



In Our 137th Year

Serving Oconee County

# The Oconee Enterprise

50 CENTS • VOLUME 138 • NUMBER 35

THE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER OF Donna and Joe Tiller, Happy Anniversary!

THURSDAY • 2 SEPTEMBER 2021



## Watkinsville answers lawsuit

City denies fault over stormwater. News, **A3**



## Perspectives continues

Pottery show goes through Sept. 12. Business, **B3**



## Philo fills up the record books

Prince QB throws for more than 550 yards. Sports, **B1**

## Coming next week

We'll report on a possible Watkinsville bypass.

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This issue was mailed Wednesday, Sept. 1, from Watkinsville and Athens, GA. Please inform your post office if it arrives late.



# OCAF hires local artist as new director

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

The Oconee Cultural Arts Foundation has hired Athens native Wendy Cooper to succeed LaRuchala Murphy as its executive director. Her first official day will be Sept. 8.

Cooper, a graduate of the University of Georgia and the Savannah College of Art and Design, worked at the Georgia Museum of Art for 12 years.

After she graduated from SCAD, Murphy operated a gallery in Savannah. She then accepted a teaching job in art and photogra-

phy at Southeast Missouri State University. She also worked in art-related nonprofits in Santa Barbara, California.

"Then, I decided it was time to come home after 20 years," Cooper said, explaining that she and her

husband moved back here in March.

"I feel like everything I have worked up to this point has prepared me for this," she said. "I love the mission of OCAF and how it supports arts education in the community."

The partnerships the organization has formed with UGA and the University of North Georgia have proven invaluable, she said, adding that she would like to see more people in the age demographic of 30 to 50 participate in arts classes.

She'd also like to introduce performing arts, such as music and dance, into OCAF's repertoire.

In other news, a story on OCAF's Perspectives, which runs through Sept. 12, can be found on B3 of this issue of The Oconee Enterprise.



Newly hired OCAF Director Wendy Cooper is a graduate of the University of Georgia and the Savannah College of Art and Design. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

# Oconee girl wins big in Pony Finals

BY MORGAN PHILLIPS

Most 10-year-old girls walk through life. Not Parker Howard. Parker Howard gallops through life on top of her horse, Greymeadows Vogue. Together, they soar through the air. They race toward victory. They win Pony Finals.

Parker, a High Shoals Elementary School student, won first place in the "10 and under 2020 medium green" pony division and won third overall in the "2020 medium green" pony division in the United States Equestrian Federation Pony Finals in Lexington, Kentucky, on Aug. 13 of this year.

"It felt really good because I love jumping," Parker said. "It felt like I was soaring through the air."

Parker and Greymeadows Vogue went through eight jumps on the obstacle course.

"It wasn't that difficult because I knew my pony was going to jump every single jump," she said.

Parker fell in love with horses at 6 years old when a friend invited her to a birthday party at Pecan Lane Farm, a hunter-jumper facility in Bishop, where she got to ride a horse for the first time.

"I just fell in love with it," Parker said. "[My parents] signed me up, and here I am."

At the age of 6, Parker met and fell in love with Greymeadows Vogue, whom she affectionately calls Bella. She and her family traveled to Washington, D.C., to purchase the



Parker Howard, a High Shoals Elementary School student, has loved horses since she was 6 years old. [Submitted photo]

horse.

"She just felt comfortable and like a really good fit for me," Parker said. It may have been love at first sight for these two, but the discomforts of training plagued the relationship at first.

When they first brought Greymeadows Vogue to Pecan Lane Farm, where Parker trains, she threw Parker off at every lesson, but Parker got back on and practiced over and over with her.

At last, the girl and the horse clicked. SEE PONY PAGE A3



Parker Howard won first place in the "10 and under 2020 medium green" pony division in the United States Equestrian Federation Pony Finals in Lexington, Kentucky. [Photo by Leslie Potter/US Equestrian]

# Judge rules mistrial in a rape case

Prosecutor under DA accused of misconduct

BY JOE JOHNSON

Editor's note: Joe Johnson, publisher of the online news source Classic City News shared this story with The Oconee Enterprise. By press time, we made several edits, additions and updates to this story.

The case of a former Oconee high school student charged with sexually assaulting another student three years ago ended with a mistrial last Thursday due to prosecutorial misconduct.

Superior Court Judge Lawton Stephens has ordered a retrial for the case of State of Georgia v. Rahul Joseph Das.

The defendant's attorney, Morris "Mo" Wiltshire, said he will file a motion asking the judge to rule that the state is barred from attempting to retry the case due to prosecutorial misconduct.

"It requires a separate hearing from granting the mistrial," Wiltshire said. "A hearing will be held on that motion well before the Nov. 1, 2021 next scheduled trial date."

Western Judicial Circuit District Attorney Deborah Gonzalez issued the following statement: "I cannot comment on the merits of a pending case ... My office takes all matters regarding constitutional rights very seriously."

Two prosecutors—assistant district attorneys Robert Schollmeyer and Kyle Bowland—face possible sanctions up to and including disbarment after an anticipated complaint is filed with the State Bar of Georgia.

Schollmeyer is accused of withholding information told to him by the victim.

In 2010, the St. Louis Beacon reported that Schollmeyer was part of the prosecution of an innocent man who had been imprisoned for more than 14 years for the murder of his mother.

The rulling said Schollmeyer coaxed false testimony from witnesses, according to the St. Louis Beacon, as well as St. Louis Public Radio.

Gonzalez hired Schollmeyer this year as an assistant district attorney. He previously worked in Fulton County.

In the Oconee County case of State of Georgia v. Rahul Joseph Das, the victim underwent a forensic examination by Athens-Clarke County Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners, during which she said she had no other sex within five days of the assault, Wiltshire told Classic City News.

The victim was also interviewed by a police detective, and on Sept. 6, 2018, Das was arrested on charges of rape and aggravated sodomy.

The defense attorney said that DNA evidence recovered from her shorts contained genetic material of at least three male individuals, one of whom was alleged to have been Das.

SEE MISTRIAL PAGE A2

# ESP rolls out new camp program

BY MORGAN PHILLIPS

At Extra Special People's inaugural Adventure Camp this summer, children with disabilities could do things they had never done before.

"Camping is definitely not easy for a lot of our families, so giving them the opportunity to go camping, to go fishing, to do archery, to ride a horse... that was the main goal," said Sarah Farriba, an ESP AmeriCorps member, who led Adventure Camp.

ESP Adventure Camp served around 150 campers at Camp Hooray in Jefferson. And it took about 120 ESP summer staff members to give those kids a summer they would never forget.

"I want them to thrive in life, and I want them to have everything that everybody else does," said Farriba. "Being able to lead this camp this summer really was a dream."

When designing Adventure Camp, Farriba wanted a "new camp feel than what we're used to."

That began with figuring out how to make Camp Hooray the most accessible it could be for campers.

Adaptive platforms were built so campers with limited upper mobility could still do archery.

Another part of that "new camp feel" was giving partici-

pants adventure books in which they received sticker awards for each activity.

ESP even added afternoon programs like fishing and archery for participants to attend during the school year.

ESP is in the midst of growth, especially at Camp Hooray.

The goal is to turn Camp Hooray into an all-accessible camp.

"There's nothing like it for people with disabilities," Marcella Genut, content coordinator for ESP, said of the nonprofit.

"We've had families move from Florida, Tennessee and other states to come experience ESP, so we're really hoping in the next few years to bring it across the nation."

Last weekend, ESP hosted its annual Big Jump at Skydive Monroe.

Over 60 people, including a handful of teachers, jumped out of an airplane as part of a months-long fundraiser for the Watkinsville-based organization.

ESP has the support of not only individuals but also other nonprofits and civic organizations.

For example, Pilot Club of Oconee recently awarded ESP a grant for \$2,000 in support of its annual summer camp.



Extra Special People's new Adventure Camp allows young people with disabilities the opportunity to enjoy equestrian and other outdoor activities. [Submitted photo]



An ESP'er learns about archery at Adventure Camp, which was held over the summer. [Submitted photo]