

See our special graduation section spotlighting the Class of 2017 inside today's edition!



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Next school year, Midway Elementary School will be known as Midway Hills Academy. (Photo/Denise Etheridge)

Baldwin County School District announces school name changes

Special to the Bulletin

Last week, the Baldwin County School District announced that "Lakeview" and "Midway Hills" would be the new names for the four elementary schools in the district.

Creekside Elementary and Eagle Ridge Elementary become Lakeview Primary (K-2) and Lakeview Academy (3-5) while Bland Hills Elementary and Midway Elementary will now be known as Midway Hills Primary (K-2) and Midway Hills Academy (3-5).

"These name changes are in line with our recent grade level reconfiguration and gives us the opportunity for a fresh start with all of our elementary schools," said Superintendent Dr. Noris Price. "These changes also represent an exciting new chapter for our district and we wanted our schools to reflect that new chapter, as well."

"The innovations happening right now in our schools and classrooms is something very special," said Baldwin County Board of Education Chairman John Jackson. "As we lead our district into the future, these changes will help us tell the story of the many positive things that are happening in our new charter district, and based on the input we have received, the community agrees."

BCSD has spent the past several weeks gaining valuable input from stakeholders via the use of surveys distributed to staff and the general public. These surveys allowed BCSD stakeholders a chance to weigh in on this important decision and respondents were allowed to recommend potential names for the school board to consider, school officials said.

The changes are set to take effect this summer and will be in place before the start of the 2017-2018 school year.

Highway 49 wreck results in two deaths

From staff reports

Two people were killed Sunday evening, May 14, while traveling on Georgia State Route 49 when a GMC Yukon struck their Nissan Sentra.

Sharon Jackson, 47, of Milledgeville was driving the Nissan accompanied by another passenger, Calvin Thomas, 48, of Macon. Both motorists were pronounced deceased at the scene by the Baldwin County Coroner shortly after the collision.

"We have not done the autopsy yet but the cause of death right now is blunt force trauma," said Baldwin County Coroner John Gonzales on Monday, May 15.

The Yukon was carrying six residents of Kathleen, Ga.: Dequarius T. Jones, 17, Quadarius Jones, 17, Vernell Harris Jr., 13, Madison Harris, 9, Adrienne Harris, 40 and Zachary V. Harris, 40.

The accident occurred when the GMC Yukon, piloted by Dequarius T. Jones, crossed over the centerline into the path of the Nissan Sentra, according to a Georgia Highway State Patrol accident report.

At the moment it appears that the driver of the Yukon may have been fatigued and as a result briefly dozed off causing the vehicle to alter its intended path. The accident is still under investigation by the GSP Specialized Collision Reconstruction Team. As of press time Wednesday, charges were pending the completion of the SCRT investigation.



ORMC enters sale agreement

Special to the Bulletin

The Boards of Directors of the Oconee Regional Medical Center (ORMC) and Oconee Regional Health Systems (ORHS) voted during a May 10 meeting to enter into a sale agreement with the Prime Healthcare Foundation. The foundation is a 501(c)3 public charity and affiliate of Prime Healthcare Services, one of the nation's leading health systems with 44 hospitals in 14 states. The agreement will ensure the long-term viability of the hospital, continued access to quality care, and retention of hundreds of jobs, according to ORMC officials. It will also allow ORMC to continue to make a positive impact on the overall health of patients and the local economy, they maintained in a news release.

"Our goal when we began this process over a year ago was to maintain a viable hospital here in Baldwin County. We have accomplished that and, as a result, our community will continue to have access to quality care," said

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Nell Robinson, a case manager with the Center for the Visually Impaired (CVI), conducts a "Living with Low Vision" seminar. (Photo/Will Slaten)

Shedding light on living with low vision

By Will Slaten

The Center for the Visually Impaired, an Atlanta based rehabilitation clinic for those living with low vision, taught a secular message in the basement of the First Baptist Church of Milledgeville this past Friday.

The program titled, "Living with Low Vision," is possible thanks to a grant from Georgia's "Drive for Sight" program which is funded by Georgia Motorists that opt to donate a dollar when they renew their license.

The goal of this educational seminar was to, "provide education and tips for those that are living with or caring for someone with low vision," said Diane Lumpkin, the program director.

The topics for discussion included a brief overview of the different types of blindness, their causes and adaptive techniques to make daily tasks easier. A few techniques discussed were the proper mechanics for using a cane and different procedures for sighted people to use when guiding those with blindness.

Mary Gower, an occupational therapist with CVI, spoke on the topic of dealing with common obstacles such as glare, contrast and how to minimize ocular stress.

Gower also did a demonstration of a plethora of products and devices that are made specifically for those with low vision. These products included a two-sided, black and white cutting board constructed to make cutting food safer, electronics with enlarged numbers and magnifying glasses designed for sustained reading.

"I came to bring our group here to get some more information about living with low vision," said Rita Harris, CEO of the Living Life Team Inc., a Madison based support group for the visually impaired. "Even a veteran learned some new things today."

At the conclusion of the educational portion of the program, five candidates were selected to participate in a low vision exam performed by an Optometrist to help discern what devices may be useful and

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GMC ranks top in General Studies

Special to the Bulletin

Georgia Military College takes the top spot as the 2017 Best General Studies

College in the state, according to Universities.com. The website ranks GMC first among 16 schools on the list that offer a General Studies Degree Program.

"It is exciting to see GMC's General Studies Degree recognized this way," said Professor Kelly Weems, GMC's General Studies Degree Program Coordinator. "Our degree program provides enough structure to make sure that the students satisfy core curriculum requirements while giving them flexibility to select additional courses to prepare for their educational goals."

GMC's General Studies program educates students in written communication, quantitative skills, global literacy, critical thinking, and problem solving in order to enable them to succeed and transfer to a 4-year college or university. Students who major in general studies are able to customize the degree concentration courses to meet their specific educational needs. Students in this degree program are advised to work closely with their academic advisor.

Universities.com finds colleges and universities that fits students' needs and career goals. They provide university rankings, tuition costs, and in depth information on more than 8,000 colleges and universities to help students

discover the highest return on

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Astrophysicist to search for black holes, neutron stars

Special to the Bulletin

A Georgia College astrophysicist will travel to Italy next month and participate in unique research to “map” the universe – and discover previously unknown black holes or dead remains of massive stars.

“This program’s ambitious, because it’ll be imaging the entire sky-worth of data from two telescopes and combining them together. This has been done for small patches of sky, but we’ll stitch together patches for an image of the full sky,” said Dr. Arash Bodaghee, assistant professor of physics and astronomy.

“That has never been done before,” he said. “We’re the only ones doing this procedure.”

Bodaghee will work with Dr. Eugenio Bottacini, assistant professor at the University of Padua. They’ve obtained permission to use Europe’s INTEGRAL (International Gamma Ray Astrophysics Laboratory), along with NASA’s Swift satellite. Both space telescopes pick up X-ray and gamma-ray light bursts in space – undetectable by scopes on Earth.

Bodaghee and Bottacini will merge pictures from both telescopes into one image, allowing them to see where light energy overlaps. It’ll help them observe additional exposure for longer periods of time. They’ll analyze the entire archive of data from both telescopes this way, while making fresh views of the universe.

Bottacini developed the program for merging telescope images. He invited Bodaghee to Italy as a visiting scientist for his expertise in analyzing data and identifying objects that emit light.

“I’m almost like a taxonomist for biology – someone who recognizes that feather comes from this bird,” Bodaghee said. “I do the same type of thing, but for X-ray sources. ‘Oh that must be a black hole; it can’t be a normal star.’”

The scientists expect to find numerous new black holes and neutron stars, which are leftover remnants of stellar explosions. They’ll also characterize “neighborhoods” of existing black holes and neutron stars – noting size, location and how hot they get.

“If you’re looking for things that emit X-rays or gamma rays – these are very, very energetic forms of light,” Bodaghee said. “You can’t do that from Earth. It’s out there. But the light never gets to us, because the atmosphere blocks it.

“So we’re forced to build telescopes and put them into space, which is costly,” he said. “But at the same time, it’s very nice, because we live in the Space Age, and it’s something we can actually do.”

It’s only been in the past 50 years that scientists proved the existence of stellar explosions and witnessed objects like passing stars disappear into black holes. Both cosmic objects remain relatively unstudied.

“It’s a knowledge of physics we need,” Bodaghee said. “The end result for a physicist is understanding how matter behaves under extreme conditions. The end result for an astronomer is we get a better understanding of what constitutes matter in our galaxy.”

This month-long collection and interpretation of gamma-ray data will lead to research opportunities for Georgia College students.

Undergraduates already work with one of the state’s best astrophysics telescopes at Pohl Observatory in Herty Hall. In 2015, it became one of about 2,000 sites worldwide accredited by the International Astronomical Union’s Minor Planet Center (MPC) to interpret space data.

A new instrument called a spectrometer was recently added to the telescope. It gathers color-coded data on objects in space and will allow Bodaghee’s students to conduct independent research next year, based on information he gathers in Italy.

Chances are Bodaghee may even find something this summer that’s never been seen before.

“Occasionally, you’ll be confronted with a very unusual object,” Bodaghee said. “This starts the process of people looking at that object. You set off a chain reaction, a new course to follow, a new avenue of exploration. That’s always a real possibility.

“We don’t count on it,” he said, “but we know it to be true. It can happen.”



Baldwin firefighters help battle Okefenokee blaze

Baldwin County Fire Rescue deployed a crew and equipment to the town of St. George in South Georgia last week, according to Baldwin County Fire Chief Troy Reynolds. Local firefighters assisted with protecting a home that was in the path of wildfires raging in the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Reynolds said. According to an Associated Press news report, the massive swamp fire was ignited by a lightning strike on April 6. So far more than 150,000 acres have burned in the park. It’s estimated that more than 800 firefighters are striving to contain the fire. (Submitted photo)



GMC Prep School senior Andy Watkins earned the Peach State Scholarship. (Submitted photo)

Andy Watkins receives Notre Dame Club scholarship

Special to the Bulletin

Georgia Military College Prep School senior Andy Watkins is the recipient of the Peach State Scholarship on behalf of the Notre Dame Club of Atlanta.

Watkins, who will attend the University of Notre Dame in the Fall, was one of two recipients in the Atlanta area to receive \$5,000. As a renewable scholarship, Watkins will receive \$20,000 over the course of his four years at the University of Notre Dame. Watkins says he was required to write an essay on “What Notre Dame Means to Me.” He says it reminds him of home.

“It was very special to receive this,” said Andy Watkins, Peach State Scholarship recipient. “It was really enlightening and exciting to get a scholarship based on an essay that I wrote about how much a school means to me. I told the story of why I like Notre Dame so much because to me it just means home.”

The Notre Dame Club of Atlanta connects alumni, family, and friends of the University of Notre Dame in metro-Atlanta. They created the Peach State Scholarship in 1996 as a needs-based award presented to students from north and central Georgia who are attending the University of Notre Dame. The club raises funds for this scholarship through an annual Golf Event, raffles, the St. Patrick’s Day Golf Event, and the Fightin’ Irish Dash. Since beginning 21 years ago, the scholarship fund has grown to over \$650,000. Leaders of the club say it was Andy’s strong leadership skills and academic success that made him stand out from other applicants.

“We are very excited and proud to announce that Andrew is the recipient of the Peach State Scholarship and will be attending the University of Notre Dame this Fall,” said Courtney Sissine, Vice President of the Notre Dame Club of Atlanta. “Andrew’s strong leadership and academic success at Georgia Military College made him a strong recipient of this award.”



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their investment.

To learn more about GMC’s General Studies Degree program visit www.gmc.edu. To view the 2017 list of Best General Studies Colleges in Georgia go to <https://www.universities.com/find/georgia/best/general-studies-degrees>.

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how to perform certain tasks more efficiently.

CVI also brought along their VisAbility store to provide hands-on-trials and the opportunity to purchase devices designed to give greater freedom, independence and dignity to those with waning eyesight.

The Living Life Team support group meets every second Thursday of each month at 10 a.m. in the Morgan County Library conference room.

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Steven M. Johnson, interim chief executive officer. “This agreement is the result of a lot of hard work by many people including our board members, employees, and medical staff. During a challenging period for the hospital, our team continued to deliver high quality patient care and helped us reduce costs, successfully positioning us for this opportunity.”

Like many other unaffiliated community hospitals in Georgia and throughout the United States, ORMC has faced growing financial challenges. In 2016, nationally recognized financial experts, Houlihan Lokey and Grant Thornton, were engaged to identify a solution that would allow the hospital to remain viable for the long term.

“Prime Healthcare has a national reputation for successfully turning around hospitals like ours. Their experience will allow for stabilization of the hospital, expanded services, recruitment of medical staff, and capital improvements - all of which is good for our community,” added Dr. Phyllis Parks-Veal, chair of the ORMC Board of Directors.

As efforts to identify a potential buyer continued, ORMC leaders worked closely with members of the county commission, in particular Baldwin County Commission Chairman Sammy Hall and Commissioner Henry Craig, to ensure that the future of the hospital would be secure.

“One of the most important assets for any community is access to health care. Without that, we cannot promise the quality of life we want for our citizens nor can we attract the kind of economic development that is so critical to our future. This decision, which will allow ORMC to remain viable, is without question in the best interest of the county,” said Chairman Hall.

“We appreciated having the opportunity to be part of this process and agree that the decision made tonight will not only stabilize the hospital, but ultimately make it an even greater asset for our community,” continued Commissioner Henry Craig.

The process to transfer ownership will take approximately 90 days. During that time, the hospital will continue uninterrupted day-to-day operations and work with the new owner to ensure a smooth transition for patients, employees, and medical staff.

“The sale agreement also includes Oconee Regional Health Ventures, Inc., and was approved tonight by those entities as well as Oconee Regional Health Systems, the Baldwin County Hospital Authority and other related subsidiaries and affiliates,” added Ted Zarkowsky, chair of the ORHS Board of Directors.

“Prime Healthcare looks forward to caring for the community and partnering with the dedicated physicians, nurses, and employees of Oconee Regional Medical Center,” said Prem Reddy, M.D., chairman, president and CEO of Prime Healthcare. “We are committed to providing the best quality care in each and every community we serve, and the addition of Oconee Regional to the Prime Healthcare family will allow us to continue that tradition.”

As required by Georgia law, the sale agreement will be reviewed by the Attorney General’s office. That review will include a public hearing to allow for community input. In addition, ORMC and certain affiliates have filed the necessary motions for the approval of a Section 363 asset sale in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Middle District of Georgia. This approach is commonly used to facilitate such transactions and will allow for continued operations and a relatively short timeframe for completion of the sale.

“As we look to the future, I want to thank our Board of Directors, employees, and medical staff for their incredible commitment to this hospital and the patients it serves,” concluded Dr. Parks-Veal.

Oconee Regional Medical Center will retain its non-profit status.