

George County Times

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All Smiles for Speckled Butter Beans



Three year old Layla Creel picks speckled butter beans with her grandmother Margie McClure in the fields of Charlie's U-Pik. See the community feature highlighting Charlie's U-Pik on A-6.

Photo by Sarah Hayden

Another wave of COVID? Hospital, Schools hope to not see a repeat year

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COVID-19 appears to be rearing its ugly head once again.

Just when it seemed the pandemic caused by a virus originating in Wuhan, China seemed to be in full retreat, it appears to be coming back.

"We had not had anyone in our COVID unit for a couple of months," George Regional Health Systems CEO Greg Havard said on Monday. "Last week we admitted five people." One, an individual over the age of 80, died. None of the five had been vaccinated.

George County School District administrations are holding their collective breath, hoping for no repeat of last year.

At a school board meeting last week, a proposed policy basically saying that the district would follow Mississippi Department of Health guidelines for COVID-19 response was given first consideration.

Superintendent Wade Whitney said that when school opens "... the wearing of masks in our schools for students, staff and visitors will be optional. Additional school district COVID protocols will be forthcoming."

Whitney told the school board the school's COVID response may change as conditions change.

Earlier in the summer, the numbers of new cases of COVID-19 infections had fallen to around 200 per day

in Mississippi. Hospitalizations statewide were hovering in the 100 to 125 range and the daily death total had fallen to almost none during June and early July.

That has suddenly changed. Over this past weekend, the three-day period from July 16 - July 18, the Mississippi Department of Health is reporting 2,326 new cases of the disease with three new deaths. Hospitalizations have jumped from 113 on July 1, to 349 on Sunday, July 18.

Nationally, the number of new cases reported in the U.S. jumped up to 12,083 for Monday, July 19, according to the John Hopkins Hospital Resource Center.

About 49 percent of the U.S. population has been vaccinated against the disease.

George County has experienced 2,577 cases of the disease with 51 deaths since the pandemic began in March 2020.

About 6,500 people in George County or 26 percent of the total population have had at least one dose of the vaccine and nearly 5,900 people or 24 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated.

Havard said the hospital is vaccinating people at no charge. All one must do is call and find out which day or days of the week vaccinations are being administered. Vaccinations are then conducted on a walk-in basis. "It only takes a few minutes," he said.

Enviva to produce first pellets in fourth quarter

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Even with this year's weather delays, the Enviva Lucedale wood pellet plant is expecting to produce its first wood pellets during the fourth quarter of this year.

Plant manager Clint Pierce came before the George County Board of Supervisors on Monday with that announcement as part of an update presentation.

Construction on the \$150 million fuel-grade wood pellet plant began in October 2019. Construction of the plant was expected to take 15 to 18 months, but ran into delays caused by factors including the COVID-19 pandemic and weather.

"I am sure you understand we lost 20 of the last 40 days due to weather," Pierce told the supervisors.

He said the plant is currently employing 350 construction workers, and work will soon be going on around the clock. Additionally, 70 production workers and 15 supervisors have already been hired. Another 10 to 15 workers will be hired as the plant goes into production.

Answering questions from the supervisors and the audience, Pierce said the facility would begin production by processing round wood or logs and

then chipped wood. A chipper is being installed and the plant will ultimately process both round wood and chips.

He said the first pellets should be shipped by rail to the Port of Pascagoula during the fourth quarter of the year.

The plant is designed to produce 750,000 metric tons of high-density wood pellets per year. The pellets are fuel grade, a sustainable energy alternative to fossil fuels for electric power generating plants. The pellets produced at the Lucedale facility are already sold through contracts with power plants in Japan and will be shipped to Japan.

At the time of the 2019 groundbreaking, the Lucedale plant was billed as the largest wood pellet plant in the world, by Enviva Chairman and CEO John Keppler.

"Every single ton of production this mill will ever produce has already been sold," Keppler said during the groundbreaking ceremony. "Not just for next year. Not for just the year after that, but for the next several decades. So, when we say that we are going to be here for a while, we mean it."

Enviva, founded in 2004, operates nine pellet manufacturing facilities in six states. Mills already operating include Ahoskie, North Carolina; Amory, Mississippi; Cottontdale, Florida; Greenwood, South Carolina; Hamlet, North Carolina; Northhampton County, North Carolina; Sampson County, North Carolina; Southhampton County, Virginia; and Waycross, Virginia.

Enviva Biomass is a \$2 billion company employing about 1,200 people

with a current stock price of about \$51 per share. It is the largest producer of wood pellets in the world.



Presented Quilt of Valor.

Independence Day, July 4, 2021, was spent in the best way possible. Thanking a veteran for his service to our great country, the USA. SSG Dale Moss, a veteran from the Iraq War, was honored for his service with a Quilt of Valor. It was presented to him by Geraldine Snelgrove, who is a member of Quilts of Valor and Melon Patch Quilters. His wife Teresa Moss and granddaughter Masie Moss were present for the presentation. The presentation was at the home of Justin and Crystal Howarth. The couple treated family and friends with a July 4th cook out.



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