



Happy Easter

The News Leader

SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 2026 | NEWSLEADER.COM

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

FLASHBACKS



A worker from Wayne Towing and Recovery of Amherst uses a crane to lift the Cessna from the deck it struck in Wintergreen on March 31, 2001. The plane was removed the following day despite rain and snow on the mountain. MARK MILLER/THE NEWS LEADER ARCHIVES

Pilot and wife survive Wintergreen plane crash

Lyra Bordelon

Staunton News Leader | USA TODAY NETWORK

WINTERGREEN – An employee of the Nelson County Service Authority was working on Laurel Springs Drive near the Wintergreen Resort on March 31, 2001.

The day was dark and foggy, but this didn't prevent the man from hearing a crash in the distance around 4 p.m. He made his way toward the noise and heard shouts for help.

He found a single-engine, two-seat 1972 Cessna plane, crumbled from a wreck, perched on the second story deck of an empty Wintergreen Resort home. Two people, a male pilot and a female passenger, had climbed out of the wreckage, and both were calling out to anyone that could hear them. The man also called for help – emergency services were on the way.

Wintergreen police, fire and rescue personnel arrived shortly after. The wreck hadn't caused a fire, but firefighters sprayed foam over the plane and surrounding area to wash away any spilled fuel. The pilot and passenger were taken to Augusta Medical Center, where they were treated for minor cuts and bruises, then released.

"Suffice it to say, those two people were very, very fortunate," said Wintergreen Police Sgt. Jeffery Harris.

Why did the Cessna crash?

Eddie Ray Rouse and his wife Marcia were headed home from a cross-country trip to Fayetteville, North Carolina, by plane that morning. They landed at Shenandoah Valley Regional Airport and boarded again at 3:20 p.m. to fly toward the Bladenboro Airport in North Carolina, according to the final report from The National Transportation Safety Board.

Rouse did not get an updated weather report as he prepared for takeoff. He had checked it earlier in the day, around 8:45 a.m., and knew the conditions were supposed to change from good to marginal after about 7 p.m.

After takeoff, Rouse climbed to 1,800 feet, made a 180-degree right turn, and continued climbing. He was aiming to reach 4,500 feet but around 3,800 feet and 18 miles away from the Shenandoah airport, the weather deteriorated.

Eight to 10 minutes to impact.



Kendall Nelson, Wintergreen public relations, Curtis Sheets, Staunton-Augusta Rescue Squad, and Raymond Uttaro, emergency services coordinator for Nelson County, confer about the plane crash. VINCENT LERZ/THE NEWS LEADER ARCHIVES

He wasn't able to read the instruments and, instead, relied on his own vision as he ascended into the thick fog. He could still see the ground but the visibility in front of the plane was limited.

He was climbing too quickly and could tell. "We used to call it scud-running, going in and out of clouds," said Warner Mills, a former instructor and inspector with the Federal Aviation Administration. "That'll put a nice coat of rime ice on the place."

Like a thick frost, cool and foggy conditions can spread rime ice across the plane's mechanics and get into the carburetor, which can lead to engine failure. Three minutes to impact.

Rouse turned west toward a highway he could see on the ground. Visibility in front of the plane was completely gone. He leveled off before trying to ascend again.

As he climbed, trees cut through the fog. He "applied full throttle and pitched the nose of the airplane up to avoid the trees," the report reads. The trees disappeared again as the plane accelerated and Rouse "once again, lost all outside visual reference."

See CRASH, Page 2A

Judge denies the motion to dismiss

Two officers charged in stun gun incident at a car wash

Brad Zinn

Staunton News Leader | USA TODAY NETWORK

WAYNESBORO — A circuit court judge has denied a motion to dismiss charges against a Waynesboro police officer who was charged following an on-duty incident at a car wash in which another officer was shocked with a stun gun.

On March 6, one of two officers charged in the incident pleaded guilty. A second officer, 31-year-old Jacob W. Moore, pleaded not guilty to charges of assault on a law enforcement officer and disarming a law enforcement officer.

On March 19, Moore's attorney, Daniel Mowry, filed a motion to dismiss the two indictments that were handed down by a special grand jury in 2025. In the motion, he argued that Waynesboro Commonwealth's Attorney David Ledbetter gave a "factually inaccurate" statement to the grand jury when he said Moore chose not to attend, and also claimed his client wasn't given an opportunity to testify.

"In effect, this statement ignored the foundational rule of law that if the Defendant exercised his right not to testify the finder of fact could draw no negative inference from such decision," Mowry said in the motion.

However, in Ledbetter's response to the motion, he produced text messages between him and Moore's prior attorney, Denise Lunsford, where he asked if the defendant wanted to testify before the special grand jury. In a July 13 text, Lunsford said Moore did not wish to testify. Ledbetter, the response noted, informed the grand jury that Moore had the "absolute right not to testify" and told the jurors they could not consider his actions when reaching a decision on whether probable cause existed to indict him.

See MOTION, Page 2A

Sale of former Augusta prison under contract

Lyra Bordelon

Staunton News Leader | USA TODAY NETWORK

The former Augusta Correctional Center is under contract to be purchased.

Details on who or what kind of entity will take over the former prison are scant, however. Augusta County Administrator Tim Fitzgerald confirmed a contract exists but was unable to offer more details.

"Yes the property is under contract," wrote Fitzgerald. "The buyers are not public yet as there is a study period in the contract."

Fitzgerald was unable to offer a timeline for when county residents could learn more about the sale. The News Leader has reached out to the Department of General Services, which is managing the sale for the state.

How did we get here?

In January 2024, the Virginia Department of Corrections (VDOC) called a town hall in Craigsville to provide residents and center employees with answers about the closing.

At the town hall, VDOC Chief of Corrections Operations David Robinson explained the state's inmate population dropped over the past several years before the closure, prompting a review of prisons across the state. VDOC found it difficult to hire and retain new employees at the facility, with over a million dollars being spent on overtime each year.

See SALE, Page 2A

Subscriber-only eNewspaper

The eNewspaper is an electronic copy of your print newspaper. Enjoy every page by going to newsleader.com/enewspaper or scan this code on your mobile device. You will also find late news and sports in the bonus sections. Check it out today!

PROUDLY SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES OF STAUNTON, WAYNESBORO AND AUGUSTA COUNTY, VA. FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY.



Volume 136 | No. 80
Subscribe 877-424-0032
©2026 \$2.50



0 40901 12502 0