



## GREENE COUNTY

# Parolee flees into woods, repeatedly resists arrest

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Several Greene County deputies participated in a dragnet that eventually led to the arrest of a Greensboro man on a parole violation warrant March 4. Jamie Lee Griffin, 37, of Greensboro also faces four counts of obstruction of law enforcement after repeatedly defying the commands of

deputies and resisting arrest.

The incident began on March 3 at around 8 p.m. when Deputy Jordan Knowles arrived at 1580 Indian Woods Drive as part of a contingent sent to serve the parole violation warrant.

Knowles arrived before the other deputies and went into the woods west of the residence to observe the backyard because the wanted subject was known to run from law enforcement.

When Knowles got approximately 50 yards into the woods, he found Griffin in a pile of leaves behind a tree, but Griffin jumped up and ran deeper into the woods.

Knowles pursued on foot and issued verbal commands for Griffin to stop but lost contact with him due to darkness approximately 300 yards behind the residence.



Jamie Lee Griffin

Other deputies arrived in the area and continued the search for Griffin.

The next morning just before 6 a.m., deputies returned to the scene and found Griffin in the woods completely buried under leaves and branches, according to an account by Deputy Matthew Cowdrey.

Once located, Griffin fled

on foot into the woods and escaped.

Cowdrey said that he was advised Griffin was known to abuse drugs, resist arrest and had violent tendencies when encountering law enforcement officers.

Deputies created a perimeter around the residence, and Cowdrey walked to the

MORE ARREST >> A2

## PUTNAM COUNTY



LENA HENSLEY/Staff

Warrick Dunn reaches for an apple pie on the table, explaining to Carla that for him, the apple pie turns the house into a home.

## LAKE COUNTRY

# Body found in Cedar Creek; suspect in custody

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Traffic on U.S. 129/Gray Highway slowed considerably as drivers crossed the bridge over Cedar Creek Sunday afternoon and noticed many blue lights flashing along the roadside and under the bridge.

A fisherman had discovered a body floating in the creek, which he called and reported to the Jones County Sheriff's Office. The responding Jones authorities, in turn, called Putnam County Sheriff's Office when they noticed the deceased was on the Putnam County side of the creek, which flows along the county line.

As PCSO deputies Jim Barbee and Paul Bernichon were working the scene along with the Putnam County Coroner's Office, Bernichon was notified that Morgan County had called to report a BOLO out of Locust Grove regarding a possible kidnapping. It didn't take long for all involved to figure out that the kidnap victim and the body that was snagged on some branches in the creek were one and the same.

Putnam County Sheriff Howard Sills identified the victim as Erica M. Atkins, 40, of Locust Grove. Locust Grove Police Chief Derrick Austin said Atkins was the mother of a 10-year-old and a couple of older children, the owner of Birdsong Books in Locust Grove, and she was active

MORE BODY >> A2

# Habitat delivers dream homes to single moms

Lena Hensley  
Lake Oconee News

Spring, the season associated with rebirth and rejuvenation, has become the time of new beginnings for two Eatonton families as former NFL Man of the Year Warrick Dunn, in partnership with Putnam County Habitat for Humanity,

Aaron's, and Ryan Jumonville, handed over the keys Feb. 28, to a pair of newly built, fully furnished houses to two single-parent families.

Single moms Carla and Cerria both became first-time homeowners, and each received a surprise \$5,000 down-payment assistance check from Warrick

Dunn Charities (WDC), as well as \$10,000 worth of furnishings, appliances, and electronics from Aaron's, plus \$45,000 in smaller appliances, furniture and decorative accents from Jumonville, Dunn's high school teammate and a major WDC donor. Longtime

MORE HABITAT >> A3

## GEORGIA NEWS

# Sports betting falls short of two-thirds required vote

Dave Williams  
Capitol Beat News Service

This year's bid to legalize sports betting is dead in the General Assembly.

The Georgia Senate defeated a proposed constitutional amendment Monday that would have put online sports

betting before Georgia voters in a statewide referendum next year. While 30 of the 56 senators voted in favor of Senate Resolution 140, it fell short of the two-thirds majority needed to pass a constitutional amendment.

The Senate vote took place early on Crossover Day, the

deadline for legislation to pass at least one chamber in the General Assembly to stay alive for the year. A House bill that would have legalized sports betting without a constitutional change failed to reach the floor before the House adjourned shortly before midnight.

Earlier Monday, state Sen. Bill

Cowsert, R-Athens, the chief sponsor of Senate Resolution 140, argued the constitutional route was the better way to go because it would have let Georgia voters decide whether to legalize sports betting.

"I don't get why it's wrong to let the people of Georgia vote on this issue," Cowsert said. "We're

not dictators up here."

But Sen. Marty Harbin, R-Tyrone, said it would be irresponsible for senators to pass the issue to voters.

"They do not have all the information you and I have," he told his Senate colleagues.

MORE BETTING >> A3

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LENA HENSLEY/Staff

**New homeowner Carla reacts with happy surprise as she enters her Habitat-built home for the first time.**



LENA HENSLEY/Staff

**Eatonton Mayor John Reid hands over the keys to a brand-new Habitat home to Cerria and her three kids while former NFL star Warrick Dunn enjoys the moment.**

# HABITAT

CONTINUED FROM >> A1

Habitat partner Harper Custom Construction built the two new homes.

These were the 211th and 212th home celebrations prompted nationwide by WDC as the former NFL star's non-profit identifies single parents across the country and helps them achieve their goal of first-time homeownership as part of its "Homes for the Holidays" program.

Eatonton Mayor John Reid and City Counselor Janie Reid were present at the event, with broadcast stations *Atlanta News First* (CBS); *WMAZ* (CBS), *Macon*; *WGXA* (FOX 24), *Macon*; and *WMGT* (41NBC), providing TV coverage.

A U.S. Air Force veteran, Carla continues to serve others as a teacher's assistant for Putnam County schools. Her 16-year-old daughter Karmyn attends Putnam County High School and is a competitive gymnast and track athlete. Before moving into the new house, they lived in an apartment building.

"I can't thank them enough," Carla said. "My daughter does a lot of gymnastics. Having a yard will give her a lot of room to move. And I'm looking forward to cooking, baking. Probably tonight!"

Also a teacher's assistant for Putnam County schools, Cerria is a single

mother to two sons and a daughter ages 5-15. In search of a better future for her family, she also attends college and is pursuing a bachelor's degree in early childhood education.

"Having our own home is everything. It's a dream come true," Cerria said. "I've been praying over it. I've been working hard. I've been speaking it into existence praying. We've been in an apartment almost 16 years. Not enough space, but we made it."

Her two sons, Jordan and Jeremiah, who are Georgia fans, said their favorite parts about the new house were their rooms with UGA décor and an opportunity to have friends over and playing in the backyard. Cerria's daughter, Journi, said she loved her room, too.

"I wanted to thank everyone who helped make our dream come true," Cerria said. When asked what she would wish for other single parents, she said, "Never give up. Pray, and work hard."

"This is unique today. Warrick Dunn chose us. It's a wonderful gift to very deserving families," Putnam County Habitat for Humanity Board Chair and President Bucky Kahl said.

Kahl explained Habitat homeowners get their homes through a 25- to 30-year, interest-free mortgage, which includes insurance and taxes. To become a homeowner through Habitat, he said applicants

have to meet certain criteria: they have to need a home, be Putnam County residents for at least two years, meet financial criteria, and do 250 hours of volunteer work called "sweat equity." They can volunteer through building their own home, working at Habitat's ReStore or helping with Habitat's classes.

"Today means a lot," Dunn said. "The weather is amazing. It amplifies the fact that Carla and Karmyn smiled when they pulled up. Being able to experience this life-changing moment with them, the joy that they showed and the appreciation ... I think that says it all."

Explaining his motivation to help families find new starts, Dunn said his mother, a police officer, was killed in the line of duty.

"She was unable to realize her dream and I wanted to support other individuals who have gone through what my mom did," he said. "She would probably be happy that we are able to help other families achieve that dream."

"A lot of this couldn't be done without our partners," he continued. "They do a great job of caring about people and helping us create those life-changing moments."

Dunn stressed his organization will help single fathers as well and encouraged them to sign up for his

program. "Pride gets in the way of creating stability for yourself, for your kids, and your family. We all need a little assistance sometimes," he said.

Dunn also explained that WDC, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in November, has other programs, too, such as the financial literacy program Count on Your Future, and Sculpt, a healthy nutrition initiative. He encouraged anyone who would like to know more about WDC to visit online at [wdc.org](http://wdc.org).

"It's not about the dollar amount for us, it's about creating memories, celebrating home ownership," said Barbara Bernard, Aaron's Southeast divisional vice president. "We've been doing this for over 20 years with Warrick Dunn, one of our longest-standing (collaborations)."

WDC Executive Director Whitney Jackson shared that while Aaron's provided the big furniture, all smaller appliances, furniture and decorative accents came from Jumonville. "Each home project costs

us about \$45,000 to upfit. We buy everything down to the toothbrush," she said. "Each home celebration is a surprise to the

families. We secretly get their preferences and then we customize each home for the family. They have no idea that this is happening."

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# BETTING

CONTINUED FROM >> A1

"When we put it out there, we're washing our hands of it."

Harbin also opposed legalizing gambling because of its potential to lead to addictive gambling.

The resolution's supporters pitched it as a way to create a needs-based scholarship program in Georgia to supplement the HOPE Scholarship program,

which is based on merit. Under the legislation, half of the state's share of the proceeds from sports betting would have gone to needs-based scholarships.

"We need needs-based funds," said Sen. Nan Orrock, D-Atlanta. "This bill puts that in place."

But Sen. Brandon Beach, R-Alpharetta, argued a needs-based scholarship program is no longer necessary in Georgia because Gov. Brian Kemp and the General Assembly now have fully funded the

HOPE program more than a decade after the Great Recession prompted cuts in HOPE benefits.

"We should reward success," Beach said. "If you have a 'B' average, you get your education paid for."

Beach proposed amendments to bar needs-based scholarships and broaden the sports betting resolution by adding casinos and pari-mutuel betting on horse racing to sports betting, but they were soundly defeated.

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