

Covington, Georgia

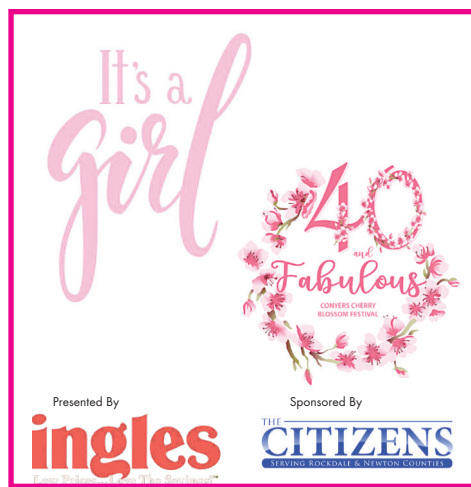
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Shooting range request fails after commissioners deadlock

By Alice Queen

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COVINGTON — A request to amend Newton County's zoning ordinance to allow for an outdoor shooting range in agricultural zoning failed after commissioners reached a stalemate with undertones of parliamentary gamesmanship.

Attorney Nezida Davis and Colin Mapp, president of the Bass Reeves Gun Club, presented a request for a text amendment to the zoning ordinance to commissioners at their Feb. 2 meeting. Bass Reeves is an Atlanta gun club of about 900 members that is pro-Second Amendment and advocates for safe, responsible and skilled gun ownership in the

African American community, according to the club's website.

District 4 Commissioner J.C. Henderson made a motion to initiate the ordinance amendment, and District 2 Commissioner Demond Mason seconded the motion. With District 1 Commissioner Stan Edwards and District 2 Commissioner Ronnie Cowan opposed, District 3 Commis-

sioner Alana Sanders abstained in an apparent attempt to compel Chairman Marcello Banes to break the tie. Banes, however, also abstained, which caused the motion to fail.

Sanders said she abstained because she wasn't clear on the wording of Henderson's motion.

SEE RANGE, A5

Rockdale approves townhouse development after a last-minute agreement

By Larry Stanford

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CONYERS — With a final decision on a proposed townhouse development rezoning request coming up at the Feb. 9 meeting hinging on the developer and the adjacent BJ's Warehouse Club reaching an agreement on a berm, the Rockdale County Board of Commissioners received a message just prior to the meeting that the agreement had been reached. They subsequently unanimously approved a change to the county's future land use map and the rezoning request.

DRH Properties was seeking a change to the county's future land use map and a rezoning from limited industrial to high density residential for 14.93 acres at 2021 Old Covington Highway and Salem Industrial Boulevard. The developer plans to build 153 townhomes on the property.

The major sticking point at the BOC's Jan. 26 zoning hearing was a berm BJ's was requesting be built between its property and the townhouse development. While BJ's and the Rosen Group, which ground leases the site on Dogwood Drive to the business, said they had no problem with the townhouse development, they were concerned that truck traffic noise at the back of BJ's would be a deterrent to home buyers and requested that the developer install a large berm between the properties to reduce the amount of noise the homeowners would hear.

But representatives of the developers said the berm being requested would cost \$800,000 to build and was not reasonable.

At the Jan. 26 meeting, the BOC said an agreement on the berm would be the biggest factor they would weigh in approving or not approving the requests.

After receiving the message that an agreement on the berm had been reached, Post 2 Commissioner Dr. Doreen Williams thanked both sides for being able to work together.

"I just wanted to say that we appreciate you working that out, because it really was not a zoning issue," said Williams. "It really was a private ownership decision. I know that they had to put a lot of work in to get that agreement, and I appreciate it."

Post 1 Commissioner Sherri Washington also thanked the developers for agreeing to

SEE TOWNHOUSE, A5



Malachi Brock is the winner of the 2021 Newton County School System Spelling Bee. Brock is a fourth-grader at Porterdale Elementary and an avid reader.

Special Photo

Fourth-grader named Newton's Super Speller

From staff reports

COVINGTON — Porterdale Elementary School student Malachi Brock emerged victorious in Newton County School System's 2021 District Spelling Bee.

Brock, a fourth-grader, edged out all other NCSS elementary and middle school school-level champions to walk away with Super Speller bragging rights this year and will now represent NCSS in the Regional Spelling Bee

on Feb. 27. Iyana Black of Live Oak Elementary School and Aiden Jarvis of South Salem Elementary School tied for second place in the district spelling bee.

"I love to read, so I'm good at spelling," said Brock after he accepted his winner's trophy. "I read a lot of books and work on vocabulary."

"I am so proud of Malachi and his performance in the county spelling bee," said Clydia Newell, princi-

pal of Porterdale Elementary School. "Malachi is a wonderful student. He is a voracious reader, and I am confident that his reading has contributed to his ability in spelling. I am excited that he will be representing Porterdale Elementary School and the Newton County School system in the regional spelling bee."

According to Dr. Helena Foster, Elementary Curriculum and Instruction specialist for NCSS,

this year's spelling bee was different from previous years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This year's bee was conducted using an online assessment platform created by Scripps," explained Foster. "Students were given 50 words to spell. The computer called the words for the students, and they had to type the words correctly within 30 minutes. Students still had

SEE SPELLER, A5

Area students on track to return to classrooms

By Alice Queen

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CONYERS — Students enrolled for in-person instruction in Rockdale and Newton counties appear to be on course to return to the classrooms.

In Rockdale County, school system officials said students who opted for in-person learning will return on Feb. 22, as announced in December. Those who have chosen the virtual instruction model will continue to learn from home.

Newton students who opted for in-person instruction are slated to return on Feb. 16 after the two-week rate of positive cases of COVID-19 reached the "moderate" level this week.

The Newton County School Sys-

tem announced last month that officials would be monitoring COVID-19 data on a week-to-week basis to determine when to resume in-person instruction.

At Tuesday night's Board of Education work session, Superintendent Samantha Fuhrey said the school system appeared to be on track to return to school Feb. 16, as planned.

Fuhrey also asked community residents to keep up their guard against the virus. "As a friendly reminder, it is extremely important that every person do their part," she said. "I monitor the numbers ... and



Samantha Fuhrey



Dr. Terry Oatts

while we are on a downward trend, all it will take is people congregating and not wearing their masks and not washing their hands, not watching their distance, then those numbers will increase again, and we'll be back in the same situation. So it is extremely important that our community work hard to keep those numbers on a downward trajectory."

Fuhrey said the downward trend looks promising. "I think the rate of positivity today (Tuesday) is in the 7s, so that's great news because the Department of Public Health says that moderate is between 5 and

10," said Fuhrey. "We haven't seen that number in a long, long, long time. We are doing the right thing; we just have to continue to do it as we try to bring kids back to school."

The school system announced the return to school on its Facebook page Wednesday, drawing mostly positive comments from local parents.

"Praise the Lord!" said one. "Thank you Lord," posted another. "I hope the school system has had enough of this game! It's time to get back on track and give these kids the education they deserve."

Despite the enthusiasm for getting students back to school, there was

SEE RETURN, A5

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