the amount of trash I've been seeing at these creeks... is a little crazy," he said. "It made me realize that people don't care as much as they thought they did... about taking care of the environment."

Said Huntley: "I hope that from this, students leave JCSU become aware of what a stakeholder is, and wherever you stay you can make better informed decisions."

Water monitoring helps manage pollution sources, especially resident alerts that contribute to identifying them. To get involved in recreational safety, message MECKNOSWIM to 888-777. To send an alert, call 311 or (704) 336-7600 between 7 a.m.-7 p.m. weekdays.

For mobile devices and for 24-hour service, use the CLT+ app.



People need to start taking a little bit more care about their communities because the amount of trash I've been seeing at these creeks ... is a little crazy.



Johnson C. Smith University
sophomore
ALEXANDER CROMWELL



Robbins



Garner-Mullins

Climate change and cultural activism motivate Gullah Geechee

Continued from page 1A

islands face a bleak forecast.

"The Sea Islands are literally the front 'shoreline' of climate change," said Queen Quet, who was elected chieftess in 2000 and founder of the Gullah Geechee Sea Island Coalition. "Sea level rise, more intense storms in a hurricane zone and ocean acidification are all things that we are faced with. These threaten human safety, food security and cultural continuation."

Queen Quet (born Marquette L. Goodwine) has taken her fight from her native St. Helena Island, South Carolina, to the United Nations. She is on a national "Save the Sea Islands" tour and in Charlotte this week to raise awareness at WFAE's April 15 "Fireside Chat" program, part of station's EQUALibrium Live Series. On April 16, she will speak at the annual WFAE Carolinas Climate Summit. Both events are at the UNC Charlotte Dubois Center.

For tickets and information, visit wfae.com or www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/fireside-chat-wqueen-quet.

Gullah Geechee are descendants of African slaves and indigenous people originating in the area commonly referred to as Low Country in the late 1600s. In the coastal areas

of North and South Carolina, they are known as Gullah; along the coasts of Georgia and Florida they are commonly called Geechee.

Due to the relative isolation of the islands, slaves and their descendants primarily from central and west Africa, developed and maintained a rich, distinct and blended culture which includes a form of English creole that is still in use.

"We have our own language, spiritual practices, foodways, musical traditions, etc. that grew from the amalgamation of numerous African languages and traditions," said Queen Quet, whose mission is to stop erosion of the low-lying barrier islands by climate change as well as cultural erasure.

"Black Church Crawl" promotes immersive ties to Black history

Continued from page 1A designated national heritage areas in the country, encompassing about 2,200 miles through coastal counties from Florida to southeastern North Carolina. "We're one of the ones that primarily focus on people," Williams said.

"In general, a lot of African Americans are battling gentrification issues," she said. "However, native Gullah Geechees that are property owners are dealing with displacement issues and attempts of genocide at the hands of destructioners and governmental bodies that assist them with attempts to eradicate our communities."

Recent trends support that concern. In the last decade, Charleston and much of the surrounding coastal area, are growing at a rate more than double that of the national average.

Eagle eyed investors and wealthy, primarily white, builders have been snatching up much of the same land which is simultaneously shrinking into the

Heritage Corridor and the commission established to oversee it on Oct. 12, 2006, through the National Heritage Act of 2006 with the aim of recognizing, sustaining, and celebrating the Gullah Geechee's contributions to American culture and history. The nonprofit assists the four state governments and local governments within those states in interpreting the Gullah Geechee's story and preserving historic sites, data and artifacts associated with its people and culture.

onean.

"Gullah Geechee landowners are the ones that hold on to spaces in which our culture can thrive and where generational knowledge can be passed on," Quet said. "That is what some people seem to be focused on eliminating."

A prime example is Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. Prior to the construction of a bridge attaching it to the mainland in the mid-1950s, Hilton Head was a relatively quiet, rural and agricultural island populated by just a few hundred, predominantly Black residents. However, with automobile access, the island exploded into an elite vacation hotspot, land was gobbled up and the Black residents displaced.

Quet has been actively campaigning and fundraising during her tour to save more Gullah Geechee properties from a similar fate.

"We do not seek to 'preserve' our culture," she said. "We seek to continue our culture. Part of that continuation is economic support."

Quet, who encourages supporters to donate directly to the Gullah-Geechee Land and Legacy Fund, is clear about economic activity that is harmful to their cause.

"Do not come to the urbanized and commercial gated areas of the Gullah Geechee Nation's coast and then feel that you are supporting us," she said. "In actually, you are then supporting our displacement because you are buying

into the very things that the state and the chambers of commerce and tourism bureaus support so that you stay away from the truth and from the actual natives."

Quet directs people to visit www.GullahGeechee-Nation.com to find out what events are "legitimate," organized and hosted by Gullah-Geechee people.

"[This way] the money goes into the hands and pockets of our people," she said. "They can then pay their land taxes and stay on their land and build generational wealth and continue to fight lawsuits that attempt to take our land and...sacred areas."

"I am a doer. Therefore, when I see a problem, I seek to address it."

people formerly enslaved at Cedar Hill Plantation more than a century ago, was completed.

The little chapel in Navassa was eventually relocated by its congregation, using logs and a team of oxen, inland on land Ed Reaves, a former Cedar Hill Plantation slave, donated to the church in 1911. The church eventually became affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal denomination and remained an AME church until it closed in the mid-2000s.



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32 years of kicking the Leandro can

Longtime readers are probably going to gag on their granola when they read what I say next.

The North Carolina Supreme Court was right in their verdict about the Leandro Plan. It is not the duty or even right of our courts to dictate what and how much is appropriated for education. Our constitution is very clear about separation of powers. The appropriation of funds is the task of our General Assembly alone.

The Leandro saga has been kicked down the road since 1994 and we're still kicking that can today. Allow me to summarize.

The original lawsuit was filed in May 1994, when five counties (Hoke, Halifax, Robeson, Vance and Cumberland) said their students were not getting as good an education as wealthier counties and wanted the state to help rectify that situation. It wasn't until July 1997 before the N.C. Supreme Court ruled that our constitution decreed that every child was guaranteed access to a "sound basic education." The court assigned Judge Howdy Manning to judge if the state was meeting that obligation.

In 2002, Manning ruled the state was not meeting this requirement, saying every classroom should have a "caring, qualified teacher," and every school have "sufficient resources and be led by a competent principal." In 2004, the state Supreme Court agreed with Manning, ruling that the state's efforts were inadequate, but they left to lawmakers and educators how to remedy the situation.

The back and forth arguing, discussing and pontificating continued until Judge Manning had to retire for health reasons and Judge David Lee was assigned the case in 2016.

In 2017 the two sides agreed (legislators and educators) agreed to seek an independent consultant to study the issues and make recommendations. West Ed, the independent consultant retained, presented its findings in 2019. The discussing and disputing continued until 2021, when a frustrated Lee sought a "declaratory relief" necessary to implement what became known as the "Leandro Plan" and ordered the state budget director to fund years 2 and 3 of that plan.

Lee was immediately labeled a "rogue judge" by the Republican-led legislature and a series of subsequent court cases saw Lee's order dismissed, upheld, and dismissed again. Earlier this month the Supreme Court threw out the case and the plan.

We asked former Supreme Court Justice Bob Orr how we should properly read the ruling. The Leandro Plan, as a case is over, Orr said. However, Leandro "as a constitutional right to an opportunity for a sound basic education," lives on.

After all these years we have come full circle to 1997, when Burley Mitchell's Supreme Court first ruled on the "sound basic education" constitutional guarantee.

It is blatantly obvious our legislature doesn't even wish to attempt to fulfill this mandate. They are like the man standing in front of a wood stove, saying, "give me heat, then I will feed you some wood," unwilling and/or unable to provide funding, yet all the while telling us that our public schools are failing. Their only solution is to throw large sums (\$675 million) for vouchers to private, religious schools attended by largely white, middle-income children.

Brace yourself for a whole new rash of lawsuits. The first question to be decided by the N.C. Supreme Court, now controlled 5-2 by Republicans, is whether to uphold or reverse the "sound basic education" guarantee.

Here's what our North Carolina constitution states about public education. In Article 1, section 15 the text reads, "The people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right."

Article IX, section 2 says, "The General Assembly shall provide by taxation and otherwise for a general and uniform system of free public school, which shall be maintained at least nine months in every year, and wherein equal opportunities shall be provided for all students."

If the court affirms that every child should be guaranteed the opportunity to a sound basic education, the next questions are to answer whose responsibility is it to uphold that guarantee, what will be required to do so and what happens if that entity fails to uphold that responsibility? These are essentially the questions first asked in 1994.

The most obvious response is to change the faces in our General Assembly and replace them with persons who pledge to uphold Leandro (the right), lawmakers who will ensure public schools are properly funded, staffed by qualified educators, and held responsible for attaining those goals.

In November we will elect all 170 members of the General Assembly. It is not too early to stake them out about Leandro. Will they vote to ensure our children have access to a sound basic education? Don't accept less than a yes or no answer.

It's time to stop this childish game of kick the can.

Tom Campbell is a Hall of Fame North Carolina broadcaster and columnist who has covered North Carolina public policy issues since 1965.

Move on, like Geno and Dawn

Let's say right away that Geno Auriemma is a championship basketball coach. I would opine that he is the greatest coach ever in women's college basketball. His record of winning is undeniable.



JAMES EWERS

Auriemma has won 12 national championships, been to 23 Final Fours and had 6 perfect seasons. That is just a small sample of his accomplishments. He is a coach, mentor and ardent supporter of women's college basketball. He has won and will continue to win. Now, let's get to what happened on April 3 to Auriemma and the Huskies.

They made the Final Four and their opponent was South Carolina. Their coach is Dawn Staley.

The hype and publicity surrounding the game had everyone talking. UConn entered the game on a 54-game winning streak. South Carolina was the betting underdog.

When the final horn sounded, USC beat UConn 62-48 to advance to the title game. The Huskies' winning streak was snapped. Both coaches approached midcourt for the customary end of game handshake and that is when the dustup occurred. Coach Geno didn't want to shake Coach Dawn's hand. Why?

In postgame comments, he felt slighted that she didn't come to the scorer's table to shake hands with him. There is a pre-game custom where coaches shake hands. However, Staley shook hands with every UConn coach and player prior to the game.

It is my opinion and the opinion of many others that Auriemma was simply frustrated because he lost. He was outcoached and his players outplayed.

In an immediate postgame interview with ESPN's Holly Rowe, Staley said, "I have no idea, imma let you know this: I'm of integrity. So, if I did something wrong to Geno, I have no idea what I did. I guess he thought I didn't shake his hand at the be-

ginning of the game. I didn't know. I went down there pre-game, shook everybody on his staff's hand. I don't know what he came with after the game. But hey, sometimes things get heated, we move on."

Staley is an ambassador for women's sports. Her vision and her opinions matter. Young women see her as the consummate role model. She understands the slippery slope between winning and losing. You can't have one without the other. That is simply the nature of sports.

If you can learn that early on as a player or coach, the losses will become a lot more bearable. You can't win them all.

Auriemma released two apology statements. The first one didn't mention Staley by name. The second one did. It said, "Those who know me know I have nothing but respect and admiration for the game and the coaches who coach it. Dawn and her team deserved to win, and they deserved better from me." Further, he stated that in the loss, he lost himself.

Simply put, his emotions got the best of him.

Some of us have been student-athletes and coaches at the college level. Winning is wonderful and it gives us a euphoric feeling. Smiles and pats on the back usually follow. Losing on the other hand is an empty and painful experience. It's draining and you are temporarily in a losing drought. Sometimes depending upon what is at stake, recovery time is slow to happen.

Women's college basketball is growing by leaps and bounds each year. Television ratings and attendance figures are at an all-time high. This has translated into more girls at the elementary, middle and high school levels playing basketball. Staley and Auriemma have placed their imprint on this growth in basketball. Let's be happy that we have these two legends in a sport that we love.

Winston-Salem native James Ewers Ed.D. is a member of the National Association of Black Journalists.

Student voice isn't a slogan, it's investment

There's a phrase we hear often in education: student voice matters.

It shows up in mission statements, strategic plans and conference panels. But too often, it stays an idea we agree with, rather than a practice we commit to. Fortunately, students are challenging that.



JENNIFER RIFKIN

Amplifying student voices isn't just about students being heard. It's about them being trusted. It's about being taken seriously enough that what students say can shape what schools do, teaching them confidence, responsibility and a host of other skills.

When students in Student Health Ambassadors in Hyde County just noticed hunger was a problem among their classmates they asked questions, gathered data

and made a case. And because adults listened, something changed. Students now have access to breakfast during the school day.

Being ready to learn rather than struggling to focus due to hunger is a tangible impact that can improve the school day for many students.

In Durham Public Schools, students in the SASH Club didn't wait for someone else to address issues of harassment, safety and mental health. They stepped into that space themselves. They created opportunities for conversation and connection. And in doing so, they helped shift the culture of their school to make it a place where more students feel seen and supported.

These initiatives likely would not have grown in the ways that they did had students just been invited to share their opinions. In order to address real issues affecting them and their peers, these students

were trusted with responsibility and the space to lead. And importantly, they were supported by adults who were willing to really listen first and then help the students act.

Truly listening to students requires not assuming that we already know everything and can always offer the best answer (many of us are still learning too). That willingness to truly listen and allow students to figure things out is the difference between including student voice and investing in it so that it's a learning opportunity and not just a platitude.

Investing in student voice is just as much about improving schools in the short term as it is about preparing future leaders for the long term. These opportunities help develop the skills that make strong communities possible: critical thinking, collaboration, communication and the confidence to speak up.

We're also sending a

message. We're telling students that their experiences matter and that their insights are valuable. The people most affected by decisions in schools are students, meaning despite all the years of experience an educator, policymaker or advocate may have, we often still need students to get the full picture.

My team at the Public School Forum has heard many times, from many sources, that people want public schools to prepare students for life. Life is constant decision-making.

When students are trusted, they lead. When students are supported, they grow. And when students are heard, they help create schools that work better for everyone and get to see that impact firsthand.

What better preparation is there?

Jennifer Rifkin is Public School Forum senior coordinator.

The real AI-pocalypse is already here

Are "The Terminator," "The Matrix" and other such films entertainment, or are they prophecy?

With the fast progress of artificial intelligence over the last few years, that's become a real question of real concern to real people.



THOMAS KNAPP

Out at the edges of the opinion bell curve, we have "doomers" on one end and extreme "optimists" on the other.

The former warn us that AI will eventually supersede humankind, quite possibly enslaving, or even exterminating, us because it won't like us (or maybe just won't care about us either way) and because it will be able to do whatever it wants with us. In a word (actually a portmanteau), "Alpocalypse."

The latter predict an era resembling Aaron Bastani's "Fully Automated Luxury Communism" in which AI increases production efficiency, reduces resource scarcity, and addresses externalities so well that we're all free to become full-time artists, philosophers, extreme sports practitioners, etc. (or, if we prefer, veg out on the couch 24/7) with our material needs fully provided for absent any effort on our part.

The Alpocalypse sounds pretty scary. Fully Automated Luxury Communism sounds kind of cool, but only if we naively assume that evil human actors won't find ways to exploit it in service to their

desire for power.

In my view, the real Alpocalypse has already arrived. It's not fully developed, but we're already seeing it in action.

The real Alpocalypse is a massive decrease in our ability to know what's true and what isn't.

Two of the most obvious manifestations:

First, "deepfake" technology that allows bad actors to "show" us events that didn't actually occur, put words in the mouths of public figures that those public figures never said, etc. That's already pretty far along. You may have seen such videos hawking "miracle cures" with deepfake material featuring the likes of Tom Hanks and "Dr. Phil." It's only going to get worse.

Second, the wave of AI "hallucination" making its way into areas as important as jurisprudence. We've seen numerous cases in which lawyers

have been caught submitting briefs that cite non-existent court cases. They had AI write the briefs, then inserted them into court proceedings. Their AI "assistants" simply generated fake "case law" supporting a desired outcome. That's only going to get worse, too.

The problem with those two examples goes beyond immediate effects. The fake material will inevitably produce (probably already HAS produced) "source pollution."

Suppose you carefully, intentionally avoid AI and its product, for whatever reason. Maybe you distrust its output. Maybe you just prefer to do your own research, and reach your own conclusions, from primary human-created sources.

But how can you know AI-generated content hasn't previously "polluted" the human-created sources with "facts" that aren't

true?

You read a claim of fact in an op-ed like this one ... or in a chemistry textbook. The source claims to be human-created. It may even run a disclaimer denying that AI was used in its creation.

But what if, somewhere back along the chain of knowledge transmission, someone DID use AI, and a non-fact worked its way into the body of presumptive knowledge?

The problem isn't new. People have always lied, and often those lies have persisted and spread, becoming "common knowledge" despite being false. AI, linked to a mechanism of near-instantaneous global spread (the Internet), can produce and distribute lies far faster than humans once did by word of mouth or through print on paper.

We may already be past the point where the holy war to even semi-reliably

Initiative eases transition to society

Continued from page 1A things like that.

CSI works to break down the barriers people find themselves battling, such as finding employment and housing. The organization provides education in essential life skills, leadership, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, mental health and substance abuse support, and reentry preparation. It also hosts family sessions, support groups, and peer gatherings to strengthen relationships, share resources and build empowerment.

"There's a quote I give people that one out of six people in North Carolina have a criminal record, but six out of six people have a criminal history," Gaddy said. "That means they've done something, they just haven't gotten caught."

CSI also has annual lobby days, where

staff speak to North Carolina legislators.

"We deal with the legislation that is hindering people who have records from going forward," Gaddy said. That work can also be boosted by partnering with corporations like AT&T, Golden Corral and PNC Bank, which is the motivation behind launching the National Speaker's Bureau.

In its North Carolina profile, The Prison Policy Initiative reports that the state incarcerates approximately 559 people per 100,000, or about 57,000 individuals across immigration juvenile, and adult detention facilities.

A 2023 analysis from N.C. Reentry Outcome Reporting System by the North Carolina Department of Commerce reported that "those exiting prison in 2021 were less likely to be employed than they were back in 1997."

Sports

THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2026



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Johnson C. Smith linebacker Vincent Hill, who earned All-CIAA honors after leading the Golden Bulls with 85 tackles in 2025, returns to lead one of the top defenses in Division II. JCSU won 10 games for the first time last year in winning the CIAA title and earning the school's first NCAA playoff berth.

'We're going to be a talented team'

Coming off a 10-win season, JC Smith uses spring development to prepare for another run in 2026

By Herbert L. White

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Spring football at Johnson C. Smith is an opportunity to measure up or, perhaps, level up.

Five months after closing the best season in school history, the Golden Bulls are focused on doing better in 2026. The early results are promising.

"We're going to be a talented team," said coach Maurice Flowers, who earned CIAA coach of the year for leading JCSU to a 10-2 record, the conference title and their first Division II

playoff berth. "We're going to be physical. Just really, really pleased with the competition going on."

The Golden Bulls took major losses at quarterback and receiver yet return depth from 2025's roster and transfers that are expected to keep JCSU among the CIAA elite. The same scenario holds on defense, which the Golden Bulls lost nine players who started games.



Flowers

"You lose a lot of guys the way that we did, you expect to see the next group of guys step up and you can really see it," Flowers said. "It's great to see the competition for the young men just fighting for open spots that's on offense, on defense. I see great competition everywhere. It also speaks to how we've recruited over the past years. We got some good guys up here that have just come through the ranks, waited their turn, and now they're getting an opportunity to compete for real playing time."

It's also an opportunity to seize attention. Last year, it was running back Bobby Smith who went from fourth on the depth charter at the start of spring drills to starter at its conclusion followed by an All-CIAA campaign. He wasn't alone.

"Spring practice is the time where guys take big strides, and you look to see it," Flowers said. "You look at Brian Lane, the number five wide receiver, you look at [receiver] Reggie Daniel, they were true freshmen and red-

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Rodolfo Aloko gets MLS opportunity in Charlotte

By Herbert L. White

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Rodolfo Aloko didn't need much time to reach Charlotte FC.

The forward last week signed to a first team contract as a U22 Initiative player on a guaranteed deal through June 30, 2030, with an option for the 2030-31 MLS season. Through four matches with Crown Legacy, Charlotte FC's junior club, Aloko, 19, led MLS Next Pro in goals and goal contributions with six goals and two assists.

He earned MLS Next Pro Player of the Month for March after opening the season with back-to-back braces and a goal in each of the next two games.

"The reason that we're thinking of bringing him up is because he's done exceptionally well with the Legacy, did well preseason with us, we've seen the potential, the development that we can get from him," Charlotte FC coach Dean Smith said last week. "We feel that he can go and compete within the squad, and that's what we want."

To make room for Aloko, who was acquired in September from Croatian club NK Kustosija, Kerwin Vargas, one of Charlotte's three

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CHARLOTTE FC

Charlotte FC signed forward Rodolfo Aloko to a first team contract through June 2030 with a club option through 2031.

Good times roll as Ascent unbeaten streak grows

By Herbert L. White

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Carolina Ascent is finding heroes everywhere.

Emily Morris' first professional goal lifted the Climbers to a 1-0 win last week against Lexington SC to run their unbeaten streak to seven matches. The rookie's game-winner in the 72nd minute pulled Carolina (11-7-6, 39 points) to within a point of Lexington (10-3-10, 40 points) while pushing the Ascent to their sixth win and a draw in their last seven games. There was another benefit as well: Carolina pulled to within a point of Lexington while denying them a playoff-clinching point.

"Our performance was steely and resilient," coach Philip Poole said. "We had to be patient. We knew that we didn't want to concede the middle of the field to Lexington. We wanted to be a little bit better in transition, but all-in-all, we got the goal and we got the shutout and we move on."

Morris admitted details of the decisive play were hazy once she unleashed a shot from about 30 yards out. Shea Groom laid the ball off to Morris away from congestion in the 18-yard box. Morris took a touch to gain control and fired the ball into the top corner.

"Shea was in the box and the edge of the box was pretty clogged, so I just stayed at the

top of the 18," she said. "I blacked out. My parents were here, my niece was here, so I think to do it in front of them meant a lot."

Said Poole: "Emily has had a really impactful first season as a pro. I've known her through her youth career, and I think it's cool that I get to coach these kids I've known about. Mo's come in and done great. She has had runs in the team and has had to be patient. She deserves all the parts of the celebrations she's going to get tonight because honestly, that was a screamer."

Lexington held the initiative most of the way, but Sydney Martinez made five stops in goal for her fifth clean sheet of the season.

Winston-Salem State hires Jay Butler as basketball coach

By Herbert L. White

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Jay Butler, who coached Virginia Union to four NCAA Division II tournament berths and a CIAA title, is moving to a conference rival.

Butler, who was hired by Winston-Salem State, is one of the CIAA's most successful coaches in the last decade. His final VUU team went 25-6 in the and earned an at-large playoff berth with a win against West Liberty in the first round.

Butler, who shared the 2025-26 Atlantic Region Coach of the Year award given by the Na-

tional Association of Basketball Coaches, has a 372-239 record over 20 seasons, including the 2018 CIAA title. He coached VUU, his alma mater, for 11 seasons.

"WSSU has a proud tradition, passionate supporters and a strong commitment to student success," Butler said in a statement. "I look forward to building a championship culture that reflects the values of this university and prepares our student-athletes for success on and off the court. I am deeply aware of the legacy that has been built here, and I am committed to honoring that tradition while build-

ing something this community is proud of for years to come."

Butler succeeds Corey Thompson, who was fired on Feb. 14. The Rams have struggled the last two seasons since Cleo Hill Jr. left for Division I Maryland Eastern Shore with a 12-41 record, and only four wins against CIAA opponents.

Butler, who earned the CIAA Coach of the Year award for the third time, and the HBCU Jerry Johnson NCAA Division II National Coach of the Year this season, has coached

Please see **JAY** | 6A

Morgan preps for NFL Draft scenarios

By Jeff Hawkins

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Dan Morgan did most of his roster's heavy lifting in free agency.

Within hours of the legal tampering period opening on March 9, three of the Carolina Panthers general manager's biggest positional targets were finalized with the signing of pass-rush specialist Jaelan Phillips, versatile inside linebacker Devin Lloyd and left tackle Rasheed Walker, who is expected to replace the injured Ikem Ekwonu at left tackle.

Did the early offseason success narrow his pre-draft focus? Morgan disagreed.

"If anything, I think it opens up a lot of possibilities," Morgan said Tuesday at Bank of America Stadium. "I think all positions are on the table. And like I said before, you never know who's gonna fall down to us."

"So, I think we're definitely in the best-player available mindset. So, yeah, I think what we did in free agency set us up to do that."

Draft options

The Panthers are scheduled to pick No. 19 overall when the three-day draft opens April 23 in Pittsburgh. Most NFL insiders project the Panthers to pick an edge rusher or offensive tackle.

Morgan did not rule out drafting a wide receiver in the first round for a third straight draft or moving down in the draft via trade to acquire additional assets.

"We're in a good spot," he said. "We're ready for all scenarios."

After going 2-15 during in 2023, Morgan and coach Dave Canales guided a rebuild to five wins in 2024 and an eight last season, highlighted by Car-

Please see **DAN** | 6A



Morgan



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Josh Jackson, a transfer from Division I FCS Central Connecticut State, will try to earn the starting quarterback role at Johnson C. Smith. Jackson's competition is Andrew Attmore, who backed up Kelvin Durham last season as a freshman.

Spring football a chance to make an impression

Continued from page 5A
shirted, but they made a total commitment to the weight room, to just getting better in every kind of way. And they stuck out in the spring."

Lane is JCSU's top returning receiver with 46 receptions for 676 yards and five scores last year while Daniel added 18 catches and six scores.

The most-watched development of spring is at quarterback where Josh Jackson, a transfer from FCS Central Connecticut State is competing against Andrew Attmore, who backed up All-CIAA Kelvin Durham last year. Neither has extensive playing time, but Flowers is confident both can succeed.

"There's definitely competition," he said. "We don't tell anyone to come in and they're going to start. If someone could just walk into a program ... and start, then we haven't done something right. We told Kevin Durham the same, and he won the job before spring was out and we told Josh the same. He's going to have an opportunity to play for the starting position, and he's doing it now. Andrew Attmore is having a good spring also. This is the place to do it. You're playing against one of the best defenses in Division II, so they're not going to give you anything."

In addition to Lane and Daniel, the new quarterback has other capable targets at receiver in Reggie Brigman, who caught 11 passes for 165 yards and two scores as well as transfer JaQuan Albright, who caught 64 passes for 895 yards and five touchdowns in 2025 as a redshirt junior at UNC Pembroke.

"A guy that came on as the season was ending was Reggie Brigham, a transfer from Tuskegee University," Flowers said. "He was hurt early in the season, but he's a guy that just stayed positive, came off his injury and really provided some big spark force late in the season. ... And we brought in a transfer from UNC Pembroke, their leading receiver, JaQuan Albright. He's doing a great job. We feel like we've got a lot of great competition at the receiver spot."

The defense is in transition, primarily in the secondary. The top returning

player is linebacker Vincent Hill (85 tackles, 12.5 TFL, 2 sacks), who earned All-CIAA in 2025, his first season with the Golden Bulls after transferring from Tuskegee.

"He's the quarterback" on defense, Flowers said. "He's one of the reasons why the defense is looking so good right now. He's one of the reasons that (defensive coordinator Barry) Tripp is putting in a lot more things now than we have in the past is because you have a guy that's an All-American caliber football player in Vincent Hill. You don't often meet a guy that's been all conference every year he's played college football, and Vince is a guy that's a student of the game."

"What we say is you either like football, you love it, or you live it. Vince is a guy that lives football and in his production on the field, you can pretty much see it."

While Jay Jackson, Jamarius Jackson, Kevin Thompson, and Jalen Gaskins are competing to play next to Hill, the defensive line returns several rotation players who can step in as starters.

"You could say we lost nine starters, but really, it's really probably about three or four, because we played so many people," Flowers said. "Our defensive line, we've had a rotation of six defensive tackles and six defensive ends. We've had that rotation the last three years. We did lose some D-linemen, but we've got another bunch of guys that were just waiting in the pipeline, and then we have a number of guys that transferred in."

The secondary may be the most open defensive group after five starters graduated.

The secondary is wide open, but we've got some guys," Flowers said. "Rossie Grimes is a mid-year transfer. He was at Tuskegee, then transferred to Eastern Kentucky, and we're just getting him this semester. He shows why he was an All-SIAC type performer. Marque Vereen, a West Florida transfer cornerback, he's doing an outstanding job. [Cornerbacks coach Robert] Massey, what he's doing with the cornerbacks, it's showing right now."

Rodolfo Aloko gets MLS opportunity in Charlotte

Continued from page 5A

U22 players, was designated a targeted allocation money player. The Crown also acquired \$170,000 in 2026 general allocation money from San Diego FC and their 2027 second round SuperDraft pick for \$200,000 in 2027 GAM and Charlotte's 2027 second round pick.

"Rodolfo is another example of our growing list of young talents coming through our development pathway, and we are happy to see him move so quickly to the first team," Charlotte general manager Zoran Krmeta said. "When we signed him in September, we knew he was a promis-

ing, young talent, but needed to settle into a new market. We've been impressed with his performances during the preseason, with Crown Legacy and at AFCON with Benin. His versatility at the forward positions with great physical attributes and an extremely strong work ethic will continue to keep his ceiling high."

Aloko has earned seven caps since debuting for Benin's national team in June and was selected earned a spot for this winter's Africa Cup of Nations tournament. He played four matches with a pair of starts as Benin advanced to the round of 16.



VIRGINIA UNION ATHLETICS

Jay Butler, who coached Virginia Union to four Division II tournament berths and the 2018 CIAA title, has been named to the same position at Winston-Salem State.

Jay Butler takes over at WSSU

Continued from page 5A

teams to nine 20-win campaigns and eight playoff appearances.

Before taking the Virginia Union job, Butler coached University of District of Columbia women's basketball for 11 seasons, where the Firebirds won 177 games, two Independent Collegiate Athletic Association national titles and advanced to four NCAA tournaments. His best season at UDC was in 2014-15 when the Firebirds won a school-record 25 games and fin-

ished No. 22 in the national rankings.

"Jay Butler brings a wealth of experience and a strong track record of success," Eric Burns, WSSU's interim director of athletics, said in a statement. "Throughout this national search, we sought a leader who could elevate our program competitively while developing young men both in competition and in life. Coach Butler embodies those qualities, and we are excited to welcome him to Ram Nation."

Dan Morgan prepares Panthers for potential draft scenarios

Continued from page 5A

olina's first NFC South title since 2015.

During Tuesday's wide-ranging discussion, Morgan detailed a series of offseason thoughts with the draft approaching:

* Regarding the Panthers hosting Top 30 visits over the next week, Morgan said he wanted to take a personal approach to getting to know the prospects.

* "I think really it's us getting to know guys," Morgan said. "I feel like if you're going to miss on a guy, you're going to miss because you don't know what he's about from a personal character standpoint, and you don't know what he's about from a football standpoint."

On the possibility of drafting another wideout after selecting Tetairoa McMillan No. 8 overall last year and Xavier Legette at No. 32 in 2024, Morgan didn't deny there was at least minimal interest in providing quarterback Bryce Young with another playmaking target.

"No," Morgan replied honestly when asked if that made it less likely. "I think

with anything, we're going to take the best player. So if the best player we feel is that at 19, I wouldn't hesitate to draft another wideout."

Morgan addressed the future at defensive tackle after releasing A'Shawn Robinson in a cost-cutting move before the start of the new league year. Will Morgan add a developmental piece to work with stand-out Derrick Brown?

"In terms of the defensive tackle class, I feel pretty good about it," he said. "I think it's a little top-heavy, but I think there are guys we like. If the opportunity arises, we would definitely have competition and depth there."

In his first two seasons as GM, Morgan swung seven draft-related trades and anticipates adding to that total.

"I think we, philosophically, have an open-minded mindset," he said. "We're open to anything, whether it's moving back, whether it's moving up, if we feel like a guy can be an impact player for us, I do think all options are on the table."

SPORTS CHARLOTTE
Podcast with a home team advantage