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### News

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## HEADLINES BY THE DOZEN

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**Players for the Park View and Surry County football teams pray at midfield, kneeling around the 55 emblazoned on Dragon Field, in memory of Jamond Salley.**

**By Susan Kyte**  
**News & Record**

SoVaNow.com / December 30, 2014

A rundown of the top news stories in 2014? Let's just flat-out state that ten is not enough for our list.

Looking back, The Sun has singled out a dozen stories that deserve mention on our year-end list of Mecklenburg County's most momentous events.

A note: judging from the online reader traffic that showed up at The Sun's website, sovanow.com, there was a wide gulf between the No. 1 story of the year, and everything else that came before or after.

The football-related death of Jamond Salley. The Friday night lights burned a little less brightly this season after the Oct. 17 death of Park View High School junior Jamond Salley, who collapsed and died suddenly during halftime of the Park View-Brunswick varsity football game in Lawrenceville. A preliminary autopsy released less than a week after the tragedy revealed that Salley, a Chase City-area resident, died of blunt force trauma to the head.

The death of the Dragon football co-captain and two-way starter stunned the football program, the high school and the wider Mecklenburg County community.

According to persons present at the scene, Salley walked off the field with his teammates at halftime, and huddled with them at an adjacent baseball field at Brunswick High School during halftime. His condition suddenly deteriorated, and he was transported by ambulance to VCU Community Memorial Hospital in South Hill, where he was pronounced dead.

The cause of Salley's death, beyond the medical examiner's finding of blunt force trauma, remains a mystery — no one has been able to reach a conclusion about the hit, or hits, that may have led to the tragedy.

A couple from Chapel Hill, N.C. with a home on Lake Gaston later learned of

## 2014 s TOP STORIES: ENERGY RULES

12/29/14 - 7:55 am

Dan River coal ash spill, natural gas pipeline lead the list of year's biggest events

## Gas tax hike imposed as year begins

12/29/14 - 7:54 am

## Business teacher named Longwood center director

12/29/14 - 7:53 am

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### Sports

## Comets prepare for pair of district matchups

12/31/14 - 11:47 am

Bassett Friday, followed by GW Tuesday

- Comets prepare for pair of district matchups
- Comets take Classic title
- Lady Comets fall to Gretna in Classic finale
- Surges propel Comets
- Comets make short work of Gretna

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## Opinion

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## A&E

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Salley's death and offered to purchase and professionally fit each Park View High School team member with helmets made by a prominent supplier, Schutt. The company provides athletic equipment to college, high school and youth-level football programs. The offer was later revised. Instead of new helmets, the couple signaled their desire to buy new lockers and a blocking sled for the Park View High School football program.

Salley, who wore 55, was memorialized by teammates, coaches, legions of friends and complete strangers who were left to ponder the risks that come with the hard-hitting game of football.

Community Memorial affiliates with Richmond's VCU/MCV Health System. The South Hill hospital celebrated its 60th anniversary by welcoming VCU/MCV Health System of Richmond as its new partner and parent, and announced plans to build an all-new hospital in South Hill.

The affiliation, which brought an end to CMH's 60 years as a standalone facility, came with the promise of a \$75 million investment in CMH by VCU/MCV, chiefly a new state-of-the-art hospital. VCU also prevailed over health systems that sought to acquire CMH by promising direct access to world-class physicians and VCU/MCV

medical facilities in Richmond.

Approval of the proposed new hospital facility came late in 2014 from the Virginia Department of Health. VCU Community Memorial Hospital CEO Scott Bumette happily announced that a groundbreaking of a new 73-acre hospital campus near US 1 and State Route 138 would take place in the next seven months, with an opening set for 2018.

The new hospital, which is projected to cost just under \$100 million, will include 70 acute care inpatient beds, a four-bed obstetrics unit and full-time, in-house cardiac catheterization services. This new facility, Bumette said, will mark the return of obstetrical services to the hospital a facet of medical care that was lost in 2012 due to space constraints. And for the first time, full-time cardiac care will become part of the regular menu of services at the local hospital.

Complaints, controversy dog Superintendent of Schools Dr. James Thornton. For the second year in a row, Thornton and his firebrand management style have earned Mecklenburg County Public Schools a prominent spot among the top news items of the year.

While much of what can be said about Thornton represents a repeat of 2013 accusations of wasteful spending, improper use of school activities funds, disappointing SOL test scores, tussles with the Board of Supervisors and a minority faction on the School Board, topped by a perceived climate of employee intimidation within the school system this year the superintendent added some new twists:

Having to hire more than 50 new teachers and administrators at the start of the 2014/2015 school year;

Surviving two attempts to oust him as superintendent, and a 180-degree turn by School Board chair Robert Puryear, who went from an ardent Thornton supporter to avowed critic and in November relinquished the title of chairman;

The defeat of a lawsuit to overturn the July renegotiation of his contract that included a nearly \$4,000 annual pay raise, an additional \$9,000 annuity, a car and other benefits;

The demotion of Deputy Superintendent Dr. Melody Hackney after she balked at Thornton's plan to use driver education money to purchase furniture for a senior lounge at Park View High School;

The accreditation of only one county school Bluestone High by the Virginia Department of Education. All seven other schools are accredited with warning, and Bluestone Middle School, having been assigned the conditional rating for three straight years, is on the verge of losing its accreditation altogether.

Chase City grocery chain owner Johnny Farmer pleads guilty to a federal conspiracy charge. Farmer, a longtime Chase City resident and Halifax County native who went from high school dropout to owner of a small chain of grocery stores, saw his career come to an ignominious end this year with an indictment in



stores, saw his career come to an ignominious end this year with an indictment in federal court for conspiracy to commit wire fraud in an alleged scam to defraud the Kellogg Company of \$1.9 million. He pleaded guilty to the crime in October and will be sentenced on January 22, 2015.

The 78-year-old Farmer faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine that could run twice the value of the funds he admitted to having swindled from Kellogg's. As if that were not enough, in late November federal prosecutors slapped a restraining order that froze Farmer's bank and credit card accounts and restricted him from touching any of his assets, including bank accounts, several vehicles and trailers, and real estate in Chase City, Littleton, N.C. and Moran, Wyoming.

Farmers Foods stores in Kenbridge and South Boston, meantime, were taken over by new ownership.

Southside Virginia's natural gas pipeline expansion. Construction began in September on one of the largest gas pipeline projects on the east coast the Williams Transco Virginia Southside Expansion. The project consists of approximately 100 miles of new pipeline extending from Transco's backbone pipe in Pittsylvania County. The extension crosses over Halifax, Charlotte and Mecklenburg counties to Dominion Virginia Power's new 1,300-megawatt, \$1.3 billion gas-fired generation station in Brunswick County. In addition, Williams is constructing a state-of-the-art, 21,800-horsepower gas turbine compressor station in Pittsylvania County. The facility will be located in close proximity to an existing Transco station in Chatham.

Output from the Brunswick County power plant is designed to replace the electricity generated by coal units at two eastern Virginia stations operated by Dominion, and provide additional gas supply to Piedmont Natural Gas Company in North Carolina.

A 2012 economic impact study projects a significant short-term boost of nearly \$100 million during the construction phase, with the hiring of approximately 1,000 workers over two years. For restaurants, motels and apartment complexes, to say nothing of local retailers, the gains come from a bump in consumer spending by construction employees, of which there were hundreds flocking from the outside world to Southside in late 2014. State and local governments also anticipate an increase in sales and use taxes on materials and equipment purchased at the job sites.

Once construction ends a tentative completion date is set for September 2015 ongoing pipeline operations are projected to have an annual economic impact of \$2.1 million, supporting nine new jobs in the region.

The minor controversy ensued when it was reported that the Virginia Tobacco Commission bestowed a \$30 million subsidy on the \$300 million pipeline project, in essence providing a subsidy to Dominion even though an inspector general's report revealed a staff opinion that the project merited only a \$6.5 million tobacco commission grant. Even the utility company admitted it didn't really need the money.

Coal ash spills into the Dan River, upstream from the Lake Country. On Feb. 2, an estimated 39,000 tons of coal ash spewed into the Dan River from a collapsed waste lagoon in Eden, N.C., at the decommissioned Dan River Steam Station owned by Duke Energy. The Dan flows into Buggs Island Lake at its confluence with the Staunton River near Staunton River State Park.

It took nearly a week to staunch the spill, which workers accomplished by plugging the broken pipe with concrete. By then, layers of toxic ash up to 5 feet deep were detected in the nearby basin in Virginia, while other deposits of less than 1 inch were found further downstream in Buggs Island Lake (Kerr Reservoir).

Tests of raw river water following the spill revealed levels of copper, aluminum, iron and arsenic contamination above state standards for surface water. Yet the tests also showed that treated drinking water supplies were safe for consumption.

The aftermath of the spill brought renewed calls from environmentalists to force the removal of all ash ponds near navigable waterways, and strict regulations on the companies that create and maintain the ponds.

By early October, Duke Energy had cleaned up only 10 percent of the

contaminated ground area in and around the Dan River basin.

In September, North Carolina became the first state to enact legislation to tackle the coal ash problem. However, environmentalists say the state law doesn't go nearly far enough in protecting drinking water, as all 33 sludge ponds located throughout North Carolina are leaching arsenic, chromium, mercury, lead and boron into nearby groundwater.

A new North Carolina law calls for the cleanup of four pits, including the one that contaminated the Dan River, over the next five years. The company has 15 years to remove remaining sludge ponds, located at ten sites, including coal-fired power plants still in operation. The law also potentially leaves the door open to capping ash dumps at their existing locations, a method that environmentalists contend would not keep contaminants from leaking into groundwater.

In December, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency weighed in, proposing to regulate coal ash as standard solid waste, rather than as hazardous materials as environmental groups sought.

Defunct St. Paul's College is denied in its bid to house unaccompanied alien children from Central and South America. The historically black university, shuttered since last year, drew the ire of Brunswick County officials and residents when the community caught wind of a proposal to convert the college campus into temporary housing for undocumented juvenile immigrants from south of the U.S. border.

The plan, hatched by St. Paul's President Millard "Pete" Stith, came to light in mid-June, less than a week before the first group of nearly 500 juveniles was scheduled to arrive in Lawrenceville. The prospect caused an uproar among Brunswick public officials who claimed they were blindsided by the move.

A town hall-style meeting that drew several hundred residents, as well as federal and local officials, brought a quick end to the relocation plans, and the demise of what Stith called a "win-win for the town and St. Paul's."

Stith argued the program was a way to help the college overcome its financial woes. St. Paul's was set to receive \$180,000 per month under a renewable five-month contract with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which would also cover the cost of renovating many of its dilapidated dormitories.

When St. Paul's closed in June 2013, it was mired in nearly \$5 million in debt, and without money for maintenance, many of its buildings were not in compliance with state or local building codes.

Some of undocumented juveniles slated for St. Paul's were later diverted to an existing facility, the Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Detention Center in Verona.

In late September, the college filed two separate federal housing discrimination complaints. One was against the Town of Lawrenceville, Brunswick County and Brunswick County Sheriff Brian Roberts, and the other was against the federal

offices of HHS and its Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Both alleged discrimination as the reason HHS ended its contract with St. Paul's to house up to 500 UACs on the campus.

In January, the St. Paul's board made plans to auction off the campus and related assets through Richmond-based Motley's Auction & Realty Group. This was followed in late May by an announcement by black activist Dr. Umar Johnson of his intent to purchase the campus for \$5 million and convert it into a residential boarding school for African-American boys. The school was to be named the Frederick Douglass Marcus Garvey Academy.

The auction brought forth no buyer and Dr. Johnson never delivered on his promise to purchase the campus.

The deaths of two local students, Heather Anne Tucker and Gianluca Gallina, and other notable departures. It was an emotional year for the county's two high schools, not only because of the death of Jamond Salley, but also due to the losses of two other popular students: Gianluca Gallina of Park View, who died Sunday, September 7, following a head-on crash near South Hill, and Heather Anne Tucker of Bluestone, who lost her high-profile battle with brain cancer.

Before his death, the 16-year old Gallina had been a standout goalie for the Dragon

soccer program and a local travel soccer team. He was the son of Joe Gallina, owner of Marino's Pizza in South Hill.

On July 10, 15-year-old Bluestone High School student Heather Anne Tucker succumbed after a year-long battle with brain cancer. The daughter of Trish and David Tucker of Clarksville, she had become the face of strength and determination for all those with cancer as she spent the last year of her life actively raising funds for the local American Cancer Association Relay for Life, while holding on as much as she could to the normal life of a teenager.

Her death became even more upsetting when news leaked out that local resident, Sebert Ray Kyle, Jr., had embezzled \$1,300 from a benefit fund set up for Heather Anne. He used the money to purchase a smart phone for himself. He later returned the money to the fund.

Kyle was sentenced on October to 2 years in prison.

Age claimed several notable Mecklenburg County residents. Lawrence Burton Buchanan, 92, died in April. Burton served his country in the United States Navy during World War II and was a member and past Post Commander of the VFW Roanoke River Post 8163. A life-long member of Clarksville Baptist Church and a charter member of the Mecklenburg County Life Saving and Rescue Squad, he also served on the Clarksville Town Council.

Thomas Fitzgerald, 93, local dentist, served his country in the Pacific Theater in WW II. He practiced dentistry for 51 years in South Hill, was a member and ruling elder of South Hill Presbyterian Church (a member since 1946), and past president of South Hill Rotary Club, a member of American Legion Post 79, South Hill Lodge 297 A.F. & A.M., and member of O.K.U. Scholastic Fraternity. He was also a past president of Southside Dental Society, A Fellow of Virginia Dental Society, Life member of ADA and Fellow of the American College of Dentists.

For 18 years he served as a member of the South Hill Town Council and as vice mayor of the town. He also spent an appointed term on Mecklenburg County Board of Supervisors, was director of the South Hill Industrial Development Corporation and the South Hill Industrial Development Authority, a founding director and first president of Woodfield Country Club, director of the founding board of South Hill Country Club, and director and Board Chairman of Citizens Bank, Inc. until it merged with First Virginia Bank, South Hill, where he was a board member and chairman until he retired in 1996.

Leroy King, who died in February at age 87, may be best remembered as a family man who served his country in the USAF, was a deacon in Mount Zion Baptist Church, a lifetime member of the NAACP, Southside Theatre Group, and Buffalo Baptist Sunday School Union Sunday School Teacher. Those who knew him may remember that he once was named Omega Psi Phi "Man of the year" and in 1992 was one of the people chosen to bear the Olympic Torch.

But few know that Leroy King was the founder, organizer and manager of the Clarksville Hawks, the semi-professional all-black baseball team that competed in the 1940s and '50s on a circuit that included Raleigh, N.C., South Hill, Chase City, and Danville. Or that because of King, his cousin Horace "Pete" Venable, and friend "Sonny Boy" Watkins (for a short time) went on to play baseball in the Negro Leagues, whose alumni include some of the greatest players to ever grace the game: Jackie Robinson, Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, Satchel Paige.

Throughout his life, King was a catalyst in ensuring equality in education and other aspects of life in Mecklenburg County, involving himself with "Freedom of Choice" legislation, equal rights marches and demonstrations including the Million Man March in Washington, D.C.

Mary Fran Lewis, 97, was working in Pearl Harbor at the time of the attack by the Japanese during WW II. While in Hawaii, she met and married her husband, Clarksville native Meriwether Fielding Stormy Lewis, who was then a navy pilot.

After the untimely death of her husband in plane crash, and a time when women were not considered savvy enough to develop real estate, Lewis pushed local bankers to lend her the money to convert the family farm into the development today known as Merfield.

She will also be remembered for her extensive efforts, building the new St. Timothy's Episcopal Church facility in Clarksville and for her civic involvement.

Jesse Overstreet, 90, served his country as a Naval Pilot during World War II, and as a member of the Navy Reserve for 23 years, retiring as a Lieutenant Commander. After the war, Overstreet graduated from the University of Richmond Law School and returned to Clarksville to open his private law practice. He also



Law School, and returned to Clarksville to open his private law practice. He also served one-term as mayor of Clarksville.

James Woodrow –Woody– Kidd, who died at age 68 was a self-employed accountant and town clerk of Brodnax, and at the same time a long-serving councilman for South Hill. His other civic involvement included membership in the South Hill Moose Lodge, Rotary, Lions and Ruritan clubs as well as membership with the South Hill Revitalization Committee, the Friends of the R. T. Arnold Library Committee. Mr. Kidd was also a life member of and longtime organist for the Providence United Methodist Church.

Library expansion in Clarksville and the breakup of the Southside Regional Library. 2014 was the best of times and the worst of times of times for the Southside Regional Library, Virginia's oldest regional library system, serving Mecklenburg and Lunenburg counties.

The Clarksville branch, often touted by Library Director Leigh Lambert as one of the most active of all six branches, reopened in July after receiving a 6,400 square foot addition. The new space included additional shelves for books, an expanded conference room/meeting space, private study space for students, and a chair lift for those with mobility issues.

In March, Lunenburg County administrator Tracey Gee asked members of the Mecklenburg County Board of Supervisors to consider moving ahead with plans for Lunenburg County libraries to withdraw from the Southside Regional Library system. The library board approved the separate shortly thereafter.

The reason Gee gave for the separation was a decision by the library director to cull older books from the library shelves in Victoria and Kenbridge. Gee said the move upset a number of the library patrons. However, troubles between the libraries in Mecklenburg and Lunenburg had been brewing for some time, particularly after the Mecklenburg County Board of Supervisors began examining the amount of financial support given to the system by Mecklenburg County compared to Lunenburg County.

As plans move forward to bring an end to the oldest library system in Virginia, Gee said the goal is to be fair and considerate of employees who may be affected the breakup.

Tobacco Heritage Trail opens Lawrenceville-to-Brodnax extension, and other tourism-related developments. Outdoor recreational opportunities throughout Southside Virginia exploded in 2014 as Phase III of the Tobacco Heritage Trail – a 17-mile extension from Lawrenceville to Brodnax – opened on Earth Day, April 22. Later, work began on Phase IV of the trail in Boydton. The official opening of Phase IV is expected in early spring 2015.

On June 16, the Southern Virginia Wild Blueway was born: a marked water trail spanning three rivers – the Dan, the Staunton (Roanoke) and the Banister – and traversing more than 100 miles of navigable water, 80 miles of which have been designated as Virginia Scenic River.

After years of promises, Buggs Island Lake finally got a new marina at Rudd's Creek in Boydton. The dock and fueling facility, which opened July 1, is owned and operated by Scott and Catherine Hughes, who also own Satterwhite Point Marina near Henderson, N.C.

And in September, the Roanoke River Basin Association Upper Reach dedicated a 100-percent handicapped accessible kayak launch at the Steel Bridge on Lake Gaston. Paddlers, regardless of their mobility issues, can now access blueways between Tailrace Park near John H. Kerr Dam and Lake Gaston at the Steel Bridge site near Bracey.

With 2015 comes the 250th anniversary of the founding of Mecklenburg County, and an opportunity to show the world all the county has to offer, especially to the outdoor enthusiasts.

Economic gains propelled by Brunswick power plant, Microsoft, Charlotte County announcements. The area's economy began to show signs of improvement in 2014. In April, the Corsi Group, a cabinet maker, announced plans to open a new facility in Charlotte County and hire 110 workers. Charlotte also will benefit from

the expansion of Blue Ridge Railcar Repair, adding 37 jobs.

That good news was followed by Microsoft embarking on Phase VI of its plan to build one of its largest cloud computing data centers in Boydton. With the work already well underway, the county received nearly \$1.5 million from the Virginia Tobacco Commission to pave Ridge Road, the new main construction entrance for the Microsoft facility.

Work continued on the new \$1.3 billion power plant being constructed for Dominion Virginia Power near Lawrenceville, and cleanup work was completed on the former Burlington site in Clarksville.

Throughout the summer and into the fall, rumors abounded that a buyer for the site was found, with plans to bring new jobs to the area. As the year draws to a close, there has been no announcement on that front. Still, jobs are coming to Mecklenburg County, which in October posted its lowest unemployment numbers in nearly six years.

The legacy of West End High School is celebrated. In May, students at Bluestone Middle School paid tribute to the men and women of color who pursued their education in the segregated era of 1950s and 1960s.

Throughout the school year, seventh graders at Bluestone Middle School, in remembrance of the 60th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, and the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, researched the history of West End High School, interviewed its graduates, and reflected on the times during which the school existed in the facility now known as Bluestone Middle School from 1953 to 1969.

The culmination of the students' research came when they presented their essays, "Small Acts of Courage-West End High School Project" to the alumni and dedicated a wall of pictures to the graduates of West End High School.

In October, alumni of West End High School dedicated a highway marker erected by the WEHS Alumni Association to honor and celebrate their school, which began in 1935, with the assistance of Jeanes Fund monies that supported educational efforts in rural African-American communities.

The marker stands on Highway 49 near the site of the second West End High School. The first high school was taken by the US Army Corps of Engineers for its Buggs Island Lake/John H. Kerr Dam and Reservoir project. The second school facility opened in 1953.

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