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**HI: 82**  
**LOW: 66**



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# The Press-Sentinel

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Jesup, Georgia 31545

Thursday, December 30, 2021

\$1<sup>00</sup>

## Infrastructure bill includes big funds for airport here

**By Drew Davis**  
 STAFF WRITER

Long-planned improvements at Wayne County's William A. Zorn Airport have just gotten a big boost.

The recently passed federal infrastructure bill includes \$110,000 for capital improvements at the airport here.

The funding has local officials beaming.

"The airport is designated as a regional airport, and most of the improvements are funded by federal grants," County Administrator Ed Jeffords pointed out. "And this is a vital part of our economic growth."

"Without an airport, you'd definitely be hurting," said Mitch Sutton, the fixed-base operator who manages the airport for the county.

Jeffrey Griffith, who has been coordinating continuing airport improvements here for the Georgia Department of Transportation, said of the new funding that he was "just happy to see

□ See **AIRPORT**, Page 9A



The Donate Life Rose Parade float that Chris Brown will be riding New Year's Day features the winged Lion Venice from St. Mark's Square in Italy in a Gothic architectural setting with classic Venetian gondolas and canals. The parade theme, "Dream. Believe. Achieve," is reflected in the float theme, "Courage to Hope." The 2022 parade appearance is the 19th year for the Donate Life float, which is intended to inspire organ, eye and tissue donation. The float was designed by Charles Meier and constructed by Fiesta Parade Floats under the direction of Mike and Mimi Thompson.

## Brown grateful for opportunity as Courage to Hope spokesman

□ **Set to ride in Rose Parade on Saturday**

**By John Eden**  
 STAFF WRITER

Chris Brown has an amazing story to share, and this Saturday, he'll get a pretty amazing platform for sharing it.

Brown, who lives in

□ See **BROWN**, Page 10A



Chris and Keli Brown

## Public bodies don't always meet in public

**By Drew Davis**  
 STAFF WRITER

How much of their local meeting time do public bodies in Wayne County spend behind closed doors?

One answer, according to a survey conducted by *The Press-Sentinel*, is more than a third (34.3 percent).

During the months of October and November, *The Press-Sentinel* monitored seven local governmental bodies for how much time the bodies met and how much of that time was spent in closed session.

The bodies selected were the four governing bodies in Wayne County (the Wayne County Board of Commissioners and the Jesup, Screven and Odum city councils); the Wayne County Board of Education; and the two most prominent county authorities—the Wayne County Industrial Development Authority and the Wayne

County Hospital Authority.

The "winner" for the highest proportion of time spent in "executive session" (to use the term commonly employed by the bodies themselves) is the Jesup City Council, which spent approximately nine hours and 21 minutes out of an estimated 14 hours and 31 minutes in closed session during the two-month study period.

That total can be highly misleading, though, because approximately eight hours of that closed-session time was spent in interviews of candidates for city manager.

Normally, the school board—which accepts or rejects every personnel recommendation by the school superintendent—easily exceeds every other public body in the county for time spent in private discussion.

Hardly a meeting, regular or called, occurs in which the Board of Edu-

## Troy Pittman is district DOT engineer for Southeast Georgia

Troy D. Pittman is the Georgia Department of Transportation's new district engineer for the Southeast Georgia District.



**Troy Pittman**

DOT Deputy Commissioner Brad Saxon has formally announced Pittman's promotion, which took effect this month.

Pittman has taken over leadership of Georgia DOT operations in the 26 counties that make up District Five in Southeast Georgia.

He succeeds Rob McCall, who recently retired from the Department after 32 years of service.

"Troy brings a vast range of knowledge and leadership skills to keep District Five moving for-

ward in this important economic development region of Georgia," Saxon said. "His diverse background in design, pre-construction, maintenance and construction, along with his education and training, will benefit him to successfully lead in delivering the best transportation services to Southeast Georgia citizens, businesses and

□ See **PITTMAN**, Page 7A

## Local knife craftsman skillfully forges a path

**By Mark Stokes**  
 SPECIAL TO THE PRESS-SENTINEL

Humans have a long-standing relationship with knives, with the oldest discovered knife dating back to around 2.5 million years ago.

Even after all that time, the crafting of knives remains so detail-oriented and specialized that it takes

decades to master.

Adam Thomas, owner of Goose Creek Knives, took on the challenge of learning the craft back in 2017. As an apprentice in the American Bladesmith Society, he's on that path toward mastery.

"At the time, Goose Creek was right behind my house," the

□ See **THOMAS**, Page 10A



**Adam Thomas of Goose Creek Knives** inspects his 2-inch-by-72-inch belt grinder, used for shaping and sharpening knife steel.



Standing: Dr. Rafael David Rodriguez, Dr. Bryan Krull  
 Sitting: Dr. C. Thomas Tucker, Dr. William Grubb

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Adam Thomas of Goose Creek Knives inspects his crafted blades in various phases of the crafting process.



Adam Thomas uses a variety of methods to hand-craft knives from start to finish.

## THOMAS

Continued from page 1A

Wayne County native said. "The name was catchy."

Though Thomas spent much of his childhood collecting knives, it wasn't until adulthood that he thought of crafting his own.

"I actually went to Smoky Mountain Knife Works, looking for a filet knife," he recalled. "I got one, and I thought, 'I could make that.' That's how I got started."

Four years later, Thomas is learning a variety of techniques. Often, he's accompanied by his 12-year-old son, Briggs, who has his own work area next to Dad's.

The first type of knife crafting that Thomas learned was the stock removal technique. This technique creates the knife shape through the use of sanders and other tools. Thomas starts with a metal rod as stock material. The forge technique, which Thomas adopted slightly more than a year ago, involves heating the steel and hammering out the desired shapes.

As Thomas' skill improves, he focuses mostly on hunting knives and skinning knives. At the begin-



At Goose Creek Knives, these cross-sections of mammoth teeth are used to craft knife bolsters.

ning of each deer season, he enjoys crafting a new skinning knife to use on upcoming kills.

"The natural stuff is what looks cool to me," he said. "The knife has to fit the person."

One of Thomas' proudest moments came when he was commissioned to make 12 custom knives with bits of hunting shirts built into the handles. The shirts belonged to the customer's late father, incorporated to commemorate him.

Thomas' favorite wood to use for knife handles is amboyna, a Southeast Asian wood that's specifically taken from a burl (or tree wart). It's prized for its deep red color and curly-grained, bird's-eye-style pattern.

He also enjoys using mammoth tooth for a knife's bolster, as its cross-section has another interesting pattern.

Though not everyone is interested in the price of Damascus steel,

what type of knife to craft, he often likes making hidden-tang knives. These are knives that are crafted so that no part of the steel under the handle is visible. Though this style of knife proves to be more challenging, Thomas said he enjoys the challenge.

"When you're buying a handmade knife, you're buying something that no one else in the world has," Thomas said. "Each one is different."

Many of Thomas' knives are commissioned through word of mouth between friends and acquaintances. Though he'd like to set up a table at a knife show to display his wares, he's been selling his work so fast that he doesn't keep enough knives to show.

"I'm not in it to make money," he said. "It's a stress relief for me." Most of the money Thomas makes goes back into buying tools and resources to improve his craft.

He has roughly two more years of his apprenticeship before he's eligible to become a journeyman. To become a journeyman, the candidate is tested by a master smith through a

series of challenges that check the quality and durability of the candidate's work. The ultimate goal is to become a master—a distinction only about 100 crafters have in the United States.

While on this path, Thomas said he enjoys the challenge. "When you're buying a handmade knife, you're buying something that no one else in the world has," Thomas said. "Each one is different."

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## BROWN

Continued from page 1A

Wayne County with his wife, Keli, and their four children, will be riding in the Rose Parade Saturday as an honoree on the Donate Life float.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!" he said in a recent interview with *The Press-Sentinel*. "I am definitely blessed to be able to share what I went through and help get the message out. It's a great thing they're doing."

The Donate Life float is dedicated to helping raise awareness of the life-changing impact of tissue donation. The float, designed around the theme "Courage to Hope," will appear in the parade, which is set to begin at 11 a.m. EST Saturday.

Brown's gratitude is amazing in light of the fact that he lost his right arm in a near-fatal accident at work in March of 2019. A few months later he began to experience intense, unrelenting chronic pain—what is sometimes called the "phantom limb syndrome"—

and was unable to work, sleep or lead a normal life.

Thanks to nerve surgery performed by Dr. Gregory Kolovich (of Optim Orthopedics) using Avance® Nerve Graft tissue donations, Brown is now pain-free, back to work and looking forward to a functioning prosthetic arm.

"I'm now the D-machine area manager [at Rayonier Advanced Materials]," Brown said. "The same machine that took my arm, I'm now in charge of."

He said he's grateful to have the opportunity to share the good news about the importance of tissue donation and the potential for pain-free living offered by the surgery.

But he has a bigger message to share as well.

He said that he wants others who may experience similar problems to know that they can get through it.

"Adapting and overcoming and having a positive attitude of pushing forward is how

I've survived," he said. "Some people struggle with keeping on, but that's the only way."

He said people were amazed that he went back to work at the site of his accident, but he said doing so helped him to overcome it.

"I didn't want to just sit around the house!" he said. "It really didn't bother me that much to go back."

Brown also said he is excited to get to ride in the Rose Parade.

"I'm a big football fan, so I've always watched the Rose Bowl, regardless of who's playing," he said. "It's the granddaddy of them all!"

He said it was "pure joy" to get a phone call offering the opportunity to him. This will be the 108th Rose Bowl, the 133rd Rose Parade, and the 19th appearance of the Donate Life float.

**Forever grateful**  
Brown said he would be "forever grateful" to all those who helped him discover the possibility of the nerve surgery and those who

donated tissue to make it possible for him.

He also said that he's in therapy now so that he can learn to use the muscles that the nerves were connected to by Dr. Kolovich's surgery to control his prosthetic arm.

"I'm learning to reprogram the nerves to control the prosthetic arm," he said.

Kolovich explained that Brown's pain was caused by neuromas, tangled masses of nerve fibers that formed at the ends of his cut nerves. The surgery was performed in the Optim clinic in Reidsville.

"During Chris' surgery, I removed the neuromas that had formed," Kolovich said. "But because nerves are destined to regrow, I needed to provide a structure for them to regrow more properly, or neuromas might recur. After removing the neuromas, I reconstructed the nerves by connecting them to nerves located in muscles in Chris's chest."

"To make that possi-

ble, there were large nerve gaps that needed to be bridged. I used Avance® Nerve Graft (donated human nerve tissue) to bridge those gaps, allowing Chris's nerves to regenerate and restore normal signals to his brain."

He said that the tissue-donation program is very important for people who need processed nerve allograft surgery.

The Donate Life America program and AxoGen® (the Florida company who developed Avance®) sponsor the float that Brown will ride on Saturday.

According to Donate Life, tissue from a donor can help heal up to 75 patients who need nerve tissue. More than a million people each year who need organ, tissue or eye transplants are helped by the program, according to Donate Life.

Kolovich also explained that pain medication usually does little to help the kind of pain Chris Brown was experiencing, but the

surgery has allowed him to be off all pain medication and live pain free.

He said that many people's chronic pain may be nerve pain and can be fixed only by the surgery, which depends on nerve-tissue donations.

"Many living with chronic neuropathic pain have been repeatedly told there is nothing that can be done. My mission is to allow patients to take back their lives by ending their neuropathic pain," Kolovich said.

He said such pain is common following traumatic injuries and can be caused by previous surgery. He said the surgery can help give these patients their lives back.

"Chris is living proof, and he is one of many," Kolovich said.

Kolovich's main office is in Savannah, but he has satellite offices in Brunswick, Hinesville, Rincon, Statesboro and Reidsville, as well as in Bluffton, South Carolina.