

# Rocky Mount TELEGRAM

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SCAN ME



Pictured here is Trevor Foote presenting the "Agent of the Month" award to Jay Hooks for March 2021. Congratulations Jay!



## Investigators probe slaying of local activist

BY JOHN H. WALKER  
Staff Writer



CUNNINGHAM

Authorities continue to investigate the murder of community activist Johnny Cunningham, whose body was found next to his truck Thursday morning in the driveway of his home in the 3000 block of Old Battleboro Road after Edgecombe County deputies conducted a welfare check.

Detective Lt. Wilson Muse of the Edgecombe County Sheriff's Office said Friday that investiga-

tors are pursuing a lead in the case. The day before, he said there was a person of interest, although no arrests had been made as of mid-afternoon on Friday. Muse said the 60-year-old Cunningham was shot at least three times with a firearm of still-unknown caliber. He said the size of the weapon and the

number of times Cunningham was shot will not be known until autopsy results are received.

The public was asked Thursday to help in the investigation as the sheriff's office sought information about anything anyone may have seen or heard out of the ordinary that might have happened between 9:30 and 10 p.m. Wednesday night in the area of Cunningham's home.

Over the years, Cunningham had both battled with and supported the Rocky Mount City Council as a frequent attendee and speak-

er at council meetings.

On Friday, council members observed a moment of silence in Cunningham's memory before starting their workday at the annual council retreat being held at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville.

In October 2014, Cunningham founded The ReGroup 1, a non-profit organization established to provide jobs and education for felons to help turn their lives around.

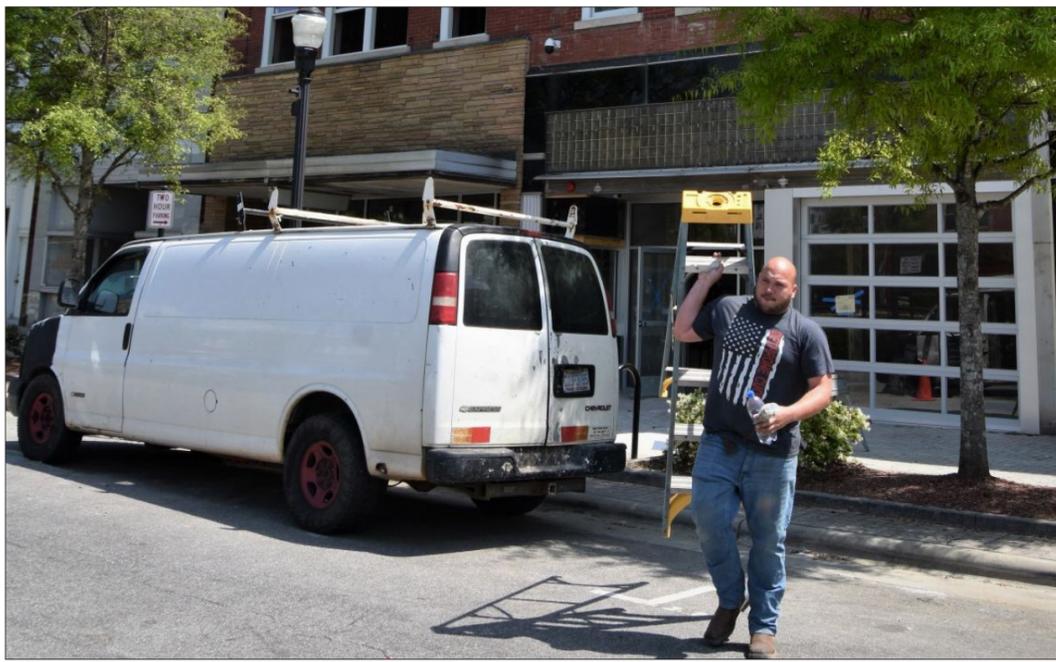
Cunningham, who had been incarcerated himself at a young age, said he wanted to use the same

hands with which he had committed crimes to help others work to turn their lives around.

He told the Telegram in a 2017 news story that, "Even though it was over 35 years ago, I think about my past every day — but what I want to do is hope God works through me to help others avoid the pain I went through and be positive with their life."

In that article, Cunningham, who was then mulling a run for

See SLAYING, A6



WILLIAM F. WEST/ROCKY MOUNT TELEGRAM

Jonathan Jackson of Floras Glass and Mirror Co. was doing work Friday at the future Davis Lofts at Main Street.

## Bill to grant state audits more power

BY AMELIA HARPER  
Staff Writer

A new bill introduced this month in the General Assembly is designed to give more teeth to audits of local governments such as the audit that was released in 2020 about the City of Rocky Mount.

The primary sponsors of SB 473, also known as the "Enhance Local Government Transparency Bill," include state Sens. Lisa Barnes, R-Nash; Norman Sanderson, R-Pamlico; and Chuck Edwards, R-Henderson.

"Government transparency is critical to the success of our democracy. My goal

in creating this bill is to strengthen the public's trust and preserve the integrity of local government while avoiding wrongdoing and conflicts of interest," Barnes said Friday in an interview.

The bill, in its current draft form, has four main purposes.

The first is to provide stronger consequences for city and county governments investigated by the

See BILL, A2



BARNES

## Retreat puts focus on downtown housing

BY WILLIAM F. WEST  
Staff Writer

The City of Rocky Mount's 2021 retreat was hardly confined to comments and discussions by the municipal officials.

During the early part of the last day of a series of

work sessions, Garland Jones, who serves on the Central City Revitalization Panel, made clear his belief in the need for Rocky Mount to have affordable housing as a key part of improving the city.

"When other people come into our city and ride

through our city, we have parts of our city that look bad," Jones said on Friday.

Jones said the time has come to make those parts of Rocky Mount look better.

"And housing is critical for this city, like anything else," Jones said. "There

are times when we argued — and we did it years ago — about which side of the track we did something on."

He was referring to the railroad line through downtown that bisects the

See RETREAT, A6

## Whitakers man pleads guilty to robberies

BY AMELIA HARPER  
Staff Writer

A Whitakers man was sentenced last week to serve 78 months in prison for his part in a bank robbery and the robbery of a Family Dollar Store that occurred in towns in eastern North Carolina.

According to court documents, Christopher Bryan Shingleton, 43, pled guilty to robbing the First Bank



SHINGLETON

released Thursday from the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina said.

Though Shingleton was indicted on four counts, he pled guilty to two counts and was sentenced to 78 months on each count to be served concurrently.

Media accounts published at the time of his arrest identified Shingleton as a Swansboro resident. However, a spokesman for the U.S. District Court confirmed that he had a Whitakers address at the time of the indictment.

During both robberies, Shingleton threatened employees by saying he had a gun and demanded money.

According to state law, a person can be charged with armed robbery if they have a weapon in their possession or even if they threaten the use of any firearm or other dangerous weapon.

As part of the sentence,

See ROBBERIES, A6

## Area teen wounded in shooting incident

BY WILLIAM F. WEST  
Staff Writer

Authorities are trying to find the person or persons responsible for a teen having been found shot late Thursday afternoon in the Cedar Brook area of the city.

Officers about 5 p.m. responded to the 1100 block of West Raleigh Boulevard and found an 18-year-old male who had been wounded in one of his arms, police Cpl. Ricky Jackson said in a

brief news release. Emergency medical personnel transported the teen to Nash UNC Health Care for treatment of non-life-threatening injuries, Jackson said.

Edgecombe County Sheriff's Office radio traffic subsequently advised there had been a shooting with an injury at the Princess Market, which is in the 1100 block of West Raleigh.

The radio traffic included

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