



The Oconee Enterprise



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business thrives during COVID-19

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State reports four Oconee COVID deaths in six days

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

Between Sept. 8 and Sept. 13, the Georgia Department of Public Health reported that four more Oconee County citizens had died of the novel coronavirus. Their ages ranged from early 50s to late 80s.

The COVID-19 death toll in Oconee is now 24. The following is a description of all Oconee deaths in the order in which they were reported:

- An 86-year-old man with chronic conditions.
- A woman over the age of 90 with chronic conditions.
- A 73-year-old man without chronic conditions.
- A man over the age of 90 without known chronic conditions.
- A 58-year-old man with chronic conditions.
- A 68-year-old man without chronic conditions.

ic conditions.

- A woman over the age of 90 with chronic conditions.
- A woman over the age of 90 with a chronic condition.
- A 69-year-old man without a chronic condition.
- An 84-year-old man with a chronic condition
- A 68-year-old woman with no chronic condition
- A woman over the age of 90 with no chronic condition.
- A 78-year-old woman without chronic conditions
- An 87-year-old woman with chronic conditions.
- A 75-year-old woman without a chronic condition.
- 65-year-old woman with a chronic condition.
- A man over the age of 90 without

a known chronic condition.

- A 74-year-old woman with no chronic condition.
- A 60-year-old man without a chronic condition.
- A 60-year-old man with a chronic condition.
- A 53-year-old woman with a chronic condition.
- A 63-year-old woman without a chronic condition.
- A 65-year-old woman without a chronic condition.
- An 89-year man without a chronic condition.

As of press time Tuesday, 677 Oconee residents have contracted the novel coronavirus since the pandemic first impacted the county in March, according to the Georgia Department of Health.

SEE COVID-19 PAGE A2



Jonathan Wallace favors policies of government assistance and regulation. [File photo]



Marcus Wiedower favors policies with more private-sector solutions and less government. [File photo]

Candidates differ on the pandemic

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

The Nov. 3 General Election will be the third time Marcus Wiedower and Jonathan Wallace have run against each other for public office.

Wiedower is the incumbent Republican representative for Georgia House District 119. Wallace successfully ran against Wiedower in 2017 in a special election. In 2018, Wallace lost his re-election bid to Wiedower. The candidates are featured in alphabetical order.

Wallace

Leadership on public health policy has been absent from the beginning of the novel coronavirus pandemic, Wallace told The Oconee Enterprise this month. Wallace called the president's response to the crisis "dismissive" and said that there has been a lack of coherence at the state level.

Wallace said he would support a statewide mask mandate due to the scientific evidence that demonstrates face coverings limit the spread of the virus. He added that if there was a mask mandate, there should be consequences for people who violate the order, such as fines.

Wallace has enrolled his children into virtual schooling and said contact sports continue to pose a risk.

The candidate said more emphasis should be placed on social safety nets, such as helping people in risk of eviction and expanding Medicaid.

Acute emergency care is the most expensive kind of health care, he said, arguing that taxpayers have ended up paying more by Georgia failing to expand Medicaid because uninsured people still have to use emergency rooms and the state has missed out on federal subsidies.

Wallace said its wrong that insurance companies drive health care choices and that those insurance policies hurt small businesses.

When asked about racial injustice, Wallace said Georgia's new hate crimes law was "long overdue" and that he was disappointed that it took the tragic death of Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick to get it passed.

"We are still not there," he said. "We don't have a comprehensive approach to civil rights in this state. I think criminal justice reform is something we need to address."

Wiedower

Since the pandemic first started, Wiedower has been involved in conference calls with hospitals while collaborating with local leaders to disseminate information about COVID-19. Wiedower said he has been appreciative of the governor's leadership.

One of the bills that passed this year offers tax incentives to companies that manufacture personal protective equipment, noted Wiedower. So far, more than 260 businesses have stepped up. State tax revenue is

up 7.7 percent compared to last year, he added.

"That speaks to how we have actually tried to open back up the economy," said Wiedower. "We need to continue to do that in a safe and cautious manner."

Wiedower said he is not in favor of a statewide mask mandate or closing schools.

"I think our local schools have done a good job," he said. "We need to make sure kids are being taught in a safe environment."

On health care, Wiedower said the Georgia General Assembly has passed more than 20 bills during his two years in office reforming health care. The Medicaid waiver bill passed in 2019 allows Georgians to tap into federal funds.

This year, Wiedower was a sponsor of House Bill 855, which requires the Department of Education to develop a protocol for schools to assess foster children who are removed from their homes and placed in a new schooling environment.

On racial injustice, Wiedower said the hate crimes bill was an important piece of legislation. He said the response to specific incidents of bad policing should be more funding to law enforcement, such as competitive salaries and more training.

Campaign funds

On Monday, Bruce Menke, an Athens-Clarke County resident and supporter of Wallace, notified The Oconee Enterprise and other news outlets about a complaint he had filed with the Georgia Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Committee regarding Wiedower's collection of campaign funds.

The complaint alleges that Wiedower took in \$15,000 in campaign contributions during the first few weeks of the Georgia General Assembly, which is not permitted under state law.

When contacted for comment, Wiedower said those donations were given to his campaign prior to the start of the session but that the financial compliance company listed those checks in the disclosure report by the date of the deposit, rather than date of receipt.

Wiedower said his campaign committee is filing an amendment to correct what he called a clerical error.

Wiedower's campaign released the following statement: "When a complaint is released to the media like this, it is usually just a political hit ... Rep. Wiedower takes his compliance obligations seriously, and there was no violation of the Campaign Finance Act. ... People in District 119 are focused on supporting law enforcement, stopping human trafficking and making sure Georgia's economy safely re-opens, not political games."

Menke told The Enterprise, "I think it's important that all of us, and certainly the candidates, take seriously the rules."

Lane Creek gets new ownership



L&J Golf recently purchased Lane Creek Golf Club. The company also owns Jennings Mill Golf Club. [Submitted photo]

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

In less than a week after closing on the property, the new owners of Lane Creek Golf Club gave the clubhouse a fresh paint job. And in the first month, they've begun remodeling the inside too.

According to the Oconee Tax Property Appraisal Office, investment firm Conquest Commercial Funding LLC purchased the 190-acre Lane Creek golf course on Sept. 3 for \$1.5 million. L&J Golf then took ownership.

L&J Golf also bought Jennings Mill Golf Club at the beginning of the year for \$2.5 million. L&J Golf's portfolio also includes Country Club of Gwinnett.

L&J Golf Executive Vice President James Deane said that

while Jennings Mill recently converted to a full-private club, Lane Creek will remain open to the public daily.

Other improvements to Lane Creek include enclosing the deck to create an all-season dining area with flat screens all around, as well as expanding the kitchen to a full-service restaurant.

"It's a beautiful course," said Deane. "They have a done a great job managing the course."

Deane complimented Lane Creek manager Butch Faust, saying that the greens are in top condition. Faust will remain with the club, which was founded in 1992 and designed by Mike Young.

The property includes 12,000 square feet of practice tee area, a

7,000 square foot putting green and a six-hole pitch and putt course.

"We want to make it the best club it can be for the neighborhood," said Deane. "We want people to go there and be happy and hang out with their friends."

In other news, the Oconee County Lions Club Golf Tournament will be held at Lane Creek Golf Club Friday, Oct. 2. The entry fee is \$80 per person, which covers 18 holes, range balls, lunch and a goodie bag. Registration begins at 11:30 a.m. The shotgun start is at 1 p.m. For more information, contact Joel Brodrick at (706) 817-8398 or Wayne Turnbull at (706) 714-6310.

Friday is digital school opt-in deadline

BY JULIA FECHTER

Parents who want their elementary school children to continue digital learning must opt them in again by the end of Friday, Chief Academic Officer Claire Buck said at Monday's Board of Education meeting.

Students who do not opt in will be placed into in-person learning at their regularly-zoned school.

Elementary students will continue to have the option to select in-person or digital learning before the start of each nine-week academic period.

As of Monday afternoon, Buck

said that 152 students have opted to do digital learning for the second nine weeks.

She also shared that digital learners have access to services, such as support from a teacher, weekly morning meetings with a counselor and media specialist and the ability to check out books from the media center.

Students in kindergarten through second grade have the option of taking a distance arts elective, and third through fifth graders may take either art and/or keyboarding.

Additional supports are being

provided for special education, English-to-speakers-of-other-language, gifted and early-intervention-program students via teachers from their home schools.

In other news, bus ridership has declined across the school system by roughly 30 percent from last year, said Transportation Director Duane Peterson. Specifically, the previous count of 7,820 riders declined to 5,561 riders, a 28.89 percent decrease.

"Given that we have 87 percent of students in person, that's causing more car riders," said BOE member Tim Burgess.

This issue was mailed Wednesday, Sept. 16, from Watkinsville and Athens, GA. Please inform your post office if it arrives late.

