

# The News - Banner

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## Highway building to strengthen services

**By HOLLY GASKILL**

When it comes to the county's new highway department building, it's a "night and day" difference, says Supervisor Shawn Bonar.

Crews broke ground on the site last fall and, barring a few hiccups, the project continues toward its original projected completion date. Conor Jackson, project manager from James S. Jackson Construction, said they plan to release the building to the county on Feb. 5. From there, he hopes the remaining work will be small punch list items.

Bonar estimates roughly 90 percent of the construction items are already complete. The remaining parts, like electrical work, are much less visually noticeable but remain a significant part of the project nonetheless. As the building's lights flickered on for the first time on Dec. 1, Bonar exclaimed, "Is that real?"

Wells County's current building was

built in 1906 as a train maintenance station. The county had since constructed two additions to adapt the building for highway department use, but it had long been a temporary fix, facing numerous building problems.

County officials and department employees had discussed the need for a new building for decades — project plans were finally inked in September 2022 for \$10.9 million.

"This was much needed," Bonar said. "We're going to be so much more efficient."

The current building's garage requires trucks boxed into two parallel rows, limiting access. Additionally, due to the relatively narrow passageway and grate between the large machinery, the area poses a danger to employees — two of whom were injured in the area in recent years.

With this and other areas of need in mind, Bonar worked with project engineers to consider the day-to-day needs and

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The site for the new highway building is located at 0828 E 200 S in Bluffton. The project will be completed in February. (Photo by Holly Gaskill)

## New treatment coming to the wastewater plant

**By JONATHAN SNYDER**

The wastewater treatment plant is getting new upgrades for 2025.

The wastewater treatment plant's renovation project looks to put all the labs and processes for treating wastewater into one big plant, instead of the traditional two plant system.

The construction crew is currently tearing down the original plant built in the 1960s and the facility built in the '90s will go offline once the new structure is built. A new pump station for sewage flow is in the works, alongside new circular clarifiers for further polishing of the wastewater. Construction is expected to be finished on July 24, 2025.

While the new system keeps a similar process for removing the solids and cleaning of wastewater overall, the new updates will make treatment less reliant on chemicals and make it a more biological one according to Tony Fey, plant supervisor.

The oxidation ditch is one of the bigger additions to the plant. The ditch is meant to be a more biological and eco-friendly treatment than the current aeration basins used now. The oxidation ditch will better manage the rainwater flow so the bugs that eat the waste chemicals have the food they need to survive. Water stays in the oxidation ditch for a longer period of time than aeration basins, giving the bugs more opportunity to feed on the waste products in the water.

"That's what's cleaning our water is those bugs," said Kelly White, engineer for the city of Bluffton. "They're good bugs. So you've got to make sure that the environ-

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Progress is being made on the new plant, shown above and below, and the oxidation ditch, shown in the bottom photo. (Photos provided by Tony Fey)



## Car plows into vehicle in Biden's motorcade

**By COLLEEN LONG**  
Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — A car plowed into a parked SUV that was guarding President Joe Biden's motorcade Sunday night while the president was leaving a visit to his campaign headquarters. The president and first lady Jill Biden were unharmed.

While Biden was walking from the campaign office to his waiting armored SUV, a sedan hit a U.S. Secret Service vehicle that was being used to close off intersections near the headquarters for the president's departure. The sedan then tried to continue into a closed-off intersection, before Secret Service personnel surrounded the vehicle with weapons drawn and instructed the driver to put his hands up.

Biden was ushered into his waiting vehicle, where his wife was already seated, before being driven swiftly back to their home. His schedule was otherwise unaffected by the incident.

The Secret Service did not immediately comment on the incident.

## Pope's 87th birthday ends church reform efforts

**By NICOLE WINFIELD**  
Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis turned 87 on Sunday, closing out a year that saw big milestones in his efforts to reform the Catholic Church as well as health scares that raise questions about his future as pope.

Francis celebrated his birthday with cake during a festive audience with children Sunday morning, and there were "Happy Birthday" banners in St. Peter's Square during his weekly noon blessing.

One early present came Saturday, when a Vatican tribunal handed down a mix of guilty verdicts and acquittals in a complicated trial that Francis had supported as evidence of his financial reforms. The biggest-name defendant, Cardinal Angelo Becciu, was convicted of embezzlement and sentenced to 5½ years in prison.

"It was quite a year for a

pope who's obviously thinking about legacy and finishing up," said Christopher Bellitto, professor of history at Kean University in New Jersey.

Only seven popes are known to have been older than Francis at the time of their deaths, according to the online resource Catholic Hierarchy. Francis is fast closing in on one of them, Pope Gregory XII, perhaps best known for having been the most recent pope to resign until Pope Benedict XVI stepped down in 2013.

Gregory was 88 and a half when he voluntarily stepped down in 1415 in a bid to end the Western Schism, in which there were three rival claimants to the papacy. Francis has said he, too, would consider resigning if his health made him unable to carry on, but more recently he said the job of pope is for life.

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### Norwell choir takes the stage

Soloists Taylor Grant, top left, and Eli Ingle, top right, sing alongside their choir-mates for the Norwell Choir Spectacular on Saturday. (Photos by Jonathan Snyder)



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**Outside**

**Rain makes way for blowing snow.**

Today	Tuesday	Wed.
High 34	High 34	High 43
Low 23	Low 23	Low 30

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### Leading the charge

Ossian Elementary collected 2,374 canned and dry goods during their annual holiday drive. The collected items will be donated to the Northern Wells Food Pantry this week. Pictured, student council representatives show part of the items they collected. (Photo by Holly Gaskill)

## Storm drenches Florida and causes floods in South Carolina

GEORGETOWN, S.C. (AP) — An intense late-year storm barreled up the East Coast on Sunday with heavy rains and strong winds that shattered rainfall records, forced water rescues from flooded streets and washed out holiday celebrations.

Authorities rescued dozens of motorists stranded by floodwaters in South Carolina's waterfront community of Georgetown, Georgetown County spokesperson Jackie Broach said. More than 9 inches (22.9 centimeters) of rain fell in the area situated between Charleston and Myrtle Beach since late Saturday.

"It's not just the areas that we normally see flooding, that are flood-prone," Broach said. "It's areas that we're not really expecting to have flooding issues...It's like a tropical storm, it just happens to be in December."

The tide in Charleston Harbor hit its fourth highest level on record and was "well above the highest tide for a non-tropical system," according to the National Weather Service.

Rising sea levels driven by human-caused climate change mean even relatively weak weather systems can now produce storm surges previously associated with hurricanes, said Meteorologist Jeff Masters, co-founder of the Weather Underground. In South Carolina that's worsened by natural subsidence along the coast.

By 2050, Charleston is expected to see another 14 inches (35.6 centimeters) of sea level rise, Masters said.

"In Charleston, this is the sixth time this year already that they've had a major coastal flood. Most of those would not have been major flooding 100 years ago, because the sea level has risen that much," he said.

The storm was forecast to gain strength as it tracked along the Georgia and Carolina coasts, producing heavy rain and gusty winds before sweeping into New England by Monday morning, the weather service said. Wind gusts of 35 mph to 45 mph (56 kph to 72 kph) could bring down trees, especially on saturated ground.

There were numerous road closures in Charleston and across South Carolina's Lowcountry, while stranded cars littered streets.

There were no reports of injuries or deaths in Georgetown

County, Broach said. Gusty winds were strong enough to topple some signs and trees. Outdoor holiday decorations were tossed about, she said.

Water rescues also took place on Kiawah and Seabrook islands, according to media outlets.

Charleston International Airport had more than 3 inches (8 centimeters) of rain in 24 hours — almost five times the prior record set in 1975, according to the National Weather Service.

Farther up the coast, minor to moderate coastal flooding was expected Sunday, according to the National Weather Service office in Wilmington, North Carolina.

There were more than 31,000 power outages in South Carolina, according to PowerOutage.us, along with over 14,000 in North Carolina and more than 11,000 in Florida.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul warned of a possible 2 to 4 inches (5.1 to 10.2 centimeters) of rain, powerful winds and potential flooding in parts of the state. Flood watches were in effect in many locations in New York City, and high wind warnings were activated around the city and Long

Island.

"We will get through this storm, but preparation is the key," New York Mayor Eric Adams said. City officials told residents to expect several hours of rain and possible delays during Monday morning's commute.

Colder air behind the storm will trigger lake-effect snow across the Great Lakes toward the Appalachians and upstate New York into Tuesday, the weather service said.

The storm dumped up to 5 inches (12.7 centimeters) of rain across Florida, inundating streets and forcing the cancellation of boat parades and other holiday celebrations.

The National Weather Service issued flood warnings and minor flooding advisories for a wide swath of the state, from the southwest Gulf Coast to Jacksonville. Major airports remained open, however, at the start of the busy holiday travel season.

"Today is not the day to go swimming or boating!" Sheriff Carmine Marceno of Lee County, on Florida's southwestern coast, said on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Coastal advisories were issued for much of Florida as strong winds churned waters in the Gulf and along the north Atlantic coast.

The storm could be good news for residents in southwest Florida who have been facing water restrictions and drought conditions heading into what normally is the region's dry season.

The weather service also warned of 2 to 4 inches (5.1 to 10.2 centimeters) of rain in parts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware, with the heaviest expected late Sunday night, and possible urban and small stream flooding and at least minor flooding to some rivers through Monday.

Forecasters also warned of strong winds in coastal areas, gale-force winds offshore, and moderate coastal flooding along Delaware Bay and widespread minor coastal flooding elsewhere.

The weather service said there is a slight risk of excessive rainfall over parts of New England through Monday morning, with the potential for flash flooding. Northern New England is expected to get the heaviest rain Monday through Tuesday morning.

## U.S., World Roundup

### Israel faces new calls for truce after killing of hostages raises alarm about its conduct in Gaza

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israel's government is facing calls for a cease-fire from some of its closest European allies. Protesters at home also want a cease-fire to free more hostages. The deadly shooting of three hostages who waved a white flag added to concerns about Israel's wartime conduct. Israel could come under more pressure to scale back major combat operations when the U.S. defense secretary visits Monday. Gaza's communications blackout is easing after four days. It's the longest such outage of the war. Aid to Gaza remains far below what's needed. Dozens of people there are chasing down humanitarian trucks and pulling boxes off them.

### Black American solidarity with Palestinians is rising and testing longstanding ties to Jewish allies

A growing number of Black Americans see the struggle of Palestinians reflected in their own struggles for racial equality and civil rights. In recent years, the rise of protest movements against police brutality in the U.S., where structural racism plagues nearly every facet of life, has connected Black and Palestinian activists under a common cause. But that kinship sometimes strains the more than century-long alliance between Black and Jewish activists. Some Jewish Americans are concerned that Black support for the Palestinians could escalate the threat of antisemitism and weaken Jewish-Black ties fortified during the Civil Rights Movement.

### Senate border security talks grind on as Trump invokes Nazi-era 'blood' rhetoric

WASHINGTON (AP) — Time slipping, White House and Senate negotiators are struggling to reach a U.S. border security deal that would unlock President Joe Biden's request for billions of dollars worth in military aid for Ukraine and national security. But ahead of the holiday recess, it's becoming apparent any deal may have to wait for the new year. The talks come as Donald Trump, the Republican presidential front-runner in 2024, delivered alarming anti-immigrant remarks about "blood" purity over the weekend, echoing the Nazi slogans of the World War II. Speaking in the early-voting state of New Hampshire, Trump drew on words from Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" as the former U.S. president berated Biden's team over record numbers of migrants.

### Trump says Nevada fake electors treated 'unfairly' during rally

RENO, Nev. (AP) — Donald Trump called out three of Nevada's fake electors during a rally in Reno. The former president said Sunday the fake electors are being treated unfairly. He spoke less than 24 hours before they are scheduled to be arraigned for signing certificates falsely stating

Trump won Nevada in 2020. Trump's sympathy for the fake electors comes amid growing alarm about his authoritarian rhetoric as he looks to return to the White House. Nevada is the fourth state to choose delegates for the Republican presidential nomination, the first in the West and the first with a sizeable Latino population. But it's gotten little attention from the GOP contenders.

### North Korea fires suspected long-range ballistic missile into sea in resumption of launches

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — South Korea says North Korea has fired a suspected long-range ballistic missile into the sea in a resumption of its weapons testing activities. Monday's launch, the North's second weapons firing in less than a day, comes as North Korea vows retaliatory steps against the U.S. and South Korea's moves to boost their nuclear deterrence plans. South Korea's military says in a statement that North Korea launched what appeared to be a long-range ballistic missile from its capital region Monday morning. South Korea also reported North Korea conducting a short-range ballistic missile test into the sea Sunday night.

### As 2023 holidays dawn, face masks have settled in as an occasional feature of the landscape

NEW YORK (AP) — As the year comes to an end with holiday parties and crowds, mask-wearing is much more off than on around the country even as COVID's long tail lingers. There's the odd one here and there, but nothing like it was three years ago at the dawn of the COVID pandemic's first winter holidays. Look at it a different way, though: These days, mask-wearing has become just another thing that simply happens in America. In a country where the mention of a mask prior to the pandemic usually meant Halloween or a costume party, it's a new way of being that hasn't gone away.

### Chilean voters reject conservative constitution, after defeating leftist charter last year

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — Chilean voters have rejected a conservative constitution to replace the country's dic-

tatorship-era charter, a little over a year after turning down a proposed leftist charter. With 96% of votes counted late Sunday, about 55.8% had voted "no" to the new charter, with about 44.2% in favor. In September 2022 voters resoundingly rejected a proposed constitution that had been written by a left-leaning convention. The new document up for approval Sunday was largely written by conservative councilors, and some warned it went to the other extreme. One of the most controversial articles in the proposed new document said that "the law protects the life of the unborn," which some warn could make abortion fully illegal in the South American country.

### Serbia's populists claim a sweeping victory in the country's parliamentary election

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Serbia's governing populists have claimed a sweeping victory in the country's parliamentary election, which have been marred by reports of major irregularities both during a tense campaign and on voting day. Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said that with half of the ballots counted, the governing Serbian Progressive Party's projections show that President Aleksandar Vucic's populists won 47% of the vote Sunday and expects to hold around 130 seats in the 250-member assembly. Brnabic says the main opposition Serbia Against Violence group won around 23%. The opposition group is disputing the election projections from the governing party. It charges there was vote-rigging and says its will dispute the vote count "by all democratic means."

### Convent-made delicacies, a Christmas favorite, help monks and nuns win fans and pay the bills

MEXICO CITY (AP) — As Christmas approaches, Catholic nuns and monks are busy preparing the traditional delicacies they sell to a loyal fan base even in rapidly secularizing countries. For many monastic communities, producing cookies, fruitcakes, even beer for sale is the only means to keep the lights on. But it's also an enticing way to strengthen their ties with lay people. The religious sisters and brothers say they have to keep the balance between their vocation to prayer and earning their daily bread. So they pray as they roll dough and mix sugar, cinnamon, or even bourbon — trusting in God's hands the lay people to whom they hope the treats will bring joy.

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