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DINE AND DASH: SAVANNAH BLACK-OWNED RESTAURANTS GETTING HEARD



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JULIE WADE: VACCINATE TEACHERS NOW TO PROMOTE SAFE SCHOOLING

Savannah Morning News.

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Interim elections supervisor named

By Will Peebles
Savannah Morning News
USA TODAY NETWORK

Last week, long-time Chatham County Board of Elections worker Billy Wooten was named interim elections supervisor. On Monday, he'll officially take the reins, less than two

weeks after 16-year veteran Russell Bridges announced he'd be retiring. Bridges' last day is Feb. 28.

Wooten, a North Carolina native, has served the Board of Elections in multiple capacities for a little over 20 years. Most recently, he served as the lead trainer for poll managers and

workers and served as the manager for the hand audit of Georgia's Presidential Election in 2020.

When he started as a clerk at a polling place on Wilmington Island all those years ago, he hoped to better represent the diverse electorate of Chatham County. He says that goal hasn't

changed.

"They didn't look like Savannah. You know, they weren't inclusive. There weren't any men. There weren't any younger people there. There weren't any people of color," Wooten said. "I thought, if people are working in something as important as the election,

they should look like the electorate."

He found out in late December that Bridges had suggested he be the person to take over after he retired.

"I'm willing to do whatever I can do to ensure a peaceful transition and to

See WOOTEN, A3

CAT drivers 'flabbergasted' by termination of CEO

Local bar has liquor license suspended

By Asha C. Gilbert
Savannah Morning News
USA TODAY NETWORK

At the center of Savannah's City Market, a bar usually filled with lights and music is now dark and silent.

Located at 309 W. Julian St., Tree House was closed Friday after owner Stu Putman received an order from the City of Savannah suspending Tree House's liquor license pending a show cause hearing.

At 5:30 p.m. last Friday, Tree House had no choice but to shut their doors.

A murder at the bar on New Year's Day was a catalyst that led Savannah City Manager Michael Brown to temporarily pull the license. Mayor Van Johnson said the issuance of an alcohol license is a privilege extended by the city and there are responsibilities for a business to maintain a safe environment.

"It appeared to city staff, based on several unrelated incidents, the Tree House was not able to provide a safe environment for employees and patrons," Johnson said.

On New Year's Day,

See BARS, A3



A passenger boards a Chatham Area Transit bus on Oglethorpe Avenue. [RICHARD BURKHART/SAVANNAH MORNING NEWS]

By Katie Nussbaum
Savannah Morning News
USA TODAY NETWORK

For the last decade, members of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1324 (ATU), which represents Chatham Area Transit (CAT) drivers, had been looking for engagement and transparency

within the organization.

When Bacarra Mauldin took over as CEO in June 2020, union officials said she was not only transparent, but let their voices be heard.

"She basically gave us a seat at every table, meaning we were included on leadership calls within the company. She was very



Mauldin



Ragland

transparent with us and we had been looking for that for years. A lot of times, we

didn't know what was going on within the company," said Courtney Wingster, president of ATU Local 1324, which represents nearly 130 CAT employees.

"Sometimes we would even find things out from the customers. The customers

See DRIVERS, A6

Joy is making appointment for stranger

By Mary Landers
Savannah Morning News
USA TODAY NETWORK

On Monday I booked appointments for COVID-19 vaccines for four Savannahians I've never met.

It was exhilarating. Each time I got through

Memorial's online sign-up process and a screen popped up saying "You're all signed up for Community COVID-19 Vaccination" I felt like I had a superpower.

Finally, something I could do about the pandemic!

And each time, an equally exhilarated senior citizen matched my enthusiasm,

whooping on the other end of the phone line.

It was a short-lived, spontaneous volunteer stint. Nearly all the newly opened vaccine appointments were taken by mid-morning on Tuesday. But I learned some tips that could help others when more appointments open up.

First, how I got here. I've been writing about COVID-19 since March. Most of the stories have been sad, even dire. But in December I started writing hopeful articles about the vaccine, first that it was distributed among health care

See STRANGER, A6

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