



PORTFOLIO

Jack Fizzle

"Democrats are evil and Republicans are stupid."

— J.D. Vance



FROM THE EDITOR

J.D. Vance, in the musty basement of a tiny church, was peddling the idea that he was commissioned to rescue the soul of the country. “Democrats are evil and Republicans are stupid,” he told me and a couple dozen Mansfield voters in March of 2022. Five months later, the primary won, Vance visited my newsroom to discuss U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan, his Democratic opponent to replace Rob Portman in the U.S. Senate. I was curious how voters would react to a dark-horse candidate, especially one only 2½ years older than me, a fellow millennial. I failed to suspect the former “never Trump” outsider sitting in my rickety office chair was on course to be the next vice president of the United States.

I have covered J.D. Vance along with plenty of other interesting topics in the decade since I joined the USA Today Network of Ohio in May of 2016. Several of my articles have appeared in our flagship publication, USA Today. I picked a few of my favorites to share in this 10-year anniversary portfolio. These stories and photographs are all my original work, completed for the USA Today Co., formerly known as Gannett, where I am a regional reporter for North Central Ohio.

Ten years of news and features is hard to condense into one publication. I wrote about life-changing things, good and bad, that happen every day to the half-million people in my coverage area. I hope these selections, each of them containing many timeless emotions, are still poignant enough to leave an impression 10 years from now, or even longer.



Jack Trigg

Seconds before darkness as totality hit Ohio during the total solar eclipse, a group of birds landed in a tree to roost about 3:10 p.m. April 8, 2024.



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ROOM FOR HEALING

Patients in detox find a place to recover at Catalyst Life Services

by Zach Tuggle
Nov. 12, 2025

Early on a weekday morning, the lobby was filled with people hiding a world of problems. Each had become an expert at tucking things away from the sight of bosses, family members, neighbors and, when things were particularly bad, even themselves.

People have visited the place after dying, brought back to life by caring strangers, worried family, or, they might tell you, God's eternal grace. Others make a pit stop on their path toward destruction, mostly self-inflicted. It's a sanctuary for the sick, jailed, cast away, hungry, cold, destitute, broken.

One man wore a beard, blue jeans and a flannel shirt. A woman a couple seats down sported dreadlocks, sunglasses and athletic wear.

Despite their differences, the patients all go to Catalyst Life Services to address their shared dependence on chemicals, a disease known as substance use disorder.

On a quiet afternoon two years ago, Ellie McLean, one hand in her father's, burst through the front door of Catalyst, a private nonprofit offering mental health and crisis services, including a 24-hour stabilization unit and the helpline 419-522-HELP.

The 43-year-old woman, like many who have decided the pain of alcohol and drugs is no longer worth it, asked her dad to drive her directly to the organization's main building in Mansfield.

"Alcohol is actually one of the most dangerous things to detox from."

"I collapsed in the lobby," McLean said. "They called 911 and the squad came and got me and took me to the hospital."

Her kidneys, doctors discovered, were failing. They needed to know her

consumption habits and, fearing death, McLean admitted to Alyse Schroeder, the organization's detox referral manager, that she had been drinking 50 shots of vodka every day for at least three months.

"Unfortunately, that's not uncommon," Schroeder said. "We see people very often that are drinking a gallon of vodka a day."

Although new patients of Catalyst tell her all the time about using illegal drugs like meth, cocaine and fentanyl, it's the poison sold legally in corner stores nationwide that causes her the most concern.

"Alcohol is actually one of the most dangerous things to detox from," Schroeder said. "It can cause seizures and death, so it's very important that we have this facility."

The most severe cases, as McLean learned, might have to spend a day or two at the hospital before the Catalyst staff can evaluate them. Once they're stable, they return to join everyone else at the withdrawal management building, a place

where they can safely detox while under medical care.

Before entering the withdrawal area, staff check new patients for hidden drugs and alcohol, then send them to the shower and give them a pair of scrubs to wear while they're admitted. Everyone gets a private room, which comes with a bed, bathroom and trash can (pronounced "vomit bucket").

"Every room has temperature control," Schroeder said. "Some people, when they're withdrawing, they want it really hot. And sometimes they want it really cold. Or maybe they're having hot and cold sweats and they have to move it back and forth."

Patients are known to keep their doors closed while they fight through the worst part of detox. Others like to congregate in a common area where they can sit on a couch and watch television. Therapists check on everyone's well-being, physical and mental.

Every person who goes through detox in the withdrawal management building takes support medications, which are closely monitored and adjusted by Paige Rhodes, the facility's director of nursing. Some of the medicines treat physical issues, others emotional.



Ellie McLean is two years sober from drinking 50 shots of vodka every day.

"This is kind of scary stuff," Rhodes said. "They are using substances for either anxiety, depression or not wanting to deal with life, and we're taking that away from them."

A handful of patients wore blue medical gowns and talked about the day's meals. One shuffled a deck of cards. Another sat on the couch. Someone changed the channel on the television. The morning sun brightened the room.

For all of them, it is the dawn of a new life away from drugs and alcohol. They're learning better habits, drawing a healthier picture, establishing a routine that will guide them. The past is gone.

"We've had a lot of people who were drinking on the job

because they couldn't go hours without having a drink," Rhodes said. "Just enough to take that edge off so that they're not shaking, not sweating, not vomiting. Just enough to get them through their shift."

To keep those old lives at bay, at least for another day, staff hold group meetings where they teach patients how to manage their medications, prevent relapse and prepare for life after discharge.

At some point on their journey, after the demon is locked in a jar, patients realize addiction wasn't the only thing wreaking havoc on their lives.

"Once that substance starts wearing off, all of a sudden you have your feelings again," Schroeder said. "That can be a really scary piece."

Many of them discover that long ago, knowingly or not, they had invited the beast into their lives to keep themselves from experiencing the world itself.

That's when therapists ask patients: "Why did you start using? What is it doing for you?"

Inside an awakened spirit, people ask their six-year-old self what they dreamed to be. A firefighter? Doctor? Teacher?

An addict?

"When did that change?" Schroeder said. "What happened to you that made you feel like you really had to escape?"

The physical danger of withdrawal ends for most people after a few days. For some, that's about 72 hours. More severe cases might take a week or longer. There is no standard.

"It is patient-centered," Rhodes said. "We're dealing with just the medical portion of it. It really is, 'How is this client doing?' We come together as a team and we talk about this."

Medical clearance to leave withdrawal management is not a recommendation that patients are ready to go home to their friends, their problems and their

secret stash of substances. Instead, it's an opportunity to graduate to a more advanced level of care.

"If they're agreeable, they're going to go next door," Schroeder said.

Next door to the withdrawal management building are separate residential units for men and women. Patients can stay there up to three months. The average visit is about 70 days.

"They get a lot of benefits from going there because they start gaining insight," Rhodes said. "They don't know why they're doing this — why they're hurting their family, why they're hurting themselves — and it gives them a chance to unpack some of that and figure out why."

During their residential stay, patients will learn from Dr. Joseph Bocka, the medical director of substance use disorder services for Catalyst, that the average sober person has about seven major relapses during their struggle, and that the organization's doors will always be open, no matter how many times they need a helping hand.

"Relapse is a part of recovery," Bocka said. "We are glad when someone is alive and they come back and we can kind of figure out what went wrong and develop a new plan to help make them successful."

Knowing help is only a phone call or text message away has kept Ellie McLean sober in the more than two years since she stumbled, literally, into treatment. She relies on support to get through every day. She wants to share the help.

"I tell people not to give up. Keep coming back, keep trying," McLean said. "Have that willingness, that open-mindedness, and let go. If you let go and let people help you, that, for me, was a big key."

Sobriety has often started with a single step into the lobby of Catalyst Life Services.

"This is a scary, scary thing to walk through these doors," Rhodes said. "But to walk through the doors and have somebody there that's going to meet you, that's going to understand what you're going through, I think goes very far."

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Farmer Suicides

by Zach Tuggle
March 8, 2024

Editor's Note: The following article describes suicide prevention, suicide and the impact of suicide loss. This content may be difficult for people who have experienced suicide loss or who are having thoughts of suicide. Please call 988 24 hours a day if you need assistance. Help is free and confidential.



Ohio farmers can now access mental-health resources 24/7

Suicide and agriculture have gone hand-in-hand for longer than most farmers publicly admit.

"They have one of the highest rates of death by suicide," said Ty Higgins of the Ohio Farm Bureau.

Males in the agriculture industry had a suicide death rate of 43.2 per 100,000 between 2010-17, compared to 27.4 for other occupations, according to a 2020 report from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

Higgins learned that reality bluntly in the 1980s while growing up on his family's dairy farm.

"We would sit around the table at supper and we would hear about a farmer taking his or her life, and that's as far as the conversation went," he explained. "The topic was talked about in whispers back then."

But the Ohio Agricultural Mental Health Alliance has finally brought farm suicide awareness to the forefront, offering much-needed resources to farmers, farm families and rural communities.

'A higher risk of death by suicide'

Stress and depression can be found in ag operations of all sizes across the Buckeye State, from micro farms to thousand-acre spreads.

"The average farm in Ohio is 170 acres," Higgins said. "About 60 to 70% of farmers have off-farm jobs to supplement their farms."

Most of them love what they do: delivering calves or piglets in the dead of a winter night, praying all summer for the right amount of rain, and always helping a neighbor even at the most inconvenient of times.

They may not have degrees or licensures, but they each have a lifetime of experience filling in 24 hours a day as their own veterinarians, mechanics, carpenters, meteorologists, biologists and economists.

"They do everything on the farm, including sitting in the cab of a tractor or combine for days at a time with just them and their thoughts," Higgins said. "Sometimes that can put them in a bad place."

Despite their seemingly limitless talents, farmers cannot be their own mental-health counselors. At times, that's what they need more than anything else.

"Farmers simply don't have control over the weather, the markets, something catastrophic happening on the farm or even family issues," Higgins said. "There are so many factors that go into agriculture that puts farmers in a higher risk of death by suicide."

'We realized that we needed to do more'

The darkest season for many came in 2019. Endless rain had delayed planting, first by weeks, then by months. In the middle of June, a lot of farmers finally gave in and sowed their seed in thick mud. Some never planted.

"They were struggling," Higgins said. "They weren't sure what to do with themselves."

The farm bureau that year joined with the Ohio Department of Agriculture and the Ohio State University to support the state's farmers.

"As time went on, we realized that we needed to do more," Higgins said.

The partners then created the Ohio Agricultural Mental Health Alliance, relying heavily upon advice from outside the ag community.

"We brought in the Ohio Department of Health, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation," Higgins said. "They really helped us see where we needed to go with this conversation."

Member organizations have since grown to include Ohio Corn & Wheat, the Ohio AgriBusiness Association and Farm Credit Mid-America.

"It's really come a long way at breaking down the stigma of mental health," Higgins said. "We're seeing farmers be a little bit more comfortable with hearing about mental health and farm stress and reaching out if they do have issues."



'It's about that family's legacy'

Growers, ranchers, dairymen and the like are often hard to reach because their anxieties are not rooted in making ends meet.

"For the farmer, it's not just about their livelihood. It's not just about bringing in money for the family," Higgins said. "It's about that family's legacy, what weight that might carry if you come to a point where you begin to realize that you might be the one that ends that family legacy on the farm because of factors you have no control of."

Hopelessness suffocates those who believe they are powerless to overcome life's present obstacles.

"Farmers don't realize that they're so much more than their farm, that their value is not in dollars or acres or bushels," Higgins said. "Their value is in their family: who they are as a father, as a sister, as a grandparent. That's their true value, and that's what we're hoping farmers see if they seek help."

Resources are available 24/7 for those in crisis

Spring can be challenging each year. Portions of the last harvest sit unsold as commodity prices drop. Planting dates approach while input costs rise. Skies are cold and gray and wet.

"They're not the only one going through what they're going through," Higgins said. "There are a lot of farmers that are struggling right now."

In a small town, there's concern that parking your truck outside a psychiatrist's office will only spark rumors about the family name.

"There's also an issue of pride in agriculture that they don't need to go seek help, that they'll take care of themselves like they take care of everything else on the farm," Higgins said. "But this is a different ballgame. This is something that requires someone that can talk to you that understands what you're going through."

If the demons are at their strongest and it seems the only way out is permanent, dial 988 any time 24/7 to call an operator from the national crisis lifeline. Counselors there speak English and Spanish.

When things are a little more calm, farmers are encouraged to fill out an online ag stress survey at go.osu.edu/farmstresssurvey.

*Please call 988 24 hours a day if you need
assistance.*

Help is free and confidential.

Responses will allow Ohioans to better help one another, Gov. Mike DeWine said in an Ohio Department of Agriculture news release.

"This survey will provide valuable help to numerous communities," DeWine said. "I urge our farmers and beyond to answer these tough but necessary questions. You won't only be helping yourself; you'll be helping your family and friends."

To read more about handling stress, farmers can visit three sites: u.osu.edu/farmstress, gotyourbackohio.org and farmstateofmind.org. Resources there are designed to connect those in need with the appropriate help.

Anyone who has an agricultural background and now works in mental health is encouraged to contact either the Ohio Department of Health or the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to see how they can help with the Ohio Agricultural Mental Health Alliance.

Friends, family and neighbors are all encouraged to keep an eye out for the state's farmers and reach out to those who may be having a hard time.

"Get farmers to the help that they need as soon as they need it so we don't have another tragedy on the farm like we've seen so many times over the past two years," Higgins said. "Getting them to someone to talk to professionally is the hardest part."

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SHOT AS CHILDREN

by Zach Tuggle
July 26, 2019

The bullet holes in their stomachs have scarred over in the 25 years since they were shot by Kevin Keith, but siblings Quanita and Quentin Reeves are afraid their memories may never heal.

They've been forced to relive the trauma of Feb. 13, 1994, anew since Kim Kardashian West went public last week with her support for the convicted murderer, claiming Keith is innocent and calling for his release from prison.

The Reeves siblings say Kardashian doesn't know what she's talking about.

"She just wants to look good," Quentin told the News Journal in an exclusive interview on Friday. "I want everybody to know what's going on."

Efforts by the News Journal to contact Kardashian via Twitter were unsuccessful.

Three people died that day, and three more were severely wounded. A Crawford County jury found Keith guilty. He was sentenced to death, but in September 2010, then-Gov. Ted Strickland commuted Keith's death

sentence to life without parole. Keith has unsuccessfully appealed his sentence many times. He's been in prison since June 1, 1994.

The night of the murders

The Reeves siblings remember in vivid detail the day that changed their lives. They were visiting their cousins on the south end of Bucyrus, about 70 miles due north of Columbus. In a rural town, Quanita said, everyone in the African-American community knows one another.

Quanita was 6. Quentin was 4. They were called downstairs when it was time for dinner: SpaghettiOs.

"There was a knock on the door. It was Kevin," Quanita said. "No mask, no gloves."

The children knew Keith, but were too young to understand that he was a drug dealer. They didn't know that their older cousin, Rudel Chatman, was an informant who had recently snitched on Keith, exposing his drug ring.

In their mind, Keith was again stopping by the home of his ex-girlfriend, Marchelle Chatman, who was their cousin, and Rudel's sister. Marchelle was 24. Her aunt, Linda Chatman, was 39, and was there to help babysit the Reeves siblings along with Marchelle's 4-year-old daughter, Marchae Chatman. Also there was Marchelle's new boyfriend, Rick Warren.

"We knew him. We greeted him," Quanita said. "We said: 'Hi, Kevin.'"

That didn't mean they were glad he was there. They thought it was weird that he was carrying a trash bag over his shoulder — he told them it was his laundry, when the bag actually contained a gun.

"I was scared of him," Quentin said. "He was big."

Keith asked for a glass of water and said he was looking for Rudel. He quizzed his ex-girlfriend on her brother's whereabouts, then wanted more water.

"He asked for many glasses of water," Quentin recalled.

When he realized the snitching Rudel wasn't at Marchelle's house, he pulled his gun from the bag.

"He must have decided, forget it, I'll shoot up his family," Quanita said.

Keith pointed the gun toward the head of Marchae, the young daughter of his ex-girlfriend, and shouted for everyone else to get on the ground.

"That's exactly what we did," Quanita said. "We got on the ground and he shot everybody up."

Dead were Marchae, Marchelle and Linda.

"I died," Quentin said. "They brought me back to life in the helicopter."

The Reeves siblings were both shot in their stomachs several times.

"I was laying on the floor, shot, throwing up SpaghettiOs," Quanita said.

The new boyfriend, Warren, escaped from the house. Quanita pushed herself up to watch Keith chase Warren down the street, but Keith saw her and shot toward her again through the window, hitting her left arm.

"There's no doubt in our minds it was him," Quanita said. "We are 100% correct."

Lifelong aftermath and uncertainty

The children woke up in the hospital the next day to learn that parts of their intestines had been removed.

"I had physical therapy," Quanita said. "I had to learn to walk again. My nerves are all damaged on the left side of my body."

Investigators asked them questions, but the children still felt heavily sedated as they were recovering from their surgeries. They each pointed to Keith when shown a photo lineup of suspects.

"We didn't go to the trial, because we were still in the hospital," Quanita said.

Warren ended up being the state's key witness.

As the siblings recovered and grew older, they started to notice a few mistakes in the investigation that they feel they could have helped with, had they been asked.

Quanita's age was recorded as 7, and every media outlet that has written about the incident since has repeated that mistake.

"I hadn't had my birthday yet," she said. "I was 6."

They have heard rumors that the shooter had worn a mask, but said Keith had no mask with him the day he shot them and their cousins.

*"I died. They brought me back to
life in the helicopter."*

– Quentin Reeves

They don't believe investigators fully understood the relationships among everyone involved, and as a result they never interviewed the people who knew where Keith had hidden his gun and who had helped him change the tires on his getaway car.

"There are a lot of people that were involved that they never even questioned," Quentin said. "I think anybody who knows anything about it should be subpoenaed. Some of them should be in jail."

They also feel law enforcement could have prevented the shooting, since they were investigating Keith already and knew that he had a history of violence. The siblings believe now it should have been clear that Keith may have sought retaliation.

Lately, the Reeves siblings have seen new rumors emerging in the media, alleging that their cousin Rudel's uncle, Rodney Melton, was actually the killer, and not Keith.

Melton is not related to Quanita and Quentin, and was not related to Linda Chatman, because he is on the other side of their cousins' family. But even if they weren't there that day, the siblings never would have believed that Melton had killed his niece, Marchelle, great-niece, Marchae, and the Reeves' aunt, Linda Chatman.

The siblings have stayed friends with Melton their entire lives. Although he's not a relative, they say he's almost been an uncle to them over the years. His eyes aren't the eyes they looked into as bullets pierced their abdomens. They trust him so much that they invited him to the News Journal for a group photo to accompany their account of Feb. 13, 1994.

"A picture says a million words," Melton said, his arms locked with those of Quanita and Quentin. "Doesn't it?"

Trauma from celebrity interference

The Reeves siblings understand that somewhere in the world someone has probably been wrongly imprisoned. Kevin Keith, they said, is not an example.

The siblings were forced back into their nightmares when Kim Kardashian West took to the internet to share her opinion of how Quanita and Quentin were shot.

"We want her to look into the facts," Quanita said. "Of course he's going to tell you he's innocent. He wants to get out."

The celebrity Tweeted her take on the case July 16.

"I heard about Kevin Keith's case last year & the more I learn about it, the more I believe the world needs to hear what happened to him! He was on death row & came w/in days of execution before the governor of Ohio commuted his sentence to life w/o parole," the celebrity wrote in a Tweet.

There's no word as to whether Kim Kardashian West has ever visited Bucyrus Estates, the apartment complex where the Reeves siblings nearly lost their lives in 1994, but the celebrity did share a video call with Keith while he sat in a holding cell at the Marion Correctional Institution.

"I had the pleasure of meeting Kevin Keith through a video visit & was so impressed w/ the amazing programs he created in prison to help others inside better themselves! So much evidence has been uncovered proving Kevin's innocence. I hope justice is served soon & he is released," she Tweeted.

Having the case forced back into national news hasn't been easy for Quanita. She's seeing her counselor again. She's worried about her children.

"I take depression pills and anxiety pills," she said. "You can't have a killer get out and be worried forever."

They want it to go away. They want Keith to stay safely behind bars. And they want Kim Kardashian West to move on to a different case.

"It's been going on too long," Quentin said. "We're tired of hearing about it."

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Fighting for her health

Woman with pregnancy complications plans pro-abortion rights rally

by Zach Tuggle
July 17, 2022

Between the time her daughter was born and the time most of her reproductive system was surgically removed, Samantha Davis feared getting pregnant again.

"There would not have been an option," she said. "I would have had to have had an abortion."

That's because, as doctors had explained to Davis, her body was no longer capable of fully producing a child.

And had such a potential second pregnancy taken place after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, the young mother said she would have had no way to keep herself alive.

"I would have died," Davis said. "I would have left my child and my husband without a mom and a wife."

The new baby, doctors tell her, would have died along with her.

"There's no if, ands or buts," Davis said. "It honestly would have come down to my life or no life."

Now, she is organizing a pro-abortion rights rally in her new hometown of Galion on July 24 in hopes of saving as many lives as she possibly can.

'Abortions are horrible'

The table of the Galion coffee shop was covered this week with paperwork and electronics as Samantha and Nick Davis discussed a life that four years ago the couple never expected would exist.

Four years ago, the two had just met.

Four years ago, neither could imagine moving away from Clintonville.

And four years ago, they had no reason — or moral desire — to actively fight for a woman's ability to have an abortion.

"We had known each other for two months," Samantha recalled. "It was a failed condom."

Neither of them had been planning to have a baby, but the test was positive.

"The first words out of my mouth were: 'I am not having an abortion,'" Samantha remembers.

Hearing that from his newfound girlfriend had brought relief to the soon-to-be father.

"I honestly decided that if she had an abortion, I would never speak to her again," Nick admitted. "Abortions are horrible. I don't think anyone out there really likes abortions."

They knew their lives would be different after getting married and starting a family, but it wasn't until their first doctor's appointment that they realized just how drastically things would change.

'I could barely walk'

The pregnancy immediately began getting difficult for Samantha when she developed severe

round ligament pain, which affected the ligaments that were holding her uterus to her body.

"At two months pregnant, I could barely walk," Samantha said. "So, not long after I found out I was pregnant."

Then she developed symphysis pubis dysfunction, which she described as "where all the pubic bones and joints come apart way too early in pregnancy."

Her pubic bone quickly separated more than an inch — her body was preparing for birth several months ahead of schedule.

"I went on full disability at five months," Samantha said. "I couldn't even work at five months."

"And then I had hyperemesis, so I was vomiting throughout the entire pregnancy."

She became a regular at both physical therapy and the labor and delivery department.

Emergency caesarian required

Things got worse during week 34 when Samantha began having major contractions.

Nurses noticed she was not yet dilated. Her blood pressure was elevated, and rising.

"Two hours later, they were like, 'Oh, we need to admit you,'" Nick said.

It was July 2, 2019, and it would be another 84½ hours until their daughter was born.

"I was contracting the whole time," Samantha said. "My blood pressure never came down."

Doctors finally decided on July 3 to induce labor.

"I went into full on labor for 49½ hours," Samantha said. "My epidural failed a couple of times."

Despite being on the verge of giving birth, she was only dilated 4cm, rather than the expected 10cm.

"I am wearing out," Samantha said. "I am exhausted."

Only a 4% chance of survival

They decided a caesarian would be needed, so they moved her to an operating table and injected her again. This time, though, she told the doctor there was something wrong, then threw up.

"I blacked out," Samantha said. "My blood pressure plummeted. My pulse plummeted. My oxygen plummeted."

The doctors started cutting before Nick even realized what was happening.

"It was considered an emergency," Samantha said.

The date was July 5, a full three days after the Davis family had arrived at the hospital.

The couple found out later that the baby had only been given a 4% chance of surviving the procedure.

Healthy girl weighed only 4½ pounds

Scarlet Davis wasn't exactly supposed to be their daughter's name.

The plan had been to have another month to think it over. Even then, they were going to make a final decision after the baby was born.

But things changed and the baby came early. Lying there delirious, blood all around, Samantha said the name was the first word that popped into her mind: "Scarlet."

The child was 17 inches, and weighed just 4½ pounds. Fortunately, she was a healthy little girl.

"Scarlet was released before I was," Samantha said.

Extensive medical issues continue

The family has made countless trips to the hospital for various health issues over the last three years.

Once Nick realized that another pregnancy could be fatal for his wife, he committed to having a vasectomy.

Scarlet had many checkups the first couple of years, but is now healthy.

And Samantha is still going back to the doctor on a regular basis, three years later.

She had her gallbladder removed soon after giving birth, then was tested for uterine cancer.

There was no cancer, but an endometriosis specialist recommended she have a hysterectomy.

"That's a really hard thing to face as a woman," Samantha said, tears welling. "You want to have more kids. You don't want to face that."

At the age of 36, Samantha is without her ovaries, without her fallopian tubes, without a uterus, without a cervix and is going through menopause.

Moving from Columbus to Galion

Hospital trips over the years have taken them across Ohio. Because of the potential for complications, they often stay in hotel rooms near the hospital afterward in case anything goes wrong.

"We've racked up quite a bit of credit card debt," Nick said.

They realized this spring that the best option for paying off their nearly \$40,000 in bills would be to sell their beloved Clintonville home and move somewhere a little less expensive.

After weeks of keeping an eye on listings, they finally found the perfect place in Galion, 52 miles north of Clintonville.

They closed on their new home in early July, and are still moving in. They have yet to finalize the sale of their Clintonville home.

Keeping track of new laws

Amid her health care appointments and moving to a new home, Samantha has been keeping track of

how the laws in Ohio are affecting women's reproductive rights.

Senate Bill 23, also known as the heartbeat bill, took effect hours after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned federal abortion protections on June 24.

The Ohio law, which had been on judicial hold since Gov. Mike DeWine signed it in 2019, banned almost all abortions once fetal cardiac activity can be detected.

“Abortions are horrible. I don’t think anyone out there really likes abortions.”

—Nick Davis

An abortion after six weeks could be legal if it prevented "the death of a pregnant woman" or "a serious risk of substantial and irreversible impairment of a major bodily function," according to a nonpartisan analysis by the Ohio Legislative Service Commission.

Samantha and Scarlet have protested at the Ohio Statehouse. Although she never had to have an abortion, Samantha says she was close to needing one.

"Morally, it would be very hard for me to have an abortion," Samantha said. "But I know it's also not my right to be in someone else's exam room."

She wants to make sure any woman who faces a potentially fatal pregnancy has the same health

care options that were available to her up until recently.

"If there's a woman in my position who doesn't know all of this and hasn't researched it and they get pregnant and they need to abort the baby, they do not have that right in this state," Samantha said. "People really need to pay attention to their health history."

No matter where she called home, she was destined to be making her opinions known this summer.

Pro-abortion rights rally

That's why she's holding a pro-abortion rights rally on the public square in Galion 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday, July 24. She notified the city, and has spread the message through social media.

So far, she's not sure how many people might be joining her, but everyone is welcome.

"I am OK to sit out there by myself with my flag," Samantha said. "I will talk to anybody. This is health care. This is not anything other than health care. This is quite literally my life, or no life. I will tell you my story and show you my records."

In a town much more conservative than Columbus, she realizes there might be more people against her than with her, and she's OK with that.

"If you are willing to have an open conversation, I'm willing to sit there and tell my story because I am the rule, I am not the exception," she said. "People are not using abortions as birth control. People are using abortions because they have to. It could be for so many countless things, but we have a right to privacy. I shouldn't have to tell my story in order for another woman to get the healthcare she deserves."

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SEIZURES



Pharmacist still free of seizures three years after brain surgery

by Zach Tuggle
April 12, 2024

Planning ahead for his next seizure was Brian George's daily schedule, even at work, for more than 20 years.

"You adapt," he said. "You're always thinking, 'What if I have one?' You're in a new environment, it's like 'OK, where's the exit? Where's the bathroom? How can I get out of here if I have one?' I used to always hate getting on an airplane."

Thanks to a laser ablation procedure through OhioHealth, the pharmacist at Mansfield Hospital has been seizure free for three years.

"It definitely changed my life," George said. "I don't have to worry about a lot of the things I used to."

'I really didn't know where I was'

Not far down the hall from his hospital pharmacy is the room where George was born.

He grew up a half-dozen miles south, in Lexington.

During high school, George got a letter from The Ohio State University that recruited him to be a pharmacist. Seven years later, he became a Doctor of Pharmacy.

"I graduated June of 1998 and started here July 1 of 1998," George said. "I did that for 20-plus years and I took the director's job."

He married his sweetheart, Heather, along the way. They had two sons, Gavin and Dylan.

His would have been a storybook life, had it not been for the seizures.

"I had my first seizure, I was probably like 8 or 9 months old," George said. "High fever, all seizures."

The seizures went away while he was a toddler, then returned during his teenage years.

"I really didn't get diagnosed completely until my second year of college," George said.

He learned he had partial epilepsy, which affected only one area of his brain – more severe forms of epilepsy attack most of the brain all at once.

Because he was only partially epileptic, George's seizures generally were mild. He would become nauseated during onset, and knew to get somewhere private with a trashcan or a toilet in case he needed to throw up.

"The last conscious thought I'd have was 'You're going to be sick,'" George said. "Then, 30 seconds, 45 seconds later, I'd come out of it and I'd be fine."

They weren't always that simple, though.

"One time in college, I got turned around and I ended up on some other floor in the building," George said. "When I came out of it, I really didn't know where I was."

'You're kind of just on autopilot'

That was George's routine for parts of three decades.

"I kind of made sure that the people I worked with closely knew in case something happened," George said.

Since he was employed in a hospital, he didn't want anyone to get the wrong idea and call for medical support during one of his seizures.

"Wait until I come out of it," George would tell coworkers. "This is what it looks like. This is what will happen."

The threat of a seizure was on his mind daily, but they only happened about once every few weeks.

After he did have a seizure, he would clean up and get back to work.

"You're kind of just on autopilot, if you will," George said. "Once you come out of it, it's fine."

'It was just getting worse'

The frequency of his seizures increased as time passed. Doctor friends told him there was a procedure that might help, but the thought of surgery made him nervous.

"I was like, it doesn't impact me enough to want somebody to, you know, get in my brain," George said. "It was scary. It took me a while to come around to even think about having it done."

He decided to keep track of his seizures and realized his average had grown to two per week.

"No meds were helping," George said. "It was just getting worse."

He learned the surgery he would need was called laser interstitial thermal therapy, or, more commonly, laser ablation. The procedure has been used about 15 years.

Laser ablations can only treat partial epilepsy caused by a small portion of the brain, according to Emily Klatte, MD, board certified adult neurologist with the OhioHealth Physician Group.

'We decided to go ahead and get me scheduled'

George finally decided to visit the epilepsy monitoring unit at OhioHealth Riverside Methodist Hospital in Columbus for an electroencephalogram, known as an EEG.

He stayed there all weekend, wires and cameras monitoring his brain activity for three days to see if he might be a good candidate for the surgery.

"We stop seizure medications and try to make people have their seizures so we can figure out where they start," Klatte explained.

George had three seizures that weekend. They all originated in his right temporal lobe, in an area called the hippocampus.

Doctors also discovered his motor skills, language and memory were all stored in the left side of his brain, which meant there was little risk in making a correction on the right side of his brain.

The medical staff cleared George for the operation.

Despite the news, he still wasn't sold on the procedure.

"It took another month or so, maybe a couple of months," George said.

He and his wife met with the neurologist and the neurosurgeon to learn more.

"I said, 'I'm a little scared, what happens if I don't have the surgery?' They said it would continue to get worse," George said. "It would impact my memory, things like that. We decided to go ahead and get me scheduled."

'We hope that they remain seizure free indefinitely'

Laser ablations are now considered minimally invasive, but they are still a form of brain surgery.

"The surgeon will drill a small hole in the skull," Klatte said.

Doctors guide a laser catheter through the skull, then do extensive imaging to ensure the device is in the best possible location.

"They deliver heat and it kind of destroys that part of the brain tissue," Klatte said.

In a matter of moments, the surgeon eliminated the tiny portion of George's brain that was causing his seizures.

"We hope that they remain seizure free indefinitely," Klatte said. "Many times that is the case."

Despite having a portion of his brain operated on, George had only a limited recovery.

"They put a few staples in my head and closed it up," he said. "I spent the night one night and then I was home."

'I wonder why I waited so long'

George had his laser ablation in 2020, right before elective surgeries were canceled during the pandemic.

A year later, Heather needed her own surgery: an organ transplant. Fortunately, her operation went as well as his.

They're both now fully recovered. After more than three years, the seizures are still gone.

"Looking back, I wonder why I waited so long," George said. "Obviously after the fact it's easier."

The seizures may be gone from his brain, but they'll always remain on his mind.

"You never want to jinx it or anything," George said. "It's not something I have to worry a whole awful lot about anymore, but I still take one medication at a very low dose just because."

He recommends anyone living with seizures talk to their doctor about the possibility of having a laser ablation.

And he admits the idea of surgery can be concerning for patients. It was for him, even after working in the hospital for nearly three decades.

"I can't imagine if I wasn't in healthcare trying to navigate some of the things that we've had to get through," George said. "I'm just very fortunate that I've had the experiences that I have. We've been very fortunate."

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SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION



Memories aplenty during Shawshank's 25th anniversary

by Zach Tuggle
August 17, 2019

Thousands of people waited for nearly an hour to get inside the one place that Andy Dufresne and Red Redding couldn't wait to leave: Shawshank State Prison, formally known as the Ohio State Reformatory.

Many of the movie's cast and crew returned to Mansfield for

the film's 25th anniversary. It was filmed in North Central Ohio over the summer of 1993, and was released in 1994.

The movie is considered by users of the Internet Movie Database to be the best ever made, according to Ben Mankiewicz, a film critic who hosted a panel discussion with actors and others involved with the movie Friday night at the Renaissance Theatre downtown.

"This is a worldwide sensation," Mankiewicz said.

As the actors took turns speaking, they thanked Frank Darabont, who wrote the screenplay for the film and then directed the movie. He appreciated their sentiments, but felt wrong taking credit for the story.

"If we're going to thank anybody, let's thank Stephen

King," Darabont said. "None of us would be here."

King dreamed up Dufresne's nightmare sometime in the 1970s. The novella was published in 1982 along with three others in a book titled "Different Seasons."

The director said all he did was channel King's story. The tale almost unfolded a very different way, the crowd learned Friday.

When Castle Rock Entertainment agreed to turn Darabont's screenplay into a movie, many in the industry suspected Rob Reiner would direct the film. Reiner had directed *Stand By Me*, a film adaptation of King's novella, *The Body*, which was also published in "Different Seasons."

Mankiewicz explained to the audience that Castle Rock executives approached Darabont with an offer of \$2.5 million to purchase the script, then roughly another \$1.5 million for a position in the film crew. Reiner would direct the film, and Tom Cruise would play the role of Dufresne.

"Life changing money," Mankiewicz said. "You said yes?"

"No," Darabont said.

The director admitted that he never once considered taking the money, although he did tell Castle Rock representatives he wanted to ponder their offer. He

said that was only a courtesy — he knew Shawshank was a project he was destined to complete. Not tackling the project would have left him in an unfulfilled artistic void.

"If not this, then what?" Darabont said. "If not now, then when?"

The move could have cost the director financially, but he didn't care.

"Nobody remembers you for your bank account when you're gone," Darabont said. "But they might remember your art, and that was important to me."

He admitted that Reiner and Cruise would have done a fine job with the movie, and that King would have been pleased with their work. He's glad, though, that he didn't give his script to them.

"It wouldn't have been this movie," Darabont said. "It wouldn't have been my movie."

Ever Lapolla was leading the Ohio Film Commission when Darabont began searching for a prison. He knew he didn't want an operating facility, leaving his list of options rather short. Lapolla took a box of photos from the Ohio State Reformatory to Darabont, who instantly fell in love with the location. Lapolla was in love with the script.

"In 20 years with the film commission, I never read a script that made my hairs stand

up like this one did," Lapolla said.

She called the reformatory the main character of the movie. Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman were secondary actors to the Ohio State Reformatory.

Okayi Ampah was hired as the film's location manager.

He said he spent more than three months in Mansfield, an unusually long amount of time on a movie set. Having the prison already in place made his job easier — he had more time to focus on finding the tree where Andy would bury the note for Red.

Working on the movie was the first time Ampah had ever heard of Darabont. He said in Hollywood, people like to compare resumes, and often judge people on their lack of experience. The search for the Shawshank tree showed Ampah how good Darabont was. He said the pair walked across the field toward the tree across the street from Malabar Farm, but Darabont wasn't immediately satisfied with the angle he saw.

"We went down to the creek bed and came up," Ampah said. "There was the tree. Boom. I said, 'Oh, this guy's got an eye.'"

The director said Ampah and his team finding the tree was one of the biggest things to happen during filming.

"I remember saying to him, 'You just made the movie,'" Darabont said.

Bob Gunton told the audience that Warden Norton was his first major role on the big screen. He'd spent most of his life on stage. He knew his transition to on-camera would go well as soon as he read the script.

It was unusual that the film's scenes were shot in sequence, Gunton said, but it proved to be perfect psychologically for the cast. He said watching it later, it's clear that the actors have developed a bond with one another that allowed their respective characters to have a bond after spending decades together in prison.

*"Nobody remembers you for your bank account when you're gone. But they might remember your art, and that was important to me."
—Frank Darabont*



Director Frank Darabont shares memories from "The Shawshank Redemption."

Gil Bellows called it magic. He played Tommy in the film. Friday was the first time he'd been back to Mansfield since the movie was released.

"I hope you have a moment in your life like that," Bellows told the audience. "It's one of the most beautiful memories I have. It's a piece of magic, and coming back here touches on that magic."

It was life-changing for Mark Rolston, who played Bogs, the leader of The Sisters, a gang that assaults Andy throughout the movie. Darabont recognized Rolston from his role as Drake in Aliens. He teared up when he remembered how hard it was waiting for a call. It took three months, but he finally heard back.

"Frank actually called me at my home to tell me that I'd gotten the role," Rolston said.

Several other cast members shared their memories from the film, including Scott Mann and Renee Blaine, who played the golf pro and Andy's wife, respectively. Alfonso Freeman, Morgan's son, also shared how the movie helped him break into the acting community. There was also Claire Slemmer, a local woman who played the bank teller — she had a lot of friends in the film.

"I want to thank you for casting so many small parts locally," Slemmer told Darabont. "Thanks for all these memories."

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'We're in for a real fight'



J.D. Vance labels himself as an outsider

by Zach Tuggle
March 11, 2022

J.D. Vance told voters Wednesday that "Democrats are evil and Republicans are stupid" when he campaigned in Mansfield for the U.S. Senate seat to be vacated by Rob Portman.

The U.S. Marine veteran has labeled himself as a "conservative outsider" who wants to focus on issues such as securing the nation's southern border, combating the use of opioids and strengthening America's economy, among others.

He acknowledged to the group of about 30 inside Saint Luke's Lutheran Church on Marion Road that winning the Republican primary this spring would not be easy given the number of well-known contenders.

"We're in for a real fight," Vance said. "I think it's a fight for the soul of the party."

Loss of local manufacturing

Vance, author of the best-selling book "Hillbilly Elegy" who graduated from Ohio State and Yale Law School, told the audience that his hometown of Middletown is similar to Mansfield in that their economic decline over the years came because they "got neglected by our leaders."

He said the middle class has suffered because household products, electronics and even pharmaceuticals are now all produced in foreign countries.

"We are no longer a country that makes our own stuff," Vance said.

Although he's a Republican, he said both parties share in that blame.

Opioid crisis and the southern border

The opioid pandemic was at the top of Vance's healthcare priorities, and he said more needs done to keep those drugs from entering the country.

"The leading cause of death in people 18 to 45 years old is from overdoses right now," Vance said. "I don't think it's right that we have 100,000 kids who are orphaned because we have this drug problem."

He said it's one of the few areas in which he thinks the federal government needs to become more involved.

"We could actually declare the Mexican drug cartels a terrorist organization," Vance said. "We can and we should."

Doing so would allow the military to track them down and take them out of business, he said, similar to how Osama bin Laden was eliminated in 2011.

The border wall, Vance said, needs to be finished to help keep those drugs out of the United States.

Staying out of the war in Ukraine

Taking care of the nation's border with Mexico is, to Vance, a more important military operation than becoming involved with what's happening in Ukraine, which he said was of little interest to the U.S.

He said it's fine to feel bad for Ukrainians and to hope the best for them, but there are more pressing issues at hand for Americans.

"Three weeks now I've prayed for Ukraine at church," Vance said.

Aside from prayer, he said he doesn't think there's much the United States could do for Ukraine.

"The one thing we could do is go to war with the Russians," Vance said. "I think that would be a terrible mistake."

He said the conflict has allowed President Joe Biden to "look tough" without actually doing anything.

"The one thing that can save this guy's presidency is a war," Vance told voters.

He said that any further aggression by Russia, though, especially to ally NATO nations, would be cause for U.S. involvement in the region.

"That's when it changes," Vance said. "That's where you have to draw a red line."

He said he hopes, though, that doesn't happen while Biden is in the White House, because he thinks Biden would be a very bad Commander in Chief.

"As far as I can tell, he doesn't know where he is at any given moment," Vance said.

Vowed not to become corrupt

Vance told the audience that a lot of people get into politics and then become corrupted when they start spending time around the lobbyists in Washington, DC.

"There's a lot of money and there's a lot of influence there," Vance said. "The deep state is real."

He said politicians quickly amass a net worth far beyond what their salaries would have



J.D. Vance in Mansfield

earned them, a clear sign they've been paid off. He vowed not to do the same.

Vance told the crowd he's going to Washington to make omelets, so he's going to have to break some eggs in the process.

He wants to challenge leadership in both parties, and he wants to ban members of congress from owning any publicly traded stocks.

He wants to set term limits for congress, and he wants to write legislation that will make it easier to fire civil servants who are not doing their jobs.

One of his targets would be the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. He said 90% of VA employees are great people, but 10% are "scumbags."

"They don't answer the phone," Vance said. "They leave you on hold for hours."

Those negligent employees are costing veterans their lives, and he wants the government to hire people who would do a better job.

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David Allan Coe comes home to Mansfield

by Zach Tuggle

December 23, 2016

He shuffled slowly in his Chuck Taylors, one hand on his cane and the other on his wife, Kim. He paused at times to tell stories — some of them with a song.

It was a day of firsts for David Allan Coe, the legendary country singer who turned 77 in September. He was visiting the Ohio State Reformatory in Mansfield the morning of Dec. 2 to film a new music video for his 1977 hit, "Take This Job And Shove It." The song will be released New Year's Day, and the music video Feb. 28.

Coe hadn't returned to the prison since being an inmate there 50 years before. The cold bars and crumbling concrete walls caught his eye many times.

"It's fine," he said. "You can't outrun your past."

Thanks to the help of Colt Ford of the Average Joe's Entertainment record label, the outlaw singer is now embracing his storied past more closely than ever. Coe plans to release a new album in the summer of 2017.

Although the new project didn't take shape until recently, it actually began in the 1950s while Coe was growing up in Akron. Those years found Coe in and out of trouble with the law, which led to his now famous incarceration in Mansfield. It was there that Coe's musical talents began to blossom as he sang in an inmate band.

"There were good memories and bad memories," Coe said.

Once he was released, Coe moved to Shelby, where he performed as "Killer Tony Coe," "Screamin' T.," and "T. Coe and the Dynamics." But his gigs in barrooms and basements didn't pay quite enough to cover his bills.

"I got a job in Galion," Coe said. "I went to work welding up caskets."

By 1970, Coe released his first album, "Penitentiary Blues," which was influenced heavily by his time in Mansfield. Success soon followed — Coe has released nearly 50 albums since, the most recent in 2010.

Ford, an acclaimed country artist himself, decided this year that it was time for Coe to return to the spotlight. Ford brought him to the studio, and the legend started recording. A few days later, a pair of musicians with Ford's label heard Coe's new tracks.

"They grew up listening to his music," said Ken Madson, manager of the Moonshine Bandits.

The duo — Tex and Bird — now sing what some people call "country rap," or "hick hop." But Tex doesn't like those names.

"We call what we do 'blue core music' — it's blue collar with a rebel spirit," Tex said. "It's for the people who work 9 to 5. It doesn't matter what part of the country you're in — as long as you love our country and respect the troops."

In some ways, they're the new David Allan Coe. That's why they knew they had to be a part of his new album. They took his new recording of "Take This Job And Shove It," added a beat and rapped — "spit" — a few lines of their own.

Coe liked the results.

"It takes the music to a whole new generation," he said after meeting the Bandits at the Reformatory to shoot the music video.

The collaboration will be on his new album, as well as their next album. Although the tune might

surprise a few die-hard country fans, the legend himself thinks the song makes perfect sense.

"I probably made the first rap album that was ever made," Coe said while standing outside his old prison cell. "I've been doing rap for a long time, long before anyone knew anything about it. I just didn't know to call it rap."

He was standing where he'd rapped with fellow inmates a half-century before. The outlaw stared through time into a scene that only he remembers.

"Kim!" he shouted. "Where's Kim? She needs to see where I was."

He showed his wife the now-rusted bed where he wrote so many of his songs, led her to the room where he used to visit with his parents and then took her to the basement where he was held in solitary confinement.

He remembered what had happened, but a lifetime of fame since those days made his own memories hard for even him to believe.

"It's like it's not really real," Coe said. "I think the human mind has a way of erasing things."

The whole experience of returning to singing and visiting the prison has been good for the legend, said his drummer of nearly 40 years, Jeff Burnett, known as "The Notorious D.O.G."

"This is his comeback," Burnett said.

And the fans are loving it already. In a small concert at Dillinger's Event Center in Bucyrus the night the music video was shot, the Moonshine Bandits invited Coe onto the stage. The crowd screamed as Coe sang his famous tune with Tex and Bird. Then, when the music stopped, Coe surprised everyone by rapping a tune that nobody had ever heard. It was an original that he's adding to his new album.

"You never know with David!" shouted a smiling B.B. Lee, Coe's guitarist. "You expect something different every night."

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Golf offers mental and physical boost during COVID-19 pandemic



by Zach Tuggle
April 2, 2020

Beyond the COVID-19 warning signs and across the sunlit valley that's split by a babbling brook, Scott Carr swung a golf club Wednesday with all his might.

"I'll take that one," he said as the ball sailed into a gentle breeze, then landed just a few feet from the cup on the 11th

hole at Valley View Golf Course in Galion.

"This is the first time I've been outside since last Thursday," he said. "I've been pretty depressed. It makes you realize how much we take stuff for granted, even just being outside. Put stuff in perspective and count your blessings, I guess."

His story was not unique. Millions in the Buckeye State have been staying home as much as possible the past two weeks at the direction of Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine. A "stay-at-home" order in effect until April 6 allows for some travel, including visits to the grocery store, trips to care for those who need assistance, and exercise excursions that benefit physical and mental health.

"It's great," Carr said of the fitness exception in DeWine's shutdown — he knows the benefit of exercise so well because he coaches varsity wrestling at Northmor High School and teaches health and physical education in the district.

Golf's COVID-19 etiquette

Schools and restaurants were announced closed the week of St. Patrick's Day, then the order to stay home came Monday. Mike Stuckman, the owner of Valley View, wasn't sure at first if he was allowed to stay open — his golf course gives people the chance to stay active outdoors, but he also sells food and drinks in the clubhouse.

"It's a situation where the county health department has the final say," Stuckman said. "That's subject to change, I'm sure."

Staff spent the beginning of the week preparing the course to be resistant to the spread of the novel coronavirus. There's a sign on the front door that directs visitors to either call the main line or knock on the side door for assistance. Drinks and snacks are available, but not prepared food. Transactions are completed on the patio, as only employees are allowed in the building.

"This was our first day operating this way," Stuckman

said. "It worked out. People understand what's going on, and they're easy to work with."

Guests can drive separate golf carts if they want to keep distance from one another — carts are disinfected after every use. Once on the green, golfers will notice all of the flag pins have been pulled, and the cups are lifted a couple inches out of the ground.



"If you hit that, it counts as making the putt," Stuckman said.

There are also no rakes to grab or ball washers to crank.

"There's nothing to actually touch," Stuckman said. "We're trying to make it as safe as possible."

The course is also asking patrons to call ahead to schedule a tee time so that golfers aren't congregated outside, waiting for their turn to play.

Season's future uncertain

Nearly 80 golfers visited Valley View on Wednesday when the temperature was in the high 50s, and course staff expected about the same

number of golfers on Thursday. They don't want much more, though, because that could overwhelm their ability to keep the place sanitized.

League play could be delayed until summertime to keep large groups of golfers from gathering at the same time. The clubhouse could remain closed for several weeks.

"I could get a phone call tomorrow that says we have to close," Stuckman said. "If we do, then I understand."

Despite the uncertainty, many of the course's regulars were glad to escape to their favorite getaway. Gary Sims, of Bucyrus, was there Wednesday evening with his friend, Brad Kalb, of Ontario.

"I've been coming here for 20-plus years," Sims said. "My work shut the doors last Friday. I'd be going stir crazy if I couldn't get out."

Kalb still has to report to duty, but was free Wednesday. He didn't want to waste the opportunity.

"It's good to get out, enjoy the weather and get some fresh air," Kalb said. "People need to get out and exercise and forget about the bad stuff going on."

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JAPANESE BEETLES



Invaders are marching across the country

by Zach Tuggle
August 14, 2023

Millions of metallic green invaders adorned with brown wing covers have been marching over the foliage of the Buckeye State this summer like columns of tanks pillaging a foreign land.

"Japanese Beetles feed on more than 300 different species of plants," explained Dr. Cindy Perkovich, an entomologist at Ashland University. "They munch on just about anything."

They're ruthless, too, eating only the leaf tissue and leaving behind the veins as plant

skeletons that quickly wither and die.

As larvae, the invaders eat entire root systems, shriveling lawns and flowerbeds to a dried brown.

"They're pretty tenacious," Perkovich said. "They demolish a lot of things."

'They have no enemies here'

The battle against Japanese Beetles has entered its 107th annual campaign in North America.

Before that, the pesky critters lived safely across the ocean.

"They were brought here," Perkovich explained. "The Japanese brought them into the country during the World's Fair."

It was 1916 and gardeners from Japan, eager to impress their foreign friends, brought the most glorious of their exotic plants to the United States.

Scientists suspect that the species' grubs – their proper name is *Popillia japonica* – were hidden in the dirt around the plants' young root systems.

"They're pretty tenacious. They demolish a lot of things."

—Dr. Perkovich

It didn't take long for the larvae to become pupae and then adults. They flew from the World's Fair, found a tasty landing spot, and flourished.

Their first established population in North America

was discovered at a nursery in New Jersey.

By 1972, Japanese Beetles had heavily infested 22 states east of the Mississippi River.

"They have no enemies here," Perkovich said.

Grubs begin turning lawns brown in late summer

The beetles lay their eggs in August. The eggs are white ovals, usually about 1/16 inch (1.5 mm) long and 3/64 inch (1.0 mm) wide, according to a fact sheet prepared by The Ohio State University.

Females lay up to 60 eggs throughout the summer, from two to four inches deep in the soil. Even after mating season has ended, adults live the rest of autumn until the first frost.

Egg development takes anywhere from just longer than a week to nearly a month. Once they emerge, the grubs feed on roots and other organic material the rest of the year as they continue to grow.

"You'll see brown patches in lawns," Perkovich said.

By winter, the grubs have burrowed about eight inches deep where they can survive until spring.

The larvae return to the surface in mid April, pupate, and emerge as adults in June.

"They're really active for about two months," Perkovich said of the adults.

The new generation then lays its eggs in August, continuing the cycle of the Japanese Beetle invasion.

'You're actually creating a problem'

Attempts at controlling Japanese Beetle populations can be very expensive, according to the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture.

The federal government's primary objective is to limit the spread of the beetles out west.

East of the Mississippi, the most common attempt at controlling Japanese Beetles is the deployment of bag lures.

Those traps use pheromones to attract the beetles, which slip into the bag and cannot escape. The only issue that biologists have with that method is that it draws in the insects from an unnatural distance.

"If you don't have a problem and you put a lure out, you're actually calling them into your area," Perkovich said.

The newcomers are likely to stop for a few moments and lay eggs before venturing into the trap, causing a large population of grubs to emerge that autumn and adults to fly from the ground the next spring.

The traps could become filled, but not before the adults deposit thousands of eggs.

"So, you're actually creating a problem," Perkovich said.

'Get the female before she lays her eggs'

Commercial growers, often nurseries that grow ornamental of fruit trees, often look to chemicals to solve the issue.

Those chemicals are either spread onto the ground or sprayed on to the leaves of plants the farmers hope to protect. Both methods kill the grubs and adults of Japanese Beetles after ingestion.

The USDA warns that chemicals meant to control the invasive species also may harm beneficial members of the ecosystem.

"We have to figure out how to live with them in peace," Perkovich said.

The most promising method of controlling the Japanese Beetle populations has been through the assistance of the spring Tiphia, a small parasitic wasp that attacks the beetles while they are still grubs. Biologists started introducing the wasps in the United States about 10 years ago, and, so far, their populations are slowly growing.

Waiting for a biological predator to emerge in Ohio might seem like a hopeless task to those who find their favorite plants destroyed by Japanese Beetles, but Perkovich said we aren't completely powerless without the use of chemicals.

She has been a predator of the insects herself every summer since she was a little girl.

"I love to garden, so I deal with Japanese Beetles all the time," Perkovich said.

Her weapon is a bucket filled with soapy water. Every time she finds an adult Japanese Beetle, she tosses it into her bucket to drown.

"Hopefully you can get the female before she lays her eggs," Perkovich said. "If you do, then next year you won't have as many grubs."

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Reporter finishes Mohican Trail Marathon with strained quad

by Zach Tuggle
June 11, 2025

Calamity struck when I pulled my left quadricep 16 miles into the Mohican Trail Marathon.

The next 10 miles were a long and painful journey filled with introspection and bizarre philosophical musings.

I realized things were getting weird when I found myself kneeled down, petting the soft green moss that carpets the floor of Mohican-Memorial State Forest — the finish line

was only a mile away, but, after nearly six hours of running and limping, time and space had lost their relevance.

The sensation that a phantom paring knife was lodged into my leg probably made it all worse.

I trudged slowly onward and completed the 26.2-mile course more than an hour behind schedule (and my little brother).

My nieces cheered. My wife, Nicole, hugged me. I stumbled

to a chair and sat down, shocked that the adventure was over.

Some muscle strains require surgery

Like many people in their 30s, I decided last year to adopt a regular exercise routine. I chose running, but strength training, cycling and swimming are other popular options.

I increased my distances over winter to include several training runs that were a half-marathon (13.1 miles) or longer.

My legs and core grew stronger, but I became residually tired sometime in early May.

The morning of the marathon, I could sense that I was one misstep from disaster. I ran carefully up and down hills, through mud and over rocks and stumps, but lost the game when I tripped over a tree root around mile 16 of the race.

My body instinctively contorted itself after the trip to prevent falling face-first onto the trail. The sudden, full-body reaction overwhelmed and pulled my already-weakened left quadricep. The pain caused me to shout out loud.

My mission immediately changed from racing my brother, Thaddaeus, to finishing the marathon without any lasting medical issues.

I took it slow and finished, but the Cleveland Clinic notes that some muscle strains are so severe that they can require surgery to heal correctly.

Endurance events unite runners

The Mohican trail runs in Loudonville are some of Ohio's most popular endurance events. Runners come from across the nation to take on the 100-, 50- and 26.2-mile races.

Competition at "Mo," as the course is affectionately called, is not against people, but the

trails themselves. Running in a pack with others during the early stages keeps morale high.

My brother and I ran together for the first six miles of the race. Our wives, our Mom and his four daughters met us at aid stations along the way. Our aunt walked the marathon behind us.

So many people were in the race that someone was always nearby even after injury slowed me down.

A portion of the course's later stages was clear enough that I could see about a dozen runners making their way uphill ahead of me. I watched them and wondered what part of their bodies hurt as badly as my left leg; when those injuries had befallen them; how they were coping; and why they, or any of us, chose to run obscene distances across grueling terrain.

The race reminded me that, inside our minds, our individual streams of consciousness are similar — we are alike, but molded uniquely by circumstance and choice.

I was everyone for a moment. Then I needed a drink of water.

What's next after Mohican Trail Marathon?

Our family gathered at my parents' house after the race. Dad ordered pizza for

everyone. Some of us took naps.

Then, in the dark of the night, my brother and I drove back to the race course to work at an aid station from midnight to 4 a.m.

Our marathon may have ended, but many runners in the 100-mile race would be competing until after sunrise, 30 hours after their event had started.

Cheering for those athletes, filling their water bottles and helping them find the right snacks reminded me that my 6-hour jog was far from extreme.

I will never comprehend how ultrarunners complete such monumental distances. A standard marathon is a short race for them, but it will always be a long one for me.

That's probably why, after taking a few days off to rest, I chose to do my recovery work on a high school track. I even put on a pair of track spikes and tested my speed. It wasn't fast, but it was all right.

Now I'm eager for my next challenge: a one-mile track race June 20 at Otterbein University in Westerville.

After an event calculated in hours, I'm excited for one that will be determined by seconds.

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Experienced.

USA Today Network of Ohio: Regional Reporter (May 2016 - Present)

- Craft articles that can be shared online and in print by up to 18 Gannett newspapers in Ohio.
- Track metrics to ensure my online content generates at least 1 million page views every year.
- Travel the region to interview sources, cover events and capture compelling images and video.

The Exponent-Telegram: Staff Reporter (Feb. 2015 - May 2016)

- Took photos and wrote at least 12 articles and news briefs every week for print and online.
- Maintained sources and kept an eye on news across a five-county region in West Virginia.

The Ohio State Lantern: Photo Editor (Aug. 2009 - June 2010)

- Made assignments for and managed 10 photographers, two interns and one paid assistant.
- Met with other editors to ensure my photo staff provided necessary content for all publications.
- Produced slide shows and enhanced digital photos for publication online and in print editions.

Mount Vernon News: Sports/Special Projects (Jan. 2005 - Nov. 2008)

- Covered games, interviewed coaches and players, wrote sports features and took photos.
- Collected and edited video of events and interviews for the paper's webcast department.

Applauded.

Associated Press Media Editors

- 2024, Best Public Service, First Place
- 2024, Best Explanatory Reporting, Third Place
- 2024, Best Business Writer, Third Place
- 2023, Best Feature Writer, Second Place
- 2023, Best News Writer, Second Place
- 2023, Best Explanatory Reporting, Second Place
- 2022, Best Feature Writer, First Place
- 2022, Best Explanatory Reporting, Third Place
- 2021, Best Public Service, First Place
- 2018, Best Business Writer, Second Place
- 2018, Best Feature Writer, Third Place

Associated Press Society of Ohio

- 2006, Best Breaking News, Honorable Mention

Recommended.

David Yonke

Mansfield News Journal, retired editor
419.376.3075

Jeanine Kendle

Wooster Daily Record, retired editor
330.749.6278

Gere Goble

USA Today Network of Ohio, planner
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Mount Vernon Nazarene University

Broadcasting, 2006-2008



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