

## Cavaliers down Wolfpack

Virginia wins rematch in OT thriller **SPORTS, B1**



## Be transit savvy on trips

Knowing how to ride the rails (and cabs and buses) is key **ED PERKINS ON TRAVEL, EXTRA, B12**

# THE ROANOKE TIMES

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## Setting a 'higher bar' for the Hokies

Whit Babcock has made his mark in 10 years as Tech's athletic director

**MARK BERMAN**  
The Roanoke Times

BLACKSBURG — Ten years ago this week, Virginia Tech hired Whit Babcock as its athletic director.

He has certainly made his mark with the Hokies in the last 10 years.

"The job as an A.D. ... is to leave it better than you found it and hopefully set a higher bar," Babcock said in an interview at his office this week.

This is the longest Babcock has ever worked for a school. The Har-

risonburg native is one of the longest-serving current athletic directors in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

"I'm thankful to have been here 10 years," Babcock, 53, said. "After moving so many times, ... this literally was my dream job. Honored to be here that long."

Is it still the dream job for him? "Yes, this is it. This is where I want to be," he said.

### 'Inexact science'

Babcock has hired a number of coaches who have achieved success at Virginia Tech.

Kenny Brooks steered the women's basketball team to the ACC tournament title and the Final Four

### THE BABCOCK REIGN

First in a series

**Coming Friday:** Babcock on the football program.

**Coming Saturday:** Babcock discusses the ACC, NIL, Cassell Coliseum and more.

last year.

Buzz Williams guided the men's basketball team to the Sweet 16 in the 2019 NCAA tournament before leaving for Texas A&M. Babcock replaced Williams with Mike Young,

Please see **BABCOCK**, Page A10



**MATT GENTRY, THE ROANOKE TIMES**

Virginia Tech athletic director Whit Babcock is shown on deck of the Student-Athlete Performance Center on Tuesday with Lane Stadium behind him. Wednesday marked the 10th anniversary of Babcock's hiring at Tech.



**DAVID HUNGATE, THE ROANOKE TIMES**

People fill the lobby of Roanoke's Grandin Theatre to hear about Arts Connect Neighbors, a combined effort of Roanoke's Arts Commission, the cultural endowment, the neighborhood services office and about 50 local artists.

## Roanoke artists come knocking

New program aims to unite neighborhoods through creativity

**LUKE WEIR**  
The Roanoke Times

Artists are lending their talents to unite Roanoke neighborhoods, ready to build door-to-door connections through music, meditation, paintings,

parades and a smattering of other creative activities.

Arts Connect Neighbors is the name of a new program that launched Wednesday and runs through the year. It's a combined effort of Roanoke's Arts Commission, the cultural endowment, the neighborhood services office and about 50 local artists, officials said.

The city is continuing momentum generated during its

"Year of the Artist" campaign in 2023, said Arts Commission Director Doug Jackson. At least 100 people gathered for the Arts Connect Neighbors launch at the Grandin Theatre on Wednesday night.

"We want people to connect and have fun," Jackson said. "There's increasing awareness nationally of the role that the arts can play in advancing community goals, and I think we're

really well suited for it."

Exiting the socially distanced era of coronavirus, and in a social media age, neighborhoods are less cohesive, said Shaleen Powell, director of the Roanoke Cultural Endowment.

"This is an opportunity for neighbors to get to know one another, utilizing the arts as a format to do that," Powell said.

Please see **ARTISTS**, Page A5

## Groundwater depletion accelerating, study finds

Loss of aquifers threatens drinking water, farming

**SUMAN NAISHADHAM**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The groundwater that supplies farms,

homes, industries and cities is being depleted across the world, and in many places faster than in the past 40 years, according to a new study that calls for urgency in addressing the depletion.

The declines were most notable in dry regions with extensive cropland, said researchers whose work was published Wednesday

in the journal Nature. On the plus side: they found several examples of aquifers that were helped to recover by changes in policy or water management, they said.

"Our study is a tale of bad news and good news," said Scott Jasechko, a professor of water resources at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and

the study's lead author. "The novelty of the study lies in its global scope."

Groundwater is one of the largest freshwater sources anywhere in the world, making the depletion of aquifers a significant concern. Overpumping

Please see **GROUNDWATER**, Page A9

## Wilder feuding with VCU again

Former governor, university clash over contentious public opinion poll

**ERIC KOLENICH**  
Richmond Times-Dispatch

RICHMOND — Former Gov. L. Douglas Wilder is rebuking Virginia Commonwealth University and its president, Michael Rao. Again.

The latest episode stems from VCU Health's failed real estate deal in downtown Richmond, what the university termed a "skewed" public opinion poll produced by Wilder's own department, allegations of a cover-up and the university's decision not to endorse the poll's findings.

Wilder, a Democrat who served as governor from 1990-94, works at VCU as a distinguished professor, earning an annual salary of \$177,000. In other words, he is publicly scolding his own boss. In a strange turn of events this week, a VCU department has fought with its own administration and communications team.

"That VCU administrators, including president Michael Rao, have failed to confront this issue directly and have not made any intention to do so comes as no surprise," Wilder wrote on his website Wednesday.

Wilder has been critical of

Please see **WILDER**, Page A6

### Deputy charged with assault identified

VIRGINIA, A4

### Trump, Biden already acting like nominees

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### Weather

Warmer, periods of rain  
**High 65 • Low 58**

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# Artists

From A1

“They’re gonna be able to pick, for free, something that they’d like to do and get to know their neighbors through.”

People can pick from a variety of activities using a catalog made specially for Arts Connect Neighbors, she said. There are options for all ages and interests, categorized as ways for neighbors to create, move, explore, learn, parade or enjoy a performance together.

Offerings include face-painting, mandala making, using a steamroller to print banner-sized images; drum circles, hip-hop and Latin dance classes; storytelling sessions, walking tours, symphony performances and more. Browse the catalogue online at [roanokearts.org/neighbors](http://roanokearts.org/neighbors).

“We want to get this in the hands of as many neighbors, different residents and neighborhoods, and just encourage them to apply,” Powell said. “It’s free.”

Groups of eight or more households can come together and schedule whatever activity they choose. The city is paying for all the programming, using \$150,000 split equally between a federal grant and a city match, officials said.

Artist Mary Ann Walker is hosting an introduction to meditation, a practice she said can help people drown out distractions and find creative inspiration. It’s an activity people can do alone, but group meditation forges connections, she said.

“This is all about creating community,” Walker said. “Building community creates more resilience. It also helps economically. It helps people widen their horizons.”

Molly Hunter is the neighborhood services coordinator for the city. She said the Arts Connect Neighbors program is taking a different approach to bringing people together.

“Neighborhoods, and communities in general, often mobilize around really controversial things, things that people don’t like,” Hunter said. “This is an opportunity to give people something that they can organize around that is positive.”



DAVID HUNGATE PHOTOS, THE ROANOKE TIMES

A new Roanoke arts program was unveiled Wednesday at an event at the Grandin Theatre.



Shaleen Powell, executive director of the Roanoke Cultural Endowment, speaks prior to the premiere of a new video on the new Arts Connect Neighbors program.



An arts patron heads to the Grandin Theatre Wednesday to attend an event announcing a new Roanoke program that will connect artists with the community.

People from all neighborhoods can apply to schedule events, she said. Just get seven other neighbors together, and sign up.

“If you’re not a formally-recognized neighborhood group, this can still be for you. Like if you’re a member of an apartment community,” Hunter said. “It’s not just for single family home neighborhoods. This is really for everybody.”

Polly Branch is another participating artist, leading a workshop for people to sketch drawings around their block. She said she wants to help neighborhoods

build trust to tackle whatever future needs might arise.

“When we choose to come together, it’s a type of courage. To be vulnerable,” Branch said. “When we share that process through community, there’s a new empowerment that comes alive.”

Branch said she has been an artist in Roanoke for 35 years, and the Arts Connect Neighbors program is a novel direction for the city.

“I’m thrilled that the city recognizes the power of the arts,” Branch said. “My hope is that we reach neighborhoods that have not felt welcome in the past to

participate in empowerment or community work.”

Also on Wednesday, Jackson said he received notice that the arts commission received an \$80,000 grant from the federal government’s National Endowment for the Arts.

It was the largest sum awarded out of 21 grants spread throughout Virginia, and speaks to the local arts community’s growing momentum, he said.

That money will go toward bringing more neighborhoods into the now-annual Daisy Art Parade, which held its inaugural celebration downtown last April.

“Roanoke has a large number of artists who believe in and are using the arts to make a stronger community,” Jackson said. “As they’re working to make the community a better place, it crosses lots of issues: social justice, housing, the environment.”

The connecting neighbors program will go all year, and could be expanded further, he said. It’s a way to market not only community-building efforts in the city, but also the artists who are running self-contained small businesses.

“We’d also like to get it out there to church groups, businesses, corporations, board retreats,” Jackson said. “You can imagine that this would be another revenue stream for our artists in the community.”

Arts Connect Neighbors is a place-based approach to community building, he said. That mentality is the next step and the big-picture approach for the arts commission’s future.

“It can be a brand identity for the arts in Roanoke,” Jackson said. “We’re actively using the arts to create a better community.”

The arts commission celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2023, he said. The commission is heading into the future with an aim to connect the city, and help folks have some fun, he said.

“This is just a different way of investing in our art sector,” Jackson said. “It’s an evolution of a lot of things. Not just work from the arts commission, but just where we are as Roanoke.”

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