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VOLUME 139, NO. 47 | PERSONCOUNTYLIFE.COM | ONLINE DAILY • PRINTED THURSDAYS | THURSDAY, AUGUST 6, 2020 | 75¢

Hack was 'worst case scenario,' staff receive high praise

By **GEORGE WILLOUGHBY**
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The Person County Board of Commissioners were updated on the May 30 cyber incident that experts have now called a "worst case scenario" at their meeting Monday night.

Dr. Shannon Tufts, an associate professor of public law and government at UNC-Chapel Hill and director of the Center for Public Technology, and Greg Manson, vice president of security, audit and compliance with the information technology security company Logically, updated the commissioners on the attack and provided background on similar attacks.

County IT Director Chris Puryear said the county has spent about \$455,000 on the recovery efforts and

logged approximately 8,000 collective hours within the IT department and support staff on the effort, which does not include the efforts of other departments like finance department who worked to restore their own service.

Puryear said staff has fully remediated or rebuilt 30 servers with 11 more in progress and eight more left to be completed. Staff completed 330 help tickets and remediated 632 desktops and laptops. Of the county staff, Puryear said 532 users have been transitioned to a new email system and 218 staff members have full access to all of their emails. The remaining staff should have full access "in the next few weeks", Puryear said.

Tufts said the North Carolina Local Government Information Systems Association strike team responded to the attack.

There have been more than 180 similar attacks on governmental systems since 2013.

In 2019, there were 10 ransomware attacks on governments across the state. Through mid-July, there have been 12, Tufts said, meaning the rate of attacks has more than doubled.

She explained that all 12 this year, including the attack in Person County, were instances of ransomware from phishing attacks and said that governments and members of the public should never pay for their information to be returned because it will only lead to more attacks.

"You had, in my opinion, a worst-case scenario," Tufts said. "Your backups were the second point of compromise. That is a targeted approach to absolutely cripple your government. One of the questions will be 'how long

does it take to fully recover?' If your backups have been compromised, the likelihood of full recovery is almost zero meaning you have lost data that you cannot recover."

The average time to full recovery is estimated at six to nine months, but can be quicker if a county's backups are not compromised. However, some jurisdictions will never fully recover, Tufts said.

Manson said it normally takes 10 days to return basic functionality and Person County returned that functionality in "a couple days." His timeline for a normal full recovery was a little quicker than Tufts, which he said was 120-150 days.

"It is my opinion that Person County IT is tracking at least to the average if

See **Hack**, Page 6A

Commissioners vote to require masks at meetings

By **GEORGE WILLOUGHBY**
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In a 4-1 vote, the Person County Board of Commissioners moved to require face masks to be worn at the body's meetings.

Commissioner Kyle Puryear voted against the motion.

Chairman Ray Jeffers said he put the item on the agenda amid questions from other commissioners about what measures could be taken by the board.

County Manager Heidi York said county employees are currently recommended to wear a mask if they are unable to keep six feet of distance between themselves and their coworkers or customers. She also said all of the health department's staff will be wearing masks as they begin reopening clinics in the coming weeks.

Commissioner Derrick Sims, the Environmental,

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GEORGE WILLOUGHBY | THE COURIER-TIMES

Protesters face off with law enforcement at the intersection of Old Durham Road and Weeks Drive near Dollar General.

DA's office releases shooting video, protests follow

By **GEORGE WILLOUGHBY**
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Following a court order last Wednesday, Person County District Attorney

Michael Waters released the dash camera video that showed 45-year-old David Brooks Jr.'s final moments as he was shot once by an officer from the Roxboro Police Department Friday,

July 24.

A press release from Waters' office states that he and Assistant District Attorney Hollie McAdams appeared

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School Board to meet Thursday afternoon

By **GEORGE WILLOUGHBY**
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The Person County Board of Education will meet Thursday afternoon at 3 p.m.

The public will be able to tune in through a link that will be posted on the Person County Schools website at the time of the meeting.

The meeting will feature an update on the school system's efforts to prepare for the next school year in the wake of COVID-19.

The board will also continue its review of the system's policies and another update on the upcoming year's calendar.

Other action items for the board will be a federal programs application, blended learning plan teacher guide and two student support contracts.

A link to submit public comments can be found on the Person County Schools website.

Cassie Foltz is simply golden

By **KELLY SNOW**
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Local Girl Scout Troop 172 just had to get a little creative in how they celebrated one of their own.

And did they ever. A collection of young girls and their parents formed a convoy and ventured deep into Timberlake to celebrate Cassie Foltz a couple of weeks ago.

Foltz, a 19-year-old second year student at Piedmont Community College, earned the Gold Award, the highest honor given to Girls Scouts, who according to the organization's website, "tackle issues

that are dear to them and drive lasting change in their communities."

The troop couldn't have a traditional celebration for Foltz because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but instead, members decorated cars, made glittery signs and rolled past her house with horns blaring, hollering out the window to show their love. Many of the cars stopped, said hello, shared their signs with the newest Gold Award recipient and took pictures — all while maintaining social distance.

For Foltz, her love of the Girl Scouts, a organization that she became a part of as a 5-year-old Daisy, intersected with her passion for com-

munity theater in her Gold Award project.

She held a one-day young adult theater workshop for youth ages 11-17 at the Kirby Theater last August. During that workshop, participants learned the technical aspects of theater production that included directing, music, stage management, costumes, sounds and lighting.

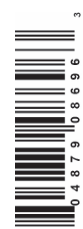
The participants were given a behind-the-scenes tour of the Kirby, including the backstage area, green room, prop room, costume closet and light and sound board. Foltz also arranged for experts in various aspects of production

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KELLY SNOW | THE COURIER-TIMES

Cassie Foltz is all smiles as she shows that she earned the Gold Award from the Girl Scouts last month.



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HACK

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not ahead of the average with regards to a full recovery," Manson said.

Tufts said the local attack was unrelated to the attack on the City of Durham and Durham County earlier this year.

"We do know that your variant was the first known variant of its kind, so I guess, in a few ways that's interesting and unique in its own right," she said.

Manson said the variant was purchased on the dark web and said a Russian IP address was used to launch the attack, but both he and the National Guard do not believe it was an attacker associated with the Russian government.

The attack was brought in through a compromised account that circumvented the county's anti-virus system.

Manson said there has been no evidence that data has been removed from the county's systems.

"While we saw anomalous activity, we did not see evidence of data exfiltration out of the environment," he said.

The department's recovery protocol treated every system as if it was infected until it could be checked and confirmed that it was clean and secure.

The county IT department was using best practices like several layers of security and anti-phishing training.

The department was also using hardware firewalls, next generation antivirus, security awareness training, periodic review of the active directory and required password complexity and lockouts.

"For the size staff you have, the entire strike team, the National Guard, the State of North Carolina's Chief Risk Officer Maria Thompson - everyone that stands in support of

these calls that we do every day said that we have ever seen anything like what Person County was able to do in the first 18 hours by themselves," Tufts said. "They did a level of containment and diagnosis that we have never seen from an organization this size."

Tufts also praised the "operational excellence" in the county's Emergency Operations Center.

"The way you stood up a command station, and kudos to all of the folks that did that beyond just IT," she said.

"The way you stood up a command station, and kudos to all of the folks that did that beyond just IT. I was in almost like a war room with people from risk and people from HR and I watched them and the way that they were managing help desk tickets coming in and prioritizing things - it was the finest I've ever seen. Normally it is literal chaos."

Dr. Shannon Tufts

"I was in almost like a war room with people from risk and people from HR and I watched them and the way that they were managing help desk tickets coming in and prioritizing things - it was the finest I've ever seen. Normally it is literal chaos."

The Person County IT Department was scheduled for a security risk assessment from Logically in the upcoming fiscal year, but the attack happened before that was possible.

"It was supposed to start in July and the incident happened in May," Manson said. We hadn't had the opportunity to get in to start tearing up what we found to find the gaps. The agreement was signed, but unfortunately we didn't get in to get the risk assessment."

Manson said the department is going to implement a number of new security features, including vulnerability scans, moving the county's computers to Windows 10 and decommissioning old servers. The county will now use a new security information and event management and security operations center service that will monitor the system 24/7.

The city and county's active computer directories will also be separated to prevent and isolate any future security breaches.



GEORGE WILLOUGHBY | THE COURIER-TIMES

Members of the New Black Panther Party stand near the makeshift memorial for David Brooks Jr. Wednesday.

SHOOTING

Continued from Page One

before the Honorable Cynthia K. Sturges, Resident Superior Court Judge of the Ninth Judicial District and asked the Court to release the footage. Brooks' family and Chief David Hess consented to the release.

The 7 minute, 45 second dash-cam video shows the officers' response to the 911 call that reported a masked man walking down Old Durham Road with a shotgun.

The statement from Waters' office says that the footage and the shotgun seized from the scene will be sent to the State Crime Lab for further analysis, which may take several weeks to complete.

Shortly after the release, members of the Brooks family, community activists and the general public protested at a memorial near the place where the 45-year-old was shot by an officer from the Roxboro Police Department.

The protesters were met by a heavy police presence at the makeshift memorial, but the group peacefully dispersed without incident.

Around 6 p.m., the group began to assemble on the side of the road near the memorial and called for justice for Brooks.

Members of the New Black Panther Party were present, but Brooks' brother Jerrimino Brooks said he did not call them to Roxboro. He explained that his brother had a plan in place that the group would come protect his family if he was ever killed by police.

Members of The Black Revolutionists, a local activist group, joined the protest and called for the officer who killed Brooks to be fired from the Police Department.

Protesters then took to the street and blocked traffic on Old Durham Road.

Minutes later, officers began to gather at the intersection of Old Durham Road and Weeks Drive.

Various agencies were represented alongside the Roxboro Police Department and Person County Sheriff's Office. Officers also utilized the Alamance County Sheriff's Office Lenco BearCat G3 armored truck.

Veé Monique, vice president of The Black Revolutionists, told The Courier-Times the protest was peaceful and justified.

"What I saw today was people that were gathering to pay their respects to this young man that was murdered and gunned down in the street by police," she said.

Azrael LeBeau, the Mid-Atlantic Region Chairman of the New Black Panther Party, said the armed contingent of the protest was present for protection.

"We were here to pay our respects and protect everybody else who wanted to pay their respects and make sure that everything was peaceful and respectful," he said.

LeBeau confirmed that the New Black Panther Party is present to protect the Brooks family and will remain peaceful as long as law enforcement are also peaceful.

"If they respect us, we will respect them", he said.

The protests took place on the second night of a curfew in Uptown Roxboro imposed by the City Council who said there was an imminent threat of widespread or severe damage, injury, or loss of life and property as an outside presence may attempt to come to the city.

The curfew was extended an extra day from Thursday night into Friday morning with no incidents reported by the Roxboro Police Department.

The full video of the officer-involved shooting is available on personcountylife.com. The footage is unedited and graphic. Viewer discretion is strongly advised.

MASKS

Continued from Page One

Health, and Safety Manager for U.S. Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers, said he checks employee symptoms every day and hands out masks.

Sims noted that there are some medical restrictions that mean not everyone can wear a mask and said there would be no way to confirm those claims, but did express his support for the mask requirement.

Jeffers said he would like to go as far as requiring masks at the meetings and for county employees who cannot be socially distant.

"I think we need to lead somewhat by example here with the rest of the departments," he said.

Puryear said he would like to hear from the county's department heads as they would be the ones who would enforce the requirement. The commissioners decided that York could discuss such a requirement separately with the department heads.

The commissioners agreed that such a requirement will be hard to enforce.

"It's the honor system

right?" Jeffers said. "We can't ask and see their medical file, but we just hope that they would understand where we're coming from and we have to accept that. I don't think we're going to turn anyone away if they say they have a medical issue."

The commissioners are currently holding all of their meetings until further notice in the auditorium at the Person County Office Building to allow for proper social distancing. Hand sanitizer stations have been placed at each entrance to the room.

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