

Savannah Morning News.

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New wine bar brings flavor to Richmond Hill

Latrice Williams
Savannah Morning News
USA TODAY NETWORK

There was never a dull moment in Nichola Lester's household coming up. Her mother frequently held gatherings at their home in the Bahamas and Lester saw how meaningful those parties were to her neighbors and friends.

Now, she is bringing her love of entertaining to Richmond Hill.

The Goodie Bar, which opened in March, is a swanky, upscale wine boutique, perfect for date nights or a girls night out.

"I grew up in a house where we had good food all the time, which is also how I learned to cook," said Lester. "My husband and I loved cooking together, entertaining as we moved around. He was in the Coast Guard for 26 years. We are always having friends over for birthday parties, gatherings."

Lester studied graphic design at Savannah College of Art and Design and taught at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh for 17 years. Her design skills are on full display, as the charcoal gray wall color, artwork and seating arrangements offer a warm and inviting experience.

"People have said that it feels like home in here, that there is a cozy vibe here," said Lester. "The painting, all the furniture, the light fixtures, the building, the bar - the property manager did pretty much everything. I just showed him pictures and told him what I wanted and then he made it happen."

Inspired by both her British ancestry and Caribbean upbringing, Lester crafted a menu that offers several unique options. Whether it be brie bites, sausage rolls, or her wide array of wine offerings, the menu is catered to foodies and anyone looking for a romantic night out or a place to host a small event.

Lester put a new spin on avocado toast - the bright green fruit sits atop a slice of brioche bread complete with pink peppercorns, balsamic vinegar and pickled onions on the side.



Nichola Lester pours a glass of Cabernet at her wine boutique The Goodie Bar. PHOTO PROVIDED BY LATRICE WILLIAMS

The bar's wine portfolio is extensive, offering an array of white and red wines that are mostly international. Lester said that Pinot Grigio and Cabernet are best sellers.

The hint of sweetness from the brie fig and pistachio bites and the spicy flavors from the sausage rolls, served

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Anchor Park project moving forward

Destini Ambus
Savannah Morning News
USA TODAY NETWORK

In 2023, City of Port Wentworth leadership dreamed of a plan to bring recreational amenities to a city overrun with industrial development. What residents have long wanted was access to places they felt were essential to quality of life - libraries and parks instead of what felt like the near constant sprouting of warehouses.

That dream will soon become a reality, with the first phase of a 150-acre park at the corner of Monteith Road and Interstate 95, which they've dubbed Anchor Park, nearing completion. VyStar Pavillion, an open-air amphitheater that seats 4,200, and the Ice Cove, the training facility for the local minor league hockey team, are set to open this August.

But, in the process of building this park, which broke ground in 2024, there have been a few hiccups, including the initiation of an appeal process by a resident that has held up the issuance of revenue bonds, one part of funding this supersized project.

Georgia and LaRay Benton, who have filed the appeals, have filed nine lawsuits against the City of Port Wentworth since 2021. One of the central conflicts between the city and the Bentons in these lawsuits has been their claim that the city is interfering with their property rights, but five of the nine lawsuits they've filed against

See **PROJECT**, Page 2A

Garden City temporarily halts data centers to study their impact

Destini Ambus
Savannah Morning News
USA TODAY NETWORK

Less than a week after residents of neighboring city Port Wentworth met to organize a protest against data centers, Garden City City Council unanimously approved a six-month moratorium for these centers.

The moratorium doesn't halt the rezoning of a land for this use, but it does halt the acceptance of applications, is-

Bullock County, Camden County, and Kingsland, Ga have all passed moratoriums in the coastal area. Kingsland was also the first city in the coastal region to receive an application at the end of April for a data center.

suance of permits, licenses of approvals within the limits of Garden City.

Data centers have made headlines over the last year regarding the massive amounts of power and water they con-

sume and the increased construction of them to power AI and cloud-computing services. While there are none in the Coastal Georgia region of any appreciable size, according to One Hundred

Miles North Coast Advocate Jeffery Beauvais, but there are currently well over 100 in use or in construction in the entire state, according to Science for Georgia.

Port Wentworth Planning and Zoning Commissioner Patrick Donovan, said he'd been told there were five areas in the region where there could be a data center: Port Wentworth, Rincon, three potential sites in Effingham

See **IMPACT**, Page 5A



LOCAL DIAMOND EXPERTS

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FIVE-DAY FORECAST FOR SAVANNAH

TODAY	TONIGHT	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
High 86 RealFeel: 90	Low 72 RealFeel: 76	88 71 RealFeel: 96/76	91 72 RealFeel: 101/78	93 76 RealFeel: 101/81	93 73 RealFeel: 104/77

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ACTIVITIES TODAY

8 am	10 am	Noon	2 pm	4 pm	6 pm
Golfing Index	0	1	0	0	0
Hiking Index	0	0	0	0	0
Fishing Index	0	0	4	0	0

0-2: Poor; 3-4: Fair; 5-6: Good; 7-8: Very Good; 9-10: Excellent

UV INDEX TODAY

8 am	10 am	Noon	2 pm	4 pm	6 pm
UV Index	0	1	3	2	0

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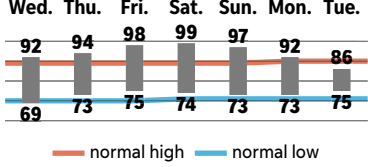
ALMANAC

Savannah Tuesday

TEMPERATURES

High/low	86/75
Normal high/low	90/71
Last year high/low	91/72
Record high	101 in 1981
Record low	53 in 1955

TEMPERATURES TREND



PRECIPITATION

Tuesday	trace
Month to date	0.65"
Normal month to date	3.51"
Year to date	10.19"
Normal year to date	20.10"

COOLING DEGREE DAYS

Index of energy consumption indicating how many degrees the average temperature was above 65 degrees for the day with negative values counting as zero.

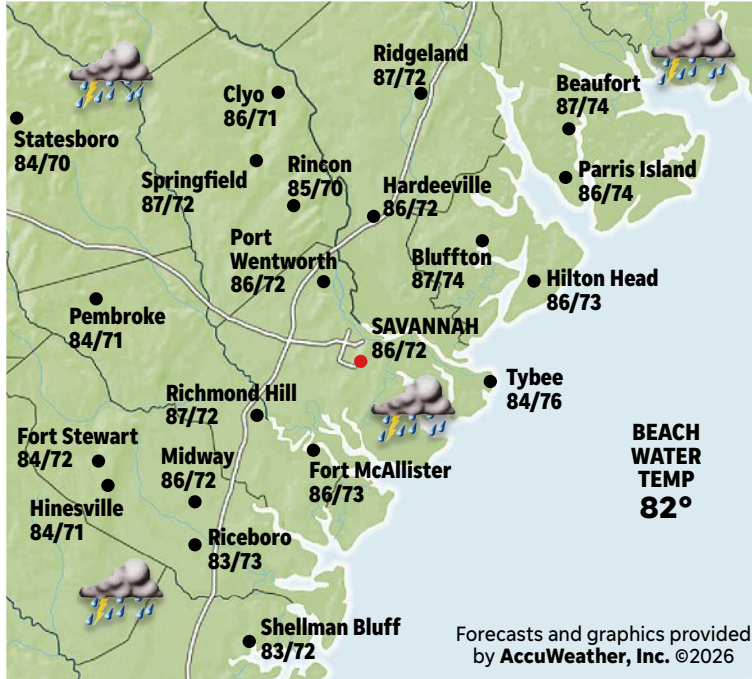
Tuesday	16
Year to date	869
Last year to date	841
Normal year to date	679

SUN AND MOON

	Today	Sat.
Sunrise	6:19 a.m.	6:19 a.m.
Sunset	8:34 p.m.	8:34 p.m.
Moonrise	11:16 a.m.	12:19 p.m.
Moonset	none	12:29 a.m.

Phase	Date
First	June 21
Full	June 29
Last	July 7
New	July 14

REGIONAL FORECAST



City	Today			Sat.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Albany	83	73	t	86	71	pc
Americus	82	71	t	85	71	pc
Athens	87	67	t	88	67	pc
Atlanta	84	69	t	89	71	pc
Augusta	88	68	t	90	65	pc
Brunswick	86	78	t	89	75	c
Charleston	89	72	t	91	69	pc
Chattanooga	85	67	t	90	67	s
Columbia	89	69	t	90	69	pc
Columbus	82	70	t	86	71	pc
Covington	84	68	t	87	68	pc
Decatur	85	68	t	88	68	pc
Dothan	81	73	t	85	72	pc
Douglas	83	71	t	87	70	c
Dublin	82	69	t	88	67	pc

RIVERS AND LAKES

In feet as of 7 a.m. Tuesday

River / Station	Flood stage	Tue. stage	24-hr change
Ogeechee			
Eden	11	5.73	-0.61
Altamaha			
Doctortown	12	5.42	-0.21
Savannah			
Burton's Ferry	15	4.90	-0.03
Clyo	11	3.64	-0.08
Butler Creek	117.5	97.22	+1.12
Ohoopce			
Reidsville	11	3.20	-0.21
Lake			
Thurmond	330	324.29	+0.03
Oconee	435	435.07	+0.16

TIDES

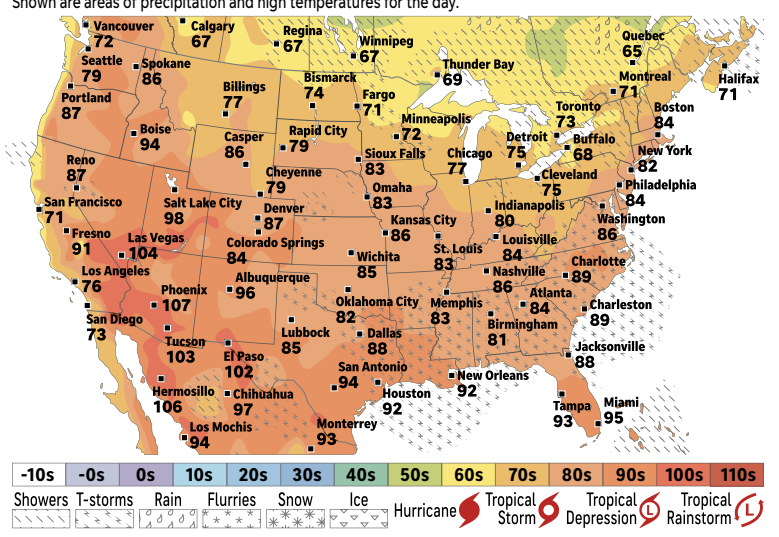
At the mouth of the Savannah River.

High	Ht.	Low	Ht.
Jun. 19 12:06 a.m.	7.8	6:30 a.m.	-0.3
12:49 p.m.	6.8	6:47 p.m.	0.0
Jun. 20 1:03 a.m.	7.4	7:22 a.m.	-0.1
1:48 p.m.	6.8	7:45 p.m.	0.3
Jun. 21 1:56 a.m.	7.0	8:14 a.m.	0.1
2:42 p.m.	6.9	8:46 p.m.	0.6

MARINE FORECAST

Wind southwest 12-25 knots Friday. Seas 3-5 feet. Visibility under 2 miles in thunderstorms.
Saturday: Wind from the west-northwest at 7-14 knots. Seas 2-4 feet. Visibility generally clear.

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NATIONAL EXTREMES Tuesday for the 48 contiguous states

High 119° at Death Valley, CA Low 31° at Angel Fire, NM

City	Today			Sat.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Albany, NY	78	61	pc	75	56	pc
Albuquerque	96	70	pc	98	65	pc
Anchorage	67	52	c	65	51	pc
Billings	77	53	pc	79	58	sh
Birmingham	81	67	t	85	72	pc
Boise	94	65	pc	86	59	pc
Boston	84	65	pc	79	62	pc
Buffalo	68	52	sh	71	53	t
Charleston, WV	80	57	c	79	58	pc
Chicago	77	61	s	80	64	s
Cincinnati	78	60	pc	79	65	pc
Cleveland	75	56	sh	75	58	t
Dallas	88	77	t	91	78	t
Denver	87	60	s	93	57	t
Des Moines	81	63	pc	82	63	pc
Detroit	75	53	pc	76	56	t
Duluth	64	46	pc	70	46	pc
El Paso	102	78	pc	103	78	s
Houston	92	79	t	90	80	t
Indianapolis	80	61	s	80	64	pc
Kansas City	86	66	pc	80	69	pc
Las Vegas	104	79	s	103	78	s
Little Rock	83	71	t	87	74	t
Los Angeles	76	61	pc	74	62	pc
Memphis	83	71	t	83	72	pc
Miami	95	78	t	92	77	t
Minneapolis	72	58	t	78	57	pc
Muskegon	70	57	pc	72	56	pc
Nashville	86	65	t	90	69	pc
New Orleans	92	79	t	90	78	t
New York City	82	64	pc	80	63	s
Oklahoma City	82	69	t	87	73	pc
Omaha	83	66	pc	85	65	pc
Orlando	92	76	t	89	74	t
Phoenix	107	80	s	106	81	s
Portland, ME	79	58	pc	75	56	pc
Portland, OR	87	55	s	78	54	pc
Rapid City	79	51	pc	73	56	t
St. Louis	83	69	s	87	72	pc
Salt Lake City	98	72	pc	88	65	pc
San Antonio	94	77	t	89	76	t
San Diego	73	63	pc	72	65	pc
San Francisco	71	59	pc	70	56	pc
Seattle	79	54	s	74	53	pc
Tampa	93	79	t	89	80	t
Trenton	82	61	pc	80	58	s
Tucson	103	72	s	103	72	s
Washington, DC	86	65	t	86	65	s

WORLD FORECAST

City	Today			Sat.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Amsterdam	91	68	pc	79	61	s
Athens	87	69	s	87	70	s
Baghdad	116	85	s	120	89	pc
Beijing	83	70	t	86	62	s
Bermuda	83	75	pc	82	76	t
Buenos Aires	59	45	pc	58	47	pc
Calgary	67	47	pc	60	47	t
Copenhagen	75	64	s	77	59	t
Frankfurt	99	69	s	97	72	s
Hong Kong	88	83	r	90	83	t
Jerusalem	82	64	s	82	63	s
Johannesburg	63	41	pc	62	41	s
Kabul	84	62	s	85	66	s
Lima	75	69	pc	75	69	pc
Lisbon	86	65	s	86	67	pc
London	86	63	s	79	63	pc
Manila	95	81	t	96	82	t
Mexico City	76	58	r	76	58	sh
Montreal	71	57	sh	65	58	sh
Moscow	69	55	sh	69	52	pc
Nassau	91	79	s	90	78	s
Paris	99	68	t	92	69	c
Rio de Janeiro	75	65	s	77	68	pc
Rome	89	67	s	89	66	pc
Singapore	87	79	r	87	78	sh
Sydney	69	56	c	69	50	pc
Tehran	98	80	pc	102	82	pc
Tokyo	84	72	pc	76	70	t
Toronto	73	55	sh	72	54	s
Vancouver	72	56	sh	70	55	s
Vancouver	73	55	sh	72	54	s
Vienna	93	68	s	95	69	s
Warsaw	82	61	pc	89	66	s

Weather: s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, l-ice

Project

Continued from Page 1A

the city have been dismissed. Some were deemed frivolous, as was the appeal made by the Benton's for the revenue bonds, by Judge Tammy Stokes. While the Benton's initial appeal was denied, as well as the appeal to the denial of their first appeal, they're pressing forward with blocking the issuance of these revenue bonds with a latest appeal submitted to the Supreme Court of Georgia on May 13. LaRay Benton declined to comment for this story until judgements have been made on his appeal.

What are revenue bonds?

Revenue bonds are a type of loan issued by state or local governments to fund specific public infrastructure projects. They are typically repaid solely from the revenue generated by those projects, funds collected through parking revenue, rent/lease payments, concessions and drinks sales or ticket sales, etc. "Anchor Park is a long-term capital asset designed to serve residents for decades," said Mayor Tracy Saunders in an email. "The funding...allows the city to finance infrastructure over time instead of placing the full cost on current taxpayers. This approach is common across Georgia for large public projects supported by user activity and public-private partnerships." Anchor Park, including the costs of the Ice Cove and VyStar Pavilion is estimated to be about \$76.2 million total. The construction of the Ice Cove and Pavilion is a \$46.2 million project, accounting for nearly 60% of that total. The training facility and amphithe-

ater are being funded through a public-private partnership between the city, the Port Wentworth Development Authority, VyStar Credit Union, Zawayer Sports, who owns the Ghost Pirates, and the Oakview Group, which will manage VyStar Pavilion. In Georgia, revenue bonds must go through a judicial validation process, which Port Wentworth started last year. The city or development authority files a petition in the Superior Court, then a judge reviews the legality of the bonds, how it will be repaid and compliance of the bonds with state law. The process is meant to provide legal certainty to investors — once validated, the bonds have strong legal standing, "which protects both the public and the bondholders," Saunders wrote in an email. This process includes a requirement to inform the public of the hearings to confirm the legality of the proposed bonds. Residents are given the opportunity to speak at the hearing, to comment on the project and the financing. At the hearing in September 2025, six residents chose to speak, including the Bentons. In September, Judge Tammy Stokes ruled to validate the sale of these bonds. About 12 days later, the Benton's filed their motion for reconsideration, which the court denied a little over a month later in October, deeming their arguments as meritless and frivolous. The Benton's argued that the bond process lacked transparency and public accountability; that Port Wentworth officials violate their oath of office by engaging in "self-dealing"; that the city is attempting to use residents' private property as "indirect collateral" from the bonds by potentially imposing taxes without "proper disclosure"; and that

the PWDA is unlawfully composed because it is made up of sitting elected or appointed officials, so everything they have done, including the bond issuance, is "null and void." Port Wentworth argued that the Benton's lack legal standing to challenge the bonds and that their objections fall outside what Georgia law allows in bond validation cases. The city also asked the court, in October, to require the challengers to post a bond of \$20 million (the contribution from Zawayer Sports), a financial guarantee by the courts that they would get paid if the appeal fails, before any appeal can proceed, citing repeated and allegedly frivolous litigation. The Benton's then filed another appeal to the denial of their first appeal to the Court of Appeals on the same day the trial court signed an order requiring the Benton's to post an appeal bond within 10 days. A month later, the city filed a response, requesting that the Court of Appeals dismiss the appeal, and accept the trial court's findings that the objections were frivolous. They mentioned that the Benton's had not paid the appeal bond, and even failed to appeal the bond order within the 30 days. Ultimately, in early April the Court of Appeals dismissed the second appeal because the Benton's failed to establish legal standing, but the court also denied the request to penalize the Benton's for filing a frivolous appeal. A Bill of Peace was issued though, requiring frequent litigants to get court permission to file further actions against the city, aiming to curb frivolous lawsuits, according to the city attorney in April. Despite that, it appears that LaRay Benton filed a court order for judicial review vs. the city of Port Wentworth to the Georgia Supreme Court on May 13, further appealing the decision to ap-

prove the bonds. **What happens now?** The city is once again in a standstill regarding the issuance of the revenue bonds, as this appeal is reviewed. The City of Port Wentworth filed a response to the new appeal on June 3, stating that the case should be "swiftly denied" because the petition was untimely, lacks standing, and none of the claims have merit. In the meantime, the city said they have been pursuing alternative funding options like the tax anticipation note, which is a short-term security debt issued by a state, that was approved in January. The debt is repaid with future tax collections. The borrowing for the TAN was limited to no more than \$7.4 million, with an interest rate of 3.8% and is to be repaid by the end of the year, or when the Port Wentworth Development Authority is able to issue the revenue bonds. The second phase of the park began construction in mid-March, which includes the football and soccer fields, concessions areas, team rooms, playground and parking. While the amphitheater is still set to open in August, the full build out of Anchor Park across all four phases is projected for completion in the fourth quarter of 2028, according to Saunders. "The bond validation appeal could create challenges if not resolved