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TOP STORY

## Some patrons still cautious about returning to museums, play places reopened in Phase 2.5

Dawn Kane , Jamie Biggs

Oct 17, 2020

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Kady Doumbia spins nephews Mohamed Sylla, 12, Ousmane Sylla, 9 and Sayid Coulibaly, 4, on a merry-go-round in Children's Garden playground at LeBauer Park in downtown Greensboro on Oct. 8. "We are thrilled to open it back up and provide some much needed relief for kids and especially their parents," said Rob Overman, executive director of Greensboro Downtown Parks, although attendance has been lower than normal.

WOODY MARSHALL, NEWS & RECORD

GREENSBORO — Cars fill the parking lot of the Greensboro Children's Museum on this sunny Saturday afternoon.

Across Church Street at LeBauer Park, youngsters play in the Children's Garden under parents' watchful eyes.

Next door to the park, quiet permeates the Greensboro Cultural Center.

By midafternoon at its GreenHill gallery, about 10 visitors had shown up to view paintings by women abstract artists. Other adjacent galleries remain closed.

The scene results from the range of reactions of North Carolinians since Sept. 4, when the state further eased restrictions stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Phase 2.5 of reopening allowed the restart of museums, gyms and play places — most with restrictions — after they had been closed for nearly six months.

The Children's Garden at LeBauer Park was among those to reopen.

"We are thrilled to open it back up and provide some much needed relief for kids and especially their parents," said Rob Overman, executive director of Greensboro Downtown Parks, which operates LeBauer and Center City parks.

Each indoor venue is operating at reduced capacity, requiring masks and social distancing and adding more frequent and diligent cleanings.

But many patrons aren't ready to visit in person.

Gone for now are school field trips, tourists and group visits.

"I think a lot of folks are still maintaining the same safety precautions that they were when the pandemic first began, and that is impacting our attendance numbers," Overman said.

Other indoor venues have increased their at-home audience by expanding online offerings.

Movie theaters were allowed to open earlier this month. So it might take awhile to know whether audiences will return to their pre-pandemic levels.

What will it take to bring more back? Operators of arts and entertainment venues don't know for sure.

"We don't expect to see the same level of traffic until there is a vaccination," said Marian King, chief executive officer of the Greensboro Children's Museum.

Here's a sample of venues, and what they have found six weeks into Phase 2.5 of reopening.

## Greensboro Children's Museum

The first week that the children's museum reopened, King stood at its door to welcome back returning visitors.

"With our masks on, they couldn't tell how big we were smiling," King said. "It felt so good to be back in business."

Like other museums, this staff has taken precautions designed to keep visitors healthy and safe.

The children's museum holds two three-hour play sessions a day. Although the building and two outdoor areas can hold 800, staff cut capacity to 150 per play session — far less than the state maximum of 50%. Capacity climbs by 25 when the museum on North Church Street downtown hosts a birthday party.

It posted recommended limits on people per exhibit.

"People have been really happy to have something fun to do," King said.

Returning visitors will find a new digital immersion experience in "Funky Forest: The Growing Place." It opened without the usual fanfare.

The museum asks for reservations online, although walk-ups are welcome. That cuts down on handling cash and credit cards.

It requires masks, takes temperatures and provides hand sanitizer. Between play sessions, it vigorously sanitizes each surface and prop.

King expected attendance to drop.

And it has — to 40% of pre-COVID-19 levels.

It sold out play sessions during last weekend's rain.

That's better than the 20 to 30% return rate of other children's museums around the country.

Revenue has dropped, too. School field trips, cooking classes and workshops are on hiatus. But the museum resumed hosting birthday parties last week .

The museum probably lost \$600,000 during the six months it was closed, King said. But the public contributed about \$150,000 to a special fundraising campaign.

At some point, King said, the museum likely will increase capacity to 200 or more "as the community becomes more confident and more people get comfortable coming out and being in a group."

One unexpected challenge: a few potential visitors objected to wearing masks.

"But most people are very cooperative, and seem pleased that we are taking these steps," King said.

## Children's Garden, LeBauer Park

When Phase 2.5 of reopening went into effect Sept. 4, LeBauer Park reopened its Children's Garden play area.

The rest of the downtown park had reopened under Phase Two, except for the splash pad that staff kept closed.

Staff placed signs encouraging social distancing and masks, and reminding visitors to take precautions to protect themselves against COVID-19 exposure.

They added a hand sanitizing station.

Park attendance has increased recently, particularly in the Children's Garden, according to Overman, executive director of Greensboro Downtown Parks.

"Folks have truly missed this park amenity," Overman said.

But attendance remains lower than Overman would expect under normal circumstances.

Being an outdoor venue has advantages.

Just ask parents visiting the Children's Garden that sunny Saturday with their toddlers and preschoolers.

"I prefer to stay outside," said Chance Rorie, who brought his 4-year-old daughter, Karter, on a downtown outing.

Dani and Boris Radosevic brought their 1-year-old, Emma.

"We have kind of kept her sheltered the past five, six months with everything going on," Dani Radosevic said. "We feel like it's time to get her out."

"We feel safe when it's outdoors, open, and we can keep our social distance from others," she said.

The play area opens from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. That gives staff extra time to disinfect surfaces and play areas, quite a challenge in a large space with multiple play features.



"Our goal from the very beginning has been to maintain these spaces for our community when they need them most," Overman said.

## Bryan YMCA



Mark Falcon swims laps at Bryan YMCA in Greensboro, N.C., on Thursday, October 15, 2020. Only one person per lane is allowed and lanes must be reserved for the 45 minute sessions.

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The reopening of gyms in Phase 2.5 came just as the weather started to cool, paving way for fall and winter weather that deters some from outdoor exercise.

Adhering to state and local guidelines, David Heggie, executive director at the Kathleen Price Bryan Family YMCA in downtown Greensboro, said they were able to begin offering outdoor group exercise classes and swimming reservations in late May.

"Since then, we have continued adding options like water fitness classes, outdoor fitness stations, summer camp and remote learning programs for youth," Heggie said.

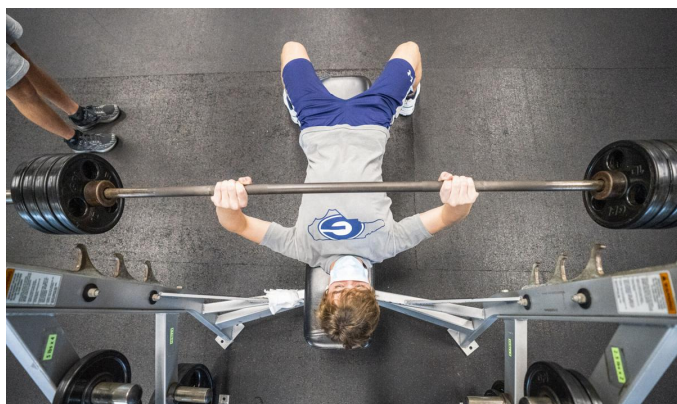
On Sept. 8, they reopened all indoor exercise, but at 30% capacity. For the Bryan Y, that means about 30 people can be in the facility at once.

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In addition to the reduced number of people, members will notice other COVID-19-inspired precautions — physical distancing signage, workout equipment spaced farther apart, extensive cleaning and a wellness check prior to entering.



Grimsley freshman Tobyn Dunning works out with free weights at Kathleen Price Bryan Family YMCA in downtown Greensboro. On Sept. 8, the facility reopened all indoor exercise, but at 30% capacity. For the Bryan Y, that means about 30 people can be in the facility at once.

WOODY MARSHALL, NEWS & RECORD

As a whole, Heggie said the response from members has been positive. People are thrilled to get back — to connect with their community — and express their appreciation for the safety protocols in place, he said.

Looking at the association as a whole, Heggie said YMCAs are seeing just under 30% of the usage they would have seen last year at the same time. Y members were given the option to freeze their membership during the

pandemic and Heggie said they are “truly grateful to those who stuck with us over the last several months.” They’ve even seen new members.

But he understands not everyone is ready to get back to the gym yet and said the Y “respects everyone’s ability to make the best decision for their family.”

## Spare Time Entertainment Greensboro





Brycen Younkman of the Can't Believe it's Not Gutter team tries to pick up his spare during his game in the Wednesday night bowling league at Spare Time Entertainment in Greensboro on Oct. 7. The facility, which was allowed to reopen Sept. 2 at reduced capacity, offers bowling, laser tag, an arcade and bar/restaurant in one site on Hornaday Road.

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For some businesses, it's been difficult getting the community to realize that they are once again open.

Amanda Afifi, event specialist at Spare Time Entertainment, said that several weeks after reopening, they still have people walk in and tell them, “We had no idea you were back!”

Bowling alleys and skating rinks were grouped in with gyms as “recreational” businesses, which were allowed to reopen last month at 30% capacity under Phase 2.5.

Spare Time Entertainment — which offers bowling, laser tag, an arcade and bar/restaurant in one site on Hornaday Road — found out Sept. 2 they would be able to reopen. Two days later, Afifi said, people were once again rolling strikes and playing arcade games at Spare Time.



“It kind of came out of nowhere,” Afifi said. “A lot of us weren’t expecting to hear anything until Sept. 11.”

They reached out to employees, but given the limited capacity at which bowling alleys are operating, less than 30% of the staff working before the pandemic was brought back. Afifi said they didn’t expect to see many customers right away, and while business isn’t what it was pre-pandemic, they’ve entertained more guests than they anticipated.

For Spare Time, the reduced capacity means the facility can entertain about 300 people at once. Afternoons are slow, as they tended to be before the pandemic, but nights and weekends are more profitable.



Ginger Amos reacts to her roll during her game the Wednesday night bowling league at Spare Time Entertainment.

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“That first weekend, we didn’t get too close to (capacity),” Afifi said, “but we were definitely busier than we thought we would be, which was great. It was a great surprise — people coming out to support us.”

On a Saturday a couple of weeks after reopening, Afifi said they did reach capacity a few times. She said they do regular counts to keep up with the number of guests. Once they’re close to capacity, they keep someone stationed by the door to keep track of those coming and going and prohibit people from entering once they reach the 300 mark.

For those who manage to get inside Spare Time before capacity is met, Afifi said, “Everything’s on.”

There are some new procedures.

When bowling lanes are assigned, a lane is skipped between each group. When people are done bowling, they leave their shoes and balls at the lane, allowing employees to thoroughly sanitize the items and area before a new group enters. Laser tag vests are left on the floor and cleaned after each round and the arcade room has been completely reorganized to allow for increased space between gamers. Dining tables are set up 6 feet apart. Masks are mandated, but people can take them off while at their secluded lanes if they choose.

Afifi said they're fortunate to be one of the businesses that people are venturing back out to visit, but maintaining a high level of customer service and sanitization takes a lot of hard work from such a limited staff.

Regardless, they plan to keep pushing on so long as the customer base continues to return.

"At the beginning, it seemed like people were just eager to get out of the house and do something," Afifi said.

They're starting to get more calls from people asking about restrictions and precautions, perhaps signaling a wave of people more hesitant to venture out that are now considering it, Afifi said.

## Greensboro History Museum

The opening of a new exhibition gave Greensboro History Museum attendance a boost in late September.

Visitors came to see "Pieces of Now: Murals, Masks, Community Stories and Conversations," which focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and protests over racial inequality and injustice.

It features about 20 murals painted by area artists in June on plywood panels that covered downtown businesses. The panels became a canvas for their thoughts and emotions amid nationwide protests after the Memorial Day death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers.

Museum Director Carol Ghiorsi Hart expected the number of visitors to drop after the initial rush.

"If anything, word is spreading," Hart said. "Visitation numbers are on par with last year, as far as visitors to the museum not with a school tour."

But there are significantly fewer tourists from out of town, Hart said. So visitor demographics have changed.

"Overall visitation is going to be down about 30% for this time of year due to no field trips or special programs or events," Hart said.

But the museum is expanding its audience through online programs.

Webinars often have attracted four to 10 times the participants that staff would have expected in person.

The education department works with teachers to provide live programs as well as resources for students.

Hart expects those changes to continue, regardless of a return to pre-pandemic norms.

"This time has been an opportunity for us to engage with the community in new ways, that are often more accessible than before," Hart said.

## GreenHill Center for N.C. Art

While other art galleries in the Greensboro Cultural Center remain closed for now, GreenHill reopened its gallery and shop on Sept. 17 for three days a week.

To ensure that galleries allow space for ample social distancing, the maximum capacity is 25. No more than four people can browse in the shop at any one time.

"With 5,000 square feet of gallery space, social distancing has not been an issue," Executive Director Barbara Richter said.

But studios where visitors make art remain closed. GreenHill offers family programming online only. School field trips are on hold.

That has cut down on in-person visits by children and young families.

The first few days of reopening, 12 to 15 people visited each afternoon.

Richter expects the number of visitors to grow when studios reopen and group visits resume.

GreenHill's annual Winter Show also will increase traffic, Richter predicts. It will display more than 400 works in a variety of media.

It will be held in person as usual, from Dec. 6 to Feb. 6, longer than past Winter Shows. That can accommodate socially-distanced small group visits.

And a new digital catalog will expand audience participation at home, statewide and beyond, Richter said.

## **Weatherspoon Art Museum, UNCG**





Students touring the Weatherspoon Art Museum during the pandemic. The museum of modern and contemporary art reopened to UNCG faculty, staff and students on Aug. 18, then to the public on Sept. 5. From Aug. 18 to Sept. 30, 1,440 people visited. That's down from more than 8,200 in January and February, according to the museum.

Martin W. Kane, UNCG University Communications, 2020, Provided

The museum of modern and contemporary art reopened to UNCG faculty, staff and students on Aug. 18, then to the public on Sept. 5.

It opened with reduced hours, capacity limits on each gallery for social distancing, and increased health and safety procedures including required face coverings, said Loring Mortensen, public and community relations officer.

Staff had worked all summer to prepare. Fortunately, the museum received \$40,000 from the national Art Bridges Foundation to help cover protective equipment, extra outdoor seating, social distancing signage, online and virtual programming and extra cleaning.

Like other museums across the country, Weatherspoon attendance declined.

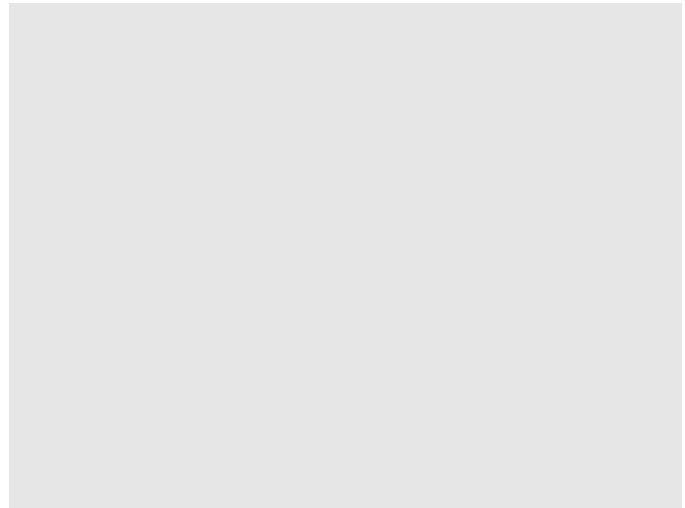
From Aug. 18 to Sept. 30, 1,440 people visited. That's down from more than 8,200 in January and February, said Elaine Gustafson, curator of collections.

Those who did visit praised their experience.

In random surveys over three weeks in September, they gave responses such as "Super phenomenal!" "Relaxing & enlightening," "You're doing great" and "Keep up the good work!"

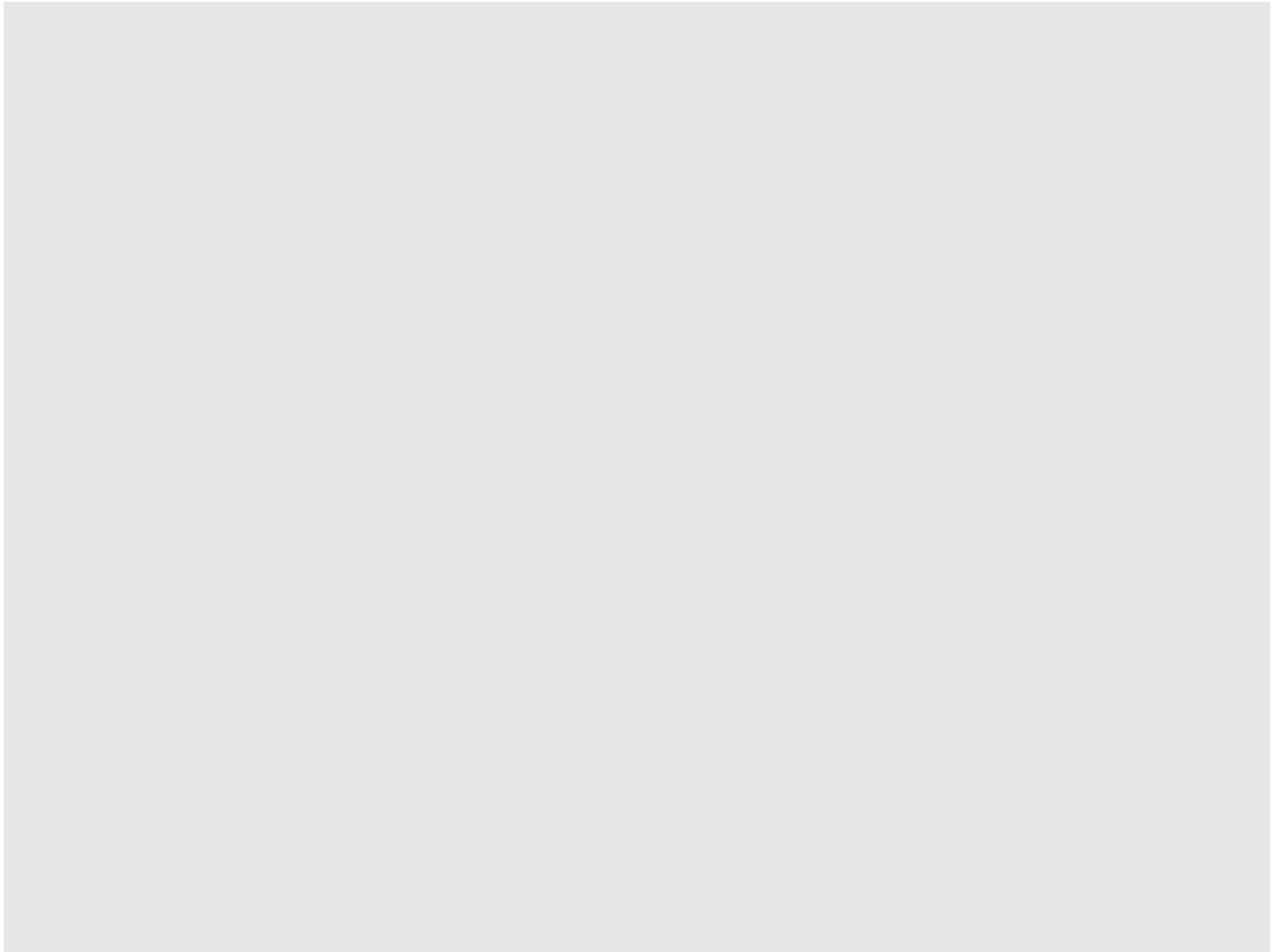
"What pleases me most is that those who do visit are enjoying our exhibitions and are aware that the museum cares about their health and is working hard to keep them safe," Gustafson said.

"If others prefer to stay 'safer at home,'" she said, "we continue to generate online viewing rooms and programming opportunities as ways to engage and best serve those audiences."



Students tour the Weatherspoon Art Museum recently. The museum reopened with reduced hours, capacity limits on each gallery for social distancing, and increased health and safety procedures including required face coverings, said Loring Mortensen, public and community relations officer.

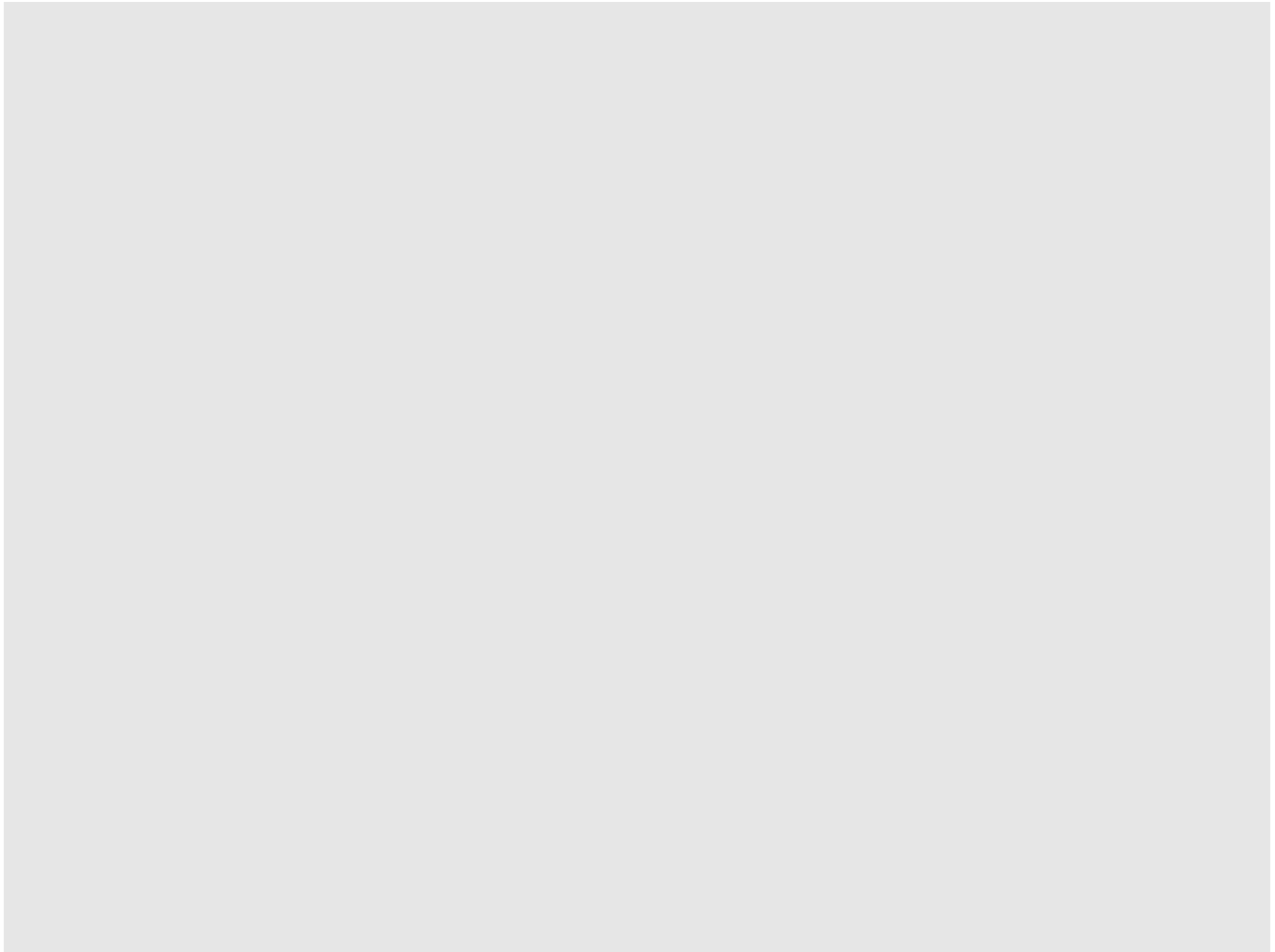
Martin W. Kane, UNCG University Communications, 2020, Provided



Mark Falcon swims laps at Bryan YMCA in Greensboro, N.C., on Thursday, October 15, 2020. Only one person per lane is allowed and lanes must be reserved for the 45 minute sessions.

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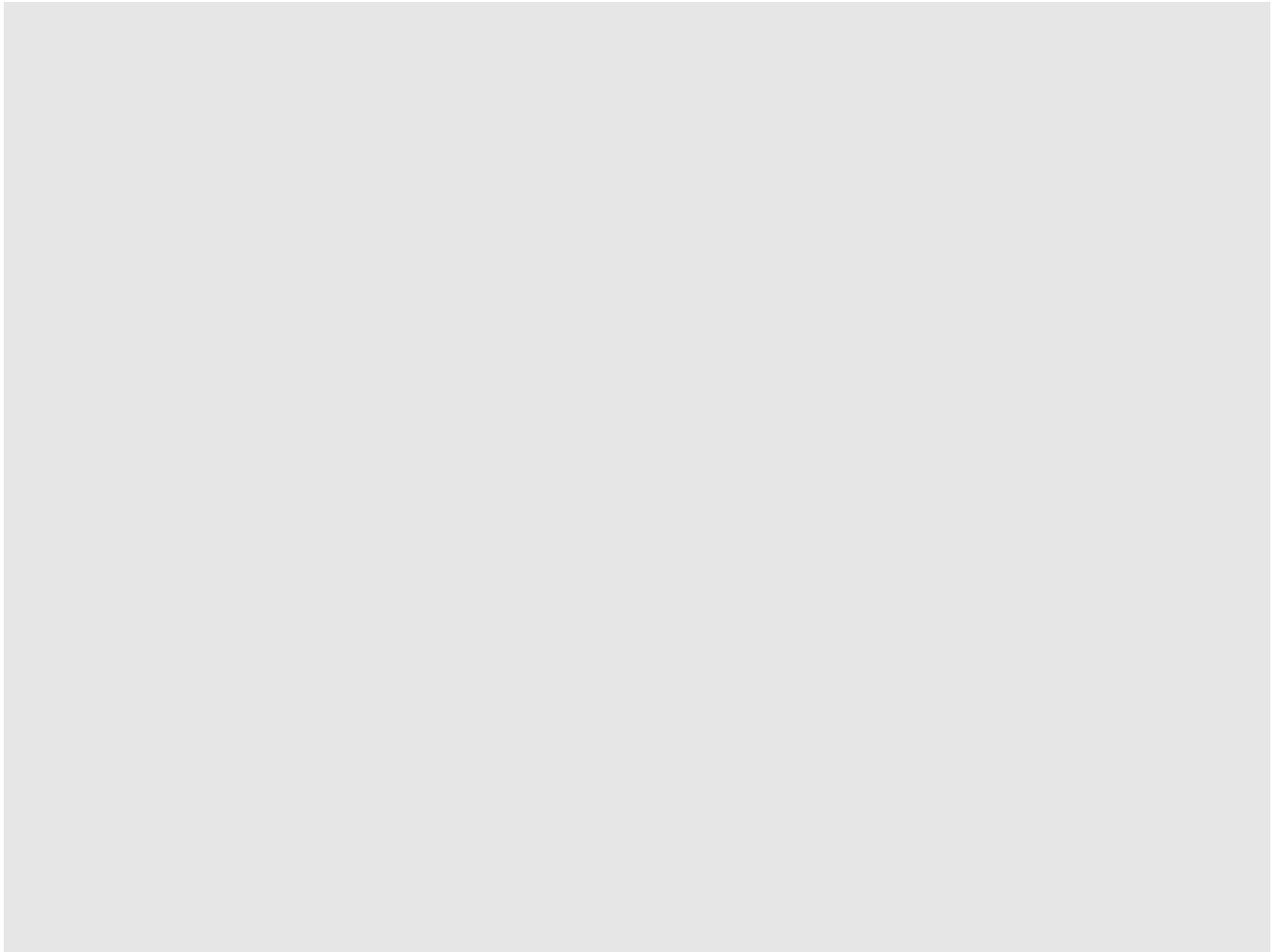


Grimsley freshman Tobyn Dunning works out with free weights at Bryan YMCA in Greensboro, N.C., on Thursday, October 15, 2020.

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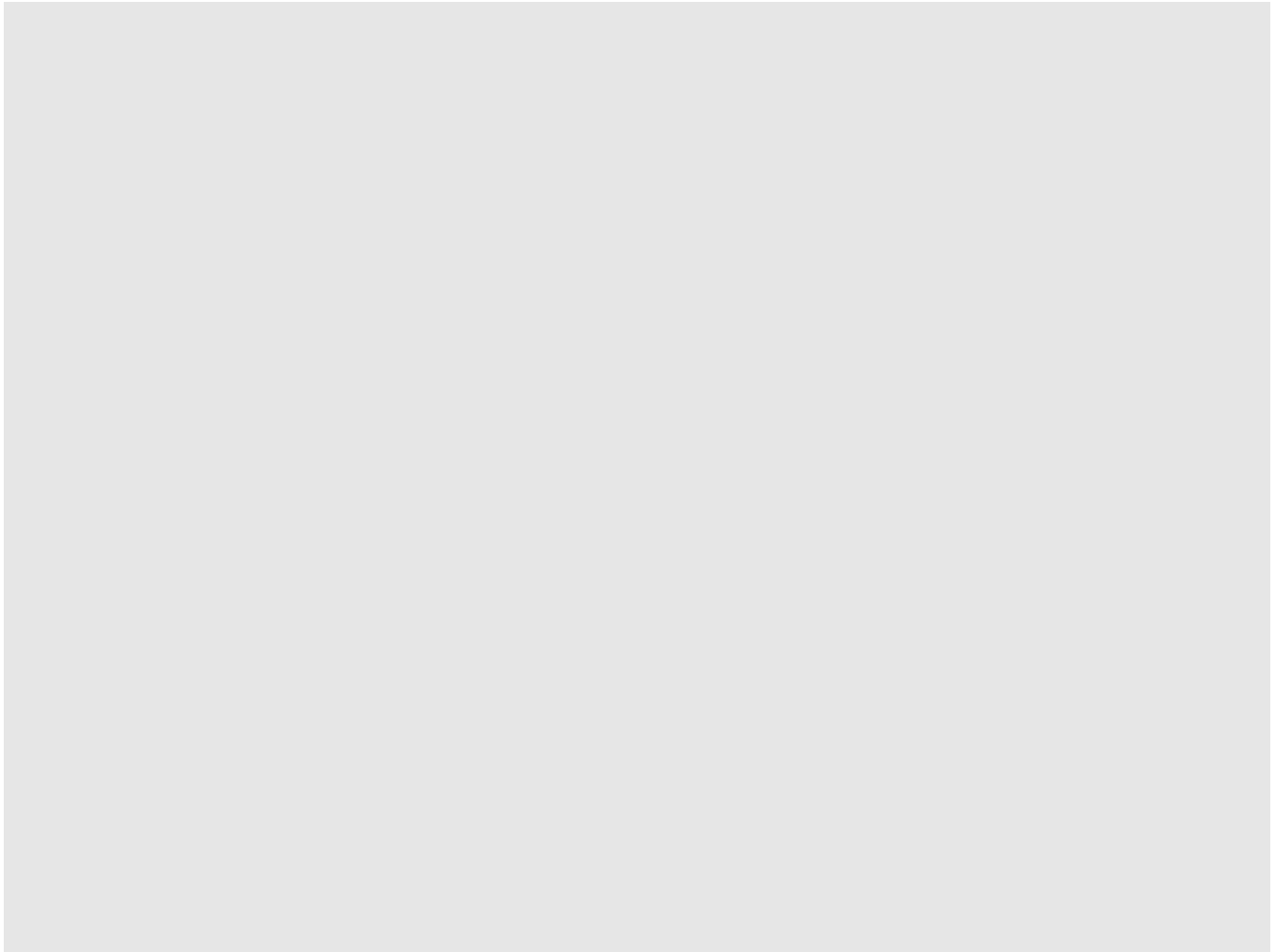




David Heggie shows a room repurposed for exercise equipment at Bryan YMCA in Greensboro, N.C., on Thursday, October 15, 2020.

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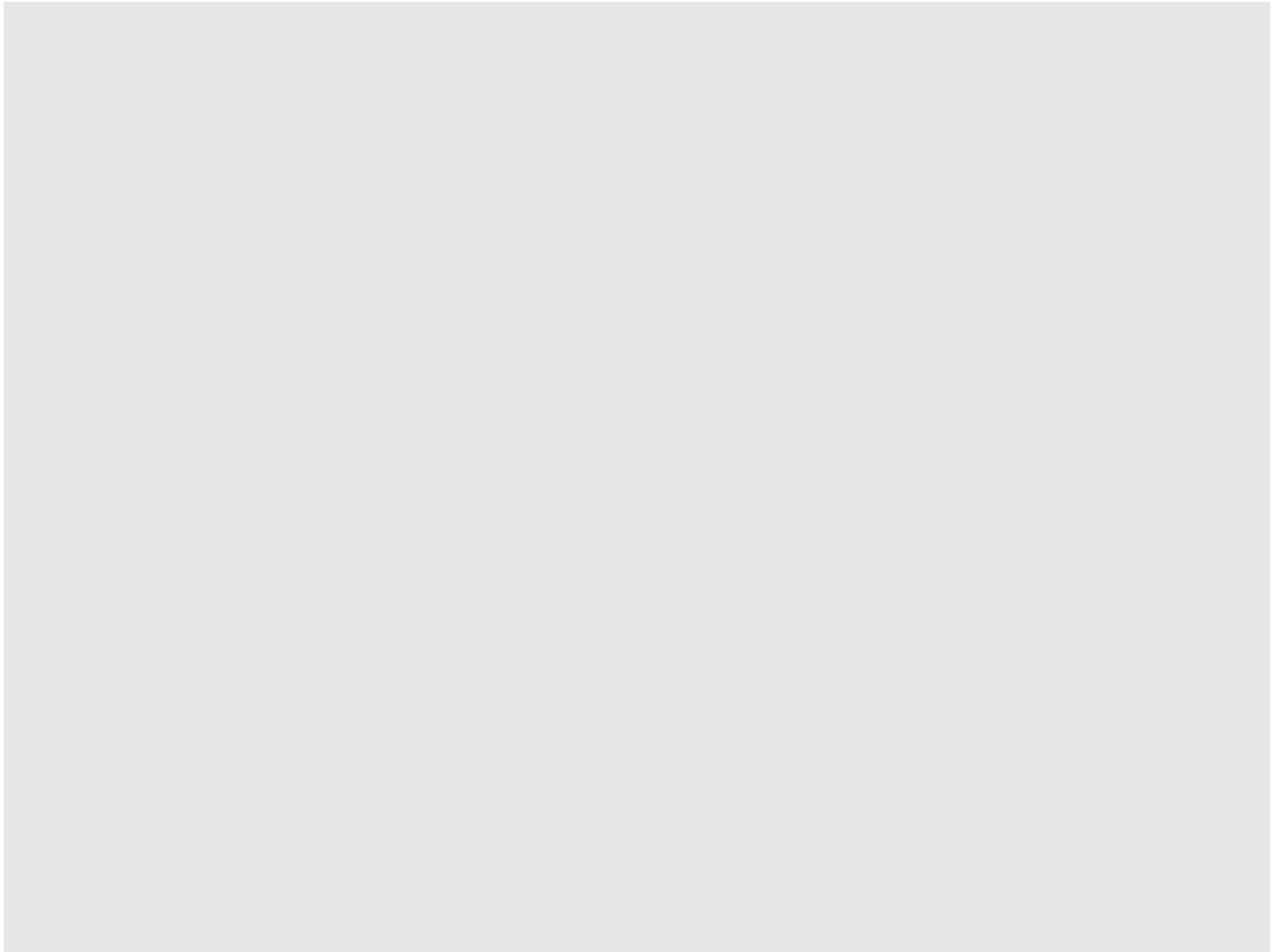
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Julio Lopez holds 5-year-old daughter Francesca Lopez's hand as she navigates a hill in Children's Garden playground at LeBauer Park in Greensboro, N.C., on Thursday, Oct. 8, 2020.

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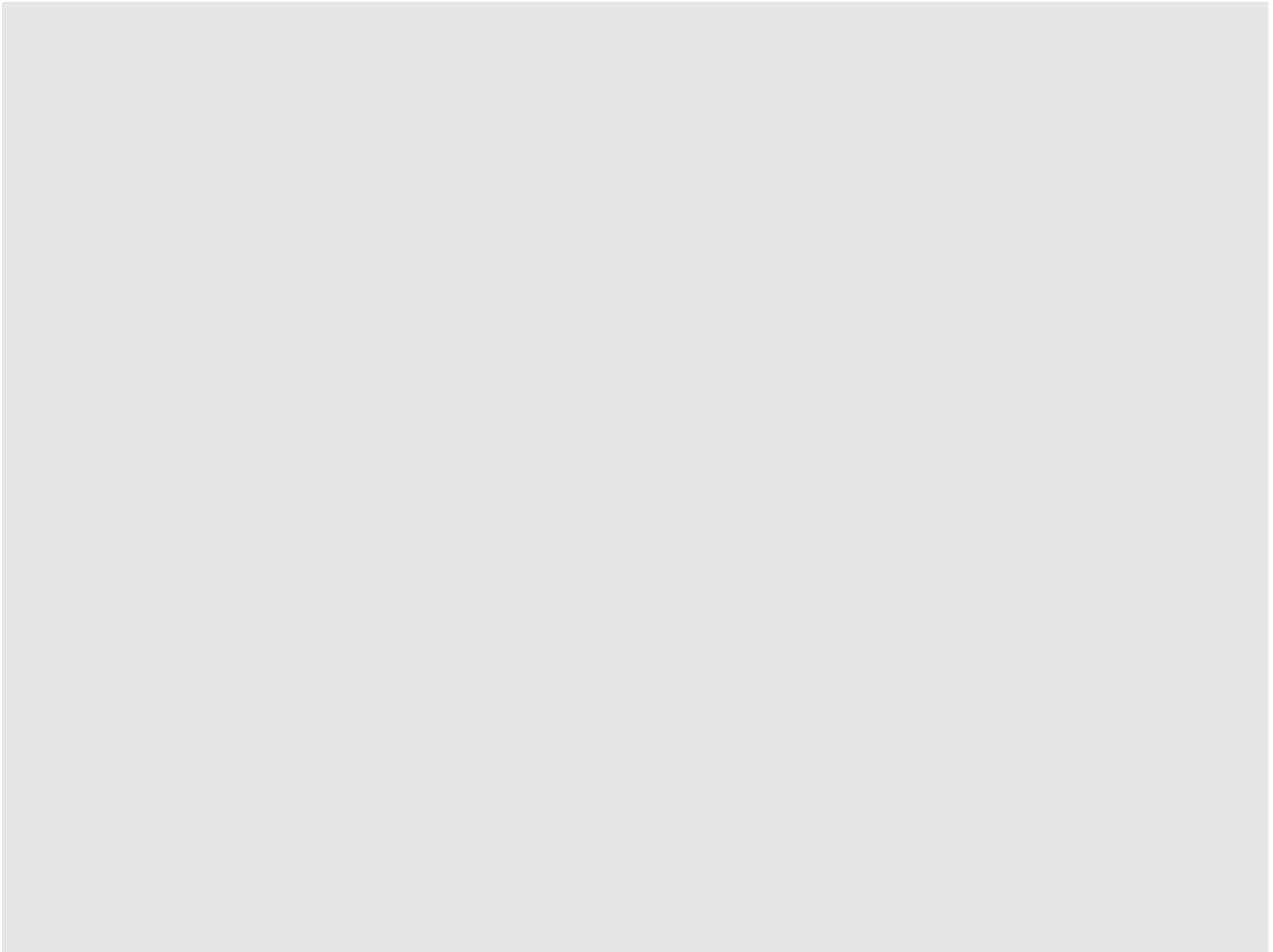
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Kady Doumbia spins nephews Mohamed Sylla, 12, Ousmane Sylla, 9 and Sayid Coulibaly, 4, on a merry-go-round in Children's Garden playground at LeBauer Park in Greensboro, N.C., on Thursday, Oct. 8, 2020.

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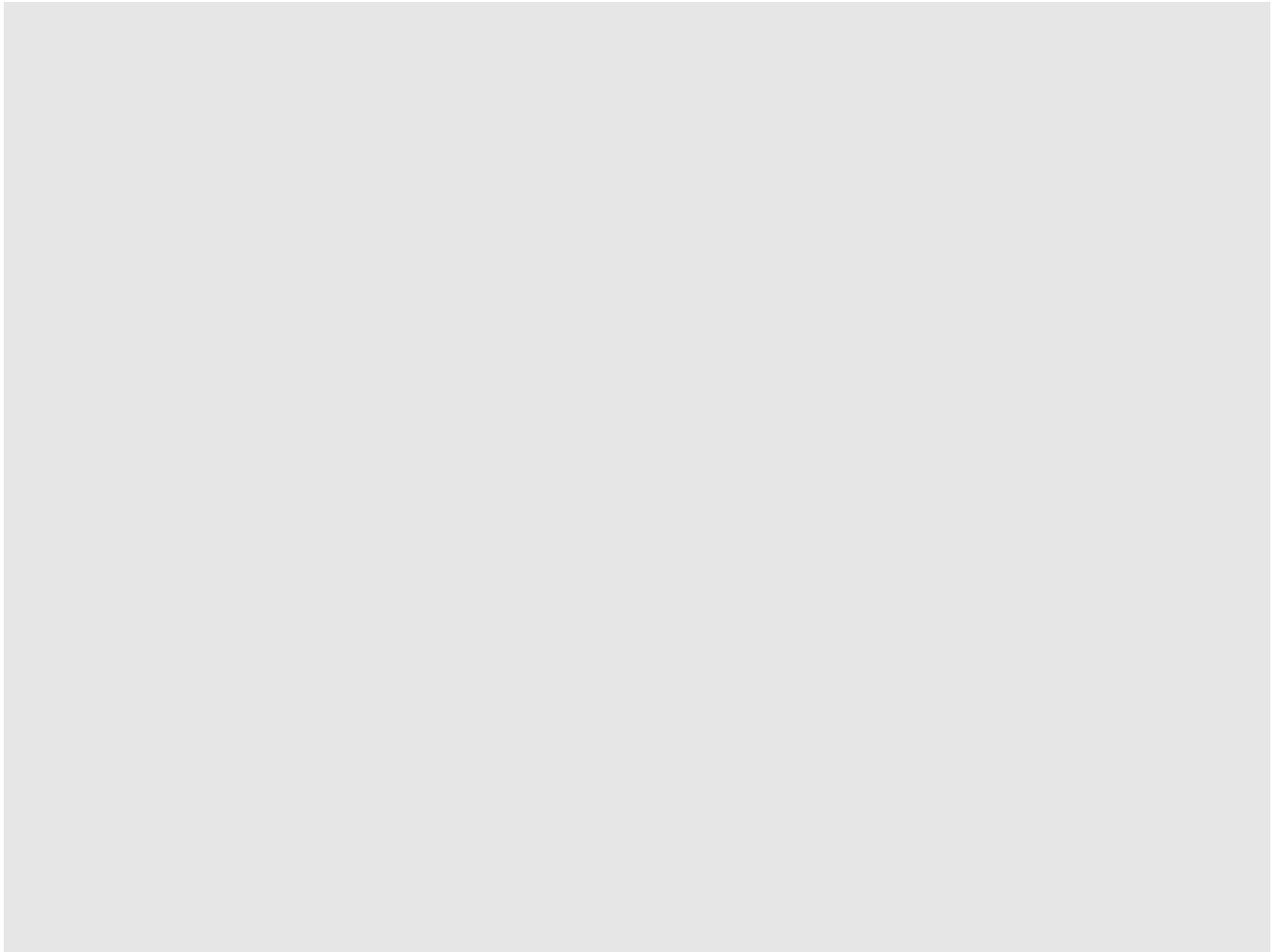


Mari Wilhite, 6, climbs the rock wall in Children's Garden playground at LeBauer Park in Greensboro, N.C., on Thursday, Oct. 8, 2020.

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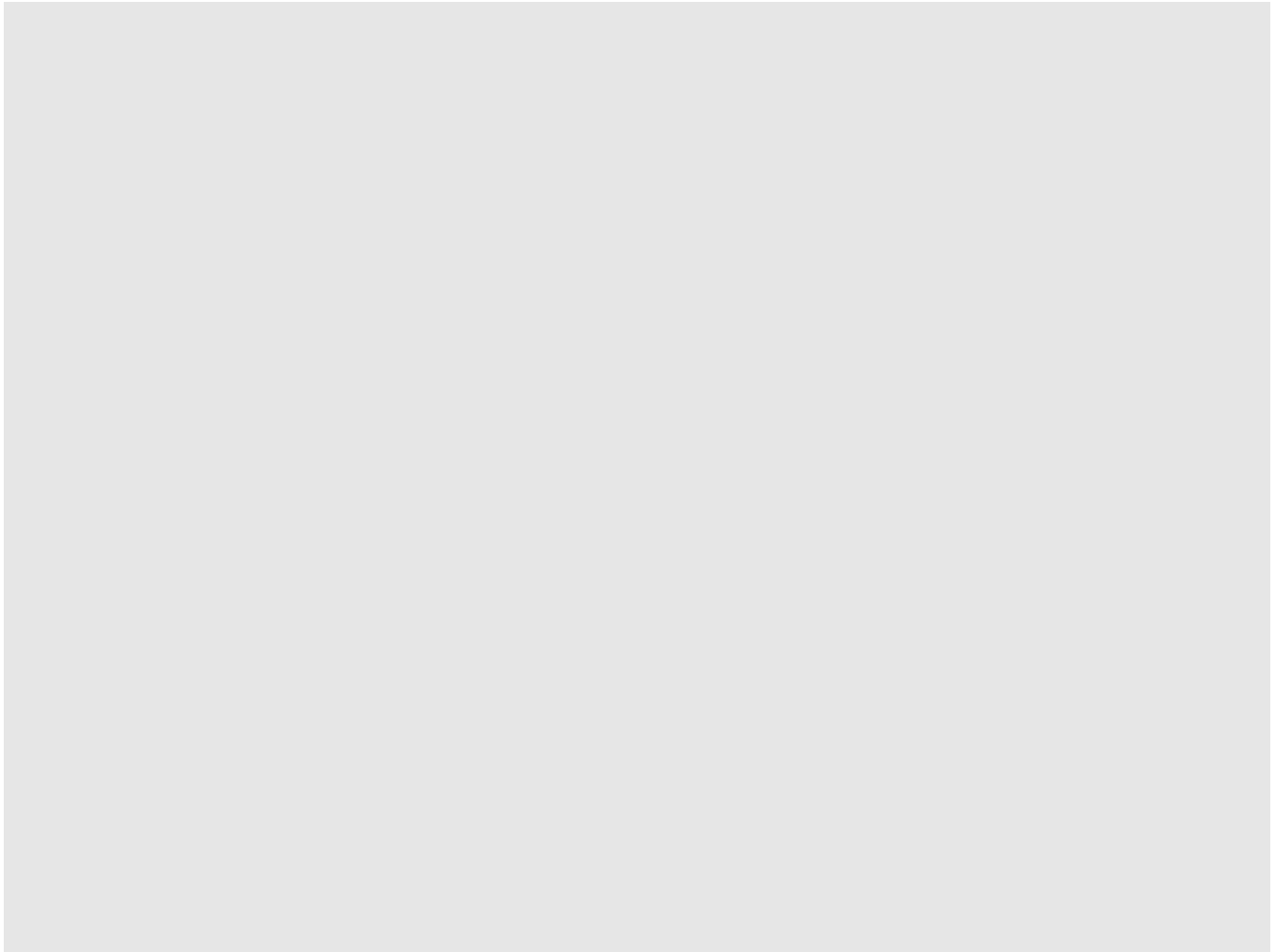




Bowlers compete in the Wednesday night bowling league at Spare Time Entertainment in Greensboro, N.C., on Wednesday, October 7, 2020.

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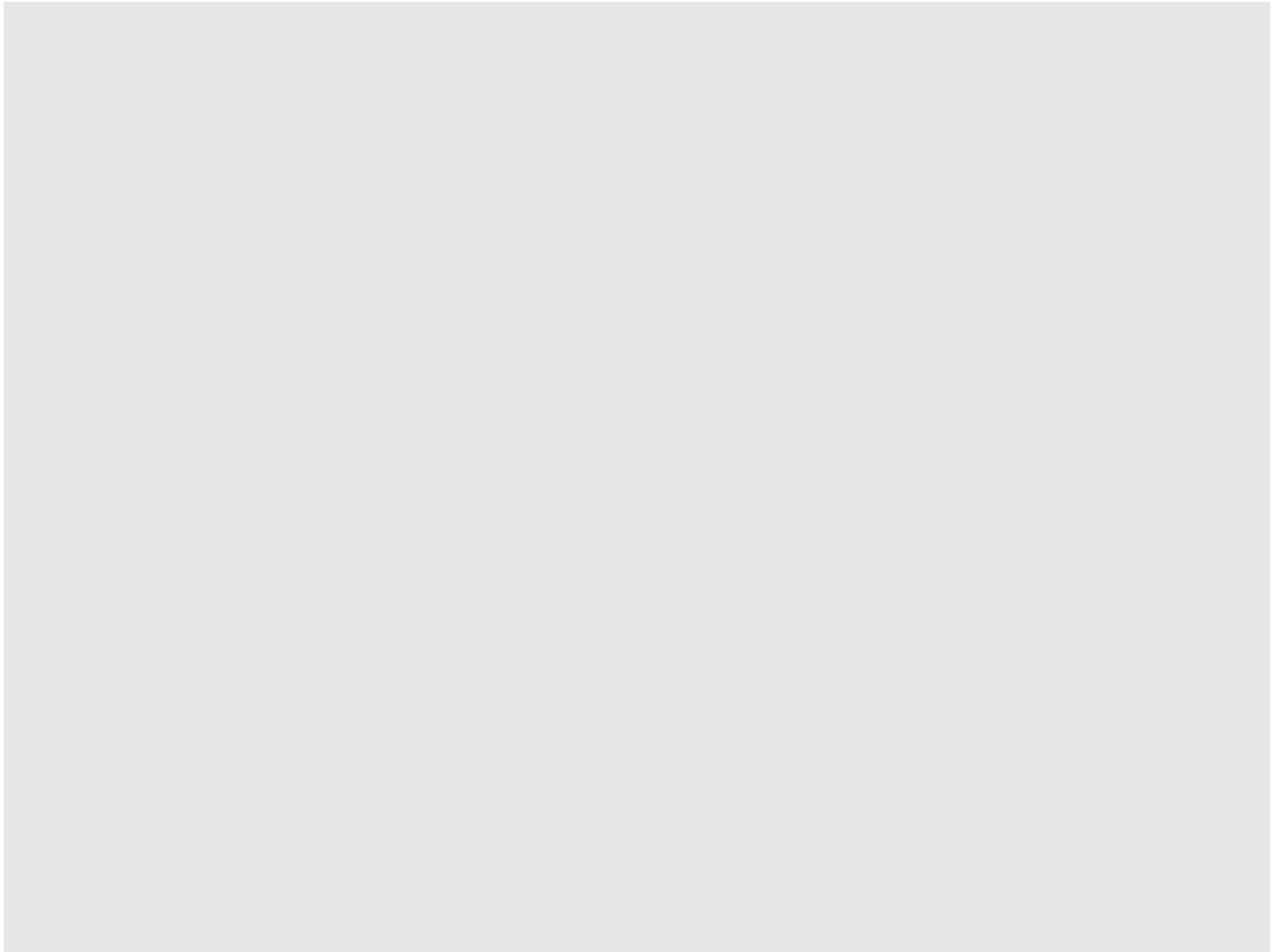
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Ryan Boland and Cindy Simpson have a conversation during the Wednesday night bowling league at Spare Time Entertainment in Greensboro, N.C., on Wednesday, October 7, 2020.

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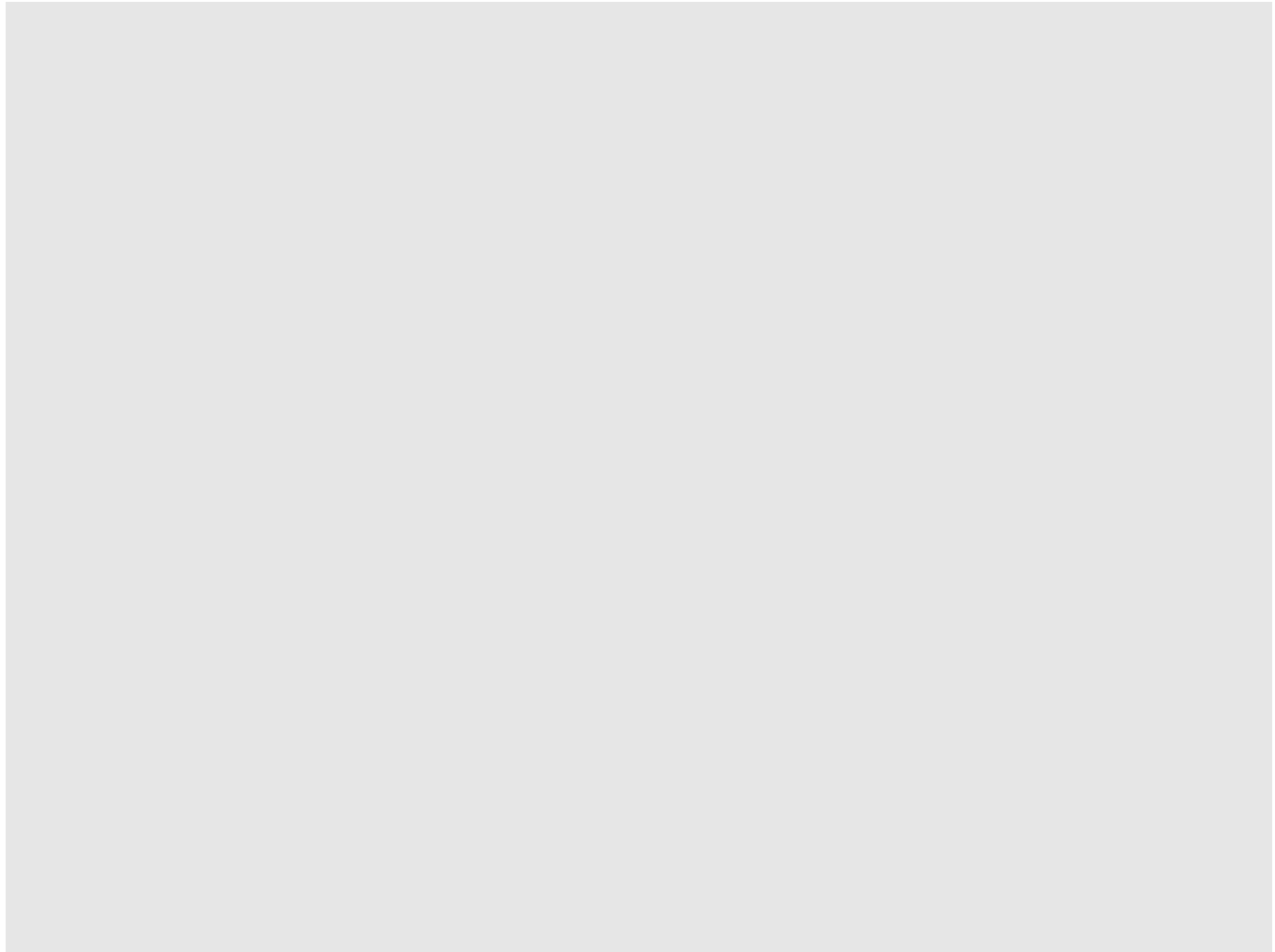
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Ginger Amos reacts to her roll during her game the Wednesday night bowling league at Spare Time Entertainment in Greensboro, N.C., on Wednesday, October 7, 2020.

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Brycen Younkman of the Can't Believe it's Not Gutter team tries to pick up his spare during his game in the Wednesday night bowling league at Spare Time Entertainment in Greensboro, N.C., on Wednesday, October 7, 2020.

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Contact Dawn DeCwikel-Kane at 336-373-5204 and follow @dawndkaneNR on Twitter.

Contact Jamie Biggs at 336-373-4476 and follow @JamieBiggsNR on Twitter.

### Saturday's COVID-19 update

**Number of N.C. cases:** There were 2,102 new cases, bringing the cumulative total to 243,725, according to the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services. There were a total of 38,152 tests completed Friday. Of the tests returned Thursday, 6.6% were positive, according to the latest data available.

**In Guilford County:** State health data shows 71 new cases and no new deaths. That brings the case total to 10,357, with 192 deaths.



**N.C. deaths:** In all, 3,929 state residents have died. That's 19 more than previously reported.

**N.C. hospitalizations:** With 97% of hospitals reporting, 1,140 people were hospitalized Friday because of the coronavirus, according to the latest state data. That's eight fewer than Thursday.

 0 comments

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Dawn Kane

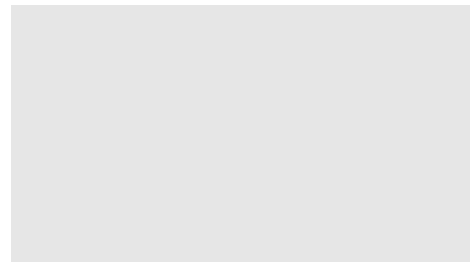
Jamie Biggs

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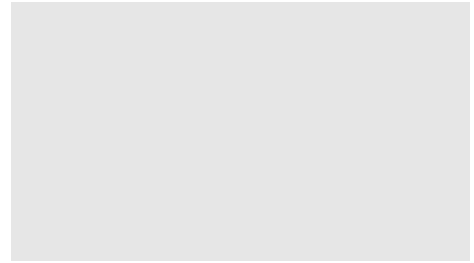
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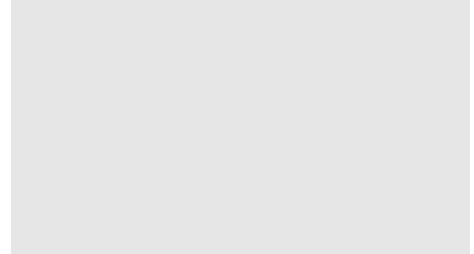
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## **2 staff members test positive for COVID-19 in new outbreak at Greensboro nursing home**

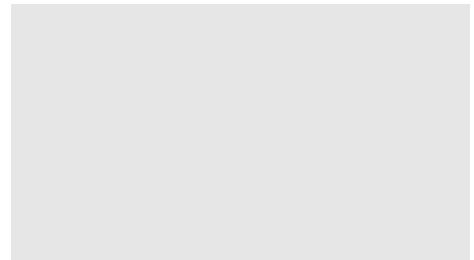
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## **Donald Trump Jr. fires up Kernersville crowd, urges them to make phone calls, encourage others to vote for the president**

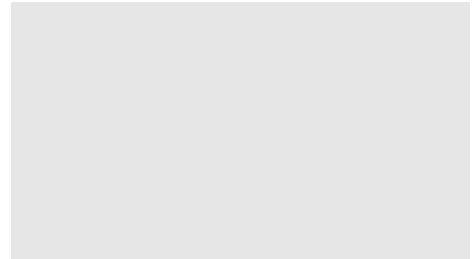
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## **From voter intimidation to COVID-19 concerns, Guilford officials grapple with 2020 election**

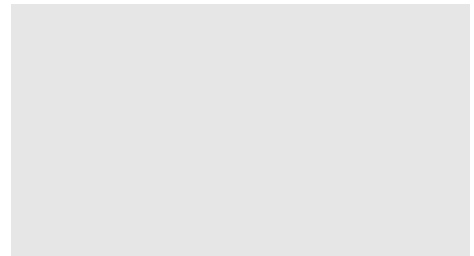
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## **Free face masks and hand sanitizer given away Thursday in High Point**

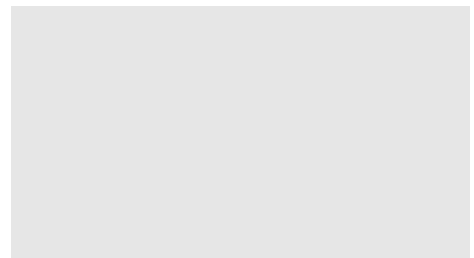
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## **Cone Health Foundation awards \$4.6 million to Greensboro-area nonprofits**

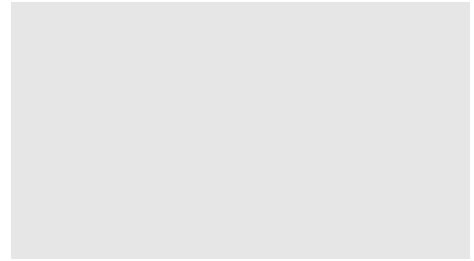
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## Vice President Mike Pence making campaign stop in Greensboro on Tuesday

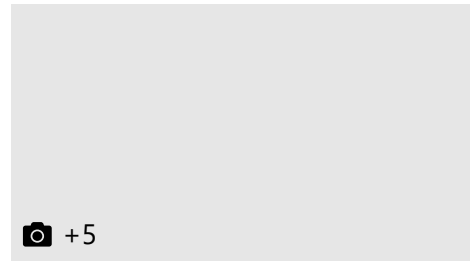
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## UNCG museum studies students take a new look at Greensboro's Magnolia House

Oct 22, 2020



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## Update: Silver Alert canceled for missing Burlington man

Oct 19, 2020

