The Bethlehem Star

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Cochran named ACS Teacher of the Year

West Alexander Middle School has the honor of having the county's top teacher for 2026.

Matt Cochran, of West Alexander Middle School, has been named Alexander County Schools 2026 Teacher of the Year.

The announcement came during a special luncheon ceremony on Tuesday, May 26, at Redbird Ridge Estate in Ellendale.

Cochran is not only a teacher, but also a mentor, bus driver, coach, and driver's education teacher.

"We're excited to announce that Mr. Matthew Cochran has been named the Alexander County Schools Teacher of the Year!" said Principal Amy Daigle. "This honor recognizes the amazing difference he makes in our music program and the positive influence he has on students in both middle and high school. Mr. Cochran isn't just a gifted music teacher; he's a mentor who genuinely cares about his students and is always there to support his colleagues, making him a much-loved member of our school family.

In addition to his musical talents, Mr. Cochran is admired for his honesty and outstanding communication, making him someone both students and staff look up to. He is always reaching out to support colleagues, inspire students in every setting, and strengthen our school spirit. Whether it's through his presence at games, his caring visits to students and colleagues, or his leadership in planning major events, such as the annual Bulldog Blast, he has a natural ability to connect with and inspire those around him, showing the true spirit of our district. We're so happy to see his hard work and passion for teaching recognized with this well-deserved honor!" said Daigle. ★

TEACHER OF THE YEAR — Matt Cochran, of West Alexander Middle School, was named Alexander Count Schools Teacher of the Year on Tuesday, May 26. Cochran is shown (left) with Superintendent Dr. Bill Griffin. (ACS photo)

AT THE HELM — Emari Odom is the new director at the Bethlehem Branch Library. Emari is a 2017 graduate of UNC-Charlotte, and is currently working on her Masters in Library and Information Science with a concentration in Archives and Records Management. Emari is a 2012 graduate of Alexander Central High School and is happy to be giving back to Alexander County in this capacity.

Emari Odom is new Director at Bethlehem Branch Library

By ANGELA FARR KING

There is a new director at the Bethlehem Branch Library and she is a home town girl who has come back home to give back to her community. Emari Odom grew up in Alexander County. She attended Taylorsville Elementary School and East Alexander Middle School. She graduated from Alexander Central High School in 2012, where she was crowned homecoming queen that year.

Emari graduated from the University of North Carolina, Charlotte in 2017 with a degree in Africana Studies. She is currently working on her Masters Degree in Library and Information Science with a concentration in Archives and Records Management.

When asked why she was drawn to work at the library, Emari said, "Since I was little, I have been a library kid. My favorite part of elementary school was going to the library. I loved going to the library even in high school."

Emari went on to talk about an archives project she did in college where she had to wear gloves to protect the items she was handling. This drew her to an interest in preservation of artifacts and records.

Emari has worked at the Patrick Beaver Library and the Ridgeview Library, both in Hickory. She has most recently worked at the Bethlehem Branch Library and her first day as library director was Monday, June 8. She is very excited about the new opportunity and will be leading preschool story time on Mondays at 10:00 a.m. as one of her duties.

In other library news, the Summer Reading Program has officially kicked off and the theme is "Unearth a Story." All library branches are decked out with fossil, dinosaur, and ancient artifact decorations. Readers, children and adults, are encouraged to register for the program on an app called Beanstack. This is where adults can track pages read and children can track minutes read. There are many fun activities planned to enhance the Summer Reading Program, including Summer art classes with the art teacher from Bethlehem Elementary School, Jennifer Gilmore. The first class will be held on Thursday, June 18, at 3:00 p.m. at the Bethlehem Branch. Students need to be pre-registered for this class.

Keyley Sigmon from Keyley Shae Design Co. paid a visit to the library to paint the windows for the Summer Reading Program theme and of course, they are exceptional. The library employees enjoyed showing them off on Monday, May 8!

There is something for everyone at the Bethlehem Branch Library. For more information, call 828-495-8753 or stop by this little branch located at 45 Rink Dam Road in the Bethlehem Community to "Unearth a Story." ★

ESPLANADE DEVELOPMENT — Land clearing and grading work continues in the large Esplanade development, being built by Taylor Morrison. Accoording to County officials, construction of homes should begin in the Spring of 2027. Taylor Morrison's website shows that the resort-lifestyle community will be coming in early 2028 to Bethlehem. The site states, "Residents will enjoy an exciting array of planned resort-style amenities, starting with The Club, which will include a Fitness Center, Movement Studio, Flex and Lifestyle Rooms, Terrace with outdoor seating. Additional planned amenities include: Resort-style pool with spa and cabanas, onsite food and beverage, lake access, fireside seating, Flex and Yoga Lawns, Pickleball, Tennis, and Bocce Courts, a Bark Park, trailhead connecting miles of walking trails, concierge services, full-time onsite Lifestyle Manager, signature events, and more."

WINDOW MURAL — Keyley Sigmon from Keyley Shae Design Co. made a stop at the Bethlehem Branch Library to paint murals on the windows to showcase the theme for the Summer Reading Program, which is "Unearth a Story." Pictured here are Library Director Emari Odom (Left) and library employee Jessica Sills (Right) showing off one of their new window murals.

Zane Mawyer awarded Eagle Scout Rank at Court of Honor

Zane Mawyer became the most recent Troop 275 Eagle Scout at a Court of Honor on May 24, 2026, at Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. He is the son Anthony and Renee Mawyer of Meadowridge Drive in Taylorsville. For his Eagle project, Zane provided leadership for structural improvements to the walking track at Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church.

Since 1910, the Eagle Scout rank has represented a milestone of accomplishment—perhaps without equal—that is recognized across the country and even the world. Those who have earned the Eagle Scout rank count it among their most treasured achievements. "Eagle Scout" is not just an award; it is a state of being. Those who earned it as youth continue to earn it in later years.

Zane started in Cub Scout Pack 275 at Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church when he was in first grade in 2015. Following his cub scout experiences with cubmasters Chip James and Chad Lackey, he joined Troop 275 at Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church in June 2020. His scoutmaster was Robert Duncan and special assistant scoutmasters were Brian Heath and Olivia Shepherd. During his trail to eagle, he earned 57 merit badges with seven palms, completed 267 service hours. He became a member of the Order of the Arrow, and visited Philmont, and will visit Sea Base in summer of 2026. He also volunteered at the Summit Bechtel Reserve in 2023. Zane is a rising senior at the North Carolina School of Science and Math in Morganton and attended Alexander

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ZANE MAWYER

Administrator changes named for West Alexander, ACHS

By ANGELA FARR KING

There were two important personnel changes made at the June 8 Alexander County Board of Education meeting.

With Assistant Principal Ashley Jenkins leaving West Alexander Middle School to go to Caldwell County, Assistant Principal Kelley Brantley is moving from Alexander Central High School to West Alexander Middle School as their new Assistant Principal.

Don Robinette, who has been the Exceptional Children's self-contained teacher at West Alexander Middle School, is being moved into the role as Assistant Principal at Alexander Central High School.

Brantley earned her administrative degree from Gardner Webb University in 2023 and was formerly a biology teacher at Lake Norman High School. Before Gardner Webb, she attended Appalachian State University. Brantley joined ACHS in July 2023 and has worked in education since 2017. The position at WAMS became available when Ashley Jenkins took a job at South Caldwell High School.

Robinette has been in education for 15 years serving most recently at WAMS in the self-contained class. He has also worked with special needs students at East Alexander Middle and Hudson Elementary School. Robinette holds a Bachelor's Degree in Recreation Management from Appalachian State University. He earned his Masters Degree in Special Education from UNC-Charlotte in 2017 and is expected to complete his administrative license work in Spring 2027 with a degree from The University of North Carolina at Pembroke. ★

BRANTLEY

ROBINETTE