



Getting a photo with the Easter Bunny was a "must" for children attending the Pink Hill Community Easter Egg Hunt Saturday. Please see page 1C.



# Wallace hires new town manager

Abby Cavenaugh  
Staff Writer

WALLACE — The town of Wallace has hired a new manager, Mayor Charley Farrior reported on Monday.

Stevie Cox, a native of Clinton who now lives in Maryland, was tapped for the position.

The Wallace Town Council held several special meetings last week, during which a contract was negotiated with Cox.

"His plan is to start with us on April 16," Farrior said. "I'm looking forward to Stevie getting to work in Wallace."

The council voted on the contract on Thursday night, ap-



Stevie Cox

**"Wallace is such a great place," Cox said. "I look forward to seeing what we can do over the next year, the next five years, the next seven years."**

**-Wallace Town Manager Stevie Cox**

proving it unanimously.

Reached by phone in his Edgewater, Md., home on Monday afternoon, Cox said he is originally from Clinton and looks forward to returning to the area.

In his junior and senior years of high school, Hobbtown High School became a part of the same athletic conference as the Duplin County high schools.

"I spent a great deal of time in Duplin County, especially Faison," he said, adding that his father is from Faison.

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## Wallace: 'There's still more I'd like to see done'

Trevor Normile  
News Editor

KENANSVILLE — With the primaries approaching, no race in Duplin County has had as much visibility so far as the race for sheriff.

Two candidates, incumbent Sheriff Blake Wallace and candidate Harvey Stroud, will face off in the May 8 Democratic primary.

Wallace was elected sheriff in 2002 and has served since then. Wallace is a graduate of The Citadel in Charleston and holds a master's degree from University of South Carolina. His experience prior to election included a short stint with Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE) and more than 10 years with the N.C. State Bureau of Investigation.

After three years, he requested a transfer to Duplin County, where he would eventually be elected, the second member of his family to do so after Bland Wallace's election in 1868.

Heading up a department in a rural county, Wallace said fighting drug abuse has been a heavy priority since he was elected.

"We made [drug enforcement] a top priority for this office. We have tried to use every tool at our disposal to combat the illegal drug problem, from aggressively enforcing the law, the trying to get larger drug dealers [prosecuted] in federal court, where the penalties are more harsh, and seizure of assets is greater," Wallace explained.

He added that the DCSO has been working with mental health providers, faith-based groups and educators to curb drug use among people who may only be using the drugs, not dealing them.

Wallace also added that seizure of assets used in crimes has helped fund law enforcement efforts against drugs.

"For several years before the program was temporarily suspended by the federal government, we bought every vehicle this department had through that program," he said. The program was reinstated in 2017.

"And so not only is that a huge

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Duplin Times photo/Abby Cavenaugh

Gus Simmons, director of bioenergy for Cavanaugh Associates, stands in front of the Optima KV refinery facility, which converts hog waste into renewable energy. The project is the first of its kind in North Carolina.

## Biogas project first of its kind in N.C.

*Converting waste to energy, gas has begun pumping into pipeline*

Abby Cavenaugh  
Staff Writer

KENANSVILLE — Duplin County is home to the state's first facility that processes natural gas from hog waste and injects it into the Piedmont Natural Gas Pipeline. From there, it's converted to renewable energy for Duke Energy's power plant.

The project, called Optima KV, pipes methane gas from five local hog farms to a central refinery where it is cleaned and injected into the pipeline. Optima KV is a collaboration between local farmers, Smithfield Foods, investors and Cavanaugh Associates LLC.

The facility has been in place since November, said

Gus Simmons, director of bioenergy for Cavanaugh Associates, but the gas was pumped into the pipeline for the first time on March 23.

"The fact that we have five participating farms is a bit unusual," Simmons said. "It tends to be only one farm in projects like this. So it may be the first project to involve multiple farmers,

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## New Board of Elections sworn in, immediately deadlocked on chair vote

Abby Cavenaugh  
Staff Writer

KENANSVILLE — After months of court battles, the N.C. Board of Elections appointed four members to each of the state's 100 boards of elections last week. On Tuesday, the new Duplin County Board of Elections was sworn in.

Democrat Angela B. Mainor is the only remaining member of the previous board. She is joined by Democrat Augustine Jiminez, and Republicans Roland Penny and Linwood Sanderson, who has previously served.

**"We are working for the citizens of Duplin County, and that's the most important thing."**  
**-Democrat member Angela B. Mainor**

The first item of business after the swearing-in of the new members was the election of a board chair, which ended in a tie vote.

Since the sitting governor, Roy Cooper, is a Democrat, the chair of the county's election board must also be a Democrat. Sanderson nominated Jiminez for the chair position, and it was seconded by Penny. Mainor then nominated herself, noting Jiminez's lack of experience serving on the board. Jiminez agreed, and seconded Mainor's self-nomination.

When it came to a vote, it was 2-2 along party lines. The board agreed to let the state decide on a board chair.

Board of Elections Director Susan Williams then stated that the board needed to appoint a vice chair and secretary. Sanderson nominated Penny as vice chair, and he was approved unanimously.

The board opted not to vote on a secretary until the chair vote is decided. The board could perform no other

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## Head-on crash ends in tragedy in Warsaw

Trevor Normile  
News Editor

WARSAW — A violent head-on collision Monday evening took the life of a male driver in Warsaw.

At about 5 p.m., Duplin EMS and Warsaw Fire Department were dispatched to a head-on collision with two reported entrapments on U.S. 117 near Community Road.

According to North Carolina State Highway Patrol, Driver José Garcia, 37, was traveling south on U.S. 117 with his 10-year-old son when his vehicle, a Toyota SUV, drove left of center and struck a Chrysler passenger car being driv-

en by 22-year old Albylys Perez.

An Eastcare helicopter was launched from Mount Olive to provide transport and law enforcement shut down the highway. Firefighters set up a landing zone in the middle of U.S. 117.

At about 5:30 p.m., Warsaw radioed for Faison Fire Department's rescue truck to assist as mutual aid. All told, three medic units, Duplin EMS 1, 4 and 8, responded.

Garcia was pronounced dead at the scene and Perez was airlifted to Greenville. Garcia's son was transported to Vidant Duplin

with minor injuries, treated and released.

In a statement posted online, Warsaw Fire Department Battalion Chief Lee Graham wrote that the department's prayers were with those affected by the crash, including the occupants and first responders.

"Sadly, the young son will have to go through life with the images from today with him forever. We hold you close to our heart young man, and pray for understanding," he wrote.

"Inside the other vehicle, a young lady returning home, not

knowing what her life was going to be like after today, sat pinned inside her vehicle. Thankfully, due to the efforts of the crews ... This young lady will be blessed with another day."

Graham added, "[Responders] operated like a team of professionals all working for a common cause. It takes a special person to be able to handle tragedy day in and day out. We ask a lot of our folks and they step up and perform every time ... Our community is blessed to have each of you."

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## Missing man found alive in Virginia

Trevor Normile  
News Editor

SUSSEX, Va. — A Silver Alert for a man who left an assisted living facility in Kenansville last week was canceled after he was found Wednesday.

Police don't know exactly how George Michael Butts, 60, ended up in Sussex County, Virginia, but he's safe, according to Kenansville Police Chief Ryan Strick-

**The Silver Alert was issued for Butts last Monday after he reportedly left the Wellington Place facility in Kenansville, formerly called Windham Hall.**

land.

The Silver Alert was issued for Butts last Monday after he reportedly left the Wellington Place facility in Kenansville, formerly called Windham Hall.

Butts reportedly suffers from some kind of mental disability, leading police to call in a bloodhound unit from Onslow County to

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