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WEATHER



Madison County Sheriff's Office Lt. Jason Ring was at home Tuesday morning when violent weather flipped the family camper and caused other property damage. Photos by Zach Mitcham

Fred packs punch

County endures tough weather day Tuesday

By Zach Mitcham
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Jason Ring of Old Ila Road was home alone when he heard the commotion outside. It was Fred.

Not a person, but a tropical storm system.

"I was in the house upstairs on the third floor when the wind got to whippin' and I heard boom!" said the lieutenant with the Madison County Sheriff's Office of severe weather that happened sometime between 8:15 and 8:30 a.m. "It was this piece of a drain bin that came from David Echols' farm down there. He's about half, three quarters of a mile. It came that far. It hit my patrol car, come over and hit the house. After I heard that, I thought it was a tree coming



Georgia Power's David Coker worked to get power restored after an outage at Danielsville schools Tuesday.

down. I ran down the steps and got in the basement, and by the time I got in the basement, it was done."

He looked outside and the family

camper was flipped.

"It wasn't here but two minutes,"

See "Storm" on 2A

INSIDE

Index:

News — 1-3A
Opinions — 4A
Crime — 5A
Social — 6A
Church — 6A
Classifieds — 7A
Legals — 8-9A
Obituaries — 10-11A
Sports — 1-8B

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STATE

Kemp sending more hospital staff to fight COVID-19 surge

By Dave Williams
Capitol Beat News Service

Georgia's health agency will more than double the number of temporary hospital staff to help cope with the current surge in COVID-19 patients, Gov. Brian Kemp announced Monday.

The Department of Community Health (DCH) will commit \$125 million in addition to \$500 million the state already is spending to increase state-supported hospital staff at 68 hospitals across Georgia from 1,300 to 2,800, Kemp said.

Specifically, 170 of the new staff will go to rural hospitals, the governor told reporters during a news conference at the state Capitol.

Commissioner of Community Health Caylee Noggle and her team have also identified 450 beds in nine regional coordinating hospitals that will be soon be available for the new staff being deployed to treat patients.

Kemp said his decision to increase hospital staff was based on input during the last week from hospital CEOs.

"Virtually every hospital's most pressing issue was a lack of qualified staff to treat the patients coming through their doors, nurses, respiratory therapists, ICU personnel, just to name a few," he said.

The additional hospital staff will be provided through a continuation of the state's no-bid contract with a private Alpharetta-based staffing firm, Jackson Healthcare, and a subsidiary, Georgia Health News

"Let the schools deal with the individual situations they have. That's better than one size fits all."

— Gov. Brian Kemp

reported recently that the contract, which began with the first wave of COVID-19 in Georgia last year, had brought Jackson \$434 million as of July 23.

Kemp's announcement Monday came as Georgia continued to lag the nation in COVID-19 vaccinations. As of Monday, 48% of Georgians had received at least one dose of a vaccine, compared to the national average of 59.7%.

About 41% of Georgians had been fully vaccinated, compared to 50.7% of all Americans.

The governor also announced Monday that state offices will be closed on Friday, Sept. 3, in advance of Labor Day to encourage state employees who have not been vaccinated to schedule a shot on or before that day.

Kemp also doubled down on his previous declaration that the state will remain open for business despite a recent rise in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths driven by the highly contagious delta variant.

See 'Kemp' on 2A

Football Preview Inside



INSIDE:

Opinion: 'The comp plan and the political aftermath,' Page 4A
Softball: 'Raiders down region rivals on the road,' Page 7B

CORONAVIRUS

The covid numbers

Schools offer update on cases; state total crosses one million

By Zach Mitcham
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Madison County schools reported 30 students and three staff members positive for covid on Monday, along with 70 students and two staff members under quarantine for exposure.

Superintendent Michael Williams said the schools are looking out for potential clusters of positive cases in classrooms, but that has not been apparent so far. He said the Monday breakdown of positive student cases was as follows: Madison County High School, 11; Madison County Middle School, nine; Hull-Sanford Elementary, three; Danielsville Elementary, two; the Early Learning Center, two; Comer Elementary, one; Colbert Elementary, one; and Ila Elementary, one.

Williams said the schools will provide weekly updates on covid numbers on the school website, just like last year. He said it's yet to be determined if the update will be on Wednesdays or Fridays.

School covid policies on masks vary between systems. Madison County schools have an optional mask policy this year.

Countywide, cases continued to climb over the past week, with the Georgia Department of Public Health reporting 104 new cases between Aug. 10 and Aug. 17. The county positivity rate was at 21.6 percent Tuesday, which is considered high. That rate topped 30 percent during the surge in cases in early 2021.

The DPH reported Madison County's youngest covid death this past week, a 42-year-old white male. The DPH did not indicate if he had pre-existing conditions.

The state health department reported that as of Tuesday, 36 percent of Madison County was fully vaccinated. Vaccination rates in nearby counties are as follows: Banks, 24; Barrow, 33; Clarke, 40; Elbert, 34; Franklin, 29; Hart, 31; Jackson, 36; Oconee, 52; and Oglethorpe, 36.

Statewide, Georgia topped one million covid positive cases since the pandemic began, with 1,000,872 cases recorded as of Tuesday.

The DPH reported that as of Tuesday, ICU beds in the Athens area were at 97.3 percent capacity, with 72 occupied. There are a total of 596 inpatient beds in use in the Athens area, which is 93.7 percent of capacity. Forty-seven ventilators are in use, 50 percent of capacity.

The DPH reports that between Jan. 1 and Aug. 10, 4,261,292 Georgians have become fully vaccinated. Of fully vaccinated people, there have been 13,332 positive covid cases recorded (.003 percent of the vaccinated), with 198 hospitalized for covid (.00004 percent) and 105 deaths due to covid (.00002 percent).

Confirmed deaths from covid in Georgia as of Tuesday were 19,044.

ELECTIONS

Qualifying being held for local offices

Qualifying for the county commission District 3 seat and several municipal offices is being held this week.

As of press time Tuesday afternoon, three people had qualified to fill the unexpired term of Theresa Bettis, who resigned from the seat earlier this year. They were Melanie Dove, Frank May and Marilyn Walton. Qualifying for that race concluded at noon Wednesday (after press time for this week).

Qualifying for races in Carlton, Colbert, Comer, Danielsville, Hull and Ila is also being held this week. An update will be provided when qualifying concludes.

