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124TH YEAR, ISSUE 32 © 2019 THE CLINCH COUNTY NEWS Wednesday, May 22, 2019 HOMERVILLE, GEORGIA 30 PAGES, THREE SECTIONS

Bargains, Coupons & Deals
INSIDE with these sales papers:



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

What's going on in your community

Spring Fling to be held Saturday

The Homerville Main Street Program will be hosting a Spring Fling/Block Party on **Saturday, May 25** at the Homerville Train Depot from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. For more information, contact Diane West at (912) 599-0204.

Tag offices to be closed for system update

All Georgia county tag offices will not be able to process vehicle transactions on **Friday, May 24 and Monday May, 27** while the state transitions to a new vehicle registration and titling program. In preparation for closing out the current system, the county tag office will close at 12 noon on **Thursday, May 23** and reopen on Tuesday, May 28 at 1 p.m. Please process your tag renewals and other vehicle related transactions before 12 noon on Thursday in order to avoid delays.

Brick Paver Project under way downtown

Homerville's Main Street Program has brought back the Brick Paver Project for the Downtown Homerville fountain. Anyone interested in having their loved one's name engraved on a brick paver and installed around the fountain, please contact Diane West at (912) 599-0204.

HUMC announces VBS dates and times

Homerville United Methodist Church will be having Vacation Bible School **Sunday-Thursday, June 9-13** from 5:30-8 p.m. nightly. The theme for this year's VBS is "Life is Wild, God is Good." Children ages Pre-K to 6th grade are invited to attend.

Brown's Chapel AME Family & Friends Day

Brown's Chapel AME will be having Friends and Family Day on **Sunday, May 26** at 3 p.m. Rev. Arthur Sirmans, Assistant Pastor of New Life in Valdosta, will be the guest speaker. Everyone is invited to attend.

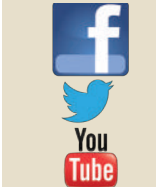
'MAGA' service at H'ville Congregational

The Homerville Congregational Methodist Church will be having a "Make America Great Again" service on **Sunday, May 26** beginning at 11 a.m. At 6 p.m., there will be a special time of prayer and singing. Everyone is invited to attend both services.

First Baptist announces dates for VBS

Homerville First Baptist Church will be having Vacation Bible School **Sunday-Thursday, June 2-6** from 5:30-8:30 p.m. nightly. The theme for this year's VBS is "In the Wild: Amazing Encounters with Jesus." Children ages 3 years to 6th grade are invited to attend.

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SPECIAL GRADUATION EDITION

INSIDE — 20 PAGES, TWO SECTIONS CELEBRATING THE CCHS CLASS OF 2019

Class of 2019 to graduate Friday

By Len Robbins
Editor/Publisher

The Class of 2019 will say goodbye to Clinch County High School Friday when graduation exercises are held at Donald Tison Field on the CCHS campus.

The ceremony will begin at 8 p.m. at the stadium, with members of the Class of 2019 scheduled to walk and receive their diplomas.

In case of rain, the ceremony will be moved indoors to the CCHS gymnasium.

Of the members of the class, the valedictorian (highest grade-point average) is Caleb Register. The salutatorian (second-highest grade-point average) is Reese Latham.

There are 17 honor graduates this year. Honor graduates are students whose cumulative grade point averages amount to 93 or above after the second six weeks of their second semester of their senior year.

The 2019 honor graduates are Caleb Christian Register, Briley Reese Latham, Duncan Karl Lutz, Charles Warren Stovall, Mitchell Dillan Prescott, Anna Leigh Jones, Holly Haven Mullis, Kenzojzia Dewann Nixon, Rokendra Ta'keyah Anderson, Stephen Andrew Selph, Tyasia Lanajwa McCoy, Alora Gail Deloach, Jonathan Deon Moore, Daylynn Marie Spivey, Ramara Laion Williams, Logan Denise Brown, and Jasmine Delores Sky Sorrow.



From left, Valedictorian Caleb Register and Salutatorian Reese Latham.

Manor woman accused of exploiting 98-year-old lady

By Laura Nipper
Staff Writer

A Manor woman is facing 71 counts of forgery and one count of exploitation of an elderly person after being arrested by the Homerville Police Department recently.

Melissa Morgan, 53, of Manor was arrested on May 14 after the Homerville Police Department conducted an investigation sparked from a complaint from a local elderly woman's family.

A report was filed with the HPD on May 9 after the woman's family noticed unusual withdrawals from the 98-year-old woman's checking account. According to the report, the elderly woman suffers from dementia and her daughter has power of attorney over all of her legal and financial affairs. The Heritage Bank in Homerville began to see suspicious transactions that were inconsistent with the transaction history for the woman's account and

contacted her daughter to look into the matter. Chief Dave Hanson of the HPD said that he was provided several bank statements and copies of approximately 71 checks that had reportedly been altered from January 2019 through May 2019. It was suspected that the elderly woman's live-in caregiver, identified as Melissa Morgan, was the offender as she was the only person who had access to the checkbooks. Detective Derrek Manning with HPD found 71 checks had been altered and tendered for payment by Morgan without permission and that a total of approximately \$8,750 had been taken by Morgan through fraudulent means.

In an interview, Morgan said that she wrote every check under the direction of the elderly woman since December, when the woman lost her eyesight. Morgan further informed the detective that she cashed various checks



Melissa Morgan

at Piggly Wiggly and One Trip at the direction of the elderly woman and reported that the woman was always standing beside her when she tendered each check, according to the report.

Morgan said that she never contacted the elderly woman's daughter to gain permission prior to making the transactions, according to the report.

According to the report, Detective Manning found out that Morgan tendered at least two checks at One Trip after a review of the store camera, and after speaking with store clerks, who stated that the elderly woman was not with her during the transactions.

Morgan was arrested and then later released on bond.

Attorney objects to AGL's private meeting with PSC official

By Len Robbins
Editor/Publisher

The attorney for two of the victims of the Coffee Corner explosion in Homerville is protesting a Public Service Commission official meeting privately with Atlanta Gas Light to discuss a fine proposed by the PSC.

Louis Hatcher, attorney for Emily and Baylee Tolle, said the PSC office has agreed to allow their safety director to meet in private with AGL officials concerning \$2.3 million in fines over alleged violations that led to the August 17, 2018 explosion in downtown Homerville. Hatcher said such a meeting would be in violation of the state's open meeting laws, and is "highly improper to allow this type of dialogue to go on in the dark." He claims the meeting should be made open to the public, just like a hearing before the PSC would be.

A spokesman for the PSC, Tom Krause, said PSC attorneys found that the informal meeting requested by AGL in response to the fine proposal doesn't meet the requirements of an open meeting because there is no committee involved, and they only requested to meet with one person, the PSC safety director. Krause said Thursday that no date for the meeting has been set yet.

In March, the PSC proposed civil fines of over \$2.3 million in response to alleged violations by AGL in relation to the August 17, 2018 explosion at Homerville's Coffee Corner building. On that date, three local women suffered serious burns and injuries when a natural gas leak prompted an explosion at the coffee shop. Investigators said a utility crew punctured a gas line and sewer line while boring fiber optic cable. The gas leaked into the sewer line connected to Coffee Corner, igniting in a fiery explosion that demolished the small brick building.

The March 29 report by the PSC included several allegations, including that AGL failed to locate and mark its pipeline, failed to consider a valve to limit the flow of gas after the incident, failed to follow its own procedures on drug and alcohol testing of personnel after the incident, and failed to

(Continued on Page 3)

Restaurants without grease traps causing issues with city sewer system

By Len Robbins
Editor/Publisher

The City of Homerville is giving city restaurants a small window to make changes to abide by state and local ordinances regarding grease traps.

At Thursday's regular monthly meeting of the Homerville City Council, Don Myers of the city water/sewer department said many restaurants in the city do not have grease traps — which is required by city and state ordinances. He said restaurants not properly disposing of grease is causing issues in the city's sewer system, and showed council members photographs of the problems it causes.

Mayor Tom Kennedy said the city will work with local restaurants to get within code over a limited time period.

In other action from the

meeting, held in the Homerville Municipal Complex, the council:

- Approved the minutes of the council's previous meeting.
- Amended the agenda, and approved it.
- Discussed the financial report.

Kennedy asked City Manager Nan Mikell if council members could have the financial report prior to the meeting to give them time to review it.

- Discussed the purchase of a hydraulic excavator. Mikell said financing for the purchase has been worked out.
- Heard a report on the airport improvement project.

Mikell said the weather station is now operable. She said the FAA is asking the city cut trees that are obstructing pilot views on airport property, and some that are on private property. Mikell said the city

will need to advertise for an airport consultant. She said that the airport beacon is being repaired.

- Discussed July 4th celebration plans.

Kennedy said the city is planning on having a celebration outside city hall on Thursday, July 4, then having fireworks and a band at the recreation park on Friday, July 5. Main Street Director Diane West added that she is also planning a BBQ Cookoff at the same time.

- Discussed inspection of the public library.
- Heard from the new manager of Republic Services, who introduced himself to council members.
- Discussed qualifying for two city council seats (currently held by J.E. Witherspoon and Willie Hardee). Qualifying will be on August 19-22, and August 23.

(Continued on Page 3)