



In Our 138th Year

Serving Oconee County

The Oconee Enterprise

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THE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER OF Tim Mackey

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New businesses open downtown

Chamber holds a ribbon cutting. Business, **B3**



Lady Wolverines hit region play

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Coming next week

We'll report on a new Watkinsville horse farm.

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Nedra Johnson began her tenure in the town government as a clerk and was successfully elected mayor and then served on the council for a number of years. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

Nedra Johnson leaves a legacy as Bishop doyenne

BY MORGAN PHILLIPS

Town of Bishop doyenne Nedra Johnson has retired from public service after having worked in local government since 1985.

Johnson got her start in city government as a clerk taking the minutes and paying the bills for the Bishop Town Council. Five years later, Johnson became mayor. The most challenging part for Johnson was being accepted as a female mayor.

"I was treated with the most respect, but I heard later that some of the council said, 'Oh Lord, we got a woman. Let's see what happens,'" Johnson said.

Johnson wasn't the first female mayor of Bishop. There was one in the 1940s, but she accidentally burned down the depot while cleaning it, and Johnson joked that some of the men who commented about her becoming mayor may have been thinking

about that incident.

As mayor, Johnson is proud of getting zoning regulations implemented.

"When I took over as mayor, there was no zoning in Bishop at all . . . and with the council's help and with a lawyer's help, we got the zoning regulations set up for the first time," Johnson said.

Another accomplishment for Johnson was having a hand in getting a book on the history of Bishop written.

The Council paid Celestea Gentry Sharp to write "Bishop, Georgia: The Ancient Roots, Rich History and Enduring Spirit of a Southern Crossroads Community." It was first published in 1996 and has since been through two reprintings, Johnson said.

"Our history is preserved in writing," she said. "The town may disappear one structure at a

time, but it's written history will be there, and I'm proud of that."

She's seen a lot of change over the years but is hopeful for the town's future.

"It's small. I don't know everybody in town but I almost do," Johnson said. "It's still a friendly town, and that to me is the kind of atmosphere we want to keep in Bishop."

Johnson said she'll miss not knowing all the inside information and not being able to vote.

"Leading people is kind of like leading cats sometimes," she reflected. "It's been a good run. I've got no complaints, [and] I worked with good council members."

As to what comes after, Johnson said she'll stay busy.

"I've got too many other things to do," Johnson said. "For an 84-year-old woman, I'm staying busy."

Murder defendant had previously broken into home of a councilman

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

According to former Watkinsville City Councilman Dan Matthews, the suspect of last

week's double murder, Peyton Valor Moyer, 20, had previously been arrested for breaking and entering his house "numerous times."



Moyer

At the time, the victims of last week's murder—Moyer's mother and stepfather, Ashley Schutza and Benjamin Smith—were renting a home in Morgan Manor subdivision. They then moved to Hog Mountain Road, where Moyer allegedly shot and killed Schutza and Smith.

Oconee County Sheriff James Hale said Moyer has obtained a public defender for legal council and has not opened up about the crime with which he has been charged.

Moyer has a criminal history that includes prior arrests for criminal trespass family violence; giving false name, address or

birthdate law enforcement; loitering and prowling; battery family violence and cruelty to children in the third degree.

Several years ago, he assaulted his stepfather and made a threat to his mother. According to a June 2021 plea agreement, Moyer was ordered to 12 months probation, mental health evaluation treatment and 40 hours community service.

Moyer had attended Oconee County High School but was last enrolled during his ninth grade year, according to Oconee County Schools Director of Communications Anisa Sullivan Jimenez.

In related news, there is a GoFundMe page to support the two children of the victims. The page is under the title "Support for the Smith and Edmunds family." However, the organizer disabled new donations as of press time on Tuesday. The amount raised at the time was \$6,250.

"Our goal here is to make monetary issues the least of their concerns as they grieve their parents," according to the page.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of the victims," according to a statement from the Oconee Sheriff's Office.

Some voting precincts to consolidate in 2022

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

The Oconee Board of Elections recently voted to merge several polling locations, thereby reducing the number of precincts from 10 to 8.

The people who voted at Antioch Christian Church (previously known as the Antioch precinct) last year will now be voting at Poplar Springs Baptist Church as the Colham Ferry precinct.

Poplar Springs Baptist Church is located at 2700 Colham Ferry Road.

The people who voted at Nations Church last year (previously known as the East Oconee precinct) will now be voting at Oconee County Civic Center as the Civic Center polling precinct.

The Oconee County Civic Center is located at 2661 Hog Mountain Road next to Oconee County High School.

This is the second time in recent history that the Elections Office has consolidated precincts after having merged High Shoals into North Oconee and Farmington into Bishop.

As previously reported, Georgia House District 121 Rep. Marcus Wiedower will represent all but two precincts in Oconee County.

State 120 House District Rep. Houston Gaines will represent the citizens who vote in the Bogart and Marswood Hall precincts.

Oconee Elections Director

Rebecca Anglin has said that the consolidation of precincts reduces expenses and number of poll workers and provides more space for the newer voting machines.

According to a legal advertisement, citizens wishing to object to the change must file a formal objection with the Oconee County Board of Elections and Registration no later than 5 p.m. Jan. 31.

In an interview with journalist Tim Bryant of the podcast "Mission: TimPossible," Anglin said the Oconee Civic Center will have more voting machines with adequate staff to handle the additional voters.

She also said that the longest wait time through the last presidential election was only 20 minutes.

"People wait for a Subway sandwich that long," quipped Bryant.

2022 will be a significant election year with local and state seats up for re-election in May and November.

In the past, early voting was held at the Oconee Elections Office. Last year, however, early voting took place at the Oconee Civic Center.

Anglin said that the Civic Center will not be able to host early voting for the May 24 Primary due to a scheduling conflict.

The Oconee County Elections Office is working on an alternative location that has yet to be announced.



From left, Sarah Bell's sisters, Glenda Chastain and Marie Davis, listen as Watkinsville Mayor Brian Brodrick speaks about Bell's influence in the community. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

Tree pays tribute to late civic leader

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

Watkinsville Mayor Brian Brodrick called it "God's providence" that the leaves of a Florida Flame Red Maple tree were still hanging on just before Christmas.

Those bright, red leaves represented the tireless and persistent civic leadership of the late Sarah Bell, who died Dec. 28, 2020 following a short battle with pancreatic cancer.

Last month, the city of Watkinsville unveiled a marker at the base of the tree in Harris Shoals Park in honor of Bell.

Bell's sisters, Glenda Chastain and Marie Davis, spoke about how much Bell loved the outdoors and playing in the dirt as a child.

Before her passing, Bell was chaplain of the Watkinsville Garden Club and had been on an



A marker at the base of the memorial tree reads, "Archiving the past while shaping the future." [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

advisory committee for Harris Shoals Park. She also served as chair of the Oconee Republican Party and president of the Oconee Historical Society.

The marker at the base of the tree reads, "Archiving the past while shaping the future."

"I don't think there's a better way of describing Sarah," said Watkinsville Mayor Brian Brodrick.

"She was tireless. . . . She was always looking out for the best of her community."

Bell was considered a watchdog of local government and even ran multiple times for elected office. In fact, she once came within 100 votes of defeating former Board of Commissioners Chairman Melvin Davis.

"She had great opinions, and she wasn't shy about offering them," said Brodrick. "But it came from a place of caring. It didn't come from a place of vitriol or nastiness. . . . She was giving you a perspective, and that perspective was valuable."

Brodrick added that Bell was part of the bedrock of our civic community. For many years, she ran a no-kill animal shelter. With a doctorate in English from the University of Georgia, Bell taught in both public and private schools for three decades.

"To know Sarah is to be in the presence of a big-hearted, caring soul, a keen mind and an unforgettable sense of humor," long-time friend Emily Archer previously told The Oconee Enterprise.



The people who voted at Nations Church last year will now be voting at Oconee County Civic Center. [File photo]

This issue was mailed Wednesday, Jan. 5, from Watkinsville and Athens, GA. Please inform your post office if it arrives late.

