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Caroline man hunts dangerous animals in Africa, Australia



Seated behind a nyala are Garry Gray (right) of Woodford and his African trackers and guides after a kill in Africa. Gray has been going on exotic hunting trips since 1998.

Hunter becomes the hunted in Africa



Garry Gray poses behind a sable antelope that he shot on one of his 14 hunting expeditions in Africa.

By **Eric Miller**
Editor

Garry Gray and two trackers were following a lion in Africa when the tracker gave him the bad news: “Mr. Gray, the lion is now tracking us.”

Gray, owner of the Caroline petroleum distributor, E.M. Gray & Son in Milford, has hunted and fished in 40 countries, including Mozambique, Botswana, South Africa, Argentina, Australia and New Zealand. He’s made 14 hunting trips to Africa and his personal collection of trophies includes two elephant tusks, two elephant feet, a fully mounted lioness, a mounted Cape buffalo head and horns, two water buffalo skulls and horns, several mounted kudu heads and horns, a zebra hide, baboon skulls and a giraffe skull.

He’s killed three lions, two Cape buffaloes, a hippo-

potamus (which kills more Africans than snakes do), three kudu, a nyala (spiral-horned antelope), two oryx (a large antelope), a bless buck, a dozen wart hogs, a dozen impalas and five baboons.

A good first hunting trip to Africa will cost about \$12,000, and that would include five days of hunting, kill permits for five animals and the round-trip airfare, Gray said.

The 58-year-old Caroline resident has seen one of Africa’s most poisonous snakes and encountered a 16-foot python while hunting. Two Cape buffaloes charged after him on one hunt. His leg got caught in a poacher’s steel trap, which was made of automotive leaf springs. His two trackers cut down two trees and pried the trap open—all in 22 minutes. It was extremely painful.

Gray will be featured on the Pursuit channel in a few weeks in a show called TNT Explosion. It includes video of his water buffalo hunt in Australia.

His first hunting trip to Africa was in 1998. He went to South Africa and bagged geese and ducks, which served as food for farm workers who made only \$3 a day. A few years later, he helped sheep producers by hunting jackals, which are similar to coyotes, and one will kill a lamb every night.

He paid \$5,000 for a government permit to hunt a hippopotamus that was tearing up a banana plantation. The government gave a portion of the \$5,000 to the banana grower to help him replant the trees.

Governments in the countries of Africa have wildlife management programs, and operate in a fashion similar to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, which seeks to control the deer population by allowing deer hunting, said Gray, who is a member of the VDGIF Board of Directors.

see Hunter page 6

Christmas fire leaves a family without a home



The Martin family lost their home due to an electrical fire on Christmas night.

On Christmas night, Mrs. LaTonya Fortune Martin and her family lost their home at 11629 Newtown Road, Newtown and everything they owned due to an electrical fire.

Since that time, the Red Cross and local church funds have enabled them to temporarily stay in a motel in Tappahannock. With the help of the community, they will be able to find another home and start to rebuild their lives.

If you are able and willing to help them accomplish this, please consider making a financial donation at <http://www.GoFundMe.com/5yds38>. The website page is titled “HELP THE MARTINS.”

At the website, one of several donors donated \$100 and wrote, “My prayer goes out for your family for strength, love, and many blessings during this great time of need.”

The goal is \$10,000 and nearly \$1,000 had been raised by press time.

You can donate funds using your credit card. No amount is too small. If you prefer to donate by mail, send a check or money order to 2878 Indian Neck Road, Tappahannock, VA 22560.

Social Services director named

By Christina Lopes
Reporter

Tonya J. Christian is the new director for the Caroline County Social Services Department.

Christian replaced Cynthia Green, who retired in July after serving as director of Caroline Social Services for 21 years. Green had spent 39 years in social work.

Christian recently had been a social work supervisor for the Essex County Department of Social Services.

“It’s a new day at Caroline Social Services,” Christian said. She began her position as director on Dec. 9. On the same day, the two hiring positions (social worker and benefits) previously approved by the Caroline County Board of Supervisors were also filled. The Caroline Social Services Department is now fully staffed, according to Christian.

Christian will oversee a budget of \$580,000 from Caroline taxpayers and close to \$1.3 million in federal funds.

Christian worked for the county 20 years ago as a



Tonya Christian

social worker, dealing with child protective services from 1993 until 1995. She left the county when she married a U.S. Navy enlistee, and life dictated her temporary relocation.

“It’s so nice to come back home,” Christian said. “The staff has been very welcoming. There are seven county staff members who remember me from back then!”

Her main focus for the coming year is concentrating her energy on the agency, and the needs of the agency and the county. “I want to be a presence in the community,” Christian noted. “I am currently opening my calendar so that I can meet individually with all 28 staff members to discuss the needs of individual staff and the agency as a whole.”

A huge goal for Christian and for the agency is

see Director page 2

Sparta FD receives gratitude from Oklahoma

By Susan Sili

In May of 2013, a devastating tornado hit Oklahoma and caused massive property damage, death and injury, and the Ladies Auxiliary of the Sparta Volunteer Fire Department stepped up to lend a hand.

Famous for their cooking, especially breakfast, the ladies raised \$500 and sent a check to aid in the rebuilding of the Moore community. When Oklahoma Delegate Tommy Hardin, who just happened to be the nephew of Sparta residents Ken and Dale Pickin, heard about the effort and the generous donation, he went to



the Oklahoma Legislature and asked for a resolution recognizing the station for their efforts.

Delegate Hardin, however, had another, more personal reason for thanking the men and women of the Sparta Station. When his aunt and uncle, Ken and Dale Pickin, moved from Williamsburg to a quiet rural community in Caroline County, they knew immediately they were home. Ken had been coming to Caroline for nearly 40 years to hunt in the pristine woods and fields that encompass some of the most beautiful acreage in the Commonwealth. Many times they had passed a small farm on their way and Dale thought to herself, “what a great home it would make,” and one day in 2008, there in the yard was a “for sale” sign.

Here on 11 acres, near Passing, east of Sparta, they soon set about raising, training and showing Redbone

Coonhounds, one of their greatest loves. Their dogs, from *Colonial Virginia’s Redbone Kennel* have won numerous national awards. This year, “PR” (Purple Ribbon) VA’s *Miss Caroline* won best female Redbone at the United Kennel Club’s

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“I think of this as my family in Virginia helping my family in Oklahoma”
—Oklahoma Delegate Tommy Hardin



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County Agricultural fair wins five first-place state awards



HOT SPRINGS—The Caroline County Agricultural Fair Association (CCAF) won 11 awards, including five first-place ribbons, during the annual convention of the Virginia Association of Fairs last weekend.

The convention was at the Homestead Resort, and Caroline representatives at the convention were Mack and Debbie Wright, Herbert Tate, Wick and Debbie Coleman, Macine Williams and Francine Whittaker.

The CCAF was recognized for entries submitted to the communication contests for the medium-size fair category (fairs with an attendance of 7,000 to 30,000). This is the third year Caroline has been in the medium fair size category.

CCAF won 11 award ribbons (five first-place blue ribbons; five second-place red and one third-place white). First-place ribbons were awarded for the radio ads on Clear Channel Radio, the billboard, the tabloid in

The Caroline Progress, the fair map in the tabloid, and advertising merchandise display.

Second-place ribbons for the fair poster (created by Lynda Tate the fair publicity coordinator); the fair article in the Caroline Progress Best of the Best Magazine; the TV appearance on the VA This Morning Show; the fair website (managed by Lynda Tate); and a photographic essay (created by Sylvia Tate and Fran Whittaker).

A third-place ribbon was

awarded for the ear advertisement that appeared in *The Caroline Progress* prior to the July 2013 Fair.

Caroline Ag Fair's Home Goods chairman, Macine Williams, coordinated the CCAF's Fair Judging School, which was held during the convention. CCAF is taking a lead in the state to develop a database of qualified judges who can judge the varied home goods categories for not only county fairs across Va., but also the State Fair of Virginia.

Sparta FD recognized from page A1

National Competition in Ohio and *Champion PR Scarlett Ohara* is the No. 1 Coonhound in the country. Their grown son, Ben is a large animal veterinarian in Harrisonburg, but he carries on the tradition of heading to Caroline when hunting season begins. Joining him all the way from Oklahoma, as often as he can, is the state delegate.

It is clear why the neighbors in the Sparta community think so highly of the couple. The Pickins are lively and a joy to talk with about farming, hunting and country living. A neighbor said, "We are just so lucky to have them, they are just good people. Some people move here from the city and look around and say, 'When will my services be turned on?' and it makes you wonder why they moved to rural Caroline, but it's like the Pickins have always lived here."

In August of this year, however the couple was working together on their farm with Dale operating the tractor as she had done many times before. She got down, thinking the tractor was out of gear when in fact it wasn't and the wheel rolled over her right leg. Her husband jumped onto the tractor and immediately halted it, laid Dale on the ground and called for help. Within five minutes, neighbors Linda and Hilton Williams of the Sparta Volunteer Fire Department were on the scene

to render aid. Soon, nearly all of Company Four had turned out to help. With Bowling Green Rescue Squad on the way, Linda Williams stayed closed to Dale and talked to her while they were waiting.

Said Linda, "I really didn't know how badly she was hurt but I was determined to keep her focused and out of shock. I knew the pain had to be bad but I kept the conversation going and staying very close to her face so she could see me." Williams never stopped talking and never left her side until Dale was loaded into the ambulance for the ride to the hospital. In many ways Dale's injuries could be described as miraculous. There were no broken bones and no permanent injury to the muscles however the skin removal was akin to having a third degree burn. She has been through several operations and is still in therapy but to look at her, one would be hard-pressed to discern any injury. Linda Williams agrees that much of this can be attributed to the hardy life style and how active Dale has always been on the farm and with the dogs.

This past Thursday evening, Dale was in attendance when her nephew, Delegate Tommy Hardin from Oklahoma's 49th District, presented Chief Hilton Williams and the Sparta Volunteer Fire Department with a resolution of deep appreciation from a grateful Oklahoma Legislature for their gift to the people of Moore.

They recalled the devastation of the storm. Touching ground on the afternoon of May 20, 2013, with peak winds of 210 miles an hour, the Moore Oklahoma Tornado was an EF5 and stayed on the ground for 39 minutes and for a distance of 17 miles. Twenty-four people were killed, including seven children in an elementary school and hundreds of people were injured. Said Delegate Hardin of the gift from the Sparta Volunteer Fire Department, "I think of this as my family in Virginia helping my family in Oklahoma. I am also extremely grateful for the help Dale and Ken received when she was injured and I am very honored to be here tonight."

Maynard Penney, one of Sparta's first volunteer fire chiefs, told the group about the founding of Company 4 in the early 1960's when the men of Salem Baptist Church believed the community needed a fire station. Their first truck was a second-hand, old Ford given by the Bowling Green Fire Department. Maynard pointed out that for 46 years the department raised its own funds without county help and that the key to success with volunteers is to recognize each member's talents and how to best use those talents. "To train to be a member and to be a chief was really training for life," he said.

Schools close due to extreme cold

Due to the cold weather, Caroline County Public Schools were closed on Tuesday, Jan. 7.

The low temperature in Bowling Green was expected to dip down to 7 degrees Fahrenheit and the high on Jan. 7 was expected to rise no higher than 22 degrees.

"With the temperature that low, it's hard to keep the buses warm," said Nancy Carson, chairperson of the Caroline County School Board. "With the wind chill factor, we didn't want kids outside waiting for the bus either."

Caroline also has "learning cottages" (modular classrooms) that are more challenging to heat when the temperature outside dips into the single digits, she noted.

The school system put the word out about the school closing at approximately 4 p.m. on Monday.



"We decided at our last school board meeting that we were going to let parents know well in advance so they could make baby-sitting arrangements," Carson said.

Consultants have told school officials that the heating and cooling system at Caroline High School "is on its last leg." It's been kept in operation for over 3.5 years with a "band aid approach." Voters passed a \$26.3 million bond referendum in

November to upgrade and expand CHS and Madison Elementary School. As part of the work, the CHS heating and cooling system will be replaced at a cost of \$3 million to \$4 million. The county did a major upgrade to the school's heating and cooling system in 1996.

Keeping CHS heated to a level appropriate for students would put a strain on the system on a day with single-digit temperatures.

Ladysmith Road will be widened

LADYSMITH—Construction work began Jan. 8 to widen Route 639 (Ladysmith Road) in Caroline County near Route 1 to create space to add a new left turn lane to improve safety.

The \$3.5 million Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) project will enhance safety by building a universal left-turn lane in the center of the roadway. Motorists traveling in either direction can use the lane

to turn into entrances along Route 639 near the Food Lion Shopping Center.

A section of Ladysmith Road will be widened that is just over one-third of a mile long—from Route 1 to a spot that is 0.35 of a mile east of Route 1. During construction, a temporary speed limit of 35 mph will be posted in the work zone. The speed limit will return to 45 mph once the project is finished.

A \$1.4 million contract

for construction was awarded to J.L. Kent & Sons, Inc. of Fredericksburg, Va. The project will be completed by May 2015.

One eastbound and one westbound lane of traffic on Route 639 will be maintained during the project. Motorists should stay alert for temporary shifting traffic patterns and lane markings.

SS Director hired from page A1

the implementation of what Christian calls a "resource council." She recalled having the opportunity to witness a similar council in Essex County, which she said worked very well.

The council would ideally be comprised of "anyone with invested interest in the community that wants to

help the county succeed and grow." The council would brainstorm ideas based on the collective needs of the county, and at a later time, sub-committees would be formed to attend to individual circumstances.

Christian is also working with the staff to become more familiar with the newly

adopted computer system for processing TANIF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) and SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) applications. The new system, VaCMS (Virginia Case Management System), is being implemented throughout Virginia.

"I can't stress enough how much I want to be approachable, responsive, and a good presence in the community," Christian said. "I am very humble and honored to be able to walk this path."

Christian has served as state secretary of the Virginia Alliance of Social Work Practitioners. She attended Longwood University where she majored in social work and graduated in 1993. She went to graduate school at the University of New England and received master's degree in social work in 2002.

Caroline gets two new state troopers

Eighty new Virginia State Police troopers graduated from the basic session of training on Dec. 20 at Meadow Even Park in Caroline County and two will be assigned to Caroline.

The two new troopers for Caroline are: Nathaniel Lee Robinson of Ruther Glen and Corey Lamont Wheeler of Fredericksburg.

Among the 80 troopers who completed their training, one-fourth came from out-of-state: Pennsylvania, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Illinois and Indiana. None of the new troopers came from Caroline County.

Members of the 120th Basic Session are the first class to be re-introduced to the "Probate Phase." The probate phase, which allows

recruits to train in the field prior to attending the Academy, was commonplace in the Department for all incoming trooper-trainees until the 1990s.

For the 120th Basic School, the reinstatement of this phase, necessitated trainees complete two and half weeks of introductory training at the Academy before being assigned to a Field Training Officer (FTO). The probate trainees then spent anywhere from four to 12 weeks in the field riding with an FTO before returning to the Academy in June to receive formal, academic instruction and extensive, advanced field training on various subjects.

"By probating in the field first, we are enriching a trainee's perspective

of the realistic demands of the law enforcement profession, while at the same time providing them with weeks of hands-on, valuable, work experience with a veteran trooper," said Colonel W. Steven Flaherty, Virginia State Police superintendent. "This transition in advance of entering the academy familiarizes a trainee with department terminology, forms, and state code, as well as sharpens their work skills. It also increases retention rates within a class, as the trainee develops a core understanding of the unique demands associated with being a state trooper."

Selected from a pool of more than 1,100 applicants, the members of the 120th Basic Session began probating Feb. 25, 2013, and continued with 30 weeks of academic, physical and practical training at the academy until June 24. In all, the new troopers have received 1,296 hours of classroom and field instruction encompassing more than 100 different subjects. Subjects include judicial procedures, juvenile and traffic law, firearms, self-defense, crowd control and first-aid, to name a few.

The new troopers have already reported to their individual duty assignments. Each trooper will spend an additional six weeks with a field training officer, learning his or her new patrol area.

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