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A headstone marking the burial place of Frank and Amanda Lee at Siloam Presbyterian Church Cemetery in north Charlotte. Below: Geologist Caitlin McCarthy taps a stake into the ground marking one of 190 unmarked graves at the cemetery.

Once dormant, a restored resting place shares stories

190 unmarked graves located at historic Siloam Presbyterian Church Cemetery

By Herbert L. White

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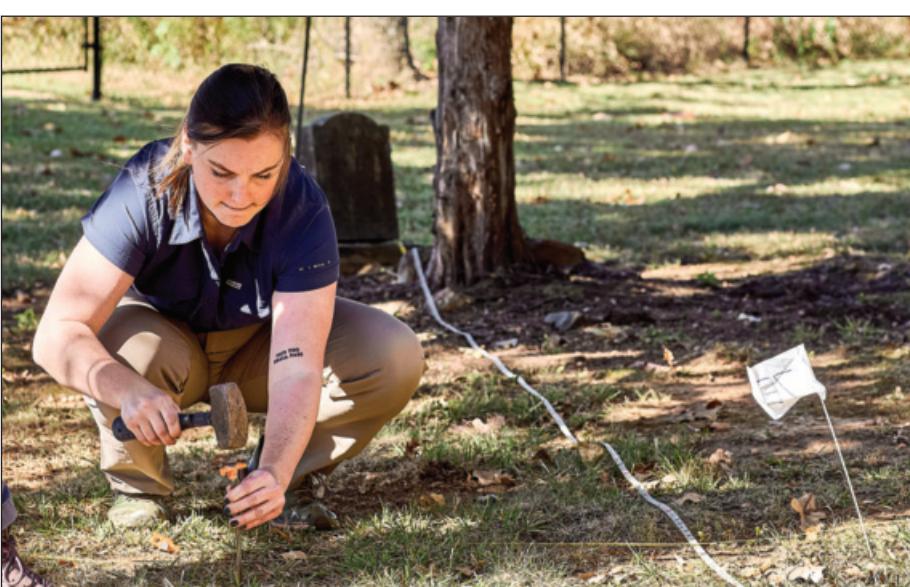
Paula Williams suspected there were unmarked graves at Siloam Presbyterian Church Cemetery. She had no idea how many.

The Siloam Presbyterian Church Cemetery Beautification Project located 190 unmarked plots in northeast Charlotte. Williams, the initiative's leader, thought there were 15. A team from Boone-based Seramur and Associates located eight based on visible depressions in the soil and ground-penetrating radar that detected the rest.

The graves were flagged last week, and the next step is to identify everyone buried there through public and family records such as obituaries.

"We assumed that there were more, but we had no idea that there were 190,"

Please see RESTORED | 2A



Fired Matthews police officer alleges toxic workplace culture

By Charles K. Harris

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

A former Matthews Police officer is coming forward with allegations of racial harassment, discrimination and retaliation that is hindering his career advancement.

Tyler Ross, who lives in Union County,

says inappropriate conduct he observed began almost immediately after he joined the department in 2022. He was fired in January.

"From the very start, I was treated differently than my white counterparts," Ross said. "I was excluded from training, denied

mentorship, and isolated from my peers."

A native of Westchester County, New York, Ross moved to Union County in 2022 and entered the Basic Law Enforcement Training program at South Piedmont Community College.

Please see FIRED | 3A

'Spirit of love:' Kitchen volunteers retire spoons after 3 decades



Volunteers from Friendship Missionary Baptist Church's women's ministry prepare meals at the Salvation Army Center of Hope on Oct. 27.

By Cameron Williams

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A ladle of soup and a friendly smile make a difference.

That is what the women's ministry at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church have been doing for over 30 years at the Salvation Army Center of Hope, an emergency housing facility for women and children. The volunteers, who serve meals eight times a month, are well into their senior years and hanging up their aprons to make way for reinforcements.

"There is a need for the spirit of love," said Pat White, the leader of volunteers at Friendship Missionary Baptist. "It may sound like a simple job that we do to come down here and serve lunch. I ask all our ladies to just come serve an hour a month. Volunteer and bring

Please see KITCHEN | 2A

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Denise Turner of Charlotte stands near the headstone of Frank and Amanda Lee at Siloam Presbyterian Church Cemetery in north Charlotte.

Restored resting place has new stories to share

Continued from page 1A

Williams said. "We were so excited."

The results didn't surprise Caitlin McCarthy, a Seramur geologist who teamed with environmental scientist Brooke Steenwyck to locate and mark the graves.

"This has happened in not all, but most burials that we find more than originally is reported," she said, "because there's a lot of times not everybody can afford to have a full burial or documents get lost on death dates or where people have been buried."

The beautification initiative, launched four years ago, has evolved into recording and preservation of Siloam Presbyterian's history and the families that shaped the north Charlotte community surrounding it.

Williams' family, which helped build Siloam Presbyterian and the school for Black students built near it in the early 20th century, were accomplished during a time when the aspirations of Black people were limited by law and custom.

"We wanted to be able to tell the story about our phenomenal great-great grandparents, Frank and Amanda Lee, because they owned land all over Charlotte," Williams said. "And in so doing, one of our cousins kept talking about the cemetery. She would bring it up every Saturday, because we would have a writing committee meeting ... for four hours and she kept harassing us about the cemetery, and we just kept blowing her off."

Frank and Amanda Lee, both born into slavery, were prominent members of the Siloam community. Frank, who died in 1963, tended sick and injured animals and owned 400 acres in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus counties, including property in today's Eastover community in southeast Charlotte and Concord Mills.

Frank Lee, who was owned by forebears of former Duke Energy executive Bill Lee, "was a little bit of everything," great grandson Frank Bauknight said. ... "He was more like a businessman in the day, which was great to be an entrepreneur back then under the circumstances."

Amanda, who died in 1959, was a midwife who delivered babies for Black and white families alike. She and Frank were church leaders at Siloam Presbyterian and donated time and resources to build the Scrub Hill School, which became Siloam School now located on the Charlotte Museum of His-

tory campus. Most of their 21 children are buried at the church cemetery, too.

"Knowing that we have as many graves out here today that's unmarked is shocking to me, because this is a small area," Bauknight said. "I'm just glad to be [Frank Lee's] great grandson, and ... I try to instill it in my children the legacy that he put before us being the guy that he is."

Progress in plain sight

A fallen Leyland cypress at stands out at the cemetery, which is owned by the Charlotte Presbytery.

Splintered from its trunk, the tree crashed through a steel mesh fence, shattering a hand-carved stone bench sitting between Frank and Amanda's headstone as well as those of Lovie Lee Winchester and Pinky Lee Gabriel. The headstones were spared. Williams said she's reached out to the property owner to trim adjacent trees, to no avail.

Still, improvements have been made after years of neglect.

"We met with the Presbytery of Charlotte," Williams said. "They installed the new fence; they installed the new sign. They keep the grass cut. They've done a fabulous job, but we were still missing the fact that we didn't know how many people were out here."

When the geology team arrived last week to mark the graves, so were family members, including cousins Frank Bauknight and Denise Turner, who introduced themselves for the first time. It also sparked personal recollections of family, community and faith.

"Church Road was once known as Frank Lee Road, and I can recall being a young girl coming to my aunt Rosie's house on the weekends, my sister and I," Williams said. "We would go to church with her at the house up here and stay all day, and Aunt Rosie would cook some of the most fabulous meals, and we always went home with a basket of fresh fruits or fresh vegetables from the garden."

"It's important to us, not just because our family had land out here, but all of the other families, including the Neals, the Davises, the Grissoms, the Browns. There's so many families out here, but they were well connected, and it was through the Siloam Presbyterian Church. ... They depended on each other, they educated each other, and they shared with each other."

Gerrymander foes file lawsuit

Continued from page 1A

ical choices in the only district in eastern North Carolina where Black voters could consistently elect a candidate of their choice.

Republicans counter the new districts constitute a partisan gerrymander - which courts have upheld as legal - as opposed to a racial gerrymander, which is illegal.

"Our communities showed up in 2024," said Courtney Patterson, a plaintiff whose home was located in District 1 under the 2023 map but shifted to District 3 this month. "We organized, we voted, and now the legislature is trying to undo our voices on purpose. We will not be silenced."

President Donald Trump demanded Republican state lawmakers rewrite congressional maps to defend his agenda in Washington. Democratic-leaning states responded in kind. North Carolina's response was crafting a majority-Republican district in the so-called Black Belt.

District mapping is exempt from gubernatorial veto. North Carolina has redrawn district lines five times in the last six years.

"Absent relief from this Court, the General Assembly's actions in unilaterally initiating the redistricting process solely to punish voters will set a dangerous precedent and incentivize regularized, retaliatory redistricting following every federal election," the complaint reads. "It fore-

shadows a relentless game of whack-a-mole against voters, in which even a hint of dissent will cause the hammer to come down through targeted line-drawing against communities whose voters dare differ from the views of those in power."

The complaint contends Republican lawmakers cited 2024 election data to justify redrawing the 1st, which showed overwhelming Black voter support for incumbent Rep. Don Davis and presidential contender Kamala Harris. Both are Black Democrats.

The new map drops District 1's Black voting-age population by 8 percentage points and splits Black voters between Districts 1 and 3, effectively neutralizing their political clout.

"North Carolina map drawers drew this map for one reason: To punish Black voters who fought back in 2024 in court and at the ballot box by rigging the game against them," said Ari Savitzky, ACLU Voting Rights Project's senior staff attorney. "What North Carolina is doing here is immoral and unconstitutional."

Said Bob Phillips, executive director of Common Cause North Carolina: "Politicians in the legislature specifically targeted Black voters in a shameful attempt to silence their voices. The legislature's discriminatory gerrymandering is a shocking violation of hard-won constitutional freedoms. Our electoral districts don't belong to politicians; our districts belong to the people."

Tips for navigating health insurance open enrollment

Continued from page 1A

and specialist visits.

Tip: Don't assume last year's plan is still the best deal. Even small changes in provider networks or drug coverage can cost you big later.

2. Compare plan types

• PPO (Preferred Provider Organization): More flexibility in choosing doctors; higher premiums.

• HMO (Health Maintenance Organization): Lower cost but requires referrals and in-network providers.

• HDHP (High Deductible Health Plan): Pairs well with a Health Savings Account if you're healthy and want to save tax-free for medical expenses.

3. Don't forget supplemental benefits

Vision, dental, disability, and life insurance are often optional add-ons, but they can make a big difference for overall protection.

For 1099 workers and freelancers

If you work independently, you won't have an employer offering insurance, but you do have options:

1. Marketplace plans
Go to HealthCare.gov or your state marketplace to compare plans side by side.

• Premium tax credits may lower your monthly cost if your income falls within certain limits.

• All marketplace plans cover essential benefits like preventive care, prescriptions, maternity, and mental health.

2. Consider a health savings account
If you choose a high-deductible plan, you can open an HSA.

• Contributions are tax-deductible.
• The money rolls over year to year.
• You can use it for anything from prescriptions to dental visits.

3. Look into professional associations
Groups like the Freelancers Union or National Association for the Self-Employed offer group health plans or access to discounted coverage.

For entrepreneurs and small business owners
If you have employees, or even just

yourself, there are smart ways to cover your team while keeping costs manageable.

1. Small Business Health Options program

Through HealthCare.gov, small businesses (with 1-50 employees) can buy group health insurance.

• You may qualify for a Small Business Health Care Tax Credit to offset costs.

• You control how much to contribute toward employee premiums.

2. Individual Coverage HRA

This newer option allows employers to reimburse workers for individual health plans instead of providing a group policy. It's flexible and often more cost-efficient for startups or growing teams.

3. Private health plans

Some entrepreneurs prefer private insurers or brokers for more customized coverage or larger provider networks. Just compare carefully, private plans can vary widely in cost and quality.

Don't miss these deadlines

• Nov. 1: Open enrollment begins.

• Dec. 15: Last day for coverage starting January 1, 2026.

• Jan. 15: Open enrollment officially ends.

After this date, you'll need a qualifying life event to make changes.

How to Choose the Right Plan

When comparing options, ask yourself:

1. How often do I see the doctor?
Frequent visits may justify higher premiums but lower co-pays.

2. Do I take regular prescriptions?
Make sure your meds are covered affordably.

3. What's my budget?
Balance your monthly premium with your deductible and out-of-pocket max.

4. Are my doctors in-network?
Out-of-network visits can lead to surprise bills.

Tip: Preventive care, like annual checkups, blood pressure screenings, and vaccines, is always free under most ACA-compliant plans. Take advantage of it.



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Fired police officer alleges race bias

Continued from page 1A

"I've always had an affinity for law enforcement, even as a child," Ross said. "To prepare myself for this career path, I worked as an armed security guard and in various other security roles to build relevant experience and discipline."

Shortly thereafter Ross was conditionally hired by Matthews' then-Chief Clark Pennington. His final employment offer was incumbent on completion of BLET, which he did, followed by field training.

According to Ross, trouble started right away.

On his first day, his white training officer barked, "Your Black ass deserves a military beatdown!" in response to what was meant as a joke.

Ross also alleges another field training officer later played music containing racial slurs in front of him and remarking, "This is how y'all do it in New York."

"The FTO allegedly failed to conduct proper training," Ross said. "Instead, [he] attended personal events and ignored basic patrol duties."

Ross produced video of lax supervision, including sitting in the patrol car and the training officer dancing on duty instead of training him.

"Later, I endured racial and derogatory comments, and when I brought this up, a sergeant told me, 'If we didn't like you, we wouldn't do this,' as if harassment was a form of acceptance."

In another instance, Ross contends he was struck in the head by a police sergeant during a suspicious person call.

"I experienced subpar and inconsistent training, often being excluded while newer officers received opportunities I was denied," he said. "This made me feel as though I was being set up for failure."

Ross says the discrimination and mistreatment

snowballed when he voiced concerns to superior officers, culminating in his firing.

During an October 2024 response to reports of a melee at Bowlero Bowling Alley, Ross, who was the first officer to respond, claims he drew his pepper spray as a precaution. Although it wasn't deployed, Ross was disciplined for actions the department deemed "unsafe."

Meanwhile, Ross alleges that nearby on-duty officers were congregated at a gas station, something they had been admonished for. As a result, they arrived at least 10 minutes later.

"I was punished for doing my job, while others, who failed to follow basic orders were protected," he said. "That's how Matthews operates."

Ross was subsequently placed on administrative leave and eventually terminated.

"I cannot name only one individual," Ross said about his mistreatment, adding several officers contributed by "creating a hostile work environment" and undermining his "credibility through manipulation and false narratives."

Ross contends that even after his termination, the harassment continues.

Ross now works at Allied Special Police but contends the opportunity for advancement and higher pay have been delayed due to Matthews police delaying release of his background check to prospective employers.

Those charges stemmed from a January 2021 incident in which Burnett was captured on video screaming at and choking a black male suspect who was handcuffed and strapped to a gurney.

Although the town did demote and eventually terminate Burnett, the matter was kept largely under wraps along with bodycam

how the Matthews Police Department handles discipline, training opportunities, transfers, and exit documentation."

Ross contends his experience is only one manifestation of a toxic workplace plagued with internal problems. His claims stem primarily from a 2022 independent investigation into the department initiated by Becky Hawke, who was Matthews town manager at the time.

One finding was that from 2018 to 2022, the department deliberately inflated crime statistics to present a more positive image.

Pennington, who hired Ross, resigned abruptly before the investigation report was made public. The reason given was that he was leaving law enforcement to pursue another career.

After the sham crime statistics were brought to light, Hawke issued a statement attributing the fudged figures to "command directives that created pervasive pressure for improved statistics."

And while the town claimed that individuals responsible for the "directives" were "held appropriately accountable" and "no longer with the department" the statement stopped short of naming Pennington outright.

That same investigation resulted in the termination of MPD Sgt. Joshua Burnett after it was determined that he used excessive force and then lied about the incident under questioning.

Those charges stemmed from a January 2021 incident in which Burnett was captured on video screaming at and choking a black male suspect who was handcuffed and strapped to a gurney.

Although the town did demote and eventually terminate Burnett, the matter was kept largely under wraps along with bodycam

footage of the incident. When video of the incident from an anonymous source surfaced in 2024, Hawke responded that there was no effort to conceal the matter, but that town officials felt it was a "personnel matter" that did not merit public disclosure.

Ross claims that these issues point clearly to the atmosphere of toxicity, misconduct and secrecy which even almost a year after leaving, he can't seem to outrun.

When contacted for comment on Ross' claims, current Matthews Town Manager Curt Walton said the allegations have been "fully investigated in a manner consistent with town policy."

"While personnel laws preclude us from commenting further at this time as to those specific allegations, the community can be assured that the Matthews PD strives every day to live by our stated values," Walton said, which include protecting the community and treating all with fairness and respect.

Ross disagrees, calling the level of injustice he faced "devastating."

"It's disheartening to know that individuals who engaged in misconduct remain employed while I was punished for doing the right thing," he said. "Emotionally, it has taken a toll, but my faith continues to sustain me."

In addition to a review of MPD policies and procedures, Ross contends employment regulations need adjusting as well.

"I also believe that [the employment exiting] process should include a way for officers to rebut false or misleading statements," he said. "There needs to be stronger state oversight to prevent blacklisting and retaliation against officers who refuse to conform to unethical practices."

Kitchen volunteers retire their spoons

Continued from page 1A

a smile and the spirit of love to the folks we serve." It was a difficult decision, but White said stepping aside opens the door for younger volunteers to continue the service. White recognizes that it may be difficult to find volunteers that can give the amount of time the church ladies have given they had been retired and didn't have work obligations to uphold.

"I understand how things are these days," White said. "A lot of people are younger than most of us. Most of us are retired now, so we have the time. We have that time in the day to give. But, over the last few years some younger ladies have come and served. It is important because I don't know if the majority of people know the kind of work that needs to be done, so by putting the word out, hopefully somebody will pick it up."

Volunteer Lillian Ward emphasized the urgency of others stepping in.

"It is a need," she said. "We are retired seniors and we need help. There are a lot of people that are younger than us that don't see the same need for it that we do, or they might not be able to do it because they aren't retired. But like Pat said, putting the word out to the community and to the younger folks that their help is needed and wanted so that we can continue to serve the community the way it needs to be served."

Salvation Army Charlotte Area Commander Major Andrew Wiley understands the effects of these volunteers stepping aside.

"There is going to be a huge void," he said. "They've done a number of days per month for over 30 years. They've given, I think we calculated, over 500,000 meals and over 200,000 volunteer hours they have put in. So, when you are trying to replace that, we desperately need groups that will step in and fill that gap. These ladies have been doing it for a long time and the need for younger folks to step up is crucial."

Wiley added that volunteers don't have to immediately serve in the same capacity as the women's ministry, but make an effort.

"Anyone who is even remotely considering volunteering and they are on the fence," he said, "just try it out and do it once. See what you think and then if you like it — because we think you will — keep coming back. But, if you are on the fence, do it once, try it out if you aren't ready to make a long-term commitment and just get a taste of it because, we think, if you do, you will love it."

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It's time to move Charlotte transit and people forward

By Clayton Sealey

SPECIAL TO THE POST

One of the defining moments of my life as both an urbanist and a native Charlottean came on the opening day of the light rail in November 2007.

At the time, Charlotte felt a bit rudderless. It was growing, but to what end? I had just graduated from college in Savannah, was living at my parents' house with my girlfriend, and we spent our days dreaming of bigger, better things and a future we imagined for ourselves in New York City.

I still remember stepping onto that train filled with curiosity, my mind racing, unsure of what to expect. Suddenly, a series of beeps broke my thoughts, followed by an electronic voice announcing, "Train's a moving, train's a moving." As we pulled away from the I-485 station, I saw my hometown as if through new eyes. In that moment, I saw a city capable of leading a new South — one defined not just by banks and skyscrapers but by connection, opportunity, and neighborhoods that could thrive as centers of commerce and community.

Nearly 18 years later, as those same trains still roll toward Uptown, I now find myself riding them several times a week. On an average week, I take the train four to six times for work, meetings, events, and simply to move through my city.

I've also relied on the bus system across at least eight different routes over the years, using it for professional errands, social visits, and even for my health and well-being. My life and career in marketing, public policy, and content creation have been shaped by a commitment to living car-light and by the belief that great cities give people real choices in how they move, connect, and live.

With state and federal governments increasingly reluctant to invest in large urban areas, we must take responsibility for funding our own future. Sunny days may come again, but we cannot afford to wait for perfect conditions or perfect plans. Incremental steps will not relieve the congestion choking a city where 76% of trips are made by car. This referendum isn't about perfection. It's about progress, and about saying that our city, our region, and our future are worth investing in.

Even as a daily transit rider, I recognize the limitations our road network faces when it comes to moving people efficiently. This referendum will unlock a tidal wave of resources for Mecklenburg County — about \$260 million a year — to invest directly in improving the roads, intersections, and corridors we all rely on. That level of funding is transformational.

First, we need to prioritize completing the full Silver Line to Matthews rather than stretching limited funds toward Pineville. We also need to recognize that light rail has practical limitations over long distances and ensure that bus rapid transit and other multimodal solutions fill the gaps where light rail cannot and should not.

Second, we must protect the small business owners who fear disruption from construction, particularly in neighborhoods like Plaza Midwood. The mistakes made on Elizabeth Avenue during the streetcar buildout cannot be repeated. Communication, mitigation, and investment in local businesses during construction must be part of the plan from day one.

Third, we need to recognize that a Better Bus won't happen without a transformational investment in how we market our bus system. We have to confront the long-standing perception problem by creating and promoting a service that is clean, frequent, reliable, and comfortable.

We need a system strong enough to attract more choice riders — people who might say, "This trip may take ten minutes longer, but I can play Wordle, answer a few emails, or take a twenty-minute nap."

Finally, we need to think not just about transportation but about the communities it connects. Land banking and community land trusts should be key tools to prevent displacement and to ensure that the neighborhoods we invest in remain accessible to the people who built them. Every mile of new transit should bring with it a mix of workforce and market-rate housing, walkable streets, and safe, vibrant public spaces.

"Transit is the great equalizer" as a wise individual once said, and making investments in how our community moves far outweighs the cost of adding 1% to every non-essential transaction.

So why, when I can still find so many faults and so many questions, do I still support a sales tax referendum? Let me answer with a question. To the parents reading this: when your child outgrows their clothes, do you wait until the right outfit pops up, or do you buy what they need? When a problem exists in your life, you solve it. It's not always easy, it doesn't always go to plan, but you make it happen. We shouldn't sit idly by while our city bursts at the seams like a child waiting for next school year's outfit.

Charlotte's next chapter depends on our ability to connect people to opportunity — safely, affordably, and sustainably. When I think back to that first ride in 2007, I remember the feeling of possibility, the sense that my city could be something greater. We have that opportunity again now. Let's take the step forward.

Clayton Sealey is founder and chief creative officer of CLT Development, and co-host of the Shaping Charlotte podcast.

The Post supports 1% transportation tax

CHARLOTTE POST EDITORIAL BOARD

The 1% sales tax to pay for Mecklenburg County transportation initiatives is a tough call for us to make.

We see the daily traffic snarls across the county and needs for road and sidewalk upgrades. Anyone who's tried to navigate Charlotte's streets daily understands the challenges.

The referendum has the support of Charlotte's corporate community and community advocacy groups. There's also a vocal cohort of opposition, which we share numerous concerns with. Still, we can't ignore the very real urgency of new infrastructure for a region that's adding hundreds of new residents by the week. We can't depend on a dysfunctional federal government that's more interested in supporting a would-be king than funding services for constituents and state government led by people who see little use for supporting urban North Carolina, especially if it involves rail. As a result, Mecklenburg is left with an imperfect, if not impossible, choice: go it alone with a local referendum or do nothing and fall further behind.

We'll take go it alone and urge voters to support the referendum, although we have reservations. There are righteous concerns that the price of progress will be difficult among struggling residents as Mecklenburg becomes more expensive and the income gap between haves and have-nots widens.

Is a 1% sales tax enough investment for a region expected to add another 600,000 people in the next 20 years? Transportation infrastructure is expensive, and prices aren't likely to fall, as we've learned since the Lynx Blue Line launched in 2007. The Metropolitan Transit Commission voted in May to prioritize a 50% increase in bus service along with 43 miles of new rail service along rapid transit corridors. It's going to be expensive, but better to get going now than to get caught having to dole out even more money for the same projects later.

If voters approve the referendum, the local levy will raise Mecklenburg's sales tax from 7.25% to 8.25% and generate a projected \$19.4 billion over 30 years. The bill is strictly local, since state or federal funding isn't part of the initiative.

We also worry that new transit — especially rail — will spur development that will put new pressure on communities already at risk of gentrification. There isn't a defined plan to help our neighbors, especially seniors and lower-income homeowners, mitigate the impact of displacement. Throw in an uncertain economy in the Trump era, and everyone should be worried about what a sales tax increase will mean regardless of income level.

We also have concerns about a less than transparent process of the initiatives' rollout and the return on investment. Although Mecklenburg is expected to grow by 600,000 people over the next three decades, no one can predict how many people will adopt mass transit as their preferred mode of transportation. If they don't, it's a massive waste of money, a boondoggle of epic proportion.

What we do know is the region is growing and doing nothing to keep pace will push us further behind in terms of providing alternatives to single-commuter travel, which in addition to choking traffic is expensive in terms of maintenance, insurance and energy costs.

Referendum advocates and foes agree on the need for improved transportation options and infrastructure. Turning our collective nose up at a chance to improve our situation leaves the entire community in a precarious situation as travel will only get worse along with com-

muters' — and ultimately voters' — patience.

Charlotte City Council

In an era when collaboration is critical to accomplish long-range growth, Charlotte needs people who can make it work for everyone. Although there are several races that were decided during the primary, there are competitive contests.

At the referendum has the support of Charlotte's corporate community and community advocacy groups. There's also a vocal cohort of opposition, which we share numerous concerns with. Still, we can't ignore the very real urgency of new infrastructure for a region that's adding hundreds of new residents by the week. We can't depend on a dysfunctional federal government that's more interested in supporting a would-be king than funding services for constituents and state government led by people who see little use for supporting urban North Carolina, especially if it involves rail. As a result, Mecklenburg is left with an imperfect, if not impossible, choice: go it alone with a local referendum or do nothing and fall further behind.

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Sports

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2025



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Johnson C. Smith quarterback Kelvin Durham looks downfield in the Golden Bulls' 52-27 win against Winston-Salem State in a CIAA game Oct. 25, 2025 at Eddie McGirt Field in Charlotte. Durham completed 22-of-30 passes for 351 yards and three touchdowns while running for 74 yards and two scores on six carries for JCSU (7-1, 4-1 CIAA).

Next hurdle is JC Smith's highest

CIAA title game berth on the line at Fayetteville State, which owns 8-game win streak vs. Golden Bulls

By Herbert L. White

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High-stakes football isn't novel at Johnson C. Smith.

The Golden Bulls are again in position to seize a spot in the CIAA title game by winning their final two games. So are the terms: beat Fayetteville State Saturday and Livingstone to close the season, neither of which they accomplished last year. JCSU has lost eight straight to FSU, including the last three under coach Maurice Flowers.

"It's a hurdle for us," he said. "Our team knows, our players know, our coaches know, our (athletics director)

knows. I believe the birds flying by know that we're 0-3 against Fayetteville State. We have our work cut out for us going to Fayetteville State, but we wouldn't have it any other way.

Smith did its part to force Saturday's winner-takes-all clash at Fayetteville State by crushing Winston-Salem State 52-27. The Golden Bulls (7-1, 4-1 CIAA) trail FSU (5-3, 5-0) and Virginia Union (7-1, 5-0) by a game for the championship round but are riding momentum with three 50-point outbursts in four games. That urgency has them in position to make another historic leap.

"We know what's at stake for us right

now and in order to get to the postseason, you have to take care of business in front of us right now," said quarterback Kelvin Durham, who topped 300 yards passing (22-of-30, 351 yards, 3 TDs) for the first time as a Golden Bull. "We take practice very seriously; we compete well against our defense. I commend those guys

coming every day, even the scout team guys giving us a look and just competing, having fun in practice, and it shows on Saturdays."

JCSU, No. 19 in the national Division II coaches' and media polls, started hot against WSSU and kept it going to clinch their third straight seven-win campaign, the longest such streak since 1961-64, and equals their victory string against the Rams. Their 25-point margin of victory was the Golden Bulls' largest since a 56-6 romp in 1975.

"Our young men have fun," Flowers said, "and I'm just proud of them that they can see their hard work paying off and we're looking forward to still being alive."

In addition to Durham's performance
Please see GOLDEN | 6A



Durham

'New team, new season:' Golden Bulls not dwelling on past

By Cameron Williams

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If déjà vu wore a jersey, it would be Johnson C. Smith's.

With two games left in the regular season, the Golden Bulls (7-1, 4-1 CIAA) are still playing for a berth in the CIAA championship game. While the Golden Bulls aren't undefeated like last season going into the home stretch with one conference loss, a win next week at Fayetteville State and the following against Livingstone, they would likely

get a rematch with Virginia Union for the title.

Last season was uncharted territory for Smith and coach Maurice Flowers said that experience made this year's team better prepared for a similar situation.

"We were 8-0 and feeling good, and then [the loss against Fayetteville State] last year," he said. "I'm so proud of our young men, because the game that we lost against Fayetteville State, we were shut out 27-0. We wore the exact uni-

form that we wore today, because our young men, our leadership council, they were like, 'Coach... What are we going to wear this week?' And then they were saying, 'All blue, all blue.' I said, 'I don't want to wear that all blue.' And they said, 'why?' I say, 'I don't want to wear all blue,' and they said, 'Coach, new team, new season.' I left them alone."

How the Golden Bulls got here

Smith's lone loss is against Virginia Union in September. They haven't had

many close games of late either, blowing out Bluefield State, Shaw and Winston-Salem State with at least 52 points scored against each. Saturday's 52-27 win against WSSU was the Golden Bulls' third straight in the series and their largest margin of victory since a 56-6 win in 1975.

"Anytime that you can beat Winston-Salem State is good," Flowers said. "I told the team in my four-year playing career against Winston-Salem State, I

Please see NEW | 6A

Panthers stick with two-back rotation

By Jeff Hawkins

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Carolina Panthers coach Dave Canales didn't alter his offensive game plan, despite Sunday's lopsided 40-9 loss to the Buffalo Bills.

The running back rotation the Panthers deployed the past two weeks made its home debut. It didn't leave much of an impression, but not much they attempted worked with backup quarterback Andy Dalton starting for injured Bryce Young (ankle). The Panthers' top running backs, Chuba Hubbard and Rico Dowdle, combined for 88 yards rushing on 20 carries. Dowdle paced the duo with 54 yards on eight attempts, a 6.75 yards per carry average. Hubbard, the starter, managed 34 yards on 12 carries for a pedestrian 2.8 average.

In the two games since Canales introduced

Please see DESPITE | 6A



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Rico Dowdle rushed for 54 yards on eight carries in the Carolina Panthers' 40-9 loss to the Buffalo Bills Oct. 26, 2025 at Bank of America Stadium.

Regular season finales for Magnificent Seven

By Herbert L. White

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November means relevant football for the Magnificent Seven.

Hough High is a game away from closing the regular season and the No. 1 spot with the playoffs set to kick off next week. The Huskies have led the rankings since the first week and haven't been challenged through the regular season.

West Charlotte is hot on Hough's heels with a 6-2 start. No. 3 Independence is followed by Olympic, Myers Park, which lost to Hough last

week, Providence and Palisades, which means six of the seven ranked squads won last week.

This week's Magnificent Seven, with overall record, conference record and previous week's ranking:

1. Hough (9-0, 4-0 Greater Charlotte 7A/8A, first). If the M7 crown was a regular season award, the Huskies would have it locked up. They passed their final significant regular season test by knocking off Myers Park 28-6 and with Hopewell on the menu, No. 1 isn't likely to change until the playoffs - if then.

2. West Charlotte (7-2, 4-0 Meck Power Six 7A/8A, second). The Lions are playing

stout football - ask Chambers, who took a 37-0 loss last week. North Mecklenburg is the season finale.

3. Independence (7-2, 3-1 Meck Power Six 7A/8A, fourth). Look who's back in a familiar spot. The Patriots recovered to the top three after dragging North Mecklenburg 41-0. Next is the Mint Hill-Matthews derby against rival Butler.

4. Olympic (7-2, 6-0 Greater Metro 6A/7A, fifth). Moving to a new conference sure has done wonders for the Trojans, who dispatched Berry Academy 28-0 for a season-

Please see REGULAR | 6A

Southern's shameful football firing

College coaching is a vicious and mean-spirited business.

Southern University knew it was going to fire head football coach Terrence Graves before he went on last week's SWAC teleconference.

I say the "university" because we all know that when it comes to football and men's basketball, **BEST** firings and hirings come from the top - not the athletic director's office. Why not release Graves after the homecoming loss?

Graves was diplomatic when asked about his employment situation. "...Yes, I would rather be 6-1 than 1-6. It's not that we don't have a good football team, but it's just that many things and factors are not coming together at this time. ...But spiritually, I'm a strong man of faith. I'm at peace with who I am and whose I am. I don't waiver on that."

Were they sitting in their offices laughing the whole time?

A little over a year ago, Southern was 3-1 in the SWAC West and on its way to winning its final four regular season



BONITA

BEST

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Please see SOUTHERN | 6A



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Johnson C. Smith is leveraging last year's late season stumble into motivation ahead of Saturday's clash against Fayetteville State for one of the top two spots in the CIAA football standings.

New team, new season for JCSU aspirations

Continued from page 5A

never won. In my junior year, 73-6. My senior year, they beat us 80-6, so when I say you want to beat Winston-Salem State, you do. And I'm just so happy for them that they know what it feels like to beat those Rams. And on top of that, it's another conference win. I'm so proud of our football team. We really have young men that are bought into the process and our culture, and they just go about their business every single day."

Golden Bulls quarterback Kelvin Durham threw for 351 yards and three touchdowns against WSSU and ran in two scores. The Golden Bulls started fast and ran out to a 38-6 lead at one point to where even when the Rams pushed back, they never threatened.

"Starting fast is big for us," Durham said. "Coach Flowers and my quarterback coach [Tyrell Jackson] get on me when I don't start fast, and it shows. [Flowers] tells me that games we start fast and score early usually lead to big wins or a big margin, ... so, I just keep that in mind every game and just make

sure that we start fast and send that message to my offensive line, my receivers and running backs as well to make sure we are all on the same page."

Single elimination tournament mentality

The Golden Bulls know that losing isn't an option if they want to play for the CIAA title. The theme of starting fast will be crucial Saturday at Fayetteville State (5-3, 5-0 CIAA).

"We're in a single-elimination tournament," Flowers said. "That is how we're approaching it. We say, one day at a time, one game at a time, one day at a time, one game at a time. And what we feel is that if we play well, we have an opportunity to win. And so that is really our focus. We want to have a good meeting each meeting. We want to have a good film session. We want to have good weightlifting sessions. We have good practices, and all of those things that will prepare us to have a good game on Saturday. That's the mindset."

"Let's do well each day to put ourselves in a position to win on Saturday."

Golden Bulls tackle toughest hurdle in Fayetteville State

Continued from page 5A

against WSSU, which included 74 yards rushing and two scores on six carries, JCSU's receivers had a big day. Biggie Proctor and Brian Lane each caught nine passes for more than 100 yards and combined for three touchdowns between them. JCSU rolled up 526 yards on offense.

"It's just building connection later in season," said Proctor, who accounted

for a team-high nine catches for 136 and two scores. "That's your strength, everybody's supposed to come together. It's the end, so you've got to just come closer with each other and we just try to not overthink about the future. Just be where you are. Just take it day by day, play by play, drive by drive."

Said Durham: "It definitely feels good, but what feels even better is we haven't played our best game on offense yet, so we're just looking forward to a better game coming in soon."

Southern's shameful football firing

Continued from page 5A

games, the division title and a date with Jackson State in the SWAC Football Championship.

Graves is gone after less than two seasons.

SWAC Commissioner Charles McClelland Jr. pretty much admitted at the SWAC Media Day that it was win or go home early for coaches. The stakes are higher than ever. With D.C. trying to turn back the clock, HBCUs are looking for self-sustainment at every opportunity and winning still opens wallets. If teams don't win, fans stay home, and somebody is out of a job.

Still, if Graves had been fired on Saturday, people would have shrugged and kept going. But to wait until after his media session was unnecessarily mean and petty.

Right man for the job

On a positive note, Prairie View A&M first-year coach Tremaine Jackson has rejuvenated the Panthers.

I've followed Jackson's career since his three-year stint at Division II Valdosta State. In 2022, he became the first African American head coach hired in the HISTORY of the Gulf South Conference. After a 5-6 first season because most of the players left, he compiled a 25-3 overall and 13-1 conference record his final two seasons, including a trip to the 2024 Division II championship.

Oh yeah, Valdosta was the only school in

the conference that didn't give the full allotment of 36 scholarships, according to media reports.

Snoopy PVAM fans thought Jackson wasn't good enough with his DII pedigree even though he's a Texas Southern alumnus. Well, Mr. Division II and his staff have the Panthers undefeated in the SWAC West and on a five-game winning streak, with five games remaining. Their defense is the best in the conference.

After PVAM defeated Southern, Jackson said, "It will be a cold day in hell before they schedule us for homecoming again."

Panther fans might still be on the fence about Jackson, but his discipline and no-nonsense reputation have gained notice outside of HBCUs.

The Sacramento Bee reported last week that Jackson was a candidate for the UAB job after Trent Dilfer's firing. Unlike most coaches, Jackson didn't deflect the question.

"That's a position you want to be in," he said. "When you're winning, you want people to talk about you; people don't talk about losers. ... We're just a bunch of Division II guys trying to figure this Division I thing out. That's what everybody is thinking anyway."

He has a sense of humor, too.

Bonita Best is sports editor at The Triangle Tribune in Durham.



TROY HULL | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Chuba Hubbard ran for a pedestrian 34 yards rushing on 12 carries for the Carolina Panthers in their 40-9 loss to Buffalo on Oct. 26, 2025 at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte.

Despite stumble, Panthers stick with 2-back rotation

Continued from page 5A

the running back rotation, the duo registered 218 yards combined. In the two previous games, Dowdle handled the workload solo and collected 386 yards, including a 203-yard effort against the Miami Dolphins on Oct. 5.

With the Panthers' three-game winning streak snapped, Canales remains steadfast - for now.

"I like the plan," he said. "I'm just looking for execution."

Dowdle: "I'm not really sure what happened"

Making his first start of the season, Dalton, a 15-year veteran, committed three turnovers (two fumbles), which led directly to 17 Buffalo points.

"Unfortunately, we did not play anywhere near the type of football we know we're capable of playing," Dalton said. "You can say it was a measuring stick. We didn't give ourselves a chance. I didn't give this team a chance."

In the postgame locker room, Dowdle waved reporters away, saying he needed to see the trainer. When he returned about 10 minutes later, he tried to rush out the door.

When he finally paused, Dowdle was short on words.

"I'm not really sure what happened," he said. "We just have to watch the film."

When asked if he favored the rotation next at Green Bay next week, he went with the company line.

"I'm in a groove with the rotation," Dowdle said. "The score got lopsided, so a different game played out."

Over the course of the Panthers' opening 10 possessions against the Bills (5-2), Hubbard, who signed a four-year, \$33 million contract extension last November, and Dowdle, who inked a one-year, free-agent deal in the offseason, alternated series. Rookie Trevor Etienne played the final possession.

On the flip side, the Bills' James Cook III collected a career-high 216 yards on 19 carries and two touchdowns in three quarters. It's the most rushing yardage the Panthers (4-4) have surrendered to a single back in a game. Cook gained 168 yards before contact.

"Give a lot of credit to the Bills," Canales said. "What they did in the running game was unbelievable. James Cook had a fantastic day. Big runs. They consistently owned the line of scrimmage, and we were not able to get the run game going."

Turnovers happened and it made it a real challenging situation for us."

Panthers fall short

So much for a pivotal game for a franchise that has not qualified for the playoffs since 2017. This week, NFL insiders questioned if the Panthers (4-4) were legitimate playoff contenders.

The questions will linger.

"We look at it as one game," Canales said. "There's a lot of good football in our rearview mirror. We have to keep our focus right here, right now. Get back to fundamentals."

And attempt to block out Sunday's rout.

"We have to wash this one away and not let it affect us," defensive lineman Derrick Brown said.

Brown, who missed all but one half of play in 2024 with a knee injury, departed in the fourth quarter with a sore knee, but was later cleared by doctors. Canales said he expected Brown to practice on Wednesday.

Coming off a bye week, the Bills entered Sunday ranked No. 31 in rushing yards allowed (156.3). In their previous outing, Atlanta Falcons running back Bijan Robinson ran 170 yards. The Panthers, who lost three offensive linemen Sunday, failed to generate much running room for Hubbard and Dowdle.

Tackle Taylor Moton (knee), center Joe Mayes (ankle) and guard Brady Christensen (Achilles) suffered injuries. Christensen is expected to miss the rest of the season.

"We'll see how this whole thing shakes out, the extent of everything," Dalton said. "We have to find ways to get the job done. We have depth. We're fortunate we have a lot of guys who have played a lot of ball. It doesn't stop for injuries. We have to keep going."

Hubbard may not have been effective as a runner, but he showed hustle when Dalton directed a screen pass to Bills defensive end A.J. Epenesa, who returned the interception to 24 yards before Hubbard tracked him down at the 1. Josh Allen scored on the next play as the Bills started to pull away 19-3 with 1:48 in the first half.

Canales plans on sticking with the running back rotation, but how much longer can he deny Dowdle additional opportunities?

"That's something to look at," Canales said. "We have to look at our schemes and personnel to see who gives us a better chance to win."

Regular season finales for Magnificent Seven teams

Continued from page 5A

best rise to fourth.

Olympic goes to Hickory Ridge for the regular season finale.

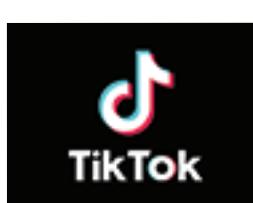
5. Myers Park (7-2, 3-1 Greater Charlotte 7A/8A, third). The Mustangs gave Hough a good run for nearly three quarters before taking a 28-6 loss to fall a game behind in the Greater Charlotte race and two spots in the rankings. They have a chance to get right against South Mecklenburg.

6. Providence (6-3, 4-0 Southwestern 7A/8A, sixth). Ballantyne Ridge was easy pickings for the Panthers, who rolled to a 45-0 win. Ardrey Kell will be more of a challenge, though.

7. Palisades (6-3, 3-1 Southwestern 7A/8A, seventh). Quick and easy is the best description of last week's 56-6 disposal of Rocky River to remain a game behind Providence in the conference standings. Next is a road game at East Mecklenburg.



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