



The Oconee Enterprise



Rec soccer grows in Oconee

Program has 1,200 athletes. Lifestyles, **A6**



City plans vote on senior living

Development seeks a rezone. Business, **B4**



Warriors win region title

OCHS boys soccer team sweeps region. Sports, **B1**

Coming next week

We'll report on Ga. 316 improvements.

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Jury delivers justice in murder of Joey Jackson

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

Waiting for an ambulance around midnight on July 16, 2019, Sue Gordon cried out to her 19-year-old grandson, "Just hold on."

"I can't," he bellowed, as blood drained from gunshot wounds on his left arm and chest.

"He's getting cool to the touch," said the first deputy on scene, Sgt. Andrew Henderson.

Recalling the heinous night she lost her eldest grandson, Gordon told 12 strangers in a courtroom how, as a trained nurse, she kept thinking to herself, "How can I fix this?"

Lying on the floor, Jackson wailed in pain, "I'm gone!"

"I told him, 'You are not gone. Look at me; you are not gone,'" Gordon testified, as tears welled up in her eyes.

On that tragic night, Jackson left his grandparents' house to buy just \$30 of marijuana from a teenage drug dealer, Akhemu Dunston. A Pontiac G8 pulled up at the corner of Whipoorwill Road and Cumberland Drive. From the passenger seat, Dunston stole Jackson's phone. In a frantic moment, Jackson jumped on the side of the car, cradling the window as he tried to get his phone



Teenager Joey Jackson was murdered in 2019. [File photo]

back. The driver, Dallas McCabe, accelerated, and as Jackson was being dragged by the car, Ryan O'Neal pulled out a 9 mm handgun and shot him.

Last Thursday, a jury convicted O'Neal of malice murder. Superior Court Judge Lawton Stephens sentenced O'Neal to life in prison with the possibility of parole after 30 years and five years in confinement for possession of a firearm during the com-

mission of a felony.

The other two defendants, Akhemu Dunston and Dallas McCabe, will be tried for murder at a later date.

All three participated in their own way, prosecutor Sheila Ross said in her closing statements.

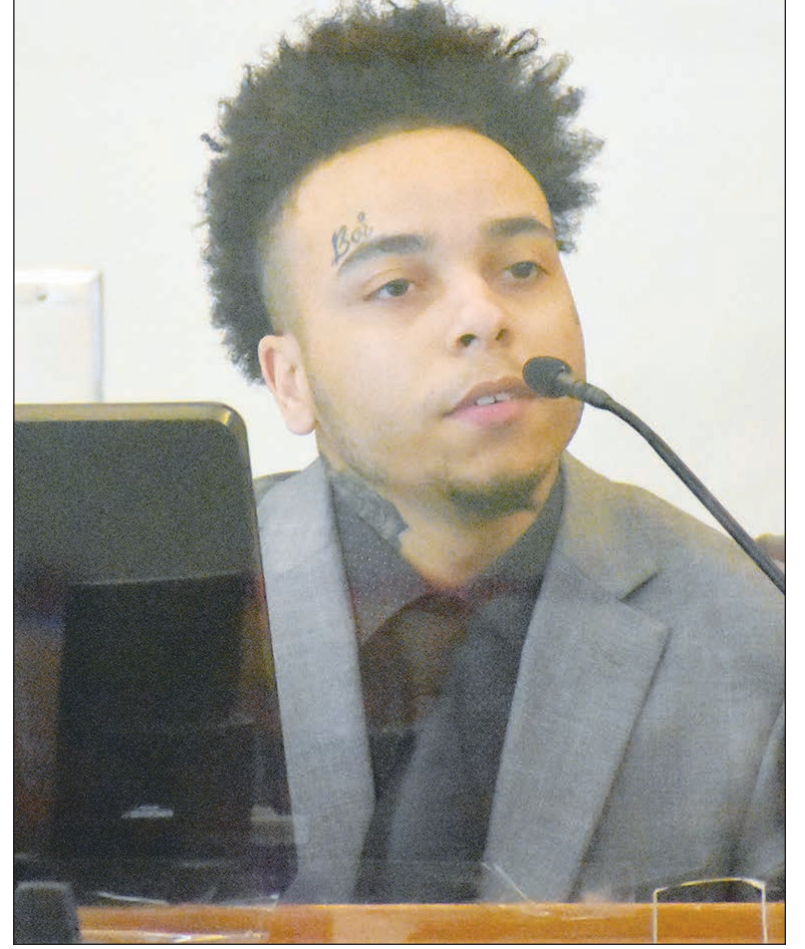
"The act of one is the act of them all," said Ross. "You can't get away with murder just by going to kill someone with a bunch of your friends and then blame each other for it... After Joey Jackson is shot, they leave together. They leave him there to die."

Early in the trial, a forensic pathologist testified that Jackson's gunshot wounds would not have been fatal had he received immediate medical attention.

But because none of the defendants called 911, Jackson lost too much blood by the time he came back to his grandparents' house about two hours later. His body was covered in abrasions, and he had multiple skull fractures.

O'Neal never testified during the trial, but during a sentencing hearing, he took the witness stand and told Jackson's family that he was sorry for the young man's death.

SEE TRIAL PAGE A3



Ryan Timothy O'Neal, 20, of Athens, was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole after 30 years for the 2019 murder of Joey Jackson. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

Guilty

O'Neal shows no remorse

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

Despite a five-day trial of emotional testimony, harrowing autopsy photos and body camera footage of Joey Jackson bleeding out in his grandparents' arms, Ryan Timothy O'Neal struggled to remember the name of the young man he was convicted of killing.

Speaking to Jackson's family during a sentencing hearing, O'Neal said he was sorry for their loss but paused when he realized he didn't know Jackson's full name.

O'Neal's apology was not an admission of guilt. In fact, he maintained his innocence and accused the Oconee Sheriff's Office of doing "sloppy" police work by investigating and arresting him.

He referred to himself as the "fall man" and said, "The system is rigged up. The system is unfair."

"Oconee, y'all are doing your job, but quite frankly, y'all are unfair," he said. "The jury is unfair. Y'all don't understand the life of a Black man who grows up in a neighborhood that I have been a part of."

O'Neal said that a more urban community may have found him not guilty.

Defense attorney Kim Stephens said O'Neal had no prior criminal record in spite of the fact that he grew up "in a neighborhood where streets have power. He grew up in a place where fear was a way of life."

Prosecutor Sheila Ross told the

judge, "This doesn't have anything to do with urban, and this doesn't have anything to do with rural."

Ross emphasized that O'Neal had no remorse for his role in Jackson's death.

"I'm truly sorry what these people did, and what they planned out premeditated," said O'Neal, referring to the other defendants, Akhemu Dunston and Dallas McCabe, who will be tried separately.

"I wish I never got into that car," said O'Neal. "They never would have had a fall man... Y'all do not understand the life of a Black man who grows up to know that threats are real."

Ross said, "He wants to blame everyone but himself for his actions."

"He's not had a chance to live a life," said Kim Stephens. "Parole is an incentive for this young man to grow up...to do right and do everything he can to better himself."

Ross said that while O'Neal gets to live his life, Jackson's life ended at only 19 years, 5 months and 15 days.

In a public statement, Oconee Sheriff James Hale said, "To the family of Joey Jackson, I send my sincerest sympathy for the loss of your young family member. I know that this verdict does not bring him back to you, but hopefully it will give you some measure of peace knowing that his killer has been brought to justice."

Oconee woman turns 100

BY JULIA FECHTER AND MICHAEL PROCHASKA

Cloaked in a colorful blanket and donning a purple sash, Mary Davis resembled royalty on her 100th birthday.

The Watkinsville Garden Club recently celebrated the milestone by holding a drive-by party, in which dozens of people dropped off gifts ranging from cards and flowers to a signed photograph of her with former University of Georgia football coach Vince Dooley.

Seated in front of Briarwood Baptist Church, Mary waved to her friends with a giant grin.

Watkinsville Garden Club President Pam Hendrix said Mary's birthday presented the best of both worlds: a way for the club to both meet again and a celebration of one of their most diligent members.

Mary has been a member of the Watkinsville Garden Club since 1983 and was the club's president from 1985-1986. She's also served as a hostess at the Governor's Mansion on behalf of the club.

"We'll probably never have another member who turns 100 who's as active as she is," Hendrix said. "She is an inspiration to all of us."

SEE 100-YEAR-OLD A8



Briarwood Baptist Church member Mary Davis turned 100 last month. [Photo by Julia Fechter]

Turn lane to be added to Epps Bridge Parkway loop 10

BOC chairman talks upcoming road projects

Editor's note: This is part one of a two-part series on road improvements. Next week, we will report on long-term goals for Ga. 316.

BY JULIA FECHTER AND MICHAEL PROCHASKA

The Oconee Board of Commissioners on Tuesday approved a \$382,335 project to have a continuous right-turn lane coming off the Epps Bridge Parkway interloop in front of the Waffle House. Also, the left-turn

lane basin as motorists depart from Epps Bridge Parkway onto the Oconee Connector will be expanded by removing a portion of the concrete median.

The contract went to Pittman Construction, which was the lowest responsive bidder. The BOC authorized a budget transfer from the fund balance to begin the project this spring. Oconee Public Works Director Woodall said the county has been working with the Georgia Department of Transportation to design a plan with the goal of reducing area accidents.

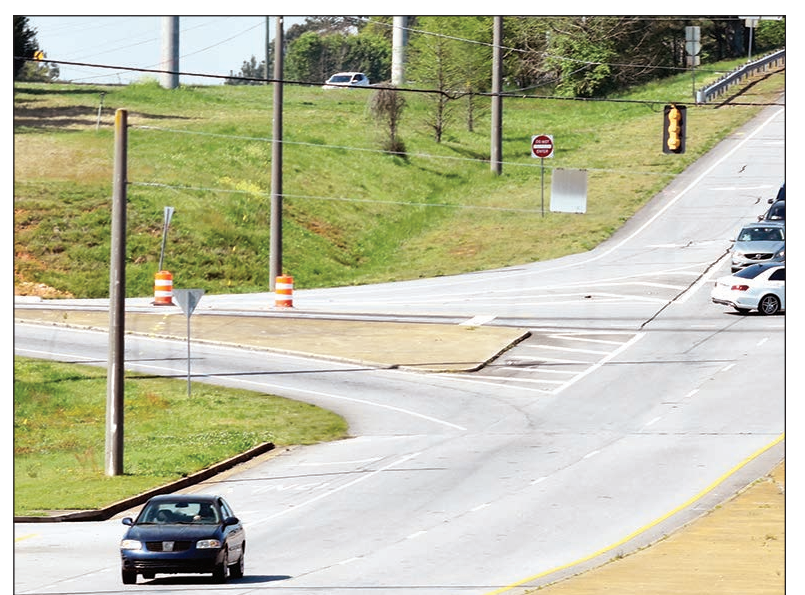
At a BOC town hall last month, Chairman John Daniell said that area sees about three accidents per week.

During the annual State of Oconee presentation last week at the Oconee Civic Center, Daniell gave an overview of forthcoming transportation projects to members of the Oconee County Chamber of Commerce.

Imminent projects

Construction will soon begin on a widening project on the section of Hog Mountain Road from Butler's Crossing to Welbrook Road. In subsequent phases, turn lanes will be extended, travel lines will be widened and walking paths will be added to go all the way from Butler's Crossing to Welbrook Road.

SEE ROADS PAGE A3



The 10 Loop's off-ramp right turn lane onto Epps Bridge Parkway will be extended. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

This issue was mailed Wednesday, April 7 from Watkinsville and Athens, GA. Please inform your post office if it arrives late.

