

Coming Sunday: Our Year in Review

In a year of political shakeups and scandals, economic ups and downs, war, wild weather, tragedies and triumphs, what were the top stories? In Sunday's Daily Press, we'll recap them all. Look for our top 10 stories of the year in local news and sports, along with listings of top stories from each year of the decade. We'll also have a fun year-ending pop culture quiz, songs of the decade and recaps of some of the best performances and exhibits in arts and entertainment. So after you flip your calendar ahead, don't forget to join us for a look back.

Inside today: Photos of the year

See some of the best images captured by Daily Press photographers in 2009 on **Page 9 of News**. Go to dailypress.com/poy to see a larger gallery of more top photos.

Year in Review online: Rate the top stories

Politics. Weather. The economy. How would you rank the top stories of 2009? Go to dailypress.com/yearinreview to cast your vote and see lots of other Year in Review content.

SPORTS

Williams, Hokies run over Tennessee

Ryan Williams ran for two touchdowns to set the ACC's single-season touchdown record as Virginia Tech routed Tennessee 37-14 on Thursday night in the Chick-fil-A Bowl in Atlanta. It was the first meeting between the schools since the 1994 Gator Bowl.

Page 1 of Sports

NEWS

NATION & WORLD



Hearings planned on bomb attempt

The Senate Intelligence Committee plans hearings for Jan. 21 as part of an investigation about missteps in the lead-up to the Dec. 25 attempted Detroit jetliner attack involving Nigerian bombing suspect Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab.

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BRIDGE-BUILDERS REACH FOR MORE

Fresh off the completion of a new span high above the Blue Nile, a Yorktown man sees bigger achievements ahead for his nonprofit



FILE PHOTO COURTESY OF RUDY HEINATZ

The Sebara Dildiy, a nearly 400-year-old stone bridge in northern Ethiopia that connects two important trade regions, was missing its center span for years. The bridge was broken in the 1930s by resistance fighters aiming to slow Italian invaders.

By Jim Hodges

SPECIAL TO THE DAILY PRESS



More online

Read our original coverage of the project, dailypress.com/prosperity. Visit the group, www.bridges-toprosperity.org

In mid-November, Ken Frantz stood on a suspended cable-and-board bridge 80 feet above the Blue Nile River in Ethiopia and pondered eight years of his life that had sped by as if they were rocket-propelled.

Those years had begun 400 yards upstream, with an earlier bridge, or more properly, they had begun with a National Geographic magazine perused while waiting

for his truck to be serviced in a Peninsula dealership.

That magazine had shown pictures of a centuries-old stone bridge with no span, and the accompanying article told the story of 125,000 villagers, many of whom had never seen a doctor; had never gone to school, whose idea of commerce ended at the river, which could be traversed only by shinnying across on a rope.

See BRIDGES/Page 4

Supervisors criticize property reassessment

Gloucester administrator says blame for latest problems should be analyzed later

By Matt Sabo

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GLoucester — The county's first in-house reassessment has vexed Gloucester supervisors and officials, with one supervisor referring to it as "crap"

and another supervisor laying blame on two county officials, according to e-mails obtained by the Daily Press.

The reassessment has been beset by delays and, most recently, a request to a judge for an extension past Dec. 31 after property owners flooded the Assessor's Office with appeals of their property values. Citizens have complained about the increase in values of land, flawed data and other problems.

On Dec. 15, County Administrator

Brenda Garton wrote an e-mail to all seven supervisors and county officials in which she told them about the request for an extension, which was obtained from a judge. The reassessment was on schedule to be completed by Thursday.

Property values increased an average of 8 percent, but notices to property owners were mailed more than a month

See PROPERTY/Page 4

Read the e-mails



See copies of messages from members of the Gloucester Board of Supervisors about the county's reassessment at dailypress.com/gloemails

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NEWS Local

WILLIAMSBURG NOTEBOOK

Original 'King Kong' kicks off afternoon classic movies series

Fans of classic movies will have their fill for free this month at the Williamsburg Regional Library.

But, for anyone with a full-time day job, you're probably out of luck. The projectors roll each Thursday at 2 p.m. The Thursday Afternoon Film Series features four films in the Williamsburg Library Theatre, 515 Scotland St.

The series kicks off with everyone's favorite giant ape terrorizing New York in the original 1933 "King Kong" on Jan. 7. On Jan. 14, catch Orson Wells in "The Third Man," a post-World War II thriller set in occupied Vienna, Austria. Return to Rick's Jan. 21 and join Humphrey Bogart as he thwarts Nazis in 1943 Casablanca. Finally, Bette Davis and Anne Baxter spar in 1950's "All About Eve."

The movies are free of charge and reservations are not required.

Support for county farms
For the third year in a row, James

City County has been awarded a hefty sum by the state to preserve farmland within its borders.

Gov. Timothy M. Kaine on Wednesday announced grant awards totaling \$635,973 to nine Virginia localities for local Purchase of Development Rights programs. James City pulled in \$93,932.19. No word on what the 19 cents will go toward, but Ed Overton, the county's PDR administrator, was enthused about the state support.

The money will go toward reimbursing the county for purchasing perpetual easements on farm and timberland from landowners who want to profit from their land but don't want it developed.

"These easements are forever," Overton said. "The easements ensure that the land will forever be used for what it's being used for today by specifying what it can and can't be used for."

In a county where farmland is dwindling, it's a small victory for open-space enthusiasts and farmers alike.

What about watersheds?

Want to know about streams and watersheds and how to protect them? The James City County Citizens Coalition, or J4Cs for short, has you covered.

The activist group and others, including Friends of the Powhatan Creek Watershed, have two seminars planned for January that deal with stream monitoring and watershed preservation.

From 1 until 3 p.m., Jan. 8, the group is hosting a discussion and guided walk titled "Stream Monitoring and Restoration — A County Success Story." The discussion will feature talks by three employees of the county's environment and storm water divisions. To participate, just show up at the Fireside Room of Greensprings Chapel, 3687 Ironbound Road.

On Jan. 16, the group will host "Understanding Watersheds — Why We Need to Protect Them," with talks given by Randall Chambers, a professor at the College of William and Mary; Paul Sturm from the national Center for Watershed Protection; and Linda Lucas and Art Gustafson of the James City/Williamsburg Master Gardeners. The seminar is scheduled for 1 to 3:30 p.m. at the James City/Williamsburg Community Center, 5301 Longhill Road.

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Dan Parsons and Tyra Vaughn



FILE PHOTO COURTESY OF RUDY HEINATZ
To cross the Sebara Dildiy, or "broken bridge" in Ethiopia's national language, Amharic, travelers cling to a rope and are pulled to the other side. Falling is almost certain death; the fast-moving Blue Nile River, scores of feet below, is lined with rocks.

Bridges

Continued from 1

Frantz believed he was called then to build a bridge across the Blue Nile to get those people to a hospital, to a school, to a market.

"I'm like a major crybaby over some of this stuff," said Frantz, who lives in Yorktown when he's not living out of his suitcase in some Third World country, working for the organization he founded, Bridges to Prosperity.

"For me, this is a hugely emotional experience, to physically watch this bridge take form, then standing on that bridge during its inauguration and thinking, 'I'm done. I'm done. This thing is never going to wash away again. It's going to be here long after I'm gone.'"

"It's pretty cool to come full circle on this calling that I've had, being able to finally put this one to rest."

That first bridge, built eight years ago at Sebara Dildiy, was supposed to last 15 years because that's what tribal elders said would be the period until a flood washes it away.

The bridge lasted just five years, Frantz said, a victim of "deforestation, a change in the weather pattern in southern Saharan Africa and diversion of the Nile." A temporary bridge served for three years until this last span was completed in November.

Over the last eight years, Frantz's ability to build bridges has evolved, as have the resources available for construction. The first bridge was built with \$1,000 from the Gloucester Point Rotary Club and \$75,000 from Frantz's pocket, inspired by the epiphany that day in the Peninsula auto dealership. The last bridge was funded by \$31,000 in Rotary money.

In between the spans, Frantz's organization has built about 60 bridges, and the Rotary support network has grown to about 50 clubs, plus the regional and international organizations. That network has been built with "champions" in clubs who bought into the idea that bridges could benefit culture and commerce around the world.

"You have to have a more-than-compelling case," Frantz said of bringing clubs on board. "You can only go as fast as the organization is willing to take it on and absorb it and get passionate on its own. You can't force passion down somebody's throat."

Rotarians already have projects of their own, including a primary cause: eradicating polio worldwide. Local clubs take on international projects, typically a well or clinic needed by a village in a poor nation.

"You can't be a Johnny-come-lately

and come into a club and say, 'Hey guys, we're going to go and build some bridges,'" Frantz said. "It won't work. You have to find champions who have that passion. You can't sell it to a club. The champions have to sell it to that club."

Rotary Clubs as far away as Fairbanks, Alaska; Albuquerque, N.M.; and Bellville, Mich., have come on board, and clubs all over Hampton Roads are spreading the word and writing checks.

"You raise money, and then it's matched by the regional (Rotary organization), and the international makes up the rest," said Ned Carr, a Warwick Rotary Club member who worked on three projects in El Salvador with Bridges to Prosperity, making contact with Rotarians and nongovernmental organizations there after surveying prospective sites.

"They had had a civil war for about 10 years because of people who were wealthy and those who lived in abject poverty," Carr said. "I saw people in the cities, and then those who lived in poverty in the rural areas where we built the bridges."

"It's something I knew about, but you can't imagine until you really get involved. And then, to think that you might have had a role in helping people fight poverty is incredibly rewarding."

More bridges are coming. A recent \$360,000 grant will fund spans in Zambia, and a major effort involving Peninsula clubs and Rotarian bridge builders is scheduled for the spring in Guatemala. That effort will

include five miles of cable, donated by contractors for Virginia Marine Terminals, which used the cable in cranes until age diminished its ability to meet lifting standards.

The cable is terrific for foot bridges across rivers, between villages. So much more has happened since that first span eight years ago. One thing is that most of the 60 spans constructed by Bridges to Prosperity were built with training in mind. Frantz estimates that 500,000 bridges are needed worldwide.

"It's huge," he said. "How long am I going to live? I want to get this job done before I'm 75. I'm 60 now. We're building about 15 bridges a year, and 15 into 500,000 is how much? (33,333 years) The math doesn't work out so well."

"It's like the Western world can't come in and solve these problems. We can never go in and build the 5 million wells that are needed, dig the 2 million wells that are needed. We've got to create the ability locally for people to have a decent chance to fight their way out of poverty. You can't do it for them."

Part of that remedy is teaching people to build more bridges by teaching them to build the first. It's a role that is embraced by Bridges to Prosperity.

Rewards abound. "The satisfaction standing on the Blue Nile River in Ethiopia, the feeling of being able to stand back and watch the fruition of all of our efforts internationally; it's realizing a reward from an emotional investment," Frantz said. "Some of my best friends on the planet live there."

Gloucester blog
Stay informed with the latest news and notes from the county at dailypress.com/gloucesterblog

response to Ressler, but also didn't defend Champion and Milligan.

"I am much less interested in who is at fault at the moment than I am in getting the thing finished," Garton wrote. "We can analyze what went wrong and assign fault when the 'book' is done and signed."

The record of property values, now computerized, is often still informally called a land book in many localities.

Commissioner of the Revenue Kevin Wilson also weighed in on the reassessment. In a Dec. 17 e-mail to Ressler and Crewe — Wilson was responding to e-mails they had sent out the previous day on another matter — he asked who was going to be held accountable for an error-ridden reassessment.

Wilson wrote that Milligan is "only partially to blame as he was brought in

during the 9th inning as a relief pitcher and lost the game because somebody forgot to give him the ball. Hard to play the game without rules and tools. No sense crying over spilled milk, but I trust that the two of you have the leadership and knowledge to fix this going forward. Need direction, ask for help because we need real solutions not excuses going forward."

Crewe replied in an e-mail that he would call Wilson about the "so called" reassessment.

"I need to get this thing fixed," Crewe wrote. "You're right about it's too late to cry over spilled milk. We need REAL ways to fix this crap."

Rilee wrote in a Dec. 15 e-mail — responding to Garton's e-mail — that he was disappointed the reassessment didn't hit "promised" timelines. The county needs to "address all appeals and make sure those adjustments are accounted for," he wrote.

"I know staff is working hard and we need to get it as close to right as possible."

Wilson responded that the county is "a long ways from getting this right." "Sorry to hear that," Rilee replied. "I haven't heard many complaints like the last time."

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