



In Our 137th Year

Serving Oconee County



# The Oconee Enterprise

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THE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER OF Maridee Williams, Happy Birthday!

THURSDAY • 30 DECEMBER 2021



## Costco said yes to Oconee

County offered incentives to the big-box retailer. Business, **B3**



## Senior living proliferates

Developments get approved. Business, **B3**



## NOHS starts off strong campaign

North Oconee boys rattle off wins. Sports, **B1**

## Coming next week

We'll report more on the double murder.

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## Special Issue

This is a special edition of The Oconee Enterprise in which we look back at the biggest stories of the year. For the front page, we have chosen the successful prosecution of the 2019 murder of Joey Jackson and the unsolved 2021 murder of Elijah Wood, as well as the myriad new developments coming to Watkinsville.

For our Business page, the biggest stories of the year are Costco announcing it will build a store at Epps Bridge Centre II and the approval of a number of senior living facilities throughout Oconee County.

Also inside the paper, we have compiled some of the biggest news stories and quotes of the year. In May, for example, the Board of Commissioners denied a controversial rezone that could have allowed a new shopping center anchored by Publix at the Oconee Connector.

Once again, many of the biggest stories of the year involved the city of Watkinsville.

Some were great windfalls for the community, such as the Oconee County Library committing to relocate to Wire Park in the near future and the allowance of breweries.

Others were big surprises, such as the abrupt resignation of Mayor Bob Smith in early spring and the firing of a police officer in the fall.

We hope you enjoy our compilation of the moments that defined 2021.



The reward money for information about the man who killed Elijah Wood is \$50,000. This billboard is on Watkinsville's North Main Street. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

## One murder prosecuted in 2021 while another remains unsolved

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

More than nine months ago in the early morning hours of March 19, a man fully disguised in black entered the Macon Highway RaceTrac and shot 23-year-old clerk Elijah James Wood, who died on the scene.

The suspect walked with a distinctive gait, and many citizens at the time questioned the perpetrator's gender. Weeks later, the Oconee Sheriff's Office confirmed that the shooter was a man in his late teens to early 30s who is 5-foot-10-inches to 6-feet tall. The suspect is light skinned African American, Hispanic, Indian or biracial, according to law enforcement.

The murder appeared to be a botched armed robbery. After shooting Wood, the suspect left



Wood Jackson

the store with the murder weapon.

When he was killed, Wood was one week short of his 24th birthday. He worked at several Watkinsville restaurants, including Dairy Queen, Dominick's, Rachel's Southern Style Restaurant and Chops & Hops, before becoming a clerk at RaceTrac.

"Elijah was a kind person who enjoyed meeting new people,

spending time with his family and was a devout Christian," said Oconee Sheriff James Hale. "He loved spreading God's word."

Hale said the case is very much active. If anyone has information about the murder, contact the Oconee Sheriff's Office at (706) 769-3945 or visit WhoKilledElijah.com.

During the first half of 2021, the murderers who shot and killed 19-year-old Joey Jackson on July 16, 2019 were brought to justice.

Akhemu Dunston, Dallas McCabe and Ryan O'Neal were all sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole after 30 years. Dunston and McCabe were tried separately, as O'Neal was the sole defendant who pulled the trigger.

SEE Y1R MURDERS PAGE A2

## Man kills mom and stepfather

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

Early Tuesday morning, deputies responded to a shooting at a Bouldercrest Circle home. Two adults were found dead from apparent gunshot wounds, and two juveniles were found unharmed, said Oconee Sheriff James Hale.



Moyer

The suspect, Peyton Valor Moyer, 20, who also lives at the residence, had already fled the scene in one of the victim's vehicles.

Moyer was later located by Athens-Clarke County Police and arrested after a short pursuit.

The victims have been identified as Moyer's mother and stepfather, Ashley Schutza and Benjamin Smith.

Hale said a firearm has been recovered from the scene, but as of Tuesday morning, he couldn't confirm whether it was the murder weapon.

When apprehended, Moyer was not forthcoming about the murder, said Hale, explaining, "He lawyered up pretty quick."

Over the past several years, Moyer had been arrested for criminal trespass family violence; giving false name, address or birthdate to law enforcement; loitering and prowling; battery family violence and cruelty to children in the third degree.

When he was 18 years old, Moyer was criminally charged after he punched his stepfather in the eye and then bit him on his head and chest.



Wire Park off Barnett Shoals Road will transform the former Anaconda/Southwire plant into a mixed-use development of retail, office and residential units, as well as housing the Oconee County Library. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

## Watkinsville sees a burst of development in 2021

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

In February 2002, Watkinsville was "rapidly adding new subdivisions," such as Stone Shoals on Barnett Shoals Road and Christian Lake near Harris Shoals Park, according to The Oconee Enterprise.

The same could be said almost 20 years later in late 2021 as the Wisteria Ridge apartment complex, Trove subdivision and Wire Park are under development in Watkinsville.

Wisteria Ridge is Watkinsville's forthcoming 89-unit apartment complex at 75 North Main Street. The land has been zoned multi-family since 1968 and was approved for a residential complex in the early 2000s but was delayed twice—first because of the Great Recession and then later because of a shortage of sewer capacity.

Trove will offer 56 homes on 35.63 acres off Morrison Street and Colham Ferry Road.

Wire Park off Barnett Shoals Road will comprise of 56 condos, 21 townhouses and 53 single-family homes in addition to office and retail space.

Early in the year, the Oconee County Library Board voted to

move the Oconee County Library to Wire Park within the next few years.

Golden Pantry and Smith Planning Group are relocating their corporate headquarters to Wire Park. One of the most anticipated eateries is Scoops, an ice cream and candy store.

Wire Park will also house Oconee's first "food hall," an open-air courtyard of various restaurants dubbed "The Grid."

The lush greenspace at the front of Wire Park will host live music, family movies and fitness classes, said developer Duke Gibbs, CEO of Gibbs Capital. There will be a number of walking trails in the back. For the second year in a row, Wire Park hosted a community Christmas celebration earlier this month.

Greeting visitors is a 47-foot silo repurposed as Wire Park's entrance landmark. It was once used to store electrical parts when the Southwire plant was in operation. The building broke ground in the late 1950s when Anaconda was Oconee's biggest employer.

In March, the Board of Commissioners approved Oconee Mercantile, a mixed-use development off Macon Highway. The

property is just outside of the city limits of Watkinsville where Oconee State Bank formerly held its headquarters.

In June, Oconee State Bank opened its new headquarters building at the intersection of Main Street and Experiment Station Road.

The two-story, white-brick building "makes a statement about our vision of being essential to the lives and businesses of the communities we serve," said CEO and President Neil Stevens.

The building was dedicated in memory of H. Mell Wells, who served as president of Oconee State Bank from 1979 until his death in 1986.

Watkinsville wrapped up the year with a community workday in December to install playground equipment for the Extra Special People Miracle League playground, which will be accessible to the public once it's completed.

"Folks, the finish line is in sight," said Watkinsville Mayor Brian Brodrick. "This is going to be an amazing space for the children of Watkinsville and the region to make memories when complete this spring."



Wisteria Ridge off North Main Street will have 89 units when it's built out. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]



Oconee State Bank opened its new headquarters in June of this year. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

This issue was mailed Wednesday, Dec. 29, from Watkinsville and Athens, GA. Please inform your post office if it arrives late.



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