



THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY SINCE 1906

# The Charlotte Post

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 27, 2025

VOLUME 52 NUMBER 12

WWW.THECHARLOTTEPOST.COM

\$1.50



CHARLOTTE DOUGLAS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Approximately 2.3 North Carolina residents will travel at least 50 miles from home between Nov. 25-Dec. 1, with Charlotte Douglas International Airport expecting 1.9 million travelers between Nov. 20-Dec. 2.

## Planes, trains, automobiles: Holiday travel taking off

Busiest time of the year for transportation will put North Carolinians on the move

By Herbert L. White

herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

It's the holiday season, and that means travel.

AAA Carolinas anticipates another record for Thanksgiving holiday travel with approximately 2.3 million North Carolinians traveling at least 50 miles from home between Nov. 25-Dec. 1. The agency anticipates 2.1 million will travel by car, another 146,000 will fly to destinations and 43,500 individuals who will use other modes of transit like buses or

trains.

At Charlotte Douglas International Airport, it's the first Thanksgiving since the completion of a \$608-million terminal lobby expansion that provides more smoother entry to the airport, and more security checkpoints with additional lanes. Airport officials predict 1.9 million passengers between Nov. 20-Dec. 2 — 10% less than last year's record-setting period. Nearly 430,000 travelers are anticipated to move through Transportation Security

checkpoints during that span, or 2.5% less than 2024.

The busiest days are expected to be Nov. 29, Nov. 30, and Dec. 1, with each day projected top 83,000 departing passengers, with Nov. 30 predicted to tally more than 178,000 total travelers. Overall, more than 9,000 aircraft departures are scheduled over the three-day period. American Airlines and its regional partners will operate 80,759 scheduled flights across its network during Thanksgiving.

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## Skin tone no deterrent to Border Patrol race profiling

By Kylie Marsh

THE CHARLOTTE POST

Skin color won't shield anyone from Operation Charlotte's Web.

An Instagram reel posted by itskerrimelina shared her frustration with the way her biracial husband Ali was approached by Border Patrol agents while working in Charlotte.

"My husband is a light-skinned Black man," she said. "Yes, he probably could pass for someone who could be Puerto Rican or Dominican of some sort, but they racially profiled him while he was working. It's the

fact that now he has to watch his back because he could end up getting pulled over by somebody else."

Kerri and Ali declined to provide their last names to maintain their privacy.

Ali called Kerri last week after his interaction with federal agents, who were in Charlotte as part of an area sweep of immigrants in the region.

"Basically, the phone call was like, 'Kerri, you wouldn't believe this,'" she said.

Ali, who drives a truck for work, was pulled over in the North Tryon area. The

agents approached him speaking Spanish. Ali told the agents he doesn't speak Spanish, and cooperated by handing over his identification.

"Even after he told them he doesn't speak Spanish, that wasn't enough for them to be like, 'oh, OK,'" Kerri said. "They still proceeded to ask him for his ID while he was in a work uniform."

After the agents checked Ali's credentials against the federal database, Kerri told The Post they informed him he "wasn't in the

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« APPRECIATION: NATHANIEL SMITH »

Kevin Hart's comedy foil was a friend and mentor at home, too



By Herbert L. White

herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Nathaniel Smith wasn't a comic, but he looked out for one of the most influential in the business.

Mr. Smith, a Charlotte native and Kevin Hart's tour manager, died Nov. 17, said Greg McMurray, a longtime friend who grew up with Mr. Smith in Charlotte.

"He was a brother from another mother," McMurray said. "We grew up together. We're not blood brothers, but some friends are more blood than blood [relatives], you know what I mean?"

Bridget Gilliam recalled her friendship to Mr. Smith with a social media post: "My heart is heavy, a long time friend that I grew up with Nate Baker Smith is now R. W. A. (Resting With the Angel). I met Baker when I lived with my grandma on Litchfield Rd in Charlotte and he lived on Nancy Dr. I remember going to see him, Chucky and Willie Walker playing in The Steel Drum Band. You will be truly missed!"

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# Brothers exonerated of murder still behind bars

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appealed the case, which prevented Banner and Cauthen's release in August. The Court of Appeals denied the state's appeal Sept. 30, affirming the men's exonerations.

Just as Banner and Cauthen eagerly packed up their bags for a second time, the state blocked their exonerations once again through an emergency petition to the N.C. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court then ruled Oct. 15 to keep the men in prison until the Court of Appeals reviews the merits of the case.

Three Supreme Court justices dissented, stating that the appellate court acted within its discretion to deny the state's appeal.

"Every moment that these defendants are imprisoned when they should be free is an irreparable harm," wrote Justice Allison Riggs in her dissent.

It could be years before the brothers see any hope of release again.

"It's frustrating that we've got to go through it and continue to go through it," Banner said.

Christopher Bryant and Jermal Toller, two of the Winston-Salem Five, were released from prison in 2017 after completing their sentences for second-degree murder. Dorell Brayboy was released a year later and was murdered in 2019. Banner and Cauthen, convicted of first-degree murder, have been serving life sentences.

The five men have maintained their innocence for decades, claiming their initial confessions were coerced. In 2020, the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission reviewed the case and found sufficient evidence of factual innocence. The commission referred the case to a three-judge panel, which upheld the defendants' convictions in 2022.

Attorney General Jeff Jackson wrote in August's emergency petition that the state is acting "out of an abundance of caution," concerned about releasing Banner and Cauthen into the community. The petition states that the men were convicted of first-degree murder by a jury of their peers and that the decision was upheld by the 2022 court decision.

Case law defines a dismissal with prejudice as an extreme remedy, as it permanently closes the case. The state argued in its petition that it has the right to appeal Broadie's decision.

"That a single superior court, more than twenty years after the Defendants' convictions were obtained, could vacate those convictions and award unconditional release without any opportunity for the State to seek appellate review is unprecedented and would be perilous for our criminal justice system," the petition said.

The N.C. Department of Justice declined to comment amid the ongoing litigation.

Joseph Hyde, a former Special Deputy Attorney General at the N.C. DOJ, said post-conviction release is designed to be difficult to obtain, and post-conviction appeals are often dismissed or denied.

"The case law recognizes such a strong preference for jury verdicts," said Hyde, who is now an assistant professor at the University of North Carolina's School of Government. "Once the jury has made factual determinations of guilt, that is a pretty hard stop."

But reversing a conviction in North Carolina has been done before. Since 1989, 78 innocent people in the state have been exonerated of crimes, with an average of 12.6 wasted years in prison, according to the National Registry of Exonerations.

Several of these cases were dismissed with prejudice. Darryl Hunt was convicted of murder in Winston-Salem at the age of 19, and he was released almost 20 years later in

2004 — 10 years after new DNA evidence linked another man to the crime.

A Superior Court judge dismissed Hunt's charges with prejudice, releasing Hunt and ensuring he could never be tried again.

"The state made this big deal about the case being dismissed with prejudice, like saying it's never been done before, which is baloney," Chris Mumma, Banner's and Cauthen's attorney, said.

Forsyth County District Attorney Jim O'Neill told the Winston-Salem Journal in August that he was surprised and shocked by Broadie's ruling and that the Attorney General's office agreed to work with local prosecutors to uphold the conviction.

O'Neill could not be reached for comment.

The North Carolina Constitution establishes the Attorney General's office as independent from each county's district attorney, with each officer independently elected and no institutional relationship between the two.

Hyde said the DOJ may decline to seek appellate review.

"We're all trying to accomplish justice for North Carolinians, but it's not a relationship such that when the prosecutor says take it up, the DOJ has to do that," Hyde said.

**Physically distant, united in spirit**

When Broadie dismissed the charges in August, Banner and Cauthen packed their bags, gave away their food and few belongings, and waited for a release that never came.

After the Court of Appeals declined to take up the case in late September, the prison had everything in place for the men to leave once again. The following day, the state filed an emergency petition to block their release, forcing Banner, as he put it, to "start back from scratch."

"They went down to receiving because they were told they were being picked up to go home, and then they were told, 'sorry, just kidding, go back to your cell,' and they had already given all their things away," Mumma said. "I mean, that's hugely impactful."

Cauthen said he was looking forward to reuniting with his brother, who has been held in a separate prison since Cauthen was 18. They only see each other only in court, and January's evidentiary hearing was the first time in years that they embraced.

"Me and my little brother should be at home right now, and this should be over with," Cauthen said.

The brothers occasionally talk by phone when they both manage to call their mother at the same time, and she connects the lines. But, they said, they miss the relationship they had growing up.

Ingram said the family was extremely close when the boys were young, including her oldest son, Joseph Cauthen, who is now 43. When the boys were teenagers, she left her shifts at Bojangles to meet them at the rec center and took her sons to Bible study several times a week. With extended family nearby, the boys always had someone looking out for them.

"They came from a structured home," Ingram said. "They came from people that love them. They had a support system."

When her sons were first held in a Morganton facility as teenagers, Ingram visited them twice per week, as often as the prison allowed. Banner and Cauthen were later split up and shuffled between prisons throughout the next decade, and Ingram drove up to eight hours round trip each week to visit her sons, depending on where in the state they were.

Separated by glass, Ingram and her sons would put their hands up to each other's at the end of the visits. Before departing on the long drive home, In-

gram would sit in the parking lot and cry.

"The visits were always nice," Ingram said through tears. "It was just that when I had to leave, and I can't say whether it was hard on them, but I can certainly tell you, it was certainly hard on me."

Currently, Cauthen is held in Pender Correctional Institution in Burgaw — the opposite side of the state from his brother, who is 330 miles away in Mountain View Correctional Institution in Spruce Pine.

Ingram speaks with Banner twice per week, which is as often as the prison allows. Cauthen's prison has fewer restrictions, and he stays on the phone with her each night until it cuts off at 10 p.m. In recent years, Ingram has been able to see her sons at their court appearances in Forsyth County, where she still lives.

When Ingram scrambled to prepare her sons' homecomings, only for the state to block their release, she said it felt like the world was crumbling around her. But, she said, she's tried to stay strong for her sons.

"Somebody has got to be mad, somebody has got to be angry, and I'm going to be that person," Ingram said.

**Dismissing the charges**

Broadie vacated the charges based on newly discovered evidence and ineffective assistance of counsel. That evidence includes a key witness recanting her prior testimony and new research that explains why the teenagers might have falsely confessed.

When the five men were accused at ages 14 and 15, the state brought in one witness: Jessica Black, a 16-year-old white girl who was with the five Black boys at the time of the murder. At the jury trials, Black testified that she drove the boys near Jones' house and heard the boys yell at Jones as they beat him to death.

She now says that was all a lie.

In the January evidentiary hearing, Black said that the officers at her initial questioning told her she would go to prison as an accessory to murder if she didn't testify for the state, and she had to repeatedly alter her story to match what they wanted her to say.

"Everything I said to them had to be changed, time and time again," Black said at the January hearing. "And then once they would stop asking me about certain things, I made the assumption that I got it right, I finally got it right."

Black first recanted her witness testimony to a Houston Chronicle journalist in 2019, and she has repeated her statement under oath several times since then.

Broadie found her recantation to be credible, and it was part of his decision to vacate the charges with prejudice in August.

"There is reasonable probability that but for the admission of Ms. Black's false testimony, a different result would have been reached at the Defendants' trials," Broadie wrote.

Northeastern University Professor of Law Daniel Medwed, who has focused his research on wrongful convictions, said courts tend to view recantations with caution.

"Often recantation cases are ones that prosecutors are skeptical of because they think maybe someone got to the witness, and maybe the witness is feeling intimidated, or maybe they, for whatever reason, begin to doubt the credibility of that witness now," Medwed said.

Mumma said she thinks Black had no external motivation to recant.

"Her life has been hell since she recanted," Mumma said. "She's gotten death threats, she's had health issues because of the stress. There is no benefit."

Black could not be reached for comment.

Broadie also ruled that

new psychological research on false confessions, published after the 2004 trials, qualifies as newly discovered evidence. Studies now show that prolonged detention and isolation, as well as mental impairment, can lead teenagers to falsely confess.

The teenagers didn't have adults present during their initial questioning and were in the police station for more than eight hours before their taped confession statement, experiencing hours of isolation and intermittent interrogations that weren't recorded. An expert asked to review the case testified in January that the defendants were mentally disabled, according to their school reports.

Broadie also determined ineffective assistance of counsel, stating the trial attorneys failed to investigate the defendants' intellectual disabilities. This means the attorneys didn't use evidence of cognitive impairment to explain the voluntary confessions.

The men testified at the evidentiary hearing that they thought they could go home if they said what the

officers wanted them to say.

"You don't isolate a child like that," Cauthen said in an interview. "You don't do that. That is a child, that is somebody's child."

In the state's petition to block Broadie's dismissal of the charges, it states a new trial is the proper remedy for recantation evidence and ineffective assistance of counsel, rather than the dismissal of charges.

Banner welcomes the idea of a retrial.

"Since I was 14, I've been telling them I didn't do it," he said.

Additional evidence presented at the January hearing showed that the DNA at the crime scene doesn't match any of the defendants, and Broadie ruled that this evidence contradicts the state's case at the jury trial. The DNA profiles were developed using testing kits made available after 2015, and thus counted as newly discovered evidence, Broadie ruled.

"The DNA profiles further serve to corroborate Defendants' assertions that their confessions were false, that Ms. Black's testimony at trial was also

false, and the Defendants were not present at the scene of the crime," Broadie wrote.

**Waiting for the storm to pass'**

If they're eventually released, Banner and Cauthen both said they want to use their platforms to advocate against injustice in the legal system, especially for wrongfully convicted people.

"The quicker I get out, the quicker I can be a voice for them," Banner said.

There's no set timeline for how the appeals process will move forward. Mumma thinks it could be at least two years before the appeal is final.

While they wait for more news, Cauthen reads and plays chess to occupy his mind while staying up to date on the legal filings, reading up on his case. Banner stays busy with his job as a supply clerk and playing basketball, and they both check in with their mother every week.

"I'm just waiting for the storm to pass through," Banner said.

Until it does, there will be two empty rooms in Ingram's house, as she waits for the day her boys return home.

## Nathaniel Smith was comic foil and road manager to Kevin Hart

Continued from page 1A

Mr. Smith was often the subject of routines in Hart's act over the years, in which he was described as the foil in their arguments. Hart often described their dustups as brotherly banter that personified their connection.

In a social media post written the day of Mr. Smith's death, Hart shared:

"I lost a dear friend today.... Nate you are a legend in this game of comedy.... I am honored to have been able to call you my road manager.... You taught me so much about this business... ur loyalty and dedication was unmatched.... U had a heart of gold man.... Sometimes misunderstood by some but never by me.

Thank you for all that u did.... I love you for life man. You will be missed. RIP NATE.... One of the best to ever do it!!!! Love u"

Mr. Smith was an integral part of Hart's success over 12 years as tour manager. His work won praise from the comic/actor, who took to social media to document gifting him with a new car.

"My Road Manager of 12yrs Nate Smith walked into his home and found a nice surprise in his garage," Hart wrote. "We argue like cats and dogs but ur loyalty has never been in question. I love your old ass man...Thank you for your help in making another tour a major success!!!!"

## St. Augustine's University wants to sign Trump education pact

Continued from page 1A

versities to give feedback on the document, and none in the group decided to sign on. Since the proposal was made public in early October, several universities have rejected it, arguing the federal funding should be based on merit, not adherence to a president's priorities. The administration has initially aimed to finalize the compact by Nov. 21, but that deadline has reportedly been extended.

The 158-year-old university is the first HBCU to show interest in the compact, which would require colleges to make a number of changes to their policies and practices in exchange for potential benefits such as an edge in federal grant competitions.

The Trump administration first invited nine uni-

versities to give feedback on the document, and they see alignment between St. Augustine's historic mission and the administration's proposal.

Despite their other reservations, "Saint Augustine's University remains eager to participate as a constructive partner and early-engagement institution," they wrote. They asked the department to work with HBCUs to shape a final agreement that upholds "both the letter and spirit of the Compact while safeguarding our statutory purpose."

## Planes, trains and automobiles: Holiday travelers are taking off

Continued from page 1A

giving week.

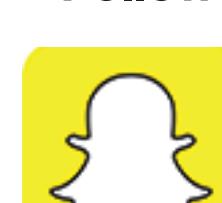
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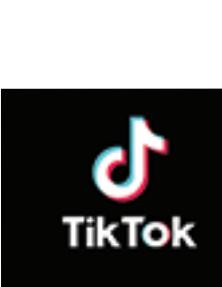
Of 25,000 parking spots at Charlotte Douglas, 15,000 can be booked online.

To ensure a smooth departure, airport officials suggest travelers arrive at the terminal at least two hours before a domestic flight and three hours before an international trip.

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## Skin tone no deterrent to federal racial profiling

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system."

"I don't know if that was a lie, because they look stupid," Kerri said, "if that was just something to say to breeze off the inconvenience and the racial profiling."

Kerri and Ali are U.S.-born citizens. She posted the Instagram video as a warning to all - not just Spanish speakers or Latinos.

"He's like, 'I'm just working, I'm just trying to do my job,'" Kerri explained. "He was like, 'I understand that you're trying to do a so-called job, but the way that they're going about it doesn't make any sense. They're just randomly pulling people over.'"

Kerri criticized poor coordination between agents during their Charlotte operations.

"They're just going up to random people because they think you look a certain way," she said. "There's no actual system of organization," referencing numerous videos posted to social media of agents chasing people or pulling up in vans and snatching them off the streets.

"You just don't know what type of ICE agent you're gonna have. Maybe one day you have an ICE agent that isn't aggressive, then you get some that are really aggressive."

Kerri didn't expect her Instagram post, which surpassed 78,000 views as of Nov. 24, would get so much traction. Some viewers commented in panic, stating that they are light-skinned or have biracial children who may be targeted. Others have been negative, like one commenter who wrote Ali "should get deported."

"You might not even be Hispanic, but if you can pass or are light-skinned, they might just question you anyway," Kerri said in the reel. Kerri said she believes Ali didn't think he'd be bothered by agents because he isn't Latino or undocumented.



ITSKERRIMELINA VIA INSTAGRAM

Ali, pictured with his wife Kerri, was pulled over and interrogated by federal immigration enforcement officials last week as part of Operation Charlotte's Web, according to a post by Kerri. Both are native-born U.S. citizens.

Since then, U.S. Rep. Alma Adams, whose congressional district includes Charlotte, posted a bulletin to Instagram reels urging those who have faced similar racial profiling to contact her local office at (704) 344-9950 or her Washington, D.C., office (202) 225-1510.

"Our community is under siege," Adams said. "ICE and border patrol are roaming this community profiling people, picking people up, it does not matter who you are."

Since last week, state and federal officials have released conflicting statements regarding whether Border Patrol agents are leaving the Charlotte area.



UNC CHAPEL HILL

Fewer international students are enrolling in U.S. schools like UNC Chapel Hill due to immigration and visa rollbacks and deportations.

## Global student enrollment slows amid US crackdown

By Emaan Parvez

UNC MEDIA HUB

The number of international students enrolled in U.S. universities has fallen sharply compared to last fall, according to recently released federal data.

According to fall 2025 snapshot data from the annual Open Doors report from the Institute of International Education, new international student enrollment has dropped by 17%.

The decline reflects a new wave of immigration policy under President Trump's second term, as the administration moves to tighten oversight of student visas and expand federal monitoring.

Changes to the immigration policy first began during the spring semester, when overnight, students and campus offices were notified that visa records were being flagged for review under new federal guidelines. By morning, inboxes filled with anxious messages: Was my SEVIS record still active? Could I travel home for spring break?

"That week felt like a bummer," said an undergraduate student from India at UNC Chapel Hill, who requested anonymity to speak freely about their immigration status. "Everyone was panicking, and no one could tell us what was actually happening."

At UNC, six students had their SEVIS records terminated by the federal government in April, which affected more than 300 students nationally. The six UNC students were eventually reinstated, but the incident sent shockwaves through the international student community on campus.

A UNC spokesperson said the university's International Student and Scholar Services office worked with multiple campus departments including the Dean of Students and Carolina Student Legal Services, to support affected students.

In the months that followed, the restrictions deepened. In May, Secretary of State Marco Rubio instructed U.S. missions abroad to stop scheduling new appointments for student-visa applicants while the State Department prepared to expand social-media vetting requirements, according to a State Department cable obtained by Reuters.

On June 4, President Trump signed a proclamation suspending entry for nationals from 19 countries, including full bans on student visas for Afghanistan, Burma, Iran, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen, and partial suspensions for several others. Student-visa overstay rates — ranging from 17% in Burundi to 70% in Equatorial Guinea — were cited as justification.

That same day, Trump signed a separate proclamation suspending new student visas for Harvard University, citing concerns about foreign ties and campus protests.

By August, the crackdown had left more than 6,000 students without legal status, according to reporting by Reuters citing a State Department official.

ing research and innovation across universities and industries. According to a projection from the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers, a sustained drop in enrollment could result in \$7 billion in lost revenue and 60,000 fewer jobs nationwide.

"Higher education is one of the country's largest exports," said Giovanni Peri, said Giovanni Peri, professor in international economics and founder and director of the Global Migration Center at University of California, Davis. He added that limiting international enrollment not only reduces a key source of U.S. revenue but also drives away the skilled graduates who help power innovation and growth.

Peri noted that international students play a critical role in sustaining research and technological growth. Roughly 40% of Ph.D. students in STEM fields are foreign-born, a group that drives much of the country's innovation pipeline. Losing them, he said, could weaken the foundation that supports U.S. leadership in science and technology.

As opportunities in the United States narrow, many students are beginning to look elsewhere. Countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom have rolled out policies designed to attract the same pool of talent, offering faster visa processing, clearer post-graduation work paths, and, in some cases, permanent-residency options.

"Student mobility works in networks," Peri said. "If Indian or Chinese students start going to Switzerland or Australia instead of the United States, others will follow." He added that companies are already adapting by moving research and innovation hubs to cities like Vancouver, where immigration laws make it easier to hire foreign talent.

But for the students behind the statistics, the consequences are personal.

"The hardest part is feeling like all your effort might not lead anywhere," said the international student at Columbia University. "You can pour your heart into your academics, internships, and networking, but still face roadblocks because of something completely out of your control."

Still, amid the anxiety, there remains a flicker of faith in the ideals that first drew them here. "What keeps me hopeful is the belief that the U.S. still rewards resilience and ambition," the student said. "Despite all the obstacles, I'm not ready to give up on that dream yet."

## North Carolina colleges battle a growing food insecurity scourge

By Catherine Wiles

UNC MEDIA HUB

Nearly 30% of college students in a recent survey reported suffering from food insecurity, according to a recent study across five North Carolina colleges.

Researchers from Meredith College, Appalachian State University, East Carolina University, Western Carolina University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill surveyed over 3,000 students on their food insecurity status, demographic identifiers, and health metrics like stress, sleep, and fruit and vegetable intake.

Across all five schools, 29.4% of students reported either "low" (12.9%) or "very low" (16.5%) food security. A further 16.7% reported marginal food security, indicating stress over food availability, but without reduced quality or quantity of food.

"Low food security, in its most basic terms, is where people are struggling on a day-to-day basis, but they're maybe not necessarily hungry," Adam Hege, an associate professor of public health and dean for research and graduate education at Appalachian State and corresponding researcher for the study, said. "They may just face challenges to find access to healthy, affordable food. Low food security is where we're looking much more at being hungry, really wondering where their next meal in general is going to come from."

There are a number of reasons college students experience a higher level of food insecurity than the broader population, which is closer to 13.5%. College tuition is a large expenditure, especially for students who are living on their own for the first time. While low-income students have gained greater access to higher education over the years, the cost of tuition still places enormous pressure on low-in-

come and first-generation students, Hege said.

First-generation college students, students whose families relied on SNAP or other food benefits, and students who are eligible for work-study programs were significantly more likely to report low or very low food insecurity, according to the study.

"I think for the traditional college student, it is their first time on their own," Hege said. "So some are coming from families where they're the first one in their family to come to college, or they may be facing income-related challenges as they get to college. But beyond just that, being a college student, learning to take care of yourself on a day-to-day basis, is something new oftentimes, and we recognize that campuses do a fairly good job of providing meal plans and those types of things, but we also know that those can't meet all needs, that those create challenges."

Ethnic and gender minority status also played a role in which students were more likely to suffer food insecurity, according to the study. While there was no statistically significant difference between students who identified as "white" as compared to "non-white," Hispanic students reported higher rates of food insecurity than their non-Hispanic counterparts: 37.1% of Hispanic students reported low or very low food security, compared to 28.5% of non-Hispanic students. LGBTQ+ students also reported greater food insecurity than heterosexual students, and a startling 58.6% of students who identified as nonbinary, agender, or other genders outside of the male-female binary reported having very low food security.

When students are unable to eat a consistent, healthy diet, it can have a pro-

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JEYHOUN ALLENBAUGH

UNC Chapel Hill student Kennedy Williams in the Carolina Cupboard, which is part of the Carolina Food Pantry Network on campus.

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# The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

Gerald O. Johnson | CEO/PUBLISHER

gerald.johnson@thecharlottepost.com

André P. Johnson | CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

andre.johnson@thecharlottepost.com

Herbert L. White | EDITOR IN CHIEF

herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

Published weekly by The Charlotte Post Publishing Company Inc., 5118 Princess Street, Charlotte, NC 28269 (USPS #065500). Subscription is \$65 per year. Periodicals postage paid at Charlotte, NC. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Charlotte Post, PO Box 30144, Charlotte, NC 28230

# We're living in a Crowtheresque era

There's too much news delivered all the time, and much does not fit the definition of news. What once felt finite, coherent, and dependable has morphed into a ceaseless torrent of noise, with social media adding more static.

Hal Crowther wants us to remember that it was not always this way. A short twenty years ago, "there were a few dozen news sources, many of which had honestly earned the public's trust." Today, we face "hundreds of compelling, conflicting voices. And literally millions of strident voices, their motivation sinister or unknown— a host of unreliable narrators vying to tell America's story."

For readers craving a familiar, reliable, but razor-sharp voice, Crowther delivers in his new book, "Bible Belt Blues." He gives a bird's eye view of the swirling chaos of what passes as news with his funny, insightful, sharp, strident, sometimes scathing voice in this collection of essays from 2010 to 2023.

Crowther lives in Hillsborough with his wife, novelist Lee Smith. He has written for Time and News-

week and many other publications. His syndicated column was known for its keen cultural and political criticism. "Bible Belt Blues," published by Blair in Durham, is his fifth book.

Crowther writes: "What I've attempted to gather here is a series of rational reactions to irrational forces. It's my fondest hope that my plea for reason will not be mistaken for another version of the party line, another partisan pleading."

Crowther mourns the decline of the profession of journalism and the loss of its goal to "get the story right."

In the introduction, written just as Trump was inaugurated for the second time, Crowther happily admits how well he knows his audience: "Since no one who admires or respects Mr. Trump will be likely to read this book, I address myself only to his detractors."

The essays cover a range of events and topics: architecture, Dante, "randy" politicians or "randy" preachers, the queen of England, and the environment. In the foreword, Lee Smith says of Crowther's writing: "It's an honor and a revelation to be here when it happens." This dense nugget of a book is a revelation in itself, more sane, civil, and decent than the news tsunami. It is not light reading, but it is delightful.

Crowther does the same. But he sees his mission as somewhat benevolent, like an educator and reformer. If you argue well, he thinks, and tackle the right issues, you might just change people's minds and things might just gradually improve. For him, writing is the tool to shine a light on what's really happening

and help people see the world more clearly.

That's what he does in "Bible Belt Blues," spotlighting various events from the last decade. He nudges— even pushes— us to think with critical and clear minds. He's not afraid to give us his opinions, but he urges us to have our own. "This is what I think. Feel free to disagree," he challenges us.

In the last essay, "Out of Date," Crowther flirts with what it means to become obsolete. He finds a silver lining: "When you're out of date and committed to it, it frees you up some." He goes on, "The parade goes by, and it can be highly entertaining as long as you don't have to march, to learn the cadence and keep up the pace. You pick a choice seat on the reviewing stand and watch, unencumbered by performance anxiety, status, or public opinion."

Crowther himself won the Baltimore Sun's H.L. Mencken prize for his own writing in 1992. Crowther admired Mencken because he was relevant. He was shocked and appalled, but he mattered. He was widely read and utterly fearless, analyzing and sharply criticizing America and democracy without hesitation or fear of the consequences.

Crowther does the same.

But he sees his mission as somewhat benevolent, like an educator and reformer. If you argue well, he thinks, and tackle the right issues, you might just change people's minds and things might just gradually improve. For him, writing is the tool to shine a light on what's really happening

## Good news in Rust Belt, but America trends downward

Thirty miles south of Chicago, the Gary Works steel mill is getting a \$14 billion modernization, protecting tens of thousands of jobs.

Similar investments are underway in Pittsburgh. On the surface, these are the headlines American manufacturing needs. But the bigger story is far darker: across the country, American manufacturing is losing ground. Gary and Pittsburgh are exceptions, not the rule.

The pace of manufacturing growth between 2022 and 2024 meant that this year we were supposed to create as many as 200,000 new manufacturing jobs and position America to seize the future of the global automobile industry.

Instead, we are on track to lose nearly 80,000. Policy shifts in big, new labor-intensive industries like electric vehicles, battery assembly, and clean energy manufacturing threaten to cancel or delay projects that could have reshaped the landscape of American industry and delivered tens of thousands of good-paying jobs. At this rate, American automobile manufacturing risks becoming a gas-powered nostalgia act.

Most Americans now live at the same address: we live where there used to be a factory. And when that factory shut down, what shot up was joblessness, hopelessness, opioid and meth addiction. Suicide, homicide, violence, and multigenerational crushing poverty followed.

We know this not as abstraction but as lived reality: communities hollowed out, families broken, hope evaporated.

The consequences are more than economic. MIT research shows that communities exposed to trade shocks and manufacturing decline became more politically radicalized. Workers didn't just lose jobs—they became more susceptible to extremes across the political spectrum. The collapse of industry didn't just shrink wallets; it poisoned our politics.

I turned 21 the year NAFTA passed. Since then, because of NAFTA, China's permanent normal trade relations, automation, and foreign competition, 65,000 American factories have closed.

Entire towns vanished from economic maps, and the social and political cost has been immense.

Yet from 2022 to 2024, momentum toward rebuilding American manufacturing emerged. Clean energy manufacturing created 330,000 jobs. Companies announced \$265 billion in investments, with three out of four dollars flowing to counties hardest hit by factory closures. Battery plants in Arizona and Michigan. Solar manufacturing in Ohio and Texas. Wind turbine assembly in small towns. These were labor-intensive jobs—the kind that restore communities, not just output.

And yet, that momentum is slipping away. Policy shifts in big, new labor-intensive industries like electric vehicles, battery assembly, and clean energy manufacturing threaten to cancel or delay projects that could have reshaped the landscape of American industry and delivered tens of thousands of good-paying jobs. Gary and Pittsburgh are bright spots, but they cannot carry the country. Without broader investment, the address most Americans live at— where a factory used to be— remains unchanged.

Even if we modernize steel, the United States risks becoming a supplier nation: producing raw materials while China and other countries dominate the high-value, finished products of the 21st-century economy.

China already controls 65% of the global EV market, 18% of Europe, and over 80% of Latin America. By 2030, four of every ten cars worldwide will be built there. If we abandon EV and battery production, the steel we produce will feed foreign factories, not American workers. Without investment in EVs, batteries, and advanced auto manufacturing, American automobile production risks becoming a gas-powered nostalgia act— while China drives the future of cars, both electric and globally competitive.

Meanwhile, Washington is paralyzed. The federal government has shut down because parties cannot agree on the basics. This dysfunction mirrors our failure in industrial policy: if the country cannot unite to produce, it cannot protect the communities left behind by decades of decline.

It doesn't have to be this way. Bipartisan industrial policy could rebuild manufacturing and revive communities. Workers, whether in Republican or Democratic districts, want the same thing: stable, middle-class jobs in the places where factories used to stand.

The research is clear: rebuilding industry reduces the political toxicity that has been rising for decades. This is not partisan theory— it is practical necessity.

We've seen what fills the void when we abandon communities: addiction, violence, hopelessness, despair, and division. We've seen what happens when we invest: jobs, stability, opportunity, and even the possibility of greater comity and unity. America's future— and the health of our politics— depends on which path we choose.

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



BENJAMIN  
JEALOUS

## Special sessions, politics and pawns

Democrats and some in the media have gotten their panties in a wad over the legislature's refusal to call a special session in response to Gov. Josh Stein's request.

It wasn't the first time this happened. In 2017, Gov. Roy Cooper called for a special session to redraw legislative districts. The U.S. Supreme Court had declared 28 legislative districts were unconstitutional because they were racially gerrymandered. The legislature refused to call the special session Cooper requested— lawmakers said they were already in session. Besides, the governor had no authority regarding the drawing of legislative districts.

Let's be clear about special sessions. The governor may declare one, but the legislature doesn't have to convene a special session at a governor's call. Article II Section 2 of our Constitution states that a special session can only be called by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House. However, Article III, Section V (7) states, "The Governor may, on extraordinary occasions, by and with the advice of the Council of State, convene the General Assembly in extra session by his proclamation, stating therein the purpose or purposes for

which they are thus convened."

The language about "with the advice of the Council of State," was recently added— a response to Cooper's handling of COVID.

We doubt that the entire Council of State gave the "advice" called for. Nonetheless, the question is whether this is an "extraordinary occasion." Governor Stein and Democrats say yes. Republicans, especially Senator Berger and House Speaker Hall say that what the governor and Democratic legislators are doing is a political stunt. They don't plan to convene and take any votes until after the first of the year.

Governor Stein has gone on the counteroffensive, saying the lawmakers, "made the time to damage our democracy with the gerrymander. But when it comes time to protect people's health care? When it comes time to enact a comprehensive budget? They're on vacation, and they'll see us next year. All while North Carolina families pay the price. That's unacceptable."

Here's my spin on this back-and-forth finger pointing.

If what Stein is engaging in is a "political stunt," Berger, Hall and the Republicans can easily and quickly end it by just paying the Medicaid balance. After all, they claim they are already in session; besides, they have billions socked away in rainy day

funds. They are going to end up paying the amount sooner or later. If they don't, they really will come off looking stingy and uncaring.

Lawmakers knew there was some \$319 million more needed to ensure we fully funded Medicaid when they appropriated \$600 million in the mini-budget passed in July. But because they couldn't reach agreement about funding for other projects, they adjourned without acting. They had another chance when they recently came back into session to redraw congressional maps, but they didn't. Both Houses have agreed to pay, they are snared in disagreement about the budget itself.

Understand that this isn't just the ever-present Republican-Democrat disagreements. What we are witnessing is an inter-party disagreement among Republicans in the House and the Senate. When these issues occurred in the past, the Senate has pretty much run roughshod over the House, but new House Speaker Destin Hall has stiffened the spines of the House and Senator Berger isn't used to that. Besides, Berger is distracted. He is facing his most serious primary election challenge in more than a decade and is being cautious.

We are the only state that doesn't have a budget in place, again because of differences between the

House and Senate Republicans. The latest word from lawmakers is that no attempts will be made to pass a budget until after the new year. This means pay has been frozen for some 161,000 teachers and state employees for at least six months after the new budget year was supposed to begin.

If this truly is a political debate, the Republicans are losing it. They are looking like their brethren in Washington, unable to reach agreements. They aren't doing the jobs their constituents sent them to Raleigh to do. And they surely don't seem to care about those on lower incomes with healthcare needs.

It's not a good look for them. Meanwhile, Governor Stein is winning points with the media, Medicaid patients, with more compassionate Republicans (and there are some) and especially with Democrats.

The real main issue is that more than 3 million residents of our state who are Medicaid patients are threatened with losing their healthcare insurance. It is unconscionable that they are being used as pawns in a political discussion.

North Carolina used to be better than that.

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

## NC college campuses battle food insecurity

**Continued from page 3A** found impact on day-to-day life. Students experiencing very low, low, or marginal food security reported statistically higher rates of stress, poorer sleep, and lower perceived health than their peers.

"Food insecurity is not just that if somebody's hungry, they'll feel that physical feeling of being hungry," said Jessica Soldavini, an assistant professor at the Department of Nutrition at UNC-Chapel Hill who also worked on the study. "It's really impacting them in so many different ways, and their ability to succeed as a college student. So when we're thinking about the college student audience, you're just thinking about their ability to succeed in school. And you know, it's much more challenging if you're stressed out, if your sleep is being impacted, if you're not getting nutri-

tious food."

While this study did not examine the impact of food insecurity on students' academic performance, similar studies have found that food insecurity has a significant impact on GPA and graduation rates. In one study at a large Appalachian university, for example, food-insecure students had an average GPA of 3.3, while their food-secure counterparts had an average GPA of 3.5. In another study, food-insecure students were found to be less likely to graduate: non-first-generation students had an approximately 10% lower graduation rate if they were food-insecure, and the gap was slightly wider for first-generation students.

For Maureen Berner, a professor of public administration and government at UNC-Chapel Hill who also participated in the

study, it was one student's experience of food insecurity that first inspired her to study food insecurity on college campuses.

"Something that motivated me was giving talks about food insecurity in general, and then actually having a student who had a significant named scholarship to UNC but was still having difficulty making it through the weekends," Berner said. "They had come from a very limited-means background, and they were still struggling. And that just made me think, 'Wow. What is the role of educational institutions in supporting students?'"

In 2016, Berner and Soldavini, then a PhD student, conducted a campus-wide study that revealed that nearly 1 in 4 UNC-Chapel Hill students were food insecure.

Since then, Berner and Soldavini have collabo-

rated on a number of institutional studies across the state and beyond to examine the prevalence and effects of student food insecurity.

"This is a much larger philosophical issue: what's the role of a private university versus a public university? I think this is something that universities struggle with," Berner said. "We absolutely want every single student to succeed and to perform to the best of their ability. And, you know, UNC, we want people to go win Nobel prizes, and start new corporations, and do great things."

"Across the board, we want every student to be successful, right? How do we best do that, while also maintaining the responsibility of the university to the people of the state of North Carolina who are supporting the university?"



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Johnson C. Smith defensive end Jalen Alexander (6 in blue jersey) tackles Frostburg State running back K.J. Smothers in their NCAA Division II playoff game at McGirt Field. Frostburg State won 21-7 to advance to the second round. Alexander, a senior, finished with four tackles. Smothers rushed for 115 yards and three touchdowns on 16 carries.

## Flowers: 'You can't go backward'

*JC Smith's historic campaign included program's second CIAA title and most wins in a single season*

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

The final chapter on Johnson C. Smith's greatest football season is finished.

Frostburg State beat the Golden Bulls 21-7 in the first round of the NCAA Division II playoffs by controlling the line of scrimmage and forcing mistakes that led JCSU to play catch-up from the first quarter. The result left the No. 11-ranked Golden Bulls, seeded second in Super Region 1 for their first tournament berth, with a program best 10-2 record and valuable experience for the future.



Flowers

"Right now, it's [time] to love up my guys and make sure they understand that it's supposed to hurt, but then look back on what we've done," coach Maurice Flowers said. "We haven't had time to reflect on it, but the lessons that we know we're going to learn, that's easy to see. We had three turnovers, I believe, if not four. We know that's one of our things to our formula for success. Three turnovers, you can't win. And then we had mental errors. We just did some things where we just normally don't do with mental errors. And then we just did not

do our job on a consistent basis." Seventh seed Frostburg State (10-2) put its stamp on the game. The Bobcats seized a 14-0 halftime advantage - the first time all season JCSU failed to score in a half - and limited the Golden Bulls to 269 yards on offense, including 50 on the ground. Frostburg State's pass rush was relentless, sacking JCSU quarterback Kelvin Durham five times and forcing a pair of interceptions. The fatal blow, however, was a fumbled exchange between Durham and Bobby Smith at the Frostburg 29 early in the fourth

quarter that killed a potential game-winning drive.

"Frostburg is a great team," said Durham (18-of-28, 219 yards, TD), who set new JCSU single season records for total offense, touchdown passes, passing yards, and completion percentage. "They have a lot of great players on their team, but I just feel that we hurt ourselves. Not to make it about myself, but I had four turnovers. I haven't done that all season and it shows - we lost... so [I'm] just trying to reflect back and not think about how much bad I did but try to think positive about all the

Please see CHANGES | 8A

## Golden Bulls ultimately eliminated by their mirror image

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

Frostburg State had Johnson C. Smith's attention.

The Golden Bulls, who lost to the Bobcats 21-7 in the opening round of the Division II tournament last week, didn't look past them for a potential third meeting against CIAA rival Virginia Union, who they beat 45-21 for the conference title. To advance, JCSU, the No. 2 seed in Super Region 1 and No. 11 in the final regular season coaches poll, needed to take care of business at McGirt Field. As it turned

out, both CIAA programs bowed out.

"Not a chance about this being a trap game," Golden Bulls coach Maurice Flowers said at the final pregame press conference. "Our entire focus is on Frostburg State. The first day the bracket came out, of course, you see the whole bracket. We did our selection show gathering, and we saw that Virginia Union was there. That's all we did was see it. There's been no talk of it in our coaching staff and in coaching staff meetings within the team. ... All our focus is on Frostburg State, because there is no game with Union if we don't

handle this one."

Frostburg State, ranked 24th in the final regular season poll, shares similar traits to JCSU. Both have balanced offenses that average 32.5 (FSU) and 36.0 (JCSU) points per game and defenses ranked in the top 22 in the country. They share another attribute - physicality on both sides of the ball.

The Bobcats are "not as big as Valdosta State (who JCSU beat 28-16 on Sept. 6), but a very big team," Flowers said. "I would say they were similar. They have similarities of a couple of years ago when Walsh (Ohio) came

here, and Walsh was a big, physical football team, and this team is a much better Walsh-type of team, and we lost to Walsh, I'll add. We know we've got our work cut out for us (against) a very, very good football team, well coached, (10-2) football team, a champion, so you know they know how to fight for four quarters, and they know how to respond to adversity."

The Golden Bulls' CIAA run galvanized JCSU's campus and alumni support along the East Coast. To accommodate an expected bump in

Please see WINNING | 6A

## At last, Hough and West Charlotte square off

By Cameron Williams  
cameron.williams@thecharlottepost.com

At long last, Hough High's Huskies and West Charlotte Lions will battle.

Preseason drama unfolded when Hough, No. 1 in The Post's Magnificent Seven rankings, wanted to play No. 2 West Charlotte when both teams had a schedule opening. Lions coach Sam Greiner wanted to avoid it for RPI reasoning but knew they would likely see the Huskies in a postseason scenario.

"We knew that in all likelihood this would happen," he said. "We didn't know at what point in the playoffs we would play [before the brackets came out] but we knew that we would more than likely end up playing Hough. It works out perfect for both parties where this is a state semifinal game. The winner is the regional champion that goes to states to represent the West. Everyone is prepped for this game, and it is what it is. ... They are a great football team, and we are a really good team as well. A clash of the titans."

West Charlotte is 10-2 with losses coming to Greensboro Grimsley, which is ranked

Please see HUSKIES | 8A



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Hough High quarterback Ethan Royal (1) has led the Huskies to a 12-0 record going into Friday's 8A playoff game against West Charlotte. Hough is No. 1 in The Post's Magnificent Seven rankings.

## ESPN dropped ball on MEAC

ESPN folks are idiots!

They were geniuses a couple of months ago after deciding to move the South Carolina State-North Carolina Central football game up a day for a primetime broadcast. The game more than lived up to its billing, and many believed the winner would win the conference championship.

South Carolina State did, but no one, except the Delaware State folks, predicted the road to the Cricket Celebration Bowl in Atlanta would go through Dover, Delaware.

The matchup should've been on an ESPN network, not stream. If you think the SCSU-NCCU game was a classic, so was Saturday. Idiots!

At the MEAC Football Media Day in July, host LeSean McCoy spilled some beans on how DeSean Jackson and Michael Vick were all humble in public but were talking trash in chat rooms that they were going to win the MEAC.

Well, only one of them backed it up.

Delaware State, which was picked to finish last, opened the season with a loss at in-state rival Delaware, but the

BONITA  
BEST

## 'Hard work works' as Young and receivers develop chemistry

By Jeff Hawkins  
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

A hampered Bryce Young limped to the Mercedes-Benz Stadium podium, moments after gutting out a franchise-best passing performance.

The much-maligned Carolina Panthers quarterback grinned when asked about his injured right ankle, which was re-injured twice during a 30-27 overtime victory over the Atlanta Falcons.

"Yeah, it's good," Young said, opening his post-game press conference.

Rebounding from a poor Week 10 performance, Young compiled a single-game, team

record 448 passing yards, rallying the Panthers from a 14-point, second-quarter deficit. With coach Dave Canales digging deeper into the playbook, Young helped complete the comeback by delivering a go-ahead touchdown pass with 1:35 remaining in regulation and a season-long 54-yarder to set up the game-winning field goal.

Here's what stood out to the coach.

"Just the resilience," Canales said Monday. "(It was) an opportunity to show his teammates that he wants to be out there with those guys to win that game with them."

Also aided by the Panthers' young receiving corps creating better separation against the Falcons' predominant press coverage, Young completed 31-of-45 passes with three touch-

downs, including a 36-yard connection with Xavier Legette on a third-quarter fly route.

"There was a concerted effort to make sure Xavier had one-on-one opportunities," Canales said.

Is it time to set Young free?

Panthers' passing attack breaks out

Entering Week 11, the Panthers' passing offense averaged just 5.36 yards per play, which ranked 29th in the NFL. Their 164 passing yards per game ranked 30th. Considering they produced just 21 passing plays of 20 or more yards, it's little wonder why opponents shifted their defensive focus to stopping the Panthers' ground game.

Canales absorbed part of the blame.

Please see BRYCE | 6A

Please see SC STATE | 6A



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Johnson C. Smith football set new standards in coach Maurice Flowers' fourth season with a program-best 10 wins and the second CIAA title after a 56-year drought. The Golden Bulls also rallied the campus and alumni during their march to the conference championship and their first berth in the Division II playoffs. "We want to be an example on our campus, not just on the field," Flowers said, "but we want to be an example in the classroom and how we handle ourselves on campus in general."

## Winning season energized Golden Bulls fans, alumni

**Continued from page 5A**

ticket demand to match the turnout for last week's conference title game, temporary seating was added.

"We had fans coming from a lot of different places," Flowers said. "I was told buses came from New York, New Jersey, D.C. area; alumni buses came, but we know a large part of that crowd was from Charlotte, and those fans now make the short trip down here to Summit [Avenue]. We would expect a good crowd. I would really expect us to be something close to a sellout, if not a sellout."

Final announced attendance: 4,293, just short of McGirt Field's 4,500 capacity.

### Notes

On the injury front, linebacker Quavaris Crouch (Harding High) was active Saturday after missing the previous three games. Crouch, a Harding High graduate was credited with a tackle and pass breakup in his final collegiate contest, finished eighth in tackles among Golden Bulls with 25 (19 solo, 2.5 for loss) and a pair of sacks.

Football wasn't the only competition on campus last Saturday. It was

also the final day of the Tip-Off Classic at Brayboy Gym, where the Golden Bulls basketball team beat Morris (S.C.) College 97-80. Flowers, who played basketball as well as football at JCSU, is mindful of the impact winning can have on campus.

"This isn't anything that I'm saying or it's not anything that's groundbreaking, but if you have winning football, winning football should help you fuel other sports," he said. "It should help fuel enrollment at a university, so we take that very seriously. We want to be an example on our campus, not just on the field, but we want to be an example in the classroom also by how we handle ourselves in the classroom and how we handle ourselves on campus in general."

"But we want to because as we know Johnson C. Smith has long been a basketball school, known as a basketball school, and deservedly so. (Retired coach) Steve Joyner (is) a Hall of Famer, a legend and it just feels good to be able to add to that with our football program having the success that it is having. It should help every sport that we have."

## Changes coming after historic season for JC Smith football

**Continued from page 5A**

good we did."

Frostburg State, on the other hand, took care of the ball and controlled tempo via its ground attack, which ground out 188 yards. The Bobcats' offensive line gashed JCSU's front seven and K.J. Smothers turned those openings into 122 yards and three scores on 16 carries.

"They beat our butt and it hadn't happened to our defense all year long," Flowers said. "We dressed 10 defensive linemen... and we always pride ourselves on having a rotation. We just didn't play up to par on a consistent basis. We did some things today that we normally don't do. They did some good things, but we're a gap control defense. We had some guys not control their gap, so if you don't control your gap, there's free run in there."



Durban



Proctor

Even with an unceremonious exit, the Golden Bulls are taking lessons into the future. There'll certainly be roster changes with Durham and top receiver Deandre Proctor (career-best 14 receptions, 139 yards and a score) moving on but the foundation for another run is in place.

"When I was out there with the guys and we shared words, the offseason workouts we're going to have are going to be incredible," Flowers said. "The summer workouts we have, they're going to be incredible because now these guys have set a standard. We have a standard of how we practice, how we go about our business, to keep building on where we are right now. I'm excited. Disappointed for the moment, yes, but excited for the future of the program, because you can't go backwards."

## SC State, Delaware State earned football respect and believers

**Continued from page 5A**

game revealed so much more.

The Hornets' defense showed talent and potential, while running back Marquis Gillis showcased the good things to come on offense with 123 yards.

Delaware State's three-game win streak didn't silence the doubters, however, since one team was a CIAA member and another was winless. The Hor-

nets' next two losses to Sacred Heart and Monmouth only proved they were pretenders all along. Right?

The mark of a well-coached team is it gets better as the season progresses despite drama on or off the field.

Jackson admitted the transfer portal was a help and a hindrance with egos and clashing personalities, and yet the staff managed to keep it all together to get

to this moment.

"We all fell in love with the grind, we fell in love with the potential," said the future MEAC coach of the year. "...There is a lot of talent here. They just needed love and encouragement."

SCS coach Chenniss Berry can empathize with the Hornets' lack of respect from the media. Bulldog fans weren't too keen on his hiring two years ago.

It didn't matter that he

### « HIGH SCHOOLS »

## Huskies and Lions meet in third round of NC playoffs

**Continued from page 5A**

14th in the nation by MaxPreps. The other was to Rock Hill South Pointe, South Carolina's top-ranked team and in the hunt for a state title.

Hough, the 8A West No. 1 seed is 12-0 with marquee wins over Rock Hill South Pointe, Independence, Mooresville, Myers Park and West Forsyth. Huskies coach De-Shawn Baker said it is great for Mecklenburg County to have two teams this good to represent CMS.

"This game means a lot," he said. "For the Charlotte area and the whole city to have teams of this caliber. The whole city will try to come out for this one. I just think it's a staple of North Carolina football. North Carolina has good players and good teams, too. Everyone talks about South Carolina, Florida, and California of the world, but we have top tier talent here too. This game will show that. We know it's a big game. All the hype around it won't matter when the ball is kicked off at 7 p.m. on Friday night."

Greiner and Baker have a mutual respect and acknowledge both have sound teams that make worthy competitors. West Charlotte has scored 417 points this season to just 82 allowed. Hough has 473 points and just 93 points against them. The Huskies are ranked No. 1 in the 8A classification and the Lions are second.

"West Charlotte is the most talented team in the state," Baker said. "There's no denying that. I will never deny that. I give them credit. They have grown a lot. They had a lot of sophomores last year, some freshmen. So, they've played together for a year now, and they're clicking and they're

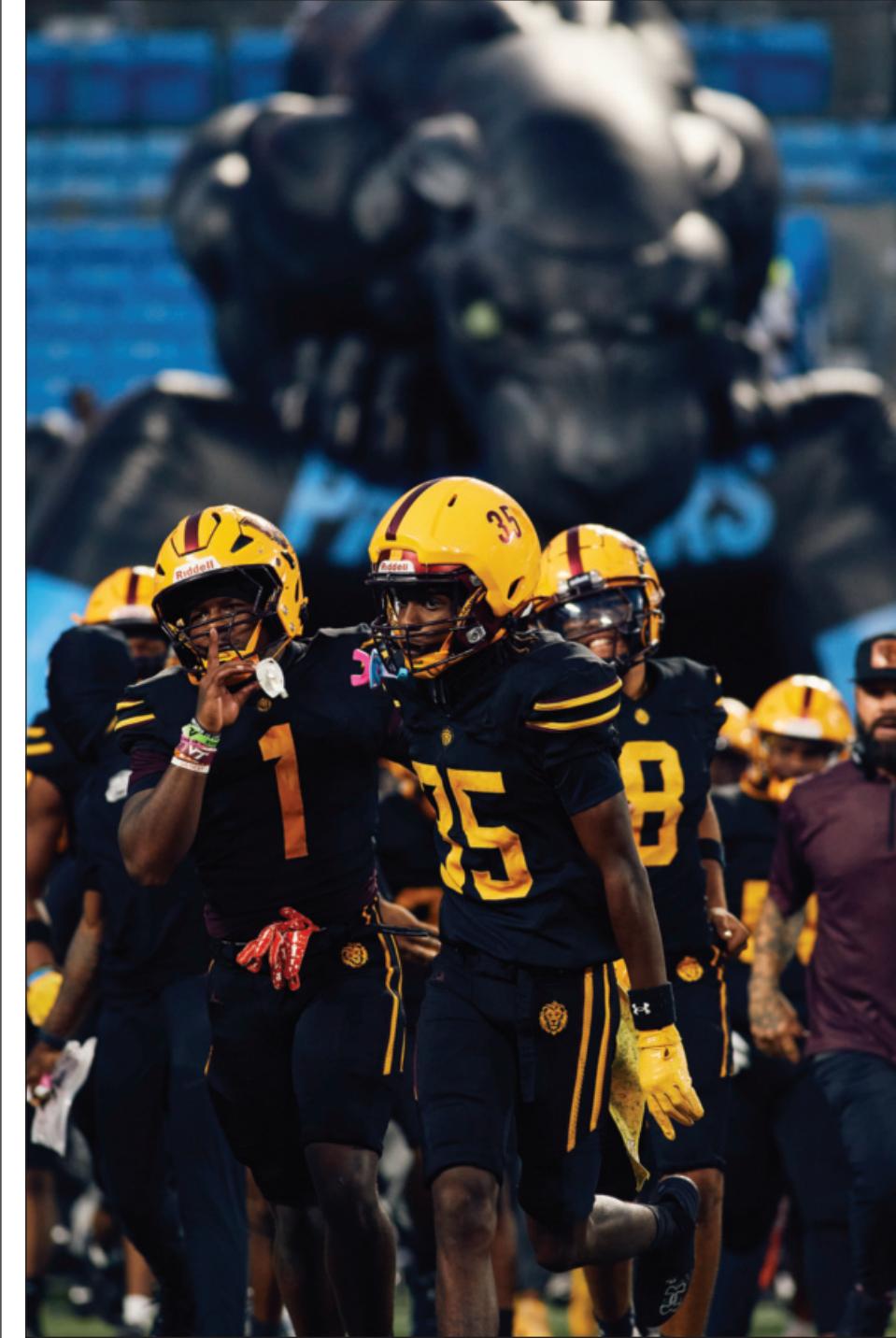
rolling. I expect their confidence level to be high. I expect them to come in here and do what they do. But again, we don't let it get too big. We are not going to get into all the rah-rah stuff unless they bring it to us."

Greiner said after winning last year's 3A championship that West Charlotte went from the hunters to hunted. While Hough may not have a state title, Baker feels being undefeated in 2025 and unbeaten against Mecklenburg County rivals since he has been at Hough makes the Huskies the team to beat.

"We are still the hunted," Baker said. "Yes, we haven't won a state championship and there is no denying that. So, when people say this or that about us, I don't get upset about it because we haven't won the big one. But everyone knows there isn't a team in Charlotte that has beaten us in however long. I tell the kids all the time we are like Alabama. No matter who it is we play, they are going to give us their best each and every Friday night. So, the standard is the standard, and we just try to keep the main thing the main thing and that is to play our best ball each time we take the field."

Greiner encourages fans to show up for two teams that on paper are as equal as they come.

"Both of these teams are going to be well prepared for one another," he said. "It doesn't matter the records, whoever the best team is will prevail. I know the coaches on both sides are going to do the best we can do. There is no clear advantage to either team. I know it's cliché, but you have to come see this one for yourself."



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

West Charlotte High, No. 2 in the Magnificent Seven, overcame a 1-2 start to fashion a nine-game win streak going into the Lions' third round 8A playoff game against Hough.

## Bryce Young and Panthers receiver corps developing chemistry and experience

**Continued from page 5A**

"It's a collective group effort and it starts with myself," he said Friday. "(We) have to make sure we put a good plan together and put them in position to be successful (by) running routes that complement their skillsets."

"From there, it's just about chemistry and timing, something the guys have been working tirelessly on for weeks now. They continue to grow together. They continue

to make strides and I'm excited to see them out there (against the Falcons).

"What I know is hard work works."

It did against Atlanta.

Connecting with nine different receivers, Young registered a career-best 212 yards on passes of at least 10 air yards. He also finished with 302 yards during in-rhythm attempts (within 2.5 to 4 seconds), the second-most among QBs this season, according to Next Gen Stats.

The Panthers pulled off a key NFC South win by discovering an aerial attack against what was the league's top pass defense. The Falcons previously failed to surrender more than 221 passing yards this season.

Rookie Tetairoa McMillan, who continues to display traits of a future receiving cornerstone, led the Panthers with eight catches for 130 yards and two touchdowns. He was one of five players with at least 52 receiving yards as Young broke

Cam Newton's previous single-game record of 432 yards. Legette, who had zero catches against the Saints, hauled in four passes for 83 yards. The 36-yard TD was a career-best effort. Coker added a 2-point conversion.

"I'm pleased with the group in general, building on the hard work they've put in," Canales said.