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Serving Anson County and the Municipalities of Ansonville, Lilesville, McFarlan, Morven, Peachland, Polkton and Wadesboro.

## Operation No Sanctuary Update: Multiple Arrests, Drugs and Firearms Seized on March 13

The Anson County Sheriff's Office has released additional details following "Operation No Sanctuary," an investigation first announced in March targeting illegal drug and firearm activity in Wadesboro and across the county.

The operation, carried out in the early morning hours of March 13, involved the Anson County Sheriff's Office working alongside the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation and the Union County Sheriff's Office. Officers executed three search warrants and made multiple arrests as part of the coordinated effort.

Authorities say the investigation began in the summer of 2025 and focused on individuals and activities contributing to violence in the community.

Search warrants were executed at 1122 North Greene Street, 312 Orchard Street, Apartment 2, and 548 Cherry Street, all in Wadesboro. As a result, investigators seized firearms, illegal narcotics, U.S. currency and vehicles.

Those arrested and their charges include:

- **Paige Diggs** – PWISD marijuana (223 grams)
- **Marcus Gainey** – PWISD marijuana (2 ounces); trafficking cocaine (29 grams); trafficking methamphetamine by possession and transportation (159 grams); possession of a firearm by a convicted felon; maintaining a vehicle/dwelling/place with a controlled substance (3 counts)
- **Darryl Simon Jr.** – felony possession of cocaine
- **James Martin** – trafficking cocaine (30 grams); possession of a firearm by a convicted felon; maintaining a vehicle/dwelling/place with a controlled substance
- **Jamias Pender** – possession of a weapon of mass destruction
- **Cory Stewart** – trafficking methamphetamine (multiple counts totaling more than 900 grams); PWISD cocaine; PWISD marijuana; maintaining a vehicle/dwelling/place with a controlled substance (3 counts)
- **Davon Hillian** – trafficking methamphetamine (multiple counts totaling more than 600 grams)
- **Carnel Caple Jr.** – PWISD marijuana (multiple counts)
- **Reginald O'Dell Jr.** – trafficking methamphetamine (multiple counts); PWISD marijuana; maintaining a vehicle/dwelling/place with a controlled substance (3 counts)
- **Divonte Cooper** – trafficking methamphetamine (multiple counts); trafficking cocaine; PWISD cocaine; maintaining a vehicle/dwelling/place with a controlled substance (3 counts)
- **James Boggan** – possession of a firearm by a convicted felon (2 counts); trafficking MDA/MDMA (39 grams); trafficking methamphetamine (30 grams); maintaining a vehicle/dwelling/place with a controlled substance (2 counts)
- **Dvonne Tyson** – conspiracy to traffic MDA/MDMA; conspiracy to traffic methamphetamine (multiple counts)
- **David Cason Jr.** – trafficking meth. (multiple counts)
- **Kalib Howard** – PWISD marijuana (8 grams)
- **Lamorris Hunter** – possession of a firearm by a convicted felon (2 counts); PWISD marijuana (20 grams)

Sheriff Scott Howell said the operation reflects a strong commitment to public safety and teamwork among agencies. He also expressed appreciation for the assistance provided by partnering organizations.

"This is just the beginning," Howell said. "Our commitment to the citizens of Anson County and the Town of Wadesboro will continue at full speed. Our goal remains clear - to reduce violence, combat the sale of illegal drugs and make our communities safer."

Anyone with information about illegal activity is encouraged to contact the Anson County Sheriff's Office at 704-694-4188. Callers may remain confidential.

## Dr. Brian C. Ratliff to Continue as Interim Superintendent

### Board of Education extends contract through June 2027

The Anson County Board of Education has announced that Dr. Brian C. Ratliff will continue serving as Interim Superintendent of Anson County Schools under a new contract running from July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027.

Board members say Dr. Ratliff's leadership reflects a strong commitment to students and a clear vision for the future of the district. Known for encouraging students and staff to "see the tree in the seed," he emphasizes the belief that every child has the potential to grow and succeed when given the right support and opportunities.

Described as a servant leader, Dr. Ratliff focuses on building relationships and fostering a culture of trust throughout the school system. He frequently encourages the district to "build bridges, not walls," highlighting the importance of connection and collaboration in creating strong school communities.

His approach centers on more than academic achievement alone. Dr. Ratliff promotes the development of character, confidence and leadership in students, reinforcing that success includes both personal growth and academic progress.

With decades of experience in public education, he also works to strengthen leadership across the district by empowering educators and staff to take on leadership roles at every level. Officials say this approach helps expand opportunities for students and supports continued growth throughout the school system.

The Board of Education expressed its support for Dr. Ratliff's continued leadership, noting that the district remains focused on developing learners, building leaders and ensuring every student has the opportunity to succeed.



**Dr. Brian Ratliff**

## Grace Senior Center Has it Going on in April!

Grace Senior Center continues to live up to its reputation as one of Anson County's most active - and most enjoyable - gathering places for seniors, offering a full calendar of programs designed to keep both bodies and spirits moving. Best of all, every activity is free and open to the public.

April brings a packed schedule filled with opportunities to stay active, learn new skills and spend time with friends. From exercise classes and dancing to crafts, games and special presentations, there's rarely a dull moment - and if there is, someone will probably suggest a game of bingo to fix that.

And, participants can take part in "A Matter of Balance" classes - proving it's never too late to work on staying steady on your feet.

Here's a look at what's happening this month:

- April 7, 9, 14, 16, 21, 23, 28, 30 – A Matter of Balance Classes, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.
- April 10 – "Do You Remember..." Session, 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.
- April 13 – Puzzling for Peace, 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.
- April 15 – Teen Mobile Presentation, 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.
- April 17 – Line Dancing, 1 p.m. – 2 p.m. or 3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.
- April 20 – Workshop: Claris Companion Tablet, 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.
- April 22 – Workshop: Coloring Spring Pictures, 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.
- April 27 – Bingo, 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.
- April 29 – Karaoke! Spring Edition, 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.

There are also plenty of chances to relax and have fun throughout the month, whether it's joining a class, trying something new or simply enjoying the company of friends.

Organizers say the goal is simple: provide a welcoming place where seniors can stay active, engaged and connected. Judging by the calendar, they're doing a pretty good job of it - one exercise class, puzzle piece and karaoke tune at a time.

Grace Senior Center is located at 199 Highway 742 South in Wadesboro, just past IGA on the left.

## Harris Chapel AME Zion Church to Host Free Community Give-Away Event

**Clothing, household items and more to be distributed April 11**

Harris Chapel AME Zion Church will host a Free Community Give-Away Event this Saturday, April 11, from 9:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon, offering a variety of items to those in need.

The event, centered on the theme "Love, Peace, Hope," is open to everyone in the community, with organizers emphasizing that all are welcome to attend.

Items available will include clothes with tags and gently worn clothing, shoes, bags, housewares, bedding and more. The give-away aims to provide practical assistance while also sharing a message of compassion and care.

The event will be held on East Main Street in Morven, and organizers encourage community members to come out, take part and support one another.

Inspired by the message of 1 John 3:17, the event reflects a commitment to helping neighbors and strengthening the whole community through acts of kindness.

## Statewide Burn Ban Remains in Effect Across North Carolina

A statewide ban on open burning remains in effect across all 100 North Carolina counties as of April 6, as officials continue to monitor hazardous forest fire conditions that prompted the order in late March.

The ban, issued by the North Carolina Forest Service on March 28, prohibits outdoor burning of any kind anywhere in the state until further notice — meaning backyard brush piles, debris burning and even that "quick little fire" some folks swear will stay small are all off the table for now.

Open burning is defined as burning leaves, branches or other plant material. Officials emphasize that burning nonvegetative materials such as trash, lumber, tires, newspapers or plastics is always illegal, regardless of any burn ban.

For those wondering about cookouts, there is some good news. Grills and barbecues are still allowed, provided no local ordinances prohibit their use - so burgers and hot dogs are safe, even if bonfires are not.

Outdoor fire pits, fireplaces and burning barrels, however, are considered open burning if they are more than 100 feet from an occupied dwelling and are therefore prohibited. Within 100 feet of a residence, local governments have jurisdiction, meaning restrictions may vary by county. Residents are encouraged to check with their local fire marshal for additional rules.

Campfires are also banned, so campers will need to swap out traditional fires for portable gas stoves or grills. Fireworks and other pyrotechnic devices are likewise prohibited statewide during the ban - a reminder that now is not the time for sparks of any kind.

Officials say anyone who spots a wildfire or suspects someone has intentionally started one should call 911 immediately.

The N.C. Forest Service has notified county fire marshals of the ban and encouraged local officials to consider additional restrictions. If a fire escapes containment - even within 100 feet of a home - state forest rangers may step in to control it, and the person responsible could be held liable for the cost.

In addition to the statewide ban, local ordinances and air quality alerts may further restrict outdoor burning. Residents can learn more about air quality forecasts by visiting [www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/air-quality/air-quality-forecast](http://www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/air-quality/air-quality-forecast).

Homeowners looking to reduce wildfire risk are encouraged to review preparedness tips and prevention strategies through the N.C. Forest Service at [www.ncforestservice.gov](http://www.ncforestservice.gov) and [www.resistwildfire.org](http://www.resistwildfire.org).

Until conditions improve, officials say the message is simple: if it involves a flame outdoors, it can probably wait — and in the meantime, North Carolinians can do their part by keeping both their yards and their neighborhoods safe.

## NC Unemployment Rate Held Steady in January

North Carolina's unemployment rate remained steady at 3.8% in January 2026, unchanged from December's rate, according to the latest figures released by state officials.

The national unemployment rate, meanwhile, dipped slightly to 4.3 percent, down 0.1 percentage point from the previous month.

Compared to one year ago, North Carolina's unemployment rate is unchanged. However, the state's workforce continues to show modest growth. The number of employed individuals decreased slightly by 3,494 over the month to 5,109,781 but increased by 19,919 over the past year.

The number of unemployed individuals rose by 96 in January to 203,481, representing an increase of 2,876 compared to the same time last year.

Total nonfarm employment in the state increased by 5,200 jobs in January, reaching 5,073,400. Several major industries posted gains, led by Private Education and Health Services, which added 4,700 jobs. Construction followed with an increase of 1,300 jobs, while Professional and Business Services gained 900 positions. Leisure and Hospitality Services added 800 jobs, with smaller increases seen in Government, Financial Activities, Mining and Logging, and Other Services.

Some sectors experienced declines during the month. The Information industry lost 1,600 jobs, Manufacturing dropped by 1,400 jobs, and Trade, Transportation and Utilities declined by 200 positions.

Looking at the past year, total nonfarm employment has increased by 41,900 jobs statewide. Growth has been strongest in Private Education and Health Services, which added 22,500 jobs, followed by Leisure and Hospitality Services with 10,900 and Construction with 10,200.

However, not all industries have shared in that growth. Manufacturing employment declined by 11,600 jobs over the year, while the Information sector fell by 3,200 jobs.

State officials note that employment estimates are subject to monthly and annual revisions, and some data - including figures from October 2025 - were unavailable due to a lapse in appropriations.

Overall, the latest report reflects a stable labor market in North Carolina, with steady unemployment and continued job growth in several key sectors.

## Serial Arson Suspect Arrested in Morven Area Investigation

**Authorities say additional arrests may be possible**

The Anson County Sheriff's Office has arrested a suspect in connection with a series of arson incidents reported in the Morven area in February.

According to a press release issued April 6, Johnny Pierre Clerveau of Morven was taken into custody without incident on March 25 following an investigation into multiple fires in the community. Authorities allege Clerveau is responsible for a series of arson-related offenses during that time period.

Investigators say the case remains active and that additional arrests may be possible as the investigation develops.

Sheriff Scott Howell praised the coordinated efforts that led to the arrest, noting the importance of collaboration among agencies. "This case highlights the importance of strong partnerships in public safety," Howell said. "We are grateful for the assistance provided by our partner agencies in bringing this investigation to a successful resolution."

The Sheriff's Office expressed appreciation to the Anson County Fire Marshal's Office, the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation, the Office of the State Fire Marshal and the Charlotte Fire Department for their assistance in the case.

Cleveau has been placed in the Anson County Jail under a \$20,000 secured bond.

Authorities encourage anyone with information about this case or related incidents to contact the Sheriff's Office at 704-694-4188. Callers may remain anonymous.

## Community Asked to Give at Blood Drive

Residents across the community are being encouraged to roll up their sleeves and give the gift of life as the Burnsville R&L Center and Burnsville Fire and Rescue Dept. host an upcoming American Red Cross blood drive.

The quarterly blood drive is scheduled for this Friday, April 10 from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and will be held in the Activity Room at the Burnsville Fire and Rescue Department, located at 13380 N.C. 742 North, Polkton.

Organizers say past drives have been successful thanks to the generosity of local donors, and they are hopeful the community will once again step forward to help meet an ongoing need.

The effort is being coordinated by BRCLC volunteer Michelle Sarno, who is working alongside other volunteers to ensure the drive runs smoothly. Community members with questions or those interested in learning more can contact Sarno at 704-607-7568.

## Bowman High School Class of 1974 Plans Reunion Gathering

Members of the Bowman High School Class of 1974 are invited to circle the date Saturday, April 18 on their calendars and get ready for an evening of laughter, memories and catching up with old friends. Classmates - along with a guest - are encouraged to gather beginning at 4:00 p.m. at Blue Bay Fish Camp in Albemarle for a relaxed and informal get-together.

The event will be a Dutch treat meal, allowing everyone to order their favorite seafood or country cooking while enjoying plenty of conversation and reminiscing. Organizers say the goal is simple: good food, good fun and great fellowship with classmates who helped make the Bowman High School years memorable.

Class members are also encouraged to stay connected by visiting the group's Facebook page, "Bowman High School c/o 1974," where updates and messages from classmates are regularly shared.

So spread the word, dust off a few old stories and plan to join the Bowman High School Class of 1974 for a fun evening of friendship and memories in Albemarle.

The Blue Bay Fish Camp is located at 1901 East Main Street in Albemarle.