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SPORTS, 9A

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Man facing homicide counts in 2016 killings



Guards lead George "Billy" Wagner III into the courtroom on Feb. 9. SHELBY REEVES/CHILLICOTHE GAZETTE

Defense appealing death penalty ruling

Destiny Torres
Chillicothe Gazette
USA TODAY NETWORK

WAVERLY, OH – The attorney for George "Billy" Wagner says he intends to appeal a ruling that put the death penalty back on the table for his trial.

Appearing in Pike County Common Pleas Court on Feb. 9 after more than a year, Wagner is the last of four defendants to be tried in the shooting deaths of eight Pike County residents in 2016.

Wagner is currently facing eight counts of aggravated homicide and 14 related offenses. Witnesses at the trial of his son, George Wagner IV, in 2022

April 22 will mark 10 years since seven members of the Rhoden family, along with one future family member, were killed in the dark of night, the first two just before 11 p.m. and the final one shortly before 4 a.m.

pointed to the elder Wagner as the one who orchestrated the killings.

Death penalty appeal

Visiting Judge Jonathan Hein, who is overseeing Wagner's trial, ruled in November 2024 that the case would go forward without the possibility of the death penalty. A month later, special prosecutor Angela Canepa appealed that decision.

In January, Ohio's 4th District Court of Appeals reversed Hein's decision and made the death penalty a possibility once more.

Wagner's defense attorney, Mark Collins, announced at the Feb. 9 hearing his intention to appeal the death penalty decision to the Ohio Supreme Court.

"It's not so much about how long

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15-foot gold Trump statue is stuck in limbo

Shawn Dignty
Zanesville Times Recorder
USA TODAY NETWORK

ZANESVILLE – All that glitters is gold – or maybe more the opposite could be true – as a 15-foot-tall statue of President Donald Trump completed in January 2025 slumbers in an Old Coopermill Road foundry.

The statue, now newly gilded with gold leaf, lies in the midst of an eight-month payment impasse and copyright infringement rift between Zanesville sculptor Alan Cottrill and an upstart cryptocurrency group heading \$PATRIOT, a memecoin honoring Trump.

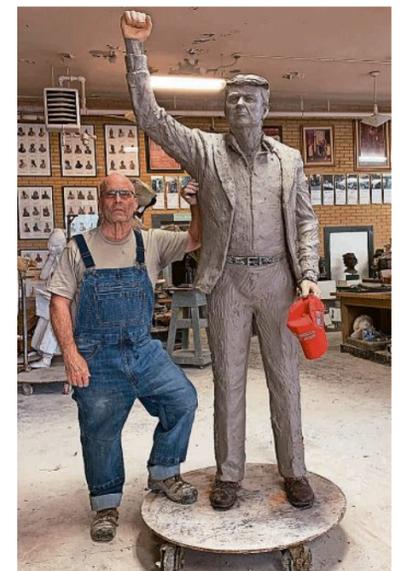
The Patriot group still owes a little more than \$90,000 for the \$300,000 undertaking, Cottrill told the Times Recorder. Around \$75,000 of that comes from 15 months' worth of copyright misuse after the memecoin started using the statue as its logo when it launched on Election Day 2024, and unbeknownst to Cottrill.

"I felt that they tried to take advantage of me and the statue that I made," Cottrill said. "That statue isn't leaving Zanesville until they pay."

Once completed, the bronze statue, which was first commissioned in August 2024, was initially supposed to be on a two-year tour across the U.S. visiting Republican conventions before arriving at its final spot at either a presidential library or the Republican National Committee headquarters.

For the secondary plan, Cottrill and his team were supposed to unveil the statue for the presidential inauguration parade in January 2025. Then, the Patriot group called with a message from the U.S. Secret Service, and the

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Alan Cottrill stands next to his work during the early phases to create a 15-foot-tall bronze statue of President Donald Trump. It started in August 2024 and was completed in January 2025. The statue, now gilded in gold leaf, is still in Zanesville waiting to be installed at Trump National Doral Miami.

PROVIDED BY ALAN COTTRILL

Ross County property tax payments due Feb. 20

Jane Imbody
AI-assisted reporter
Chillicothe Gazette
USA TODAY NETWORK

Ross County property owners are reminded that their first-half property tax payments are due Feb. 20, according to a community announcement from the Ross County Treasurer's Office.

Taxpayers have several ways to pay – by mail, online or in person. The Treas-

urer's Office is suggesting that those who mail payments do so early, as new postal processing practices could delay mail.

Property owners can view their updated property valuations on the Ross County Auditor's website.

Property tax bills changes

This year, property tax bills may look different due to a full reappraisal of

property values completed in 2025. Ohio law requires county auditors to conduct a full reappraisal every six years, with a triennial update at the midpoint.

Local officials have taken steps to reduce tax rates where possible, according to the announcement. All 16 townships in Ross County have reduced the millage they collect, and the

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