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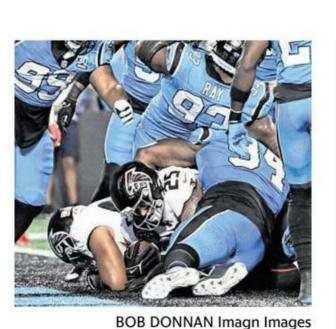
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Cracks appear in how consumers handle debt, with younger borrowers being hit the hardest.

In today's paper

SPORTS: Panthers won't get better until faltering defense is fixed. **Scott Fowler, 1B**





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Warning horn never sounded at site of fatal SouthPark fire

BY GAVIN OFF goff@charlotteobserver.com

Several missteps at the site of last year's fatal fire in SouthPark may have contributed to conditions that killed two men and required emergency rescues of many more, newly obtained state records show.

For one, an air horn — a loud device

commonly used at construction sites to warn workers of emergencies — never sounded, according to state Department of Labor records obtained by The Charlotte Observer through a public records request.

The five-alarm blaze, Charlotte's biggest in recent history, killed Reuben Holmes and Demonte Sherill, two men installing windows on the sixth floor of the rising apartment building.

In April, Department of Labor officials fined three companies more than \$56,000 for a series of violations relat-

ed to the monstrous fire. The 169-page file recently released fills in more details on how safety code violations at the site likely slowed the escape of some of the roughly 35 workers at the job site, or — in the case of the

SEE WARNING HORN, 7A

Helene aftermath: Funerals to be held instead of wedding

BY THÉODEN JANES tjanes@charlotteobserver.com

In their imaginations, Knox Petrucci and Alison Wisely were at their wedding

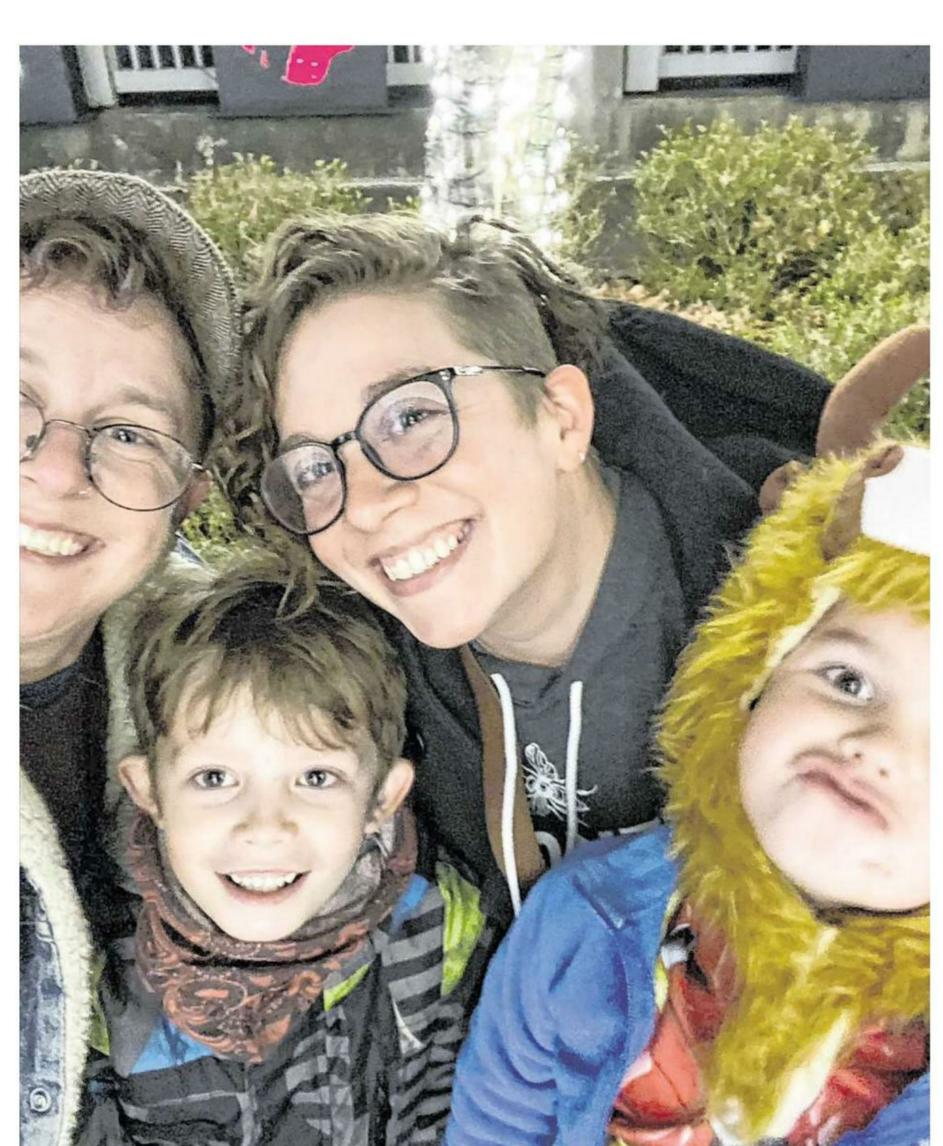
— dancing. Perhaps cheek to cheek, to a cherished song of Knox's, like Langhorne Slim's "Changes" or JFDR's "White Sun." Or maybe to a tune Knox had penned for the self-produced folk-rock album he'd been recording. Or, more likely, to a party favorite they could both just let loose to; with laughter cascading out of their mouths; surrounded by Alison's sons Felix (9) and Lucas (7), friends from all over Western North Carolina's Yancey County, and relatives from all over the country.

In their imaginations, this dancing would have followed a show-stopping speech by the precocious Felix, who was planning to kick off his remarks to their 50 or so guests with: "Thank you, everyone, for joining us on this auspicious evening...'

Which would have followed a big Italian feast. Which would have been preceded by Knox — in a brand-new navy-blue suit and an ascot — and Alison — in an embroidered top and white pants — standing in the shadow of Mount Mitchell and professing their undying love for each other.

They had been daydreaming about these moments for more than a year. And in some ways, it was more than just a wedding. More than just a joyful excuse to assemble the people they

treasured most. It would be a moment of triumph, a climb to the top of their own personal mountains after years of tribulations. For Knox, who in recent years had reestablished a close relationship with his older sister Briana Yarbrough after a long, sorrowful estrangement. For Alison, who in the wake of a painful divorce had formed a healthy co-parenting situation with their devoted father, Lance Wisely.



Courtesy of Lance Wisely and Briana Yarbrough

"It's heartbreaking," "like I'm not talking about real life right now": Knox Petrucci, left, his fianceé Alison Wisely, and her sons Felix, second from left, and Lucas all died after being swept away by floodwaters last month.

But on Sept. 27, just over six weeks before they were to be married, Hurricane Helene unleashed a deluge that caused the normally peaceful river in front of their Green Mountain home to become a ferocious — and deadly —

So ferocious and so deadly, in fact,

SEE HELENE, 6A

In east Charlotte, Pizza Hut closing is symbol of decline

BY IEFF A. CHAMER jchamer@charlotteobserver.com

People living in the Milton Road corridor of east Charlotte said the closing of a Pizza Hut in their neighborhood is just the most recent example of a lack of attention from city hall to neighborhood problems that are hindering growth.

Greg Asciutto, the executive director of the nonprofit CharlotteEAST, said gun violence, vagrancy and drug dealing make it difficult for economic development and commercial businesses to succeed.

The Pizza Hut at 1909 Milton Road closed in late summer and now sits emp-

"The economic opportunity sure is lacking, which is something that we're trying to fix," Asciutto said in an interview with The Charlotte Observer. "It's a vicious cycle, because at the same time, you can't get economic opportunity if you have this blight and vagrancy. And it just self-perpetuates."

His nonprofit promotes economic development, public education and community building in its mission to improve east Charlotte, he said.

But after the closing of the Pizza Hut, an area already "starving for economic opportunity" is left with another commercial vacancy because of the "highly visible and active criminal element," Asciutto said.

Tyler Hebert, a vice president of operations with the franchisee ADT Pizza, emailed Asciutto in July about neighborhood problems.

"After several attempts to get the local law enforcement involved with people laundering in our parking lot, dealing illegal things, littering on the property, we have no option other than to close permanently," Hebert's email said. "We have to protect our employees and our customers from this kind of non sense." Hebert declined to be interviewed for this story.

"What's happening in the neighborhood is really unfortunate, but we would like to stay out of the press here," Hebert said in an email to The Charlotte Observer. "Let's focus on the growth and job creation we are doing in all of our other locations."

The Pizza Hut building has been stripped of its logos. A convenience store parking lot across the street is a drug market, Asciutto said. There's a respectable-looking daycare just down the street.

A CHANGED NEIGHBORHOOD

On a recent afternoon nearby, a woman walking a bike down the street, trying to stay out of the road, appeared like she might fall over at any moment. Some

SEE PIZZA HUT, 10A

UNIQUELY CHARLOTTE

Riccio's Italian Restaurant closes after 62 years

story.

BY MELISSA OYLER moyler@charlotteobserver.com

For a restaurant to exist for even a handful of years in Charlotte's everchanging food scene is a sign of success. So when a local restaurant stays open for 62 years, serving generations of families, that's a real win.

Riccio's Italian Restaurant, which has been feeding Charlotte for more than six decades, announced via an

Instagram post on Wednesday that it has closed. "Thank you Charlotte for supporting us over the last 60 years," the eatery posted unceremoniously, using a black background with simple white text to announce the news. But there is so much more to Riccio's

RICCIO'S ITALIAN RESTAURANT: BUILD-YOUR-OWN PASTA, PIZZA

AND CHICKEN PARM

The second-generation, family owned

Italian restaurant was nestled in its last location in a corner of Touchstone Village for the past few decades. The nofrills, casual spot was known for its classic dishes like chicken parm, with boneless breast fried and topped with tomato sauce and melted mozzarella. Buildyour-own pasta was also on the menu, as were pizza and wings.

Peggy and Jerry Segal, Ricky Segal's parents, opened the restaurant in 1962. Ricky was 5 at the time, according to Charlotte Observer archives, and he would go on to take the reigns in

1979. THE LOGISTICS: The restaurant was on Scaleybark Road in 1962, then moved to the Taipei Express location on Providence Road, then to Middleton Drive, Ricky's daughter, Elizabeth Se-

SEE RESTAURANT, 6A



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