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# Ledger-Enquirer

## Surprise candidate enters race to be next Columbus mayor

BY BRITTANY MCGEE  
[bmcgee@ledger-enquirer.com](mailto:bmcgee@ledger-enquirer.com)

Columbus lawyer Chris Breault has entered the race for Columbus Mayor, qualifying as

a candidate Friday.

Breault's surprise candidacy came as the qualifying period ended at noon Friday.

Columbus is a city in decline, he told the Ledger-Enquirer in a text message, mentioning trash

on roads and poorly maintained parks.

"I think if you want real change and the possibility of creating a far different and better city, then you can't do it with the same old tired actors,"

he said. "You need people with new ideas and new energy."

A graduate of the University of Georgia School of Law, Breault specializes in personal injury and car accidents. He has been involved in several million-

dollar lawsuits and represented former Columbus District Attorney Mark Jones in a misconduct case.

Last year, Breault clashed with the Supreme Court of Georgia after it gave him a six-month suspension of his law license for violations of the Georgia Rules of Professional Conduct because of events that occurred in a 2017 case.

"I stand by my work in that case. I'm the first lawyer in

**SEE CANDIDATE, 4A**

## Columbus kayakers begin 500-mile trip on Chattahoochee River

BY KALA HUNTER  
[khunter@ledger-enquirer.com](mailto:khunter@ledger-enquirer.com)

The Chattahoochee River Conservancy recently got a new Program Director, and he means business.

Stephen Burden, 26, originally from Forsyth County, is on a mission to complete a 500-mile kayak trip from the headwaters of the Chattahoochee River in Helen, Georgia all the way to the Gulf of Mexico to raise \$50,000 for the River Conservancy in Columbus.

He's not alone. His paddling partner, Jarod Horne, 27, who hails from Phenix City is an outdoor adventure enthusiast.

Starting March 1, every day the two will average about 10 miles of kayaking in order to make it to the Gulf by March 30 to reverse the stigma that the Chattahoochee held decades ago for being unhealthy and unsafe to paddle.

They're calling the fundraising adventure 'Rediscover the Chattahoochee'.

"We're showcasing the river trying to change hearts about the river's gross reputation," Burden said. "We hope to raise \$50,000 before we reach the gulf and all of that goes toward CRC."

Burden became interim director of the CRC in October.

The Conservancy needs funding to do execute some of their catalog of crucial river restoration work.

Since 2010, the small non-profit has made significant improvements to habitat restoration from the dams that have impacted the river's health, planting native shoal lilies ev-



STEPHEN BURDEN

Stephen Burden, interim director of the Chattahoochee River Conservancy and Jarod Horne start their adventure at the Chattahoochee Gap in the Appalachian Trail on Sat., Feb 28.

**SEE RIVER, 4A**

## Judge hears Columbus' land dispute with railroad

BY BRITTANY MCGEE  
[bmcgee@ledger-enquirer.com](mailto:bmcgee@ledger-enquirer.com)

Last week, lawyers representing the Columbus Consolidated Government and Genesee & Wyoming Railroad Services appeared before U.S. District Judge Clay Land after the railroad company filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit the city filed to recover about 90 acres of land it claims should have been returned to it because of a 19th-century agreement.

The city filed a lawsuit last August against Norfolk Southern and other railroad companies, including Genesee & Wyoming, to recover land it claims should have reverted to city ownership because of an agreement made over 175 years ago.

CCG, represented by the Columbus law firm Page, Scramton, Sprouse, Tucker & Ford, argues the railroads requested land from the city for a depot in 1847, which was agreed upon because of the benefits a passenger depot would provide to Columbus citizens.

Resolutions were passed granting the railroads' use of the land under limitation with the intent that it would be used for public good, according to CCG's complaint, and that the land was never given to the railroads.

By the 1970s, the railroads ceased service in Columbus, the complaint says, with depots being sold or demolished. This triggered the terms that returned the land and title to CCG, the city argues.

Since then, the railroad has remained on the property and uses it for nonpublic purposes, the complaint says.

CCG's lawsuit seeks to restore its control of the land and recover the "losses and damages CCG has suffered by the railroad's continued use of the property."

The lawsuit was originally filed in the Superior Court of Muscogee County, but it was sent to federal court in the Middle District of Georgia.

### MOTION TO DISMISS COLUMBUS RAILROAD LAWSUIT

The motion to dismiss filed by Genesee & Wyoming Railroad Services argues the property comprises an "integral part of the nation's rail system."

They say in the motion that CCG's claims fall under the Interstate Commerce Commission Termination Act of 1995

**SEE JUDGE, 4A**

## Search for new HCSD superintendent down to 1 finalist

BY MARK RICE  
[mrice@ledger-enquirer.com](mailto:mrice@ledger-enquirer.com)

The search to hire a new superintendent for the Harris County School District has been narrowed to one finalist — and it's somebody familiar with the Columbus area.

HCSD announced Thursday night on its Facebook page that the Harris County Board of Education selected Michael Barden as the sole finalist to be the school system's next super-

intendent, succeeding Justin Finney, who announced in October he plans to retire at the end of this school year.

Barden is executive director of technology learning and support for the Muscogee County School District. His 27 years as an educator in public schools include being principal of Blackmon Road Middle School and Shaw High School in MCSD. He also has been a teacher and a coach.

"We are excited to have someone with the experience and ability of Mr. Barden to serve as

our next superintendent," HCSD board chairman Garnett Ray said in the Facebook post. "He is committed to Harris County Schools and has an outstanding record of successful leadership. We have had a deliberate and thorough search process, and I am appreciative of the work by the members of our Board."

Georgia law requires the board of a public school district to wait at least 14 days after announcing the superintendent finalist or finalists before voting



Michael Barden

on final approval.

The HCSD board used consultants from Georgia Leadership Associates to choose Barden among 12 applicants, the post says.

According to his LinkedIn account, Barden earned a specialist's degree in educational leadership and administration from Albany State University, a master's degree in educational leadership and administration from Columbus State University, a master's degree in foundations of education from Troy University and a bachelor's degree in business administration and management from CSU.



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