

or to the event, and shall be provided the reasons for such denial. Notification in writing shall be deemed to have occurred when a letter is delivered in person, by telefacsimile with verification of delivery, by mail with some form of return receipt, or by e-mail with some indication that the message has been read.

VIII- Alternative permit.

(1) The County Judge, in denying an application for a parade or public assembly permit, may authorize the conduct of the parade or public assembly at a date, time, location, or route different from that named by the applicant. An applicant desiring to accept an alternate permit shall, within 5 days after notice of the action by the County Judge, submit a written notice of acceptance with the County Judge.

(2) An alternate parade or public assembly permit shall conform to the requirements of, and shall have the effect of, a parade or public assembly permit issued pursuant to this Ordinance.

IX- Appeal procedure.

(1) Any applicant shall have the right to appeal the denial of a parade or public assembly permit to the Drew County Quorum Court. The denied applicant shall make the appeal within 5 days after receipt of the denial by filing a written notice with the Drew County Clerk. If there are less than 5 days prior to the requested date for the parade or public assembly permit, the applicant shall make the appeal by filing as soon as possible before the scheduled date a written notice with the Drew County Clerk. The Drew County Quorum Court shall act upon the appeal at the next scheduled meeting following receipt of the notice of appeal, provided that if no scheduled meeting, or agenda session, will occur prior to the requested date of the parade or public assembly, the Drew County Quorum Court shall call a special meeting to decide the appeal.

(2) The issue on appeal shall be whether the application meets the criteria set forth in this division for the issuance of a permit for a parade or public assembly. The Drew County Quorum Court shall consider the information provided in the permit application.

(3) In the event the Drew County Quorum Court rejects an applicant's appeal, the applicant may file an immediate request for review with a court of competent jurisdiction. To the extent that a record of the action of the Drew County Quorum Court may be required as part of such an appeal pursuant to a rule of procedure, such record shall consist of a certification by the Drew County Clerk that the appeal was filed on a particular date, was heard by the Drew County Quorum Court on a particular date, and that

the Drew County Quorum Court voted by a specified division of votes to deny the appeal."

For the full text of the ordinance visit mymonticellonews.net.

Gibson also strongly encouraged court members and Perry to contact him with any concerns about the ordinance before the next meeting.

The Court chose to table the ordinance at least until the next regularly scheduled meeting in July.

City Council discusses protest ordinance with full house

By MELISSA ORRELL
editor@monticellonews.net

A packed house with standing room only greeted the City Council during their regularly scheduled meeting Tuesday, June 22, at the Sadie Johnson Center in Jordan Park. Many issues were discussed and updates were given before the Council arrived at the final item on the agenda, a first reading on the ordinance regarding large gatherings which was also introduced at the Quorum Court meeting earlier this month. However, due to the controversy surrounding the ordinance, the Council did not take up the ordinance for a first reading but instead introduced a discussion, asking Monticello Police Chief Jason Akers to address the crowd explaining the safety concerns of the city in reference to protests and large gatherings.

"I am going to ask your permission to amend, we are going to discuss this instead of having the first reading," said Monticello Mayor Paige Chase when introducing the topic of public gatherings. "Chief Akers is on his way to explain the Police Department's perspective on public gatherings."

Akers began by stressing everyone gathered was all on the same page in regards to the right of free speech and to publicly assemble.

"That being said, I need help, and what is happening is the police department is asked to help with protests and parades and we want to," Akers began. "But we need some notice and we need some way of having somebody when there is a parade or rally to communicate to when things go awry."

He continued to explain during the Black Lives Matter protest last year that the Department had several people communicating with them on when to be where but there was no one person for the Department to reach out and talk to.

"I am going to share something with you guys that you may not know about," he said. "We are typically not the problem, when there are people trying to peacefully protest, 99% of those people are not causing any problems.

Same way with the parade, rally or march it's typically not an issue, a lot of times it is outsiders, its not us. It wasn't that day. But the Police Department received information from a concerned citizen that there were going to be some criminal acts occur during the course of that march. We wanted to make sure when a group of our citizens are walking down the street that they are going to be safe when doing that. There is a wall up in front of the Drew County Courthouse that says sacrifice. It has the names of people who died while serving our country and one of the things they died defending was our right to do this right here (gather and protest). We need to make sure that if tomorrow that if Mr. Barton wants to march from the library to the courthouse that he can do that but that he can do that safely."

"We want to make sure that we have enough people to make sure that you can do that safely. I don't care what you are protesting, it doesn't matter to me, it is my job to make sure you can do it freely and safely. It is not to inhibit anybody. I will go out there with you, Mr. Peer and I walked together in that particular march. I'll go tomorrow. If you think about it from the standpoint of protecting someone's right to get up and speak their mind, there is nothing more important than this and we should do everything we can as a law enforcement agency and as a governing body to insure that we can do it safely."

Akers continued to explain that advance notice will help the police department be prepared and have enough officers on duty at the time to protect citizens involved in the public gathering while also continuing the day to day job of the force.

Alderman Clarissa Pace explained the confusion during the Black Lives Matter protest and disagreed with Akers that the protest was unorganized, stating two groups were planning a similar protest and she connected the two groups, stressing the organizers were there and were dressed alike in order to be able to quickly identify the organizers. However, she did state there were some who were not organizers who muddied the waters when it came to who were organizers, acting as if they were the organizers when they were not.

Alderman Cedric Leonard expressed his views on the topic to Akers while also expressing his understanding of the concerns by the police department.

"I understand your concern and everyone's concern when it comes down to safety but we are looking at..." he stated. "For one we are looking at timing. The timing of this the protest was a year after a mother lost her kid. OK. So

now you come up the following week or two and you say 'Now you have to have a permit.' I am not saying a riot, a protest and a parade, they are all assemblies but they are to me it is a different meaning. You tell someone 'you are mad, you are hurt.' Whether it is that particular case or the City Council is stealing money, everyone finds out and they want to protest. You are mad at the City Council but you have to go get a permit. You are telling me when I can get mad or when I can get upset. I think for safety we need permission or permit just for safety because, like you said, we have crazy people out there but to just say you are going to protest, what to protest. You have ten day notice, you have 48 hour notice, you have to get permission."

Akers responded stressing that is what the discussion is about.

"Those are things we can work out," Akers said. "We can discuss that. This comes on the heels of a recent, I guess you can call that a protest, you can also call that maybe a more of a remembrance for Marquis, that is what we are referencing, that is the elephant in the room we are talking about."

"A demand for justice," Leonard corrected.

"There were several folks upset about the courthouse was closed, wouldn't it be good that they can call up and say I want to have this when the courthouse is open? They should have the protest when they want to have it. No one is saying when you can have it, I just need to know when you need us there. If you need police protection or some type of service from the city, let us know, that is all we are asking."

"I don't know why this is even here, but it seems to me we are not going to get anything resolved tonight," Leonard stated. "We can go down this list and say this ain't right, this ain't right, this person wants to talk, this person wants to talk. Seems to me like we need to have, as always, a committee to look into the ordinance before it is even brought up. For one the thing is bad timing, I can't even see a first reading on it, you have rules, guidelines and emotions all in the same time frame."

Akers acknowledged that the timing could seem bad but when looked at from the perspective of people deserving the right to protest safely and have facilities close to them if feasible, the timing is not off.

Chase acknowledged Reverend Darien Buffington, who was in the audience and asked the Council to allow him to speak on the issue.

"As I listened to the Chief speak about the ordinance on the permits and things of that nature, now y'all are aware of George Floyd, Brianna Taylor and things of that nature," began Buffington after thanking the Council for allowing him to speak. "That happened in

that instance. The ordinance is saying you have to have 48 hours notice and that nature so you are telling me that this community has to wait 48 hours and Chief who is going to be responsible for handing out those permits?"

He continued by asking if the community wanted to protest the police would they have to go to the police to get that permit.

The meeting continued with concerns raised about the distrust of the government and police by members of the community. Chase stressed she understood that she did not understand and could never understand what the African American community has been through but that she is listening.

A committee was then formed to go over the ordinance. The committee is made up of Aldermen Clarissa Pace and Cedric Leonard, along with community members Joe Britton, Diana Lewis, Special Sanders, Kimberly Johnson, Darien Buffington, along with Akers, Chase and City Attorney Whit Barton.

Monticello says goodbye to local physician, McKiever

By MELISSA ORRELL
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Longtime resident and doctor to many, William "Randy" McKiever died Thursday, June 24, adding yet another loss to Monticello.

McKiever, the eldest born to W.J. and La Nell Sanderlin McKiever, graduated from Monticello High School before attending and graduating from the University of Arkansas at Monticello in 1977 with a bachelor's degree in biology. After earning his biology degree McKiever attended the University of Medical Sciences where he graduated with an M.D. in 1981 before serving his residency in obstetrics and gynecology at Sacred Heart Health System in Pensacola, Fla. from 1983 through 1986. He then served as an Emergency Room physician at the DeQueen Medical Center before returning to Monticello to open McKiever Clinic in 1986. McKiever spent the next 20 years practicing obstetrics, family medicine and general surgery. During that time McKiever still worked a weekly night shift at Drew Memorial Health System as an Emergency Room attending physician, served on the State Board of Health and was the team physician for the UAM football team. During his time as a doctor, McKiever brought thousands of babies safely into this world. In 2006 McKiever's time as a doctor was cut short by a brain injury.

McKiever's education continued in 2004 as he went on to earn a Doctor of Divinity and Doctor of Philosophy in Human Behavior from Trinity Christian University and enjoyed conducting marriage ceremonies, including his daughter Monica's.

McKiever also enjoyed coaching and coached multiple family members, including his siblings, children and nephews in baseball, basketball and softball.

Funeral services were held Sunday, June 27.

JULY HIGHLIGHTS

Committee meets, discusses public meeting ordinance

By MELISSA ORRELL
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Monticello and Drew County citizens met with the committee formed to discuss an ordinance introduced in June at the Monticello City Council Meeting on public meetings, parades and protests Thursday, July 8, at the Sadie T. Johnson Community Building, 707 US Highway 278 in Monticello.

The committee was formed after outcry from the community regarding the ordinance, which was introduced after a protest was held at the Drew County Courthouse to demand justice in the murder of Wilmar man, Marquis Martin, who was found in a creek in February 2020.

The council chose at the time to reconsider the ordinance and form a committee that would take the public safety and the right to protest and assemble freely in consideration and to see if a compromise could be worked out that would satisfy the concerns of both.

The meeting began with Alderman Clarissa Pace summarizing events that led to the ordinance's introduction at the City Council meeting and the forming of the committee. The committee was initially formed with Pace, Alderman Cedric Leonard, along with community members Joe Britton, Dana Lewis, Special Sanders, Kimberly Johnson, and Darien Buffington, along with Monticello Police Chief Jason Akers, Mayor Paige Chase and City Attorney Whit Barton to advise on legal matters.

At the meeting all were in attendance except for Chase and Britton, along with many local community members attending to have their concerns heard by the committee.

Pace began the meeting with a prayer offered by Buffington before asking Akers to introduce how the ordinance was introduced to the Council.

Akers explained the ordinance was drafted by Barton based on the County introducing an ordinance to the Quorum Court. He went on to state the ordinance was based on Little Rock's ordinance which they have used for years and he believes is a good ordinance before stating it was probably a little out of scale for Monticello's needs and there is a lot in the or-

DISASTER

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moving quickly to help however we can."

While rain has thoroughly soaked most of the state throughout the week, Desha County has possibly seen the worst of it. The Arkansas Agricultural Research Station at Rohwer, located in Desha County, recorded more than 19 inches of rain Tuesday morning, the second-highest rain total ever recorded in Arkansas during a 48-hour period, according to the National Weather Service.

The Arkansas Department of Transportation closed several highways in the region, including roads in Arkansas, Desha, Lincoln, Monroe, Ouachita and Phillips counties.

The rain has flooded crop fields and roads throughout Desha County and threatens to flood neighboring Chicot County as well, as rain continues to fall and bayous and rivers begin to back up.

John David Farabough, Desha County extension agent for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said that after a brief respite Wednesday, the rains returned Thursday.

"As we speak, we're probably getting another two-and-a-half inches," Farabough said.

The county will likely suffer widespread crop damage, if not outright loss, in the wake of the wind, rain and flooding. Farabough said the county's soybean verification plot, part

of the Division of Agriculture's verification program, was under "knee-deep water" as of Thursday morning.

"Just in that area, that farmer who works with the program, he's probably lost 1,600 acres," Farabough said.

Full damage remains to be seen.

He said the full extent of the crop damage remains to be seen and will depend in large part on how long it takes for the standing water to drain off the fields — an increasingly drawn-out prospect, as rivers, creeks and bayous continue to back up. As of Thursday afternoon, the National Weather Service predicted the Mississippi River would crest at 35.5 feet near Greenville. Flood stage is 48 feet.

"In the larger scheme of things, we probably don't have a fraction of a clue how much crop damage there's going to be," Farabough said.

Larry Earnest, director of the Rohwer Research Station, described the rain and flooding's effects on the various research plots as "disheartening."

"The variety testing is kind of iffy," he said. "It's under about two feet of water and some of it just got planted."

In another area, "the soybean bedding is about 80 to 85 percent gone," he said. However, he did have some optimism that if the water drained off quickly, cotton variety plots would be OK, as well as the phosphorous and potassium fertility studies, and some weed work.

Once the water does come off, "It'll be awfully muddy.

When it does settle, the plants will have a tremendous amount of mud on them. A half-inch shower wouldn't hurt," he said.

Draining through Chicot County

Clay Gibson, Chicot County extension staff chair for the Division of Agriculture, said his area had received about 4 inches of rain within two hours Thursday afternoon, with no apparent end to the deluge on the horizon.

"We didn't get what Desha County got," Gibson said. "But it's coming down right now. We're at about 7 inches for this whole rain event, near Lake Chicot.

"The western part of the county has gotten the most rain — it's gotten 8-9 inches. The northern part of the county's gotten about 8 inches."

Gibson said Chicot County will likely see conditions worsen, if not from rain, then from the floodwater likely headed its way.

"There's nowhere for it to go now, is the problem," he said. "Lake Chicot's backed out; Big Bayou, Bayou Mascon, Bayou Bartholomew, the Boeuf River — they're all backing out because we're taking all the water that's in Desha County. It's got to drain through us."

Gov. Hutchinson toured the flood damage in the southeastern area of Arkansas on Friday morning, June 11, with a meeting with community leaders at the Dumas Community Center at 9:30 a.m., a meeting with farmers in Winchester at the cotton gin and a meeting in McGehee.



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dinance that the committee could probably agree on to trim down.

"It has been brought up in the past about parades and it is an issue that the Police Department has to deal with, which is what I am here for," Akers said, "is to relay the concerns of law enforcement and get your input as to how the City wants to proceed, how the community wants us to proceed when we have certain events going on."

He went on to explain that the ordinance had been brought up before with concerns when the City had competing events or interest going on. Such as a candlelight vigil in a parking lot and the parking lot also is used by a business and the business has no where for the customers to park. He also expressed hope that the committee could help accomplish the goal of finding a compromise for public safety and the right to assemble that would also set some guidelines and get everyone on the same page so the community and law enforcement can organize and communicate much more effectively than they have done in the past.

Pace summarized the points telling the committee that they needed to decide if they wanted the ordinance, didn't want the ordinance or to make some type of suggestion to the City Council. She then opened the floor up to concerns from the committee and community.

Buffington began the discussion by asking Akers what had been put into place as far as policies and procedures up to the point that the ordinance was announced and considered.

"That's the thing, there hasn't been," Akers answered. "There is no consistency. If you decide to hold a parade there is a different set of procedures than if say Cedric does it. I say a parade, anything, candle light vigil, or a march. There is no set procedure and that is what we are trying to establish so we can better prepare for the event. Just some parameters, if we are going to have a parade and the parade would be from this

point to this point, so we can know how many intersections we are going to have to cover. Know how many officers we are going to need so the parade doesn't get broken up in it's continuity, know when it is going to end or at least a rough time, so we can go out and make the necessary adjustments."

He gave an example of if an event was happening on the square, who would make sure the businesses on the square were made aware. He stated he would rather assume that responsibility so the Department knows it got done and they have a point of contact.

"Basically just make it to where we are all on the same page and doing it the same every time and setting the same guidelines and rules so each group that wants to have a parade or march, we all do it the same," he stated. "So it's fair that way."

Leonard stated he believed the committee needed to begin by looking at the ordinance and seeing what could be eliminated and said he believed they could begin with parades.

"Right now there is no procedure, I've pulled all the paper work I can find and there is no procedure," he said.

He continued by stating that at this time if you want to have a parade or rent a building it all goes through the Parks department. He stressed that the parades should be simple, fill out an application stating where it is going to start and where it is going to end.

"That will take care of the whole parade issue," he said.

He continued by pointing out the City and Parks department also already has procedures for renting out pavilions at the parks so that shouldn't be an issue since procedures are already there.

Members of the community also had an opportunity to express concerns with Wilmar Mayor Toni Perry expressing her concerns, along with other members of the community, including Marquis Martin's mother, Lakisha Arrington.

During the meeting the committee came to a consensus in order to satisfy the need for public safety and the rights

of the people, Barton will rework the ordinance to make it to where there will be no application, instead the City and Police Department will request anyone wanting to hold a large gathering or parade, notify the Police Department so the Department will have time to prepare for additional coverage if needed in order to protect both the City and those gathering.

The committee will reconvene to review changes before taking the proposal to the City Council.

The County, in their Quorum Court meeting Monday, July 12, decided to not take up the ordinance introduced to them but to instead let the City handle it.

Monticello loses former County Judge, Mayor

By MELISSA ORRELL
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The Drew County community lost another community leader Wednesday, July 14, with the passing of former Drew County Judge and Monticello Mayor Harold West.

West, who served as County Judge for two terms and as Mayor for four terms, also served his community as a member of the Arkansas National Guard. He also served as District 4 Vice-President, first Vice President and then President of the Arkansas Municipal League as well as a member of the Southern Municipal league and the on the Transportation Infrastructure Service Committee.

Lake Monticello was constructed during his tenure as mayor and was named by West, who is remembered fondly by those who knew him.

"We probably wouldn't have a Lake Monticello without Harold," said current Drew County Judge Robert Akin.

West received many honors throughout his lifetime including being named Mayor of the Year in 1999 by the Arkansas Association of Chiefs of Police, the President's Award in 2002 by the Arkansas Department of Human Services and he was admitted into the

Drew Central Hall of Fame for outstanding Citizenship and as an exemplary graduate in 2010. Those who knew him remember him as a man who wanted to help any time he was given the chance.

"During his time as Mayor, Laura Gober and Greg Whitaker wanted to get married, I'm pretty sure it was on a Saturday," remembers Akin. "I had been duck hunting and it was very cold. Harold's dad had frozen pipes and was dressed as if he was going to Alaska. Harold came in the Mayor's office and preformed the ceremony for Laura and Greg on a Saturday while all of us wore out rubber boots and coveralls so the couple could go to a construction job out of state. That was just the kind of man he was."

During his tenure as County Judge, West also came to Akin's aid.

"A friend of mine and I had a job building a fence for Dr. David Denson, it was a pipe fence on Midway Route and we had to weld the pipe," Akin stated. "I was worried we would catch the field on fire

and we did.

"We were putting the fire out with out shirts when Harold drove up in his County Judge Car," Akin remembered with a laugh. "He bailed us out by radioing the fire department. He said he was glad he came along when he did or before long we would have been naked. We always had a laugh when he came to the office."

West had many hobbies that included golf, fishing and woodworking, as well as being a licensed pilot and enjoyed flying his family, friends and business associates to many locations.

Funeral services were held Saturday, July 17, with burial at Oakland Cemetery.

MPD earns State Accreditation

By MELISSA ORRELL
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The Monticello Police Department was recognized Tuesday, July 28, as an accredited agency through the Arkansas Association of Chiefs of Police

Law Enforcement Accreditation Program Committee at the regularly scheduled City Council meeting.

The Arkansas Association of Chiefs of Police started this program back in 2010, writing policies for police departments, according to Gary Sipes, executive director of AACCP.

"Some (departments) didn't have a policy, they didn't have the resources to write policies, they didn't have the ability, so the Chiefs Association took it and started writing policies to assist these agencies," Sipes told the Council when describing the program which costs the agencies nothing to use. "We currently have about 70 policies. So after we did this we decided we wanted to try and make law enforcement agencies across the board professional."

The Association then came up with the accreditation program. According to Sipes, there are about 37 other states across the country that have their own state accreditation like Arkansas does.

"What this means is, Chief Akers and Assistant Chief Gar-

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cia and the others took on the responsibility, looked at their policy and did an internal inventory of their department," he explained.

According to Sipes, the well vetted policies were created with input from the Arkansas Municipal League and they to insure the policies stay up to date, the Association contracted with a firm out of Indiana, who keep the policies up to date on all federal and state statutes.

"They update them for us so therefore they are good pol-

icies," he stated. "What this means for the City of Monticello is that the Chief and the officers of Monticello police department have taken these policies and they have looked at everything. It covers all the critical issues that could get a law enforcement agency in trouble. Some of (the policies) are use of force, police pursuits, evidence and property management and control in investigative operations."

According to Sipes all of those major policies are cov-

ered in the manual.

"I came down to Monticello a few weeks ago and looked at their policy to make sure that they were doing what they were supposed to be doing and they scored a 100," Sipes stated. "It is a very good police department, very impressed with the Chief and his staff. I talked to some of the officers here, you have a great department and I just want to thank Chief and present him with this award."

"The Arkansas Association of Chiefs of Police Law Enforce-

ment Accreditation program hereby acknowledges that the Monticello Police Department has voluntarily complied with the required standards set forth by the Arkansas Law Enforcement Accreditation Program Committee and is hereby recognized as a level 2 accredited police agency," he said. "This is good for three years, now the work really begins. He has to give us proof that he is abiding by this."

Akers credited his officers for all their hardworking while ac-

cepting the award.

AUGUST HIGHLIGHTS

Quorum Court votes to phase out sirens

By MELISSA ORRELL
editor@monticellonews.net

Discussions about weather

radios led to another report on the County's severe weather sirens when Jesse Griffin, Drew County Office of Emergency Management director, announced that two of the County's sirens were no longer operational due to needing two motors replaced at the top of the sirens, a task that OEM is not qualified or able to accomplish, which would add significant cost to the maintenance and repair of the towers, which are already costing the County a

SIRENS

Continued from Page 1

towers to the County began. Griffin held up a booklet that tells how to work the sirens and how to trouble shoot the sirens. There are two people in the County who attended a school to know how to work and maintain the sirens, the rest have had to learn through reading the owner's manual, which is what Griffin has done.

"We are not just sitting here and letting these things fall down," Griffin emphasized, "we are trying to make sure they are all working but it does take some effort."

The sirens, in fact were working earlier this month during the tornado warning and they were all activated, but it took a toll on the sirens and could have proven dangerous if another storm had come through, especially for citizens who rely solely on the sirens for a tornado warning.

"Last week, the storm came through, they all worked they're all great," said Griffin. "The problem we have is when you turn the sirens on, it takes 55 amps to kick it off. Once you kick it on, those four batteries, the charger does not automatically recharge the battery. On the storm the tornado came through, we turned on half of them in the county."

It was at this time that Griffin stressed, the sirens the County has are not automated and the Office of Emergency Management must be in the OEM building watching the news for warning in order to activate the sirens. He continued to explain the sticky situation the County could have been in with the sirens.

"We turned them on," said Griffin of the first wave of bad weather that came through threatening the Northern part of Drew County. "Watching the TV the next storm comes across there. We turned the sirens on on the bottom. Then from there we turned them all on. If another storm would have come in the next day, we have no alert system, we have none because the batteries are not recharged."

"I can't fix what we have done in the past but what I am trying to do is with the communication stuff and the new technology that is out there on your telephone," he continued, "different technology that is there, we can make it come to your phone a lot quicker."

Griffin continued speaking to the Court, explaining that he isn't proposing to let the sirens go without offering alternative options to try and ensure the residents still have a warning system.

"We are trying to make sure

we have you covered," Griffin said. "Now this phasing or getting rid of in 18 to 24 months, we are going to propose some systems along the way to replace what we got now and what the future is going to bring us. With that the company that put these in have sent me a quote. They can come back in and set our sirens back up with A/C and D/C with a battery pack being the back up, you lose power and the batteries kick in but now you are talking about \$225,000."

Justice of the Peace for district 9, Renee Knowles, asked at this time if there were grants out there that would pay for reworking the electrical system.

"The reason I am saying this is because.. personally, the sirens, obviously they are a waste, upkeep and all that," said Knowles, "but I am not sitting here because of my personal feelings about it. I have gotten more messages and more phone calls and more texts in the last tow week than I have even over the trash. There are a lot of people out there concerned because everybody don't have a smart phone."

Griffin said he was not sure but it was something he could look in to.

Another alternative is to switch from Everbridge alerts that work by sending text, pushing an alert out on a cell phone and/or making a phone call to alert the user to a Tornado Warning is a cheaper option that is automated and would be able to alert people with cell phones of warnings wherever they are presently located and not just based on address. They also work for all phones and computers, not just smart phones. Griffin also stressed that if the user is signed up correctly, Everbridge will work on androids, flip phones and computers, but they have to be signed up correctly and just like with the sirens, they may not work 100% of the time.

In an opinion piece written by Channel 7 News' Todd Yakoubian stressed the importance of not depending on one source for a warning after talking about the possibility of false alarms and the unreliability of non-automated sirens.

"It all goes back to having two sources for warnings," he stated in the op-ed arguing against any sirens that were not automated. "You need to have the KATV weather app with notifications set up properly. The sound must be loud enough to wake you up in the middle of the night. Also, I recommend a NOAA weather radio with a battery backup. All warning systems can fail, but having at least two ways to receive warning help keep that to the lowest chance possible. And once again, NEVER RELY ON OUTDOOR WARNING SYSTEMS!"

The emphasis in all caps was Yakoubian's.

Which is another argument used against the systems. Whether a resident can hear the system indoors or not, they are not designed to be a warning system for those indoors, the sirens are, by design, for those out of doors when severe weather strikes.

"The problem we have with the system, we have a comfort zone in Drew County that we have sirens," said Griffin. "We are the only County in Southeast Arkansas that has county wide sirens."

It was at this time that Knowles requested waiting to vote on the resolution and asked if the Court could get some more information on alternatives in the form of grants or alternative ways to fix or maintain the sirens such as changing the configuration of the electrical system.

SaraBeth Wells, a Drew

County resident, also spoke to the court about her concerns about removing the sirens, citing the lack of a TV and only two cell phones in the household as reasons why she felt safer with the sirens and why the County should continue to maintain them despite the costs, sharing her personal experiences.

She explained her mother-in-law has a storm shelter that her family goes to in the case of a tornado and her distrust in technology because of how fast it changes. She told the Court she could hear the sirens inside her home and she uses the siren as her signal to load up the family and head to the tornado shelter during storms.

She also said she does not spend money on new technology because it is obsolete and outdated by the time you purchase it.

It was then decided the resolution would be tabled and the court will make a decision once

more options and research has been brought to them.

Other things discussed during the meeting was a hospital update that included the news Pafford Air Med did not want to wait to construct on hospi-

tal grounds so they now have a helicopter at the airport for air evacs. The company will explore options with Drew Memorial Health Systems at a later date if the company decides to stay in the area.



A big round of thanks, and best wishes too, for a year of good fortune to each one of you!

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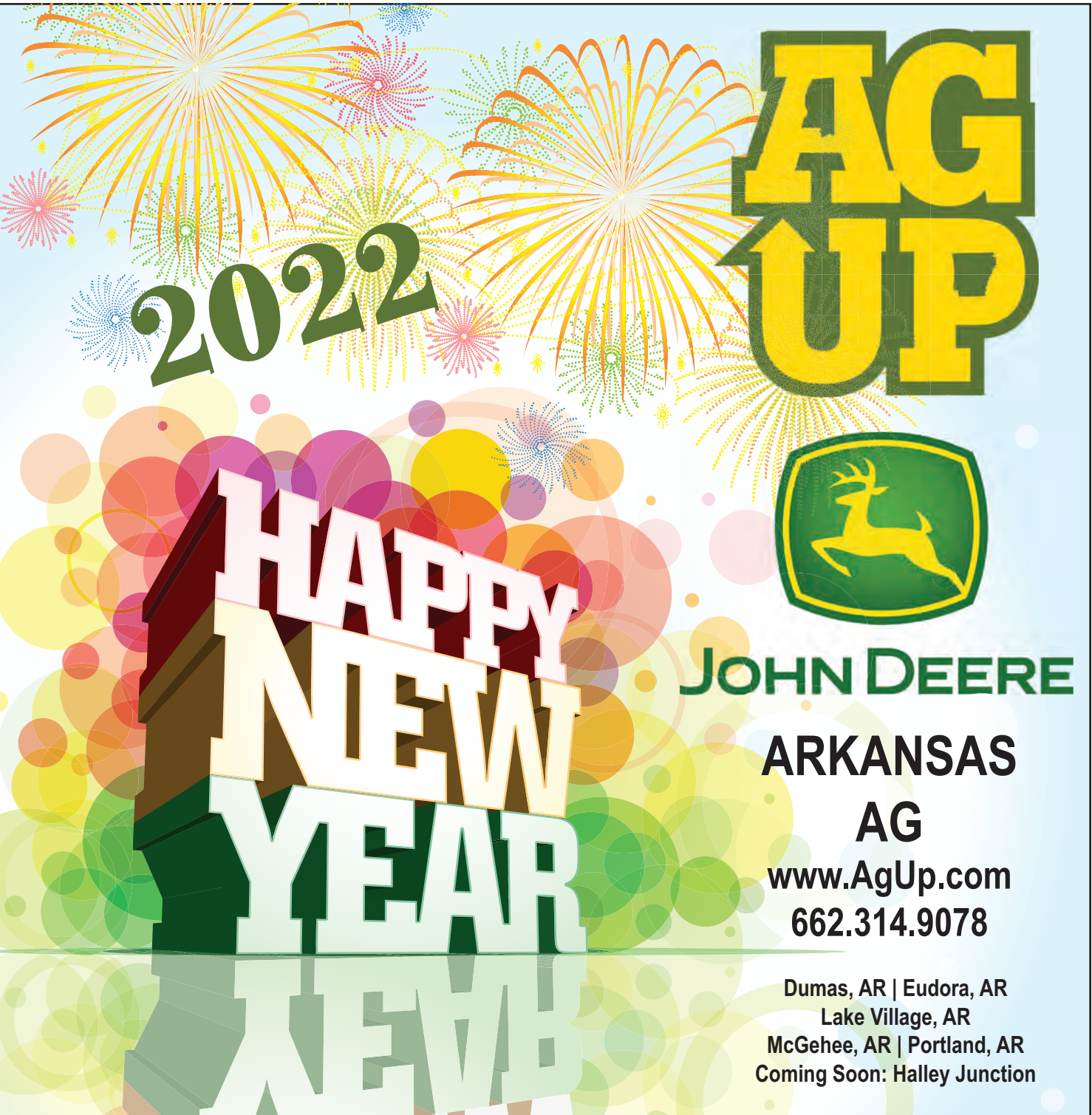
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substantial amount per year. In addition to the two motors that are out, the county now has an additional two towers that need charger replacements. It was during this time that the court voted to phase out the sirens as they go down for repairs. The City of Monticello is currently responsible for towers within the city limits and these will continue to be maintained at the City's expense. This includes the tower located near the hospital and Monticello Schools. Griffin also reported that OEM is working with the University of Arkansas at Monticello to get the University the ability to be able to control their siren, currently they have to contact OEM to have the sirens set off for emergency purposes.

A motion was then made to phase out the tornado sirens with the caveat that those at the hospital and schools will not be phased out.

During the discussion, Griffin also informed the Court that the original emergency radio they had chosen to distribute to those in Drew County who have a trash account is no longer being manufactured, however, he brought another emergency weather radio to show the Court that had the same price tag and was able to be charged by winding it up. The radio also had a flashlight function. The cost of the radios is \$14.95 and can also be purchased at Walmart.

An appropriation ordinance was approved in the amount of \$7,500 to purchase weather radios to be given to County residents with a trash account in the County.

Griffin also addressed the new Hyper Reach emergency alert system for phones that will be operational "next week."

Also during the meeting, the court approved an appropriation ordinance in the amount of \$6,450 to continue to pay for part time help in the County Collector's office. The part time help is still needed and the County Collector's office has the funds to cover the cost.

The County also approved an appropriation ordinance in the amount of \$2,500 that allows the County to use funds from the American Rescue Funds for advertising for COVID-19. The County announced they spent \$599.24 out of the funds to advertise their pop up clinic at the Drew County Fair in the Advance Monticellonian.

During the hospital report to the Court, Scott Barrilleaux, Drew Memorial Health System CEO, reported the health system had a record month in terms of volume and revenue. He stated that even though the report is not finalized yet, the net income total bottom line is almost 2.5 million dollars, owing a lot of that money to the CARES and PPE funding, stating it is very hard for hospitals to make money through revenue right now.

He also reported on labor shortages but stated that recent legislation will give hospitals money to help with recruitment and retention with the requirement that hospital recruit from out of state to avoid competing in the same labor pool and making

DMHS offers Regeneron COVID-19 treatment

By MELISSA ORRELL
editor@mouticellionews.net

Treatments for COVID-19 is few and far between but Drew Memorial Health System is administering one that has been proven effective at slowing the progression of the disease and helps to keep patients out of the hospital from severe infection. Regeneron, the same medication former President Donald Trump received during his bout with COVID-19, is administered in an infusion in a hospital setting and as the numbers of patients receiving the infusion increased, DMHS reserved an area of the hospital to use exclusively for the infusions.

"COVID is a little ball with spikes on it, everyone has seen the pictures, the spikes are what allow it to attach to the cells in your body," explained Brannon Hill, Pharmacy Director, DMHS, about how Regeneron works to keep patients out of the hospital. "They react with the cells and can get in the cells

that way. When it get's into the cells COVID can replicate, multiply, that is how it makes more and everything else it does in the body to try and take over. Regeneron basically covers the spikes. It doesn't let it react with the cells too well. So it slows down the progression of the disease a lot. It is not a cure, it doesn't make you feel 100 percent better the next day. Long term, by slowing down the disease progression it let's you body kind of take over, take control and it keeps you out of the hospital."

While the treatment works well for some, there are qualifications that have to be met to receive the treatment.

"Anybody who has had a positive test result within the last ten days that doctors deem have comorbidities that put them at high risk," said Hill, explaining about who qualifies for the treatments. "So if they go to the physician and they don't necessarily meet the rest of the qualifications but the doctor thinks they are at high risk based on comorbidities, then they can get it with a doctor's order."

"Anybody over roughly 80 pounds that at least has some kind of immunosuppressive therapy going on, chronic kidney disease, BMI greater than 25, diabetes type 1 or type 2," he stated, "or anyone 65 or over, they automatically get the qualifications of getting Regeneron. Fifty-five or older they can have COPD, hypertension or cardiovascular disease. It can also be given to people 12 to 17 years old based on pretty specific categories. So if they have sickle cell, some kind congenital disease, some kind of neuromuscular development disease, or neurodevelopment disease. Asthma, that requires daily medications or anyone that is on medical related technology dependence. Trach dependent, dialysis, anyone that pretty much has all the comorbidities that we see with COVID qualify."

"But it remains that if the doctor deems that can receive it, based on other conditions that put them at high risk, they will qualify," he stated while encouraging anyone who has tested positive to ask their doctor about the treatment. Vaccination status does not matter in terms of receiving the monoclonal antibody treatment. However if you are in the middle of getting vaccinated and haven't received the second dose of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine, you will have to wait at least 90 days after treatment to get your second dose of the vaccine, according to Hill.

There are only a few conditions that will keep a patient from receiving Regeneron, according to Hill. "The only thing that really disqualifies people from being able to get Regeneron is if you go to the ER or to the doctor's office and you require extra oxygen," he said. "So if you aren't normally on oxygen at home and they put you on oxygen or if you are normally on four liters at home and they put you at 6 liters, that disqualifies you."

The disqualifications for these reasons are to protect those who have progressed too far in the disease and the treatment can then make the infection and the patients health worse.

"In the studies when people required extra oxygen or had to be admitted to the hospital they saw that those people generally did worse after Regeneron," Hill explained. "It didn't help them stay out of the hospital, it didn't help them stay healthy, they actually had an increase in mortality so it didn't help anything at all, it actually made things worse. So if you need extra oxygen or you are being hospitalized with severe COVID disease or you are going to be hospitalized for more than 24 hours then it is a no go."

Infusions at DMHS of Regeneron have averaged around six to seven per day, according to Hill, Monday through Friday, who points out the speed at which a person is treated after showing symptoms is important in qualifying for the treatment and for better outcomes.

After seeing their doctor and testing positive for COVID, local doctors then refer the patient to DMHS, who will call the patient to schedule a time for the infusion, which they try to schedule within 24 hours.

"The physician will see

them in the clinic, they'll do the positive test, go through all the symptoms, they will figure out if they meet criteria and then they will send us the order form and then we will call and schedule with the patient, explained Hill. "We usually try to get it within 24 hours, but if we are not able to we have other options we can start. We can start doing subcutaneous therapy. So we can do that if we can't get them in within 24 hours, we can do that at the clinic."

Once the appointment is scheduled the patient goes to the hospital at their scheduled time for the treatment.

"You will come through the ER check in and say you are here for the infusion and your scheduled time," said Hill. "We will come get you and bring you up to where we are going to do (the treatment) and then it is a 20 minute infusion and an hour wait time afterwards."

The one hour wait time is to observe the patient once the infusion is given.

"The only thing we worry about side effect wise is an allergic reaction," Hill said. "It will happen during the time that you are here. We have done over 100 infusions since COVID started and we haven't had a big reaction."

As far as outcomes that the health system has seen, the infusions are working with only a few going on to need hospitalization.

"I don't know the exact number but there are a few (who received the infusion but went on to be hospitalized) but those people had significant comorbidities, they were pretty close to the 10 day mark when we finally got it to them, it was early on, from a nursing home, they were probably around day 8 or 9 and they had a lot of comorbidities going on so they did get admitted after getting it, like the next week, it wasn't because of Regeneron," Hill said. "It is usually when they get it later in the course (of infection) and they already have all these bad things going on. It just doesn't help at that point so the earlier you can get it, the better. So that is why we are really trying to do the 24 hours. If we can't get you in in 24 hours we are going to get you somewhere to get the subcutaneous. That way we can get (Regeneron) in 1 or 2 days of being positive."

There are some risks that come along with Regeneron like all medications or treatments.

"We haven't had any side effects reported. It is monoclonal antibody with means it is proteins that are developed in a lab," said Hill. "So that is the reason we worry about the allergic reaction but you can also have a thing called an infusion reaction. Which means you get nausea, headache, flu like symptoms for a little bit but usually when you stop the infusion it goes away or you can give them steroids. That is more of an immediate thing, there is no big longterm side effects. You can always have the fever, aches, chills, nausea, diarrhea with any medicine. We will know if the infusion reaction happens or if an allergic reaction happens. If you are going to have any reactions it is going to happen while it's running or 15 to 20 minutes after."

Hill encourages people not to wait too long to be tested since the window of time is from time of symptoms, not time of test. "Honestly if you wait until day 8 or 9 to get tested but you have had symptoms for 2 weeks, it doesn't matter when you are positive, it matters when your symptoms started to help or not," he explained. "So just because you took a test yesterday and you are positive but you had symptoms starting 12 days ago, it isn't going to help. The earlier you can get it the better."

With no cost associated with the drug to the patient, Hill encourages anyone who tests positive to speak to their doctor and see if they qualify for the treatment. "I would encourage everyone, if you have symptoms, get tested, talk to your doctor about Regeneron, all of our (doctors) love to order it, they like it," stated Hill. "It does keep people out of the hospital if you get it early enough. Don't be afraid to ask your doctor if you see COVID positive to test if you qualify for it. It does help and it's free right now. It's main goal is to free beds up. We are

not trying to cure you, we are trying to keep you out of the hospital. That's what it does."

Hill also said the hospital is giving Moderna and Pfizer vaccines anytime Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Go to the front desk at the Main Entrance and tell staff you are there for a vaccine and whether or not it is your first or second dose.

Monticello City Council meets, discusses projects

By MELISSA ORRELL
editor@mouticellionews.net

While the levee may appear to be finished, it is not and the City of Monticello is asking for everyone to stay off the levee until the project is completed.

During the regularly scheduled finance meeting, Mayor Paige Chase announced that while the repair of the levee has been completed, the levee is not complete with some finishing touches still needing to be completed before the levee is driven on and used. In addition to the finishing touches on the levee, the City is also working to get a road built for Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. Once the road is completed, AGFC will be able to complete their projects and then the task of waiting really begins. Waiting for the lake to fill back up.

The Monticello Lake bike trail is also seeing some progress with the first phase already funded through grants. Dr. Doug Osbourne, who has been one of the driving forces behind the project and the grant writer, relayed to the council that he has been advised to go ahead and apply for another grant for the second phase of the trail, explaining that unlike academia grants that he is used to writing, ArDoT plans for and funds grants ahead of ground breaking.

Osbourne informed the Council, during the City Council meeting following the finance committee meeting that the trail still has \$40,000 in unmatched donation money. He requested permission from the council to apply for a grant to go toward the second phase of the trail so the \$40,000 will not be wasted. Phase 2 will cost approximately \$347,000, with a 20% match the city would only be \$29,000 short of the \$69,000 needed to match the full amount. According to Osborne the grant application has already been completed and he just needed a resolution from the City in order to turn in the application.

He received permission from the council to apply for the second phase grant which will add seven miles of trail once it is completed.

The City is also waiting on permitting from Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality to move ahead with the sludge removal for the east sewer pond and can not move forward with the project until the permit is acquired.

The sidewalk project, which will construct a sidewalk on the east side of U.S. Highway 425 from U.S. Highway 278 to Old Warren Road and the second phase of the project which involves construction of a sidewalk from the Library to Jordan Park, is still in the planning phases and

are awaiting grant money for the projects.

The City is also still in a holding pattern on the Old Post Office Exterior Masonry repair, they are currently still waiting on Entergy to schedule with the electrician to complete the job. Entergy and the electrician will have to work together to move the power lines from between the building to bury the lines between the post office and City Hall.

Following the finance meeting, the regularly scheduled August City Council meeting got underway with a report that the Public Works department had repaired a total of 26 water leaks this month, with 16 of the leaks involving a water main.

Monticello Police Chief Jason Akers also gave a report to the council that compared two years worth of statistics.

It showed the Monticello Police Department on average serves 40 court papers a month. The statistics also show a decrease in vehicle accidents dropping from 62 a month at its peak by 44%. While the MPD can control the amount of patrolling and enforcement of traffic laws to help reduce accidents, Akers pointed out that the accidents counted included private property, such as parking lots, which the MPD can not control. However, the high visible police presence as well as enforcement of traffic laws has helped to lower the number of accidents. According to Akers, residents have noticed and have contacted him about the increased visibility of the police department.

"We have received a great response from our community saying 'Hey, thank you for slowing traffic down,'" he said.

Domestic abuse, which is a serious problem in society, has also seen a 70% decrease from the high of 20 a month. Akers attributes more effective communication with the courts and effective communication with the prosecution for the reduction. He also pointed out that when felony arrests go up, domestic violence cases go down.

"As felony arrests go up which is aggressive proactive law enforcement that is not just waiting for things to happen...you see what the chart clearly shows with our domestics," he pointed out. "When there is a spike in arrests, there is a decrease in domestic incidents and calls to domestic disturbances."

"Domestic disturbances are one of the biggest problems our society faces, it is when children are impacted the most, when children get post traumatic stress disorder, they have their interaction with law enforcement, whether positive or negative, that is a big deal. When you see this and you see that our proactive policing nets us 20 to 25 felony arrests a month, then it can consistently reduce the domestic violence that comes with crime. They definitely correlate between the two."

The MPD has on average 1206 calls for service a month over the last two years.

However, COVID did impact the number of calls the MPD received, as well as affected the fine intake of the department.

Citations have also gone up with Akers again receiving positive responses from the community.

Felony arrests have

jumped from 5 a month to 48 a month over the past two years, with Akers attributing that not to a rise in crime but to aggressive pursuit by the police department.

The City also approved a resolution declaring 848 North Rose Street a nuisance and giving the owner 30 days to remove or repair a structure and clean up the lot or the City will do it for them, at which time a lien will be put on the property to cover costs associated with the clean up. The Council also approved a lien on 889 Maria Place in the amount of \$250.34 to cover clean up cost after the owner failed to take corrective action within the given time after the property was declared a nuisance.

The City also approved a contract between the City and Area on Aging of Southeast Arkansas, Inc. The contract is the same contract the City signs every year and allows Area Agency of Aging to help Monticello financially support the Senior Center.

SEPTEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

Meet Monticello's newest doctor

By MELISSA ORRELL
editor@mouticellionews.net

Practicing medicine wasn't what Dr. Blayne Beene, DO, dreamed of doing while he was growing up in Marianna, Ark. It wasn't until he spent time studying diseases in soybeans that he realized while he liked to work on a farm doing physical labor, he did not like being in a lab studying soybeans.

"I didn't necessarily grow up wanting to be a doctor like a lot of the people I went to school with," Beene revealed. "A lot of them knew when they were kids they wanted to be a doctor."

Despite growing up with Dr. Don Ball, former Mainline Health Systems, Inc. clinical director, as a mentor and his childhood best friend's dad, Beene didn't consider med school until he was already in college.

After graduating High School from Lee Academy in Marinanna, Beene began his college Career at Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, earning a bachelor's degree in Biology. It was during this time he studied the soybeans.

"When I went to college I thought well, I'll get a degree in biology," he said. "I grew up on a farm, so a degree in biology I will either do agriculture or maybe medicine. I was leaning more toward agriculture."

After deciding agriculture wasn't right for him, Beene then traveled with his best friend, William Ball to Mississippi where the two completed a Master's program in biomedical science. The program, according to Beene was basically the same classes a student would take their first year of medical school and allowed the students to see if they would be interested in the medical field. Beene was.

"I did (the master's program) and halfway through I thought, 'I can do it, why not,'" he explained.

After finishing his master's program at William Carrey

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University, Beene began medical school and completed his fourth year on rotation at a family clinic in Greenville.

During this time, his mentor, Dr. Ball began talking to him about Mainline. Ball, who died in 2018 was with Beene every step of the way, encouraging him in his path to medicine. He also put Beene's white coat on him during his white coat ceremony.

During this time, Ball was already speaking to Mainline Health Systems, Inc. CEO Allan Nichols about Beene coming to Monticello and the Mainline.

"Dr Ball and I were very close and he spent a lot of time letting me know that his son and his son's best friend were going to be doctors one day," said Nichols. "He worked on that pretty hard for a long time."

Beene for his part was sold on Mainline and signed a contract to practice in the Monticello clinic before graduating.

"We are very excited for Blayne to be here and we have been thinking about Blayne before he ever thought about us through Dr. Ball," Nichols continued. "He committed very early to come here. He is one of us. He is a south Arkansas young man and so he is one of us. He experienced the things we have experienced through life so he is going to be able to relate to his patients. He is super bright and ready to make a difference. We are super excited and invest whatever we need to invest in him so he can be successful."

Beene, who had visited Monticello with his girlfriend before committing to Mainline, enjoys hunting and playing golf, but says he will miss the food available in a big city like Tupelo.

Beene began seeing patients Monday, Aug 30. To schedule an appointment with Beene, call Mainline at 870-367-6246. Mainline is open Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Fridays from 8 a.m. to noon.

Former UAM chancellor passes

By **EMBER DAVIS**
University of Arkansas at Monticello

Dr. Fred J. Taylor, former chancellor of the University of Arkansas at Monticello, passed away Aug. 27, 2021 in Little Rock. Dr. Taylor served as chancellor from 1977 until 2004 and was the longest-serving chief executive in UAM's history. Before he came to UAM, he worked for the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and the UA System in various administrative roles. During his 27 years at the helm of UAM, the university saw enormous growth in enrollment, program offerings, and capital projects. The academic accomplishments of students were always a particular point of pride Taylor. He once said of UAM students, "It's not where they came from, but what they've been able to achieve that validates the role and mission of the university."

His unwavering com-

mitment to providing all students access to higher education remained front and center. He believed that UAM always represented opportunity. Dr. Taylor and his wife Janice were also lifelong advocates of the arts throughout the state and, especially, in southeast Arkansas.

During Dr. Taylor's tenure, UAM created the first master's degree and earned specialized accreditation for programs in forestry, teacher education, music, and nursing. Taylor was instrumental in the creation of the UAM Foundation Fund, as well as the completion of many significant capital building projects. These included the Gibson University Center, the Agricultural Research and Extension Center, and the Fred J. Taylor Library and Technology Center. He also facilitated the mergers of Great Rivers Technical Institute and Forest Echoes Technical Institute with UAM to create the UAM College of Technology at McGehee and the UAM College of Technology at Crossett. The result was a comprehensive system of post-secondary education in Southeast Arkansas.

Upon announcing his retirement, Taylor reflected upon his time at UAM. "A university is the most exciting place a person can spend a career and a lifetime," he said. That excitement was sincere, and lifelong. Dr. and Mrs. Taylor remained connected to the university even after leaving Monticello, through supporting student scholarships at the institution they once called home.

A day of remembrance; 911 ceremony held

By **MELISSA ORRELL**
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"Today, Friday, Sept. 10, 2021 we join with hundreds of other communities and tribes across our State and America who are participating in the First Annual 9/11 Flag of Honor across America Memorial. We are here to remember the 20th Anniversary of Sept. 11, 2001, and to honor the thousands of men, women and children who perished in the two World Trade Center towers, the Pentagon, United flights 175 and 93, and American Airlines flights 11 and 77," said Leanne Birch, Former State Representative and Brigadier General retired, to a crowd on the Monticello Square who had gathered to remember the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. "Today we raise the flag of the United States of America, the Arkansas State flag, and the 9/11 Flag of Honor."

The Flag of Honor was designed by John Michelotti in honor of the victims.

"On September 11, 2001, my concept of what is normal was changed forever," writes John Michelotti, who designed the Flag of Honor in remembrance of the victims of 9-11. "I watched helplessly as thousands of lives were extinguished and the Towers evaporated into dust. Like most Americans I watched it played over and over praying

the outcome would somehow miraculously change. It didn't."

The flag which features the stars and blue background of the United States flag, creates the stripes of the flag with the names of the 2,983 women, men and children who lost their lives in the World Trade Center Towers, the Pentagon, United Flights 173 and 93, American flights 11 and 77, and the six people who were killed on Feb. 26, 1993, while the Flag of Heroes memorializes the emergency services personnel who gave their lives so others could live.

The inspiration for designing both flags was Michelotti's desire to immortalize the individual victims that were killed in the terrorist attacks of 9/11, give comfort to the families left behind knowing their loved one will be forever honored and remembered and to create an enduring symbol recognized by the world of the human sacrifice that occurred on Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2001.

Saturday, Sept. 11, 2021 marked the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on America and the citizens of Drew County took part on Friday, Sept. 10 in the First Annual 9/11 Flag of Honor Across America Memorial where 100 communities and tribes across the United States paused to remember those lost on 9/11.

Americorps and EngageAR took the lead in the event with volunteers across the community joining in including Former State Representative and Brigadier General Leanne Burch (Ret.), Monticello Mayor Paige Chase, Monticello Police Department, Drew County Sheriff's Office, Monticello Fire Department, University of Arkansas at Monticello's VISTA, SEEM, Veteran of Foreign Wars Post #4515, American Legion Post #2, Palliative Community Services, Boy Scout Troop 67 and many others.

The Monticello Fire Department displayed a flag hanging from a Fire truck and Boy Scout Troop 67 presented the United States Flag, Arkansas Flag and Flag of Honor during the ceremony while Monticello citizens read 50 names of victims followed by 7 names of victims from Arkansas.

While Monticello read their list of 50 names, communities across America joined in with all the victims names being read.

Following the ceremony, Hospice Home Care sponsored a Heroes cookout where the delivered and gave out approximately 300 meals to the Sheriff's Offices, Police Departments, EMS and Fire personnel in five counties (Ashley, Bradley, Chicot, Desha and Drew) while also serving local veterans.

Protest causes change in policy at Courthouse

By **MELISSA ORRELL**
editor@monticellonews.net

A protest in honor of Marquis Martin, Friday, Sept. 17, demanding that Drew County Sheriff Mark Gober

for an easily accessible but secure location for the kiosk. Veasey sees this as an additional way to reach veterans, especially those who do not know about the Veteran Service Officer located at the Drew County Courthouse who works to help veterans navigate their benefits.

Those interested in more information about the VFW or the VFW Auxiliary may contact Veasey at 870-723-4993.



Melissa Orrell/Advance Monticellonian

Maddison Stewart plays taps during the First Annual 9/11 Flag of Honor Across America Memorial in the Monticello Square while participants of the memorial stood silent in remembrance of those who lost their lives 20 years ago during the terrorist attacks.

recuse himself from Martin's death investigation caused concern, a heated debate at the Quorum Court regularly scheduled monthly meeting and a change in policy.

"Last Friday, Sept. 17 2021, I personally witnessed about a dozen people gathered around near the front east door of the Drew County Courthouse and on the steps and paved drive leading up to (the) door of the Courthouse which is the only public access to the courthouse," Akin stated in his order. "Those people purported to carry on a protest or demonstration, and in the process obstructed the public's access to the Courthouse and its several offices, and used loud and abusive profanity that was broadcast and amplified by megaphone that one of these people had. These actions amounted to an attack on the Drew County Courthouse, and caused many County employees and others in the Courthouse to fear for their personal safety, and interrupted their ability to concentrate on doing their jobs for the People of Drew County."

Lakeisha Arrington, mother of Martin and one of the protesters disagrees, stating the group never blocked the Courthouse entrance, and didn't intimidate anyone who visited the Courthouse that day and emphasized the suspicion within parts of the community about the investigation and again asking Gober to recuse himself from the case.

In a letter written to Drew County Judge Robert Akin and shared with the Court, County Attorney Cliff Gibson outlined some of his concerns about the protests and his advice on how to move forward.

"As you know this is the second such protest/demonstration involving some of the

same persons," said Gibson in the letter. "Since there is no ordinance regulating protests/demonstrations such as this, there is no requirement that advance notice of same be given to law enforcement about the holding of a protest/ demonstration. That said, there are state laws that regulate the conduct of people participating in a protest/demonstration. I will list some that come to mind relative to the most recent protest/demonstration."

Due to the protesters standing on or near the steps of the building while chanting with a bull horn and using obscenities, Gibson believes Ark. Code Ann 5-54-102(a)(1) would apply. The code states a person has committed obstruction of government operations if the person knowingly obstructs, impairs or hinders performance of any governmental functions. He also believes Arkansas Code 17-24-505(b)(2) would also apply which sates the use of obscene or profane language is a violation of State law, as well as Arkansas Code 5-71-207 which states a person commits disorderly conduct if the person causes a public inconvenience, annoyance or alarm by making unreasonable noise, obstructs vehicular or pedestrian traffic. Gibson also provided Arkansas Codes for harassment and causing public alarm as well as others.

In his letter he further stated he believed the County should coordinate with the Sheriff to arrange for a rapid-response team of law enforcement officers so any criminal conduct by participants in a protest or demonstration may be promptly addressed. He also suggested Akin issue an executive order directing any and all protest/demonstrations at the

Courthouse be conducted only on the adjacent to the Courthouse.

And that is exactly what Akin did, stating that while he is a firm believer in the American right to protest, it cannot obstruct and interfere with governmental operations that are conducted at the Courthouse.

"Pursuant to my authority as Drew County Judge to have custody and control of County property....I hereby direct and order...anyone desiring to conduct a protest or demonstration on any part of the premises of the Drew County Courthouse and Detention facility complex hall due so only on the large lawn situated in front (on the east side) of the Drew County Detention facility and no protest or demonstration shall be conducted on any other part of the premises of the Drew County Courthouse and Detention Facility complex," the executive order stated. He also directed the Drew County Sheriff's Office to enforce the order and to arrest and charge anyone who does not follow it.

For Arrington's part, she said she was fine with staying in that area for future protests and stated the protesters were not trying to hurt or scare anyone, they just want Gober off the case.

"We locked arms to show solidarity, diversity and what democracy looks like," she said in response to Akin telling the Court the protesters locked arms and blocked the doors of the Courthouse. "We were not there to hurt anyone or to scare anyone."

"I came down Friday to ask Mark Gober to recuse himself from Marquis' case. It's been over a year and I am tired of hearing the same lie that it is an ongoing investigation and he has no suspects, no leads,

VEASEY

Continued from Page 1

Veasey of the poppy sales.

In addition to poppy sales the VFW also offers raffles throughout the year as well as community cookouts. The Veterans have stepped up in the wake of COVID by helping to pass out food to the community, while continuing to serve Monticello by installing flags in the cemetery for Memorial Day

as well as participating in various community events throughout the year.

A project the VFW is currently working on will offer an additional way for veterans to request and receive records they may need for the VA or other reasons. A kiosk will be in place by October that will allow veterans to pull up their records and request the records be sent by mail. According to Veasey, the VFW is currently looking



Photo courtesy of Melvin Veasey

Melvin Veasey, shown placing flags on veterans' graves for Memorial Day, was appointed Commander of VFW Post 4515 in July.

Happy New Year 2022

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UAM NURSING PROGRAM ACHIEVES 100% PASS RATE ON NCLEX-RN EXAMS



Photo Courtesy of the University of Arkansas at Monticello

2021 graduates of the Associate Degree Registered Nursing program at the University of Arkansas at Monticello recently achieved a 100% pass rate on the NCLEX-RN examination. According to test results released by the Arkansas State Board of Nursing, UAM had the only associate degree nursing program out of 18 two-year programs in Arkansas to achieve a 100% pass rate. “We are certainly pleased with these results and happy for our graduates,” said Dr. Brandy Haley, Dean of the UAM School of Nursing. “It’s an indication of the quality of the students we have in our program and speaks to the quality of our faculty and their efforts to ensure that all of our graduates have a chance to be successful.” For more information, contact the UAM School of Nursing at (870) 460-1069.

Starting from left to right, front row: Tiffany Rogers- Crossett, AR. Melonie Williams- Crossett, AR, Taylor Day- Tillar, AR (McGehee) Back Row: Joy Stringfellow- Assistant Professor (Monticello), Kristopher Kirby- Bastrop, LA, Nicholas Colvin- El Dorado, AR

no evidence, no crime scene.”

As far as the order, she said it doesn’t bother her.

“I’m fine with (the order) we aren’t trying to go into the Courthouse anyway,” she said. “We are not trying to hurt anyone.”

Arrington stated she is a grieving mother who needs justice and closure and she doesn’t feel she will get it with Gober on the case.

Charges against Rogers dismissed by trial judge

By MELISSA ORRELL
editor@monticellonews.net

Charges were dismissed in the Stephanie Rogers solicitation of murder trial Thursday, Sept. 23, when the defense asked the Judge for a directed verdict in the case after the prosecution had rested. A directed verdict is a ruling entered by a trial judge after determining that there is no legally sufficient evidentiary basis for a reasonable jury to reach a different conclusion. A directed verdict may be granted sua sponte, or voluntarily, or upon a motion by either party, in this case it was asked by the defense and the judge agreed.

The trial began Wednesday, Sept. 22, with jury selection which took the entire morning before breaking for lunch. It was during questioning of potential jurors that the defense began to give hints to their strategy, asking jurors when solicitation begins and about the standard of proof.

After selecting the jury, court was dismissed for lunch, upon return the prosecution began their case with prosecutor Sandra Coody-Bradshaw presenting her opening statement, telling the jury on Oct. 16, 2018 Mykayla Rawls went to the Monticello Police Department to report that Stephanie Rogers wanted to kill her husband, Joe Rogers, and his ex-wife, Debbie Rogers, explaining to the jury that they would hear testimony from Rawls about the conversations her and Stephanie had, stating that in the beginning she did not take Stephanie seriously and didn’t think she meant it when she asked if Rawls knew anyone who could kill Joe and Debbie. However, when Stephanie told her in another conversation that she had loosened the lug nuts on one of Joe’s cars before he traveled to Little Rock for a doctors appointment, (he ended up driving a different car to the appointment) she realized Stephanie was serious. She also would testify that Stephanie wanted Joe to die first and then needed someone to kill Debbie since the two owned property together following their divorce. She then went to the police because of the lug nut conversation. It was at this time that Kenny Cox, with the Monticello Police Department, called in Arkansas State Police Bo Norris and they decided they would set up a conversation between Rawls and Stephanie that the police would record.

At this point the defense attorney, Patrick Benca, asked to approach the bench because he noticed that Debbie Rogers, who would later be called as a witness, was present in the courtroom. The jury was dismissed at while Judge Quincy Ross, Bradshaw and Benca discussed Debbie’s presence in the courtroom with Benca arguing the presence of a witness in the courtroom violated Stephanie’s due process. Bradshaw argued that the defense

waited until she was giving her opening statements to ask that Debbie be sequestered, also arguing that prosecution witnesses did not have to be sequestered since the defense did not ask for that. Benca, for his part argued that he hadn’t noticed Debbie in the court room until Bradshaw had already begun and that they could not discuss the abuse that was claimed by Stephanie while Debbie was in the court room. Bradshaw argued their was no justification for solicitation of first degree murder. Benca answered back that the defense was not offering that up as justification but it was counter intuitive to not give the backdrop of how the parties arrived here and that he approached as soon as he noticed Debbie was in the courtroom, stating their was no waiver for Debbie to be present and the defense was not arguing justification or asking for sympathy. Ross agreed the presence of Debbie was not appropriate and stated all witnesses would have to stay outside the court room until after their testimony. The jury was then brought back into the court room.

The prosecution continued stating Joe and Debbie had been married for over 20 years and were divorced in 2011 and had a grand niece they were raising together. After reporting the conversations to the police, Rawls called Stephanie, Stephanie told her not to talk to her over the phone, that she would come by Rawls’ place of business that day when she got off work. It was at this time the police department gave Rawls a recording device for when Stephanie came to her work. Stephanie arrived at the tanning salon, where Rawls worked. During this conversation Stephanie told Rawls she wanted Debbie killed and to make it look like a robbery and to have her raped. She also asked what the price would be for one or two. Rawls told her that she had an uncle (who does not exist) that could kill Joe and Debbie. Stephanie then gave specific details how to get to Debbie’s house, even giving the layout of the house. During her testimony later in the trial Debbie would testify that other than one bathroom that was described where it was not, the layout given was correct. Stephanie also said she wanted “it” done on a Wednesday because that is when Debbie takes the grand niece, who lives with her, to church. It was also during this time that it came out Stephanie had a married boyfriend who had recently been arrested for domestic violence. Stephanie also mentioned she had another friend, she called Shay who stated she knew someone who could do it for a TV. “Shay” was later identified as Shanquita Taylor who later testified as a prosecution witness that while, yes, Stephanie had spoken to her about it, there was never any agreement made for her to find someone for Stephanie and that she did not believe that Stephanie was serious when they discussed it. She also testified that Stephanie had been very emotional since marrying Joe and that Debbie had also made Stephanie’s life very hard and that when Stephanie talked to Joe about it, he did not listen and did nothing to stop Debbie from treating Stephanie badly.

During the recorded conversations presented to the jury that took place over the phone and mostly in the tanning salon, Stephanie said, “Lord, forgive me. I know I am doing

wrong but I need this lady gone.” Stephanie also spoke to Rawls and Taylor about abuse from Joe, because the defense did not have to call any witnesses, this was not corroborated by Joe, however Benca spoke in his opening statement about Joe being willing to testify to the abuse Stephanie was suffering.

After the meeting at the tanning salon when Rawls said she would find out what the price would be for taking care of one or two, the Arkansas State Police prepared for an undercover officer to pose as Rawls’ uncle and to make the deal with Stephanie. However, when Rawls called Stephanie to arrange the meeting, Stephanie told Rawls she would go another direction.

Cox, who took the stand for the prosecution stated that since the police did not know what other direction Stephanie was talking about, and fearing for the safety of Joe and Debbie, arrested Stephanie. She was later charged with solicitation of murder. The witnesses called by the prosecution mostly confirmed the prosecutors opening statement on what happened and how it happened.

The defense argued during opening that there was no justification or excuse for what Stephanie did but that it was important to understand why Stephanie reached a point to have careless conversations with young women and to understand what she was going through. He further stated that Debbie was the former wife of Joe and that she made it clear to Stephanie that she would be in Stephanie and Joe’s lives every day and that she was upset that Joe married Stephanie. Debbie later confirmed this in her testimony for the prosecution, testifying that her and Joe were raising Joe’s grand niece together and that they owned several properties around town and were in business together. She also stated that she did not want the divorce from Joe but that she eventually moved on a couple years after the divorce was final.

Debbie, Benca said, had contact with Joe every day, despite Stephanie telling Joe that it hurt her and that Joe ignored it and that conversations with Joe went nowhere and Stephanie was spinning herself to death trying to get Joe to understand but he was not getting it. Benca went on to say that while the jury may not agree with the conversations Stephanie had, there was never an agreement and before she can be found guilty of solicitation of murder, there must be an agreement, which never happened. This was the argument that was later ruled on by Ross in the directed verdict.

Benca asked why would officers need a fictional character to speak to Stephanie if she had already committed the crimes in her conversations with Rawls or Taylor? He stated the elements needed to have an agreement were not there and even after someone commits solicitation of murder, they can take it back, however, Stephanie never had to take it back because she never got there. He then asked the jury to listen to all the evidence and to understand under the law “you can go crazy for a little while as long as you don’t do too much.”

After the defense rested the prosecution began their case by calling Investigator Kenny Cox to the stand. She then went over with him the events how they occurred beginning with Rawls coming to the police

station, through the final phone call when Stephanie told Rawls she would go in a different direction. The defense asked no questions of Cox. Next Rawls took the stand, testifying to how she knew Stephanie and the conversations they had leading up to her contacting the police and then the prosecution playing the recorded conversations. Rawls testified that she did not take Stephanie seriously until the Stephanie said she loosened Joe’s lug nuts and it was at that time she feared for Joe and Debbie’s lives. The prosecution then took a detour to discuss Stephanie’s boyfriend and Rawls’ and Stephanie’s conversations related to him. During the cross examination Rawls testified to Stephanie talking to her about Joe being emotionally abusive. Benca then asked Rawls about past abuse she had faced in a relationship and asked if her and Stephanie talked about that and she said yea. He then asked her about an uncle and other family members who had confronted the boy responsible for scaring her and she testified that they had gone to his house and yelled at him and told him to leave her alone. Benca also asked Rawls about speaking to Bo Norris about her boyfriend getting a job as a trooper, however, Rawls also testified that she did not ask anyone to put in a good word for her boyfriend. During redirect Rawls was asked if her uncle had ever killed anyone and she testified that he had not but that he had told the boy who scared her to stay away from her.

Cox was brought back to the stand and testified that after the phone call where Stephanie stated she would take another route, she was arrested “for everyone’s safety.” Benca then asked pointed questions of Cox about surveillance during the investigation to ensure the safety of Joe and Debbie but was told there was none. Benca also asked Cox if he agreed that Stephanie had to engage in an agreement with Rawls in order to charge her for solicitation. Cox answered yes. He then asked if Rawls ever asked anyone to kill anyone, and if she agreed to kill Joe and if she agreed to be complicit in

murder. All the answers were no. He also asked questions about the lug nuts proving that although Stephanie told Rawls she had loosened the lug nuts there was actually no evidence that she did.

After Bradshaw and Benca finished questioning Cox, court was dismissed for the day to resume on Thursday, Sept. 23.

Second day of testimony for the prosecution began with Taylor being called to the stand. Her testimony for both the prosecution and the defense’s cross was that Stephanie changed after she married Joe, becoming very emotional also speaking to her about how Joe did her wrong and how he talked to her. Taylor testified that Stephanie had told her that Joe and Debbie owned property together but with Debbie out of the way, and then Joe, that she would get the property. She also testified that Stephanie spoke to her about getting someone to “do it” but that she did not take her seriously and even though she told Stephanie she knew someone who would, she actually didn’t and never spoke to anyone about it and didn’t go to the police because she figured Stephanie was just talking and blew in off and tried to dial the talk down.

Debbie was next called to the stand where she testified to the accuracy of the directions and layout of her house as well as the reason for her divorce was because Joe was having an affair with Stephanie and that she did not want the divorce. She also testified that she harassed Stephanie by tying black balloons on Stephanie’s mail box for “abortion awareness” and she wanted to remind Stephanie of what she had done when she had an abortion. She also testified that if she knew that anyone else who’d had an abortion she would also tie black balloons to their mailboxes to remind them of what they had done. She also stated that she talks to Joe regularly and will continue to do so regarding their businesses.

The prosecution rested.

During this time the defense requested the directed verdict and the jury was dismissed from the room. Benca argued that Rawls and Stephanie did not make an agreement to kill Joe. That there was no agreement between them only an agreement to find someone. That the State had to prove that Stephanie engaged in specific conduct to kill Joe and Debbie and that did not happen.

Bradshaw disagreed offering two cases for Ross to consider and arguing that in order to be charged with solicitation it isn’t necessary to succeed.

The judge took a 15 minute recess to study the cases offered by Bradshaw before returning and making his stunning verdict.

Ross said the cases that were given as precedent were wholly different than the case against Stephanie with both having an agreement to pay money to have the crime committed. Stephanie never agreed to pay anyone and that one of the cases comes to urging and that Stephanie never urged anyone to commit the crimes. It was at this time that Ross called the jury back in to the court room and announced the charges

had been dismissed.

“I am just happy that she got the result I always felt that based upon the charging instrument, this is what should have happened,” said Benca.” This is the reason I took it up to the Court of Appeals, I felt there has to be some way to address charges that are insufficient on their face and there is no way to do that in the State of Arkansas. The only way you can do it is to go through a trial and raise it at the time I raised it. The judge is powerless to address those arguments without that happening. It’s scary you have to go through a whole trial and possibly expose yourself to that motion being denied for a jury to make a decision. That isn’t what happens in most states. In most states you have to go through a grand jury but here the prosecutor gets to make the call. prosecutors have complete discretion.”

Guldin inducted into Forestry Hall of Fame

By LON TEGELS
UAM College of Forestry, Agriculture and Natural Resources

We all start somewhere. As an educator, Dr. James Guldin started his forestry education journey here at the University of Arkansas at Monticello at the School of Forestry. The sojourn ended last month, 38 years later, with his induction to the Arkansas Division of the Society of American Foresters Hall of Fame. Guldin received the award on August 31 at the Vines Center in Ferndale.

Dr. Guldin spent 11 years celebrating the green of the forests and UAM. He joined UAM School of Forestry as an assistant professor in 1982 and was promoted in 1987 to associate professor. Guldin said, “There wasn’t a better place in the country to be a silviculture professor other than UAM in the latter part of the 20th century. It was fascinating.” Guldin said he taught more than 200 UAM graduates during that time.

“It was a wonderful time to teach silviculture in south Arkansas,” Guldin added, “the local timber companies were practicing a variety kinds of forestry. Georgia Pacific was still doing shelterwood management on a 45-year rotation. Deltic Farm and Timber had 400 thousand acres in Union County and 100 thousand acres in the Ouachita’s, and they were doing classic Crossett-style uneven aged silviculture.” Georgia Pacific was doing prescribed burning effectively, and International Paper was clear-cutting and planting.

What Guldin liked about the UAM forestry program was that “it really prepared students for that first forestry job. It would get people hired. UAM positions people to do a better job in their careers, particularly when it comes to verbal communications. A lot of UAM students can sell; they learn the gift of conversational ability,” said Guldin.

Guldin said high points at UAM were his participation in the forestry club and summer camps. In these forestry summer camps; he

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and other faculty would take students to the Ouachita and Ozark National Forests and teach ecology. Guldin said summer camps were required back then, but many students now get [practical forest experience] summer jobs. He said field tours to the Buffalo River and the diverse whelm of silviculture were also focal points of his field trips with students.

Guldin left UAM in 1991 to work on a major ecosystem management project with the Ouachita National Forest. In 1992 he accepted a position with the United States Department of Agriculture, Southern Research Station as a Research Ecologist. Guldin held various leadership positions for the next 20 years until 2019, when the Southern Research Station went through a strategic realignment. Guldin holds forestry degrees from Pennsylvania State University (BS 1975), Yale (MFA 1977), and University of Wisconsin (Ph.D. 1982). Guldin officially retired in December 2020 and now resides in Springfield, Missouri.

The mission of the Society of American Foresters is to advance sustainable management of forest resources through science, education, and technology, promoting professional excellence while ensuring the continued health, integrity, and use of forests to benefit society in perpetuity.

OCTOBER HIGHLIGHTS

Drew County inmate escapes, captured

By MELISSA ORRELL
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A hunt for an escaped convict forced local schools to go on lock down and implement supervised releases at the end of the day when Brandon Cox, an inmate at the Drew County Detention Center escaped from Mainline during a doctor's appointment Wednesday, Sept. 29, before turning himself in the morning of Friday, Oct. 1.

Multiple agencies joined the hunt on Wednesday and surrounded the wooded area bordered by Jordan Drive, Scogin Drive, U.S. Highway 425 and the University of Arkansas at Monticello campus after Cox escaped from Mainline and ran into the woods.

According to Drew County Chief Deputy Brian Slaughter, Cox told his escort that he needed to use the restroom and had his belly chains removed. Upon exiting, Cox resisted putting the belly chain and handcuffs back on and escaped through east exit of the clinic still wearing shackles.

This is not the first time Cox has fled law enforcement, according to Slaughter. Cox had fled from them before his arrest and led deputies on a chase before hiding out in a patch of woods. During that incident the Sheriff's Office backed off and obtained a warrant for Cox's arrest and arrested him three days later. At the time, Cox told deputies that he had been in the wooded area for three days, believing the DCSO was pursuing him. Initially, number two Reader's Choice police officer, K-9 Cezar was used to search the woods but was unsuccessful. Later in the day, Arkansas Department of Corrections released their K-9 trackers with Department of Corrections officers, as well as Drew County Sheriff Mark Gober, joining them on horseback, while multiple dogs searched the area.

Cox, who was being held on charges of fleeing, kidnapping, domestic battery 1st degree, drug paraphernalia possession and parole violation, gave up and turned himself in to DCSO Friday, Oct. 1, in the Green Hill and New Hope area.

Since then, escape procedures have changed for how inmates will be escorted to an unsecure location, such as medical clinics, with two officers accompanying the inmate at all times, according to Gober.

"I want to thank the ten agencies who joined in the search and helped to push Cox away from the school areas," Gober said.

Cox now has escape, assault of a correctional officer and commercial burglary added to his list of charges. The burglary charge stems from the belief Cox entered the Monticello Bus

Shed at some point and stole a hacksaw, which he then used to cut his shackles.

Quorum Court discusses vacation policy changes

By MELISSA ORRELL
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Budgets, COVID pay and vacation policy were the main topics of the Quorum Court meeting Monday, Oct. 11 as the Court talked to elected officials about the 2020 budget needs of each department. While the Court listened to the budgets, final approval of the department budgets were not voted on or approved at this time.

Extra pay for working during the height of the pandemic with funds from the American Rescue Plan were also discussed with Drew County Clerk Nancy White introducing a formula designed to calculate a bonus based on hours worked at a rate of \$3.03 per hour, capped at \$5,200. However, the plan was not finalized with White asking the Court if members of the Court wanted to include themselves in the bonuses and at what rate, as far as hours, the Court declined to accept any of the money offered after Justice of the Peace Steve Morrison said he didn't feel right taking any money and Justice of the Peace Steve Pigott agreeing, saying he did not feel like members of the court had gone above and beyond during the pandemic the way County workers had. The Court also discussed at what rate they would offer bonuses to County Attorney Cliff Gibson, who also stated he did not want to accept a bonus, and County Coroner Chuck Dearman, who both work at a base rate for the County as needed and are not paid on an hourly rate. Also included in bonuses will be election workers who will be retroactively paid based on the hours they worked the polls.

Also up for discussion was the County vacation policy which at this time uses an 18 month "use it or lose it" rule for employees, however, some workers have not been able to take vacation during this time, due to staffing and other issues, and have been losing their vacation time due to circumstances beyond their control. Gibson brought a resolution to the court that would have enabled County workers to sell unused vacation time yearly, however, the court did not like that the new policy would not enable employees to carry over vacation time from year to year. County Treasurer Charlie Searcy pointed out that this would make it difficult for employees to save up their vacation time for life events such as pregnancy, pointing out that even though federal policy insures they cannot be fired while taking maternity leave, the new policy would make it impossible for employees to be able to stay home after having a baby and get paid at that time like they can now with the 18-month carry over policy. Justice of the Peace Renee Knowles expressed concerns that employees could "abuse" the policy and save vacation for the sole purpose of selling it back, costing the County more money in the long run since the County gives three weeks of vacation time a year. Searcy said if every employee was to save their days to sell back it would cost the County a little over \$200,000 a year. The Court was also reminded the policy was an attempt to stop turnover rates for employees who were unable to take vacation time, especially jail employees who are the most affected by the current use it or lose it policy. Gibson was tasked with reworking the policy and bringing it back to address concerns of the Court.

The Court also passed a resolution to administer grant funds to the hospital from the American Rescue Plan in the amount of \$493,000. The grant had already been approved in an ordinance but the Court needed to pass it in ordinance.

Hospital staff has been given a moment of relief, according to Drew Memorial Health System Chief Executive Officer Scott Barrilleaux, following the surge in COVID infections across the State. He reported to the Court that the hospital was in good shape with July and August being very busy with the surge, with September's stats down from August. He also reported the

Drew County represented at State Fair Pageant



Photos courtesy of Ashlee Orrell and Christina Roque

Drew County was well represented at the Arkansas State Fair Project and three of the girls brought home some trophies in their respective divisions. Lilli Orrell (left), 14, daughter of Darrell and Ashlee Orrell, of Monticello brought home First Runner up in the Junior Miss pageant. Khloe Wood (middle), 3, daughter of Matt Wood, of Monticello, and Christina Roque, of Warren, brought home a Second Runner up trophy in the Tiny Miss competition and her sister Arabella Wood (right), brought home second runner up in the Young Miss category.

Health System was focusing on expanding the surgery center beginning with joint replacements. The center will begin with knee replacements before adding hip replacements at a later date, as well as adding tube surgeries with an ENT, enabling more Southeast Arkansas residents to stay in the area to receive these common surgeries. The hospital is also working on adding pain management and a pulmonologist to the list of offerings available. A compensation plan to entice health care staff to stay and to reward loyal healthcare workers for staying with the healthcare system has been implemented. Barrilleaux said the plan focuses on retention and the hospital has come up with a strategy to reward workers through April of next year, instead of following other models that would have only allowed the money to last for a couple months.

The University of Arkansas Extension office also presented to the Court with the Court introduced to Scott Hayes, the new agricultural agent. In the report the extension office reported 828 educational contacts through the Ag agent, 77 farm and land site visits, 5 demos, 35 Master Gardners working on 9 projects and a total of 435 Master Gardeners volunteer hours, as well as verification programs and integrated pest management over the last year. Hazalene McCray reported the office had given 6 financial management classes, 3,034 SNAP contacts, 780 youth contacts and 7 clubs, Lynn Lanthrip reported 50 families are involved in 4-H with 98 members, 26 leaders and 4 new clubs introduced in the County. One of the new clubs focuses on drones.

City Council approves salary for Water Operator

By MELISSA ORRELL
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Debate about the salary of Monticello's water operator was the reason for a special called City Council meeting, Tuesday, Oct. 19. The salary of \$72,000 annually would allow the City to hire a level four operator, which at this time is not a requirement based off the size of the city, based off the 2020 Census, which Monticello Mayor Paige Chase says the City is challenging but is a process that could take up to two years. The City has struggled with finding an operator that is qualified and could face fines if the position is not filled soon.

During the debate Alderman Mark Tiner questioned the need for a level four operator and expressed concerns over the hefty price tag that would be paid with tax payers money.

"We have had a population reduction, which does not require us to have a level four," he began.

"We weren't required to have a level four before we started this process either," Chase countered.

"But we were anticipating an increase in population since we were so close and preparing for that," he said,

before Chase announced the City was challenging the census. "I just think this whole exercise of hiring a guy at this rate at \$36.61 an hour is irresponsible on us to consider that with the taxpayers' money and we have done a poor job preparing for this, not just recently, but through the whole deal when we knew we had to get somebody....It does not set a good precedence with our current employees when we are bringing someone in at such a significantly high rate of pay....It is \$20 an hour more than what we pay someone in this job. I think we're panicking, I don't think we have done our due diligence; we have done a poor job of due diligence to try to fill this job. We need to look for other means to satisfy the Health Department requirements."

Alderman Claudia Hartness asked to clarify that the City was told they needed a level four operator but was told the City only needed a level three operator. However, they were told they would soon need a level four based on the population, before the Census was released that showed a drop in population.

"We can inch along like we have done for years," Hartness stated, reminding the Council that saying they are looking for someone and continuing the job hunt is only acceptable for so long. "We don't need to get in trouble with them."

After discussing past operators, the Council exited into executive session.

Upon returning from executive training they Council discussed continuing to train the employees they have, however, the time requirements for experience would mean the City would be without an operator for three years. Chase stated they have interviewed three potential employees, one who wanted \$75,000 and one who would come from Louisiana, however, his license would not reciprocate. The job has been advertised since January. The City also sent letters to level four and level three operators but had no luck.

After more tense discussion between the Council, a vote was taken. Alderman Clarissa Pace abstained from voting, no votes were made by Al Peer and Mark Tiner, with Michael James, Craig McRae, Mike Wigley and Claudia Hartness voting yes to pass the resolution which will enable the City to hire and pay the Monticello level four water operator a total annual salary of \$72,000.

Planning committee receives final CDI report

By MELISSA ORRELL
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"The first impression is the most important" is a popular saying that contains truth. When looking for a new place to settle down, many people turn to online research and a quick trip through their final choices before making a decision. For this reason the Community Development Institute Central, which was established in 1987 at the

University of Central Arkansas, uses a first impression tour and online research as two of the ways to gather information on their chosen town during their optional fourth year advanced training where they are able to put their new found knowledge and skills to the test. The complete CDI experience is a three year training program that focuses on a comprehensive, applied approach to the field of community and economic development. In the fourth year, an Arkansas town is selected so CDI graduates can apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills in real-life situations and to kick start a community and economic development in the chosen town. Monticello was chosen in 2020 as the town that would benefit from the program in 2021.

At the regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting for October, the final report was given to members and the members were asked to review the report for discussion at the upcoming November meeting.

A strong sense of community was one of the great assets listed in the executive summary of the report.

"Monticello is a wonderful community in Southeast Arkansas with great assets including its historic downtown square, a respected four-year institution and a strong sense of community," the report

stated. "Participating in the CDI Advanced Year 2021 process shows that leaders in Monticello are looking toward the future and are open to new ideas and opportunities for their community.

"Our goal with this report is to share the challenges and opportunities the CDI Advanced Year class identifies, as well as to provide some recommendations to help imagine the future of Monticello based on our assessment and feedback from community leaders and citizens," the summary continued. "The challenges and opportunities identified by community leaders and citizens in Monticello are shared by many other communities in Arkansas."

The summary continues by explaining how the class took a "holistic approach" in assessing Monticello from an outsider's perspective by researching Monticello online before visiting. After discussing the research, the class then participated in a driving tour, met with community leaders, conducted focus groups with citizens and implemented an online survey to collect feedback from the community. At the end of the week the class then presented the findings to the community in a public presentation, and pulled insights and future recommendations into the report. The summary also emphasized this was not



It's a new year, a fresh start, and a chance to let all of you know how much we appreciate your loyal support. We're so inspired by the strength, compassion and resilience we've seen all around us through a challenging year, and we're proud to be a part of this caring community. As we begin anew in 2022, we wish everyone here good health and good fortune.

Happy New Year, and thanks for being such wonderful neighbors!



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a comprehensive analysis but offers a fresh look at the community from several outsiders with community and economic experience and expertise. The summary concluded there is a lot to be proud of in Monticello and recommendations will build on the great work the community has already done.

The online research used several different groups to focus on a perspective college student, a family with young children, retiree, tourist, small business owner, industrial prospect and a citizen of Monticello. A few of the strengths found were:

- The University of Arkansas at Monticello has the only forestry program in the state
- UAM offers fantastic opportunities for music students
- A unique mascot
- UAM has a number of technical and professional certifications
- Monticello has several Pre-K options
- Shorter commutes compared to larger metropolitan areas
- Drew Memorial Hospital
- Monticello Senior Center
- Assisted Living options
- Quality of life with great parks
- Rich culture and history highlighted by the museum
- Hunting and fishing opportunities
- Country club and golf course
- Local restaurants
- Population of 8,500 and a daytime population of 17,800
- ExploreMonticello.com as a great resource for quality of life
- Arkansas Midland Railroad
- UAM
- Municipal airport with commercial, freight and charter capabilities
- Selected twice by Arkansas Business as a City of Distinction for Quality of Life
- MEDC website
- Family friendly community

Some weaknesses noted were:

- Few rental options available for housing
- No mention of community recreation of UAM’s website
- Local school ratings
- Limited shopping
- Not much senior-friendly outdoor recreation
- Smaller single-family housing
- City websites not up to date
- Not many reviews online for local restaurants
- No information found online about downtown
- No online presence for Chamber of Commerce

There were several short-term steps recommendations provided in the report these included:

- Start regular inter-organizational meetings with local leaders
- Elevate the Chamber of Commerce to serve as a hub and connector for organizations, activities and businesses in Monticello
- Intentionally engage the business community with regular communication and opportunities to be more involved in community and economic development
- Regularly communicate the status of improvements on Lake Monticello with the broader community

- Plan a ribbon cutting ceremony for the reopening of Lake Monticello
- Assess social media presence and create a social media strategy for the City and MEDC pages
- Revitalize Explore Monticello website and regularly maintain website with updated links, events and community meetings.

MPD reminds residents of safe exchange location

By MELISSA ORRELL editor@monticellonianews.net

As the holiday season approaches and more and more people are purchasing items online and meeting up with people to make purchases, the Monticello Police Department would like to remind the community of the safe exchange location, located behind the Monticello Police Department.

partment, there is an issue,” said Monticello Police Chief Jason Akers. “Why would you not?”

Akers emphasized that robberies and scams are a wide spread problem across the United States.

“They set up fake profiles and use local swap shops to advertise something, like a phone, at a cheap price,” Akers stated. “They will then make arrangements to meet somewhere and will either sell something like a stolen phone or will set up a robbery.”

Monticello is not immune to the problem. In August two sisters from Warren came to Monticello with a friend to purchase a phone they saw advertised. The seller, who was later identified as Elijah King, of Monticello, had the group meet his at a home located on Lincoln Court. When the group arrived to purchase the phone, King reportedly pulled a handgun and demanded everything they had of value. After the robbery, King and an unidentified accomplice fled the on foot, according to the police report, leaving the victims unharmed physically. No shots were fired and no injuries were reported.

This case shows that even in Monticello, meeting someone to purchase an item can be dangerous. That is one of the reasons the MPD set up the exchange locations, which are covered by 24 hour surveillance cameras which have a live feed inside the PD as well as being recorded. The locations make any exchange, whether to purchase an item or to do custody exchanges safer and if anything does happen the department will have identifying information from the cameras, such as license plates numbers.

“When you get ready to buy online, check the seller, check their profile to see how new it is and the activity on the profile. A new profile or one with out any friends or contacts is probably a fake profile,” Akers said.

Akers also shared some safety tips when making an online purchase or sale-

1. Check the profile of the seller. Look for the number of friends and if the page was recently created.
 2. Send them a friend request and check out if there are any posts or activity.
 3. Look for mutual friends and if there are any, ask around about the credibility of the seller.. are they known by mutual friends to be honest?
 4. Don’t give out ANY of your personal information whether you are buying or selling. Address, account numbers, etc.
 5. Always take someone with you to make a sale or a purchase.
 6. Never ever go to a secondary location.
 7. Always tell someone where you’re going and where you’re going to meet.
 8. Use the Police Department resources. They are there for you.
 9. Don’t be afraid to ask for more photos of the items you’re buying.
 10. If someone won’t meet you at the Police Department, there is a reason. If offers seem too good to be true, they usually are.
- Remember to be safe and be smart when meeting someone to purchase an item if you don’t know the seller.

NOVEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

Quorum Court approves pay raises, premium COVID pay

By MELISSA ORRELL editor@monticellonianews.net

After a somewhat contentious discussion Monday, Nov. 8, the Drew County Quorum Court passed an ordinance allowing the County to pay current county employees a “premium pay” from funds received from the Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Fund established under the American Rescue Plan. The pay is to compensate employees who worked throughout the pandemic.

The ordinance will allow the County to amend the annual operating budget for the 2021 calendar year to pay all eligible essential employees who worked during the time period between June 1, 2020 and May

31, 2021 \$3.03 for every hour worked during that time with a \$5,200 cap. The disagreements in the ordinance were due to the provision that former employees who worked for the County during that time were not included in the current ordinance.

According to County Treasurer, Charlie Searcy, guidance from the Association of Counties stated that retired employees who receive the pay could have their retirement messed up since they would be receiving funds from the County during retirement. Justices of the Peace Orlando Jones and Joe Williams argued that the ordinance should include all former employees and give retirees the right to refuse the pay in order to avoid problems with their retirement but that other employees who did not retire but worked throughout the pandemic as essential employees should also be included in the pay. Other members of the Court stated they could come back later after retirement issues had been addressed by the State and pay the other employees.

“I did not vote against the ordinance because I don’t want people to receive the pay,” said Williams, who was one of the two Justices who voted against the ordinance. “I voted against the ordinance because I believe everyone who is entitled to the pay should receive it. Other counties have approved the pay for past employees and we should have, too.”

The Quorum Court plans to revisit the issue of former employees, including retirees and the pay they could receive at a later date.

Ordinance 2021-17, which will only pay current eligible employees, will use \$422,490.38 from the funds the County received from the American Rescue Plan.

Also during the budget meeting and subsequent Quorum Court meeting, the Court approved several pay raises in an effort to retain employees and improve pay in the county. The Court agreed to a 10 percent pay increase for every position with 5 percent of the increase being used for an across the board pay raise and the other 5 percent for each position being left to the discretion of the elected official in charge of the position.

This will allow the elected officials to use the funds available to fix big jumps in pay from one position to another that has some of the officials concerned or to use the funds however they see fit, depending on each employee, their job duties and other factors the elected officials choose to take into consideration.

However, Sheriff Mark Gober was given a choice to participate in the 5 percent across the board raise or to a \$3 an hour raise to be used at his discretion for his employees. The Justices stated that the need to compensate the Sheriff’s department for their work and to better retain qualified personnel was a priority and wanted the pay to better reflect the job and the dangers of the job performed by deputies. Gober chose the \$3 an hour to better compensate Drew County deputies. The \$3 pay raise was originally suggested by County Judge Robert Akin during his time before the court during the budget meeting. Akin requested the raise for County employees who possess highly coveted skills such as mechanics and operators with Commercial Driver’s Licenses. The raise is not guaranteed to any employees but instead will be a tool Akin can use when recruiting and retaining qualified employees in critical skill positions. The rest of the Road Department will be included under the 10 percent slot raises which will include the 5 percent across the board raise and will leave the remaining 5 percent at the discretion of the supervisors and elected officials.

The Court continued discussions and came to an agreement on a new leave policy which will enable County employees to sell unused vacation time after one year versus the old system which operated under a use it or lose it policy. The new policy, which is retroactive to take effect on Jan. 1, 2021 states: “an employee should be paid for his or her accrued but unused vacation time as herein set forth. As to persons who are employees on Jan. 1, 2021, their accrued but unused vacation time shall include all unused vacation time that was earned during the 18 months immediately preceding Jan.

Horse Club donates to Hope Place



Photo Courtesy of Drew County Extension Office

The Drew County Horse Club, an organization run through the Drew County University of Arkansas Extension Office, held their annual event, Fallin’ 4-Horses, on Saturday, Oct. 30. The event, which featured many activities including pony rides, strives to help the community through donations that go to local causes. This year the youth donated canned goods to Help Place Monticello for their food pantry. Pictured are 4-H members Bentley S., Cooper S., Tipton J., Zoe M., Chloe R., Veda J. and Willies J. Club leaders Becke Williams and Cathy Denson, along with Brandy Davis, representative for Hope Place Monticello.

1, 2021. Payments for such accrued but unused vacation time as of Jan. 1 2021, will be made in the following December. Thereafter, payment for accrued but unused vacation time shall be made in December of each year for unused vacation time that was earned during the prior year. An employee may elect to refuse payments for unused vacation time and to carry forward and accumulate same, but such ability of an employee to accumulate unused vacation time for which the employee has not been paid shall be limited to unused vacation time that was earned during the preceding year plus the six months preceding the year.”

Discussion about the leave policy was brought up during the pandemic when the jail was working on a skeleton crew and employees were losing earned unused vacation time because they were unable to take time off. The new policy seeks to address those situations to ensure County employees are able to take full advantage of their compensation packages. Employees who lost time under the old policy during 2021 will now be able to recoup the time lost.

Originally the policy was introduced with a 12 month threshold but that was changed to increase the amount of time employees had to use their vacation in an effort to be able to plan for life events such as becoming a parent.

The resolution passed with a unanimous vote of the Justices.

Also passed during the meeting was an appropriation ordinance to levy taxes for the 2021 year. The taxes are as follows:

On all property in Drew County Arkansas a rate of 1.8 mills for County Hospital Tax and County General Tax on all real and personal property, 1.1 mills County Road Tax for all real and personal property and 1 mill on all real and personal property for the County Library.

City taxes for 2021 are the same amount all real and personal property as follows:

- Monticello: 2.2 mills
 - Jerome: 1.5 mills
 - Tillar: 1.6 mills
 - Wilmar: 1.7 mills
 - Winchester: 1.5 mills
- School district taxes on all real and personal property are as follows:
- District number 51 Hamburg: 39.5 mills
 - District number 5 Drew Central: 39.9 mills
 - District number 6 Dumas: 42 mills
 - District number 17 McGehee Special: 40.46 mills
 - District number 18 Monticello: 39.9 mills
 - District number 22 Dermott Special: 41.81 mills
- The following improvement district taxes were also levied:
- Canal number 18 drainage district .75 percent of the assessed value upon all acreage, town lots and right of ways

within the district for maintenance and operation.

- Chicot-Desha and Drew Watershed Districts: \$0.65 per rural acre and \$5.00 per city or town lot
- Dermott Drainage District: \$0.35 per rural acre and \$5.00 per city or town lot
- Voluntary Animal tax for 2021 per statement less es-crows in the amount of \$10.

DWI fatality in Walmart parking lot

By MELISSA ORRELL editor@monticellonianews.net

Tragedy struck Friday, Nov. 19, when a driver allegedly under the influence of drugs entered Monticello Walmart parking lot causing a trail of destruction before striking and killing a pedestrian.

According to Monticello Police Chief Jason Akers, a Pine Bluff man is facing felony charges in connection with the fatal vehicle accident that occurred in the Monticello Walmart parking lot.

According to Akers, Jarvis Dillard, 33, of Pine Bluff was arrested by the Monticello Police Department after a vehicle he was operating collided with multiple other parked vehicles in the parking lot.

“The vehicle operated by Dillard also struck a pedestrian in the parking lot who was near their vehicle, killing the pedestrian,” Akers stated.

Dillard was charged with manslaughter, DWI drugs and criminal mischief, second degree. A parole warrant was also served at the time of his arrest. Dillard is currently in the Drew County Jail awaiting a first appearance and bond hearing.

Subers awarded Arkansas Foster Parents of the Year

By MELISSA ORRELL editor@monticellonianews.net

Over 350 foster children have traveled through Marilyn and Hiller Suber’s house over the years as the Subers served their community through foster care. Steady and willing, these parents have helped to get teenagers focused on graduating and being suc-

cessful in life, regardless of their situation. Getting the teenagers graduated is what Marilyn Suber said drew her to fostering teenagers in the first place. And while seeing the kids succeed is reward enough, this year the Department of Human Services Division of Children and Family Services surprised the 2021 Area 10 Foster Parents of the Year with the distinction of being the state-wide Overall Winners of Foster Parent of the Year.

“Their years of service and dedication are absolutely unparalleled to what they have done for teenage girls in the state of Arkansas,” said Deborah West, as she introduced the Subers as the Area 10 awardees at a watch party for the virtual ceremony. “As an adopted parent of teenagers myself, I know it is not an easy road and they have dedicated their lives to it in a way that I would not call service, I would call ministry. They pour into them, they share Christ with them and those kids leave with an opportunity, they have a life changed and a home to return to if they need to.”

During the virtual ceremony each area winner of the award was introduced with a short telling of their story in foster care.

“There is a set of doors in Drew County that has seen over 350 foster children pass in and out over the past two decades,” the emcee said as he introduced the Subers. “One half of this Foster Parent of the Year honoree team was battling breast cancer, not once but twice, they did not stop caring, committing and connecting to the children placed in their care. They especially have a heart for teenagers.”

Marilyn began the couple’s story explaining why she has such a heart for teenagers.

“Best for me, the way I work, was to take in teenagers and that is what I wanted to do for a long time,” she said.

“We have been committed because that child came here needing someone to love them and needing someone to be a mentor for them, to help them,” Hiller stated in the prerecorded video. A lot of kids look at their surroundings and

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they say, 'well they got everything,' but we didn't get it by just sitting down, we got it by hard work..."

"And that is what we try to show them," Marilyn finished. "And that is another reason we do teenagers, so we can show them because they are going to be in our shoes one day, so, learn from us."

She continued by stating it is hard to get the bond with the teenagers but if they learn something from her that is what is important.

"If your lifestyle is enough, to make them make the right choices," she stated.

One of the girls the Subers has raised has been with them for almost 4 years, and Marilyn saw potential in the straight A student.

"I wanted her to graduate, she was a straight A student," Marilyn said. "She made up her mind then she was going to graduate here and school was going virtual during the time she was pregnant and she was able to do her work at home and take care of her baby."

She has since joined the National Guard after first looking into the Air Force and Marilyn told her to talk to Hiller about it because he had been in.

"I told her it wasn't going to be easy. The military first going in it's not easy, you got to do what they say, you got to change your ways because you got to be getting up early and then I explained you can't say, 'Oh, I got five minutes.' That five minutes will get you disciplinary action."

In 2011 Marilyn was first diagnosed with breast cancer when she had two or three girls in the house at the time.

"It was several months that I went to chemo at that time. I was diagnosed last year with breast cancer again," Marilyn said. "It was a challenge for them and me. But we got through it, I mean, we are still getting through it, I'll put it that way. I need them just as much as they need me."

The Subers were recognized with the award for their perseverance and the impact they have made on over 350 children's lives.

Local businessman killed in accident

By MELISSA ORRELL
editor@monticellonews.net

A beloved father, husband, son and Monticello businessman was killed in a tragic accident at his family's deer camp Saturday, Nov. 20. William Jeffery Busby, 35, was crushed when a tree fell on him and pinned him against the steering wheel of the tractor he was driving.

At 1 p.m. Saturday, the Monticello Police Department dispatch received a 911 call from William Dean Busby, William Jeffery Busby's father, stating a tree had fallen on his son and he was trapped underneath it, according to the Drew County Sheriff's Department incident report.

The dispatcher called for SEEMS ambulance service and the Monticello Fire Department, who responded and arrived on scene. The Drew County Sheriff's Department arrived on scene at approximately 1:25 p.m.

According to the report, Busby was driving the tractor under a partially fallen tree when the tractor's roll over protection device, attached to the back of the tractor, struck the tree resulting in the tree falling on Busby. The fallen tree caused him to hit his head and become trapped under the weight of the tree.

The Monticello Fire Department extricated Busby from the tractor and he was then transported to the coroner at Stephenson Dearman Funeral Home in Monticello.

Busby is survived by his wife, Katelyn, and their two young children.

Busby served the Monticello community during his time on the parks and rec committee and through his work at Edward Jones Investments.

According to his obituary, he had many loves in his life but most of all he loved being part of a large loving family, the foundation of which was his love for his wife, Katelyn. Of all the roles he played, that as father to his two children was

his most cherished.

Gentle, loving and kind, William's unconditional and unwavering love for his children will be everlasting.

A celebration of life service was held Tuesday, Nov. 23, at First United Methodist Church in Monticello with a reception that immediately followed in the Family Life Center.

DECEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

First multi-commission meeting held

By ASHLEY HOGG

Advance Monticellonian correspondent

The first known inter-commission meeting to take place in Arkansas occurred Monday, Dec. 6 when the Monticello Planning Commission, Parks and Rec Commission, Economic Development Commission and Advertising and Promotion Commission met for the first time as a group in the Citizens Bank Conference Room.

The A and P Commission goals were presented by member Mike Wigley. He stated that the long term goals for A and P were to create a civic center in Monticello that would be able to host a large number of guests for various events. In the short term, they intend to bring events to the city which will bring tourists to Monticello. Currently, the commission is working on promoting the city and continuing to work on the signage at the four entry points to Monticello. He added that lighting and landscaping are in the works for the "Welcome to Monticello" signs.

Before outlining the goals of the MEDC, Nita McDaniel gave the group a brief overview of some of the specific focuses of the commissions. She stated that the A and P Commission is committed to focusing on tourism and bringing non-residents into Monticello. McDaniel also stated that the MEDC has a primary focus of recruiting new business and industry and maintaining current business and industry.

Currently, the MEDC is working on grant pursuit and infrastructure development including I-530 and I-69.

Parks and Rec Commission Chair, Taylor James, said that their long term goals are to host tournaments at the sports complex. Presently, the commission is in communication with City of Monticello employees that are dedicated to park upkeep, maintaining the parks and remodeling the bathrooms at the Western Pines Park.

"I would really like money to go towards maintenance than all new stuff," Wigley added.

Parks Commission members Bubba Groves and Clay Corburn were in attendance and talked about potentially closing one field at a time at the sports complex to perform necessary maintenance in order to get the fields tournament ready.

James also mentioned doing away with the deposit refund for renting park pavilions, the splash pad and other park amenities.

"The deposit is in place now

to reserve the pavilion," Chase added. "Once your reservation is over and you have vacated the pavilion or park and there is no damage done, the full deposit is returned to you."

Chairman Dan Boice of the Planning Commission said that their mission was to "make plans for a city that will attract people."

"Today's generation is looking for a place to live before they look for a job," Boice noted. "We have to plan for a city that people want to come to for all stages of life."

A city study has been completed by the Community Development Institute of Arkansas, as well as a walk audit. The Planning Commission is now tasked with writing a city wide plan. Once the plan is complete, the commission will make recommendations to the City Council.

Mayor Chase stated that the City has begun a 10 year infrastructure plan and a new city website is coming soon.

The last item on the agenda was an discussion about the armory. Currently, the old armory located on Jordan Drive is partially being used by Drew Memorial Health System, Inc., for storage. The intent is to have a feasibility study done to determine whether the City of Monticello needs to retain ownership of the building or sell it.

City Council member, Clarissa Pace, and Planning Commission member, Lou Lambert, both expressed concern that the citizens of Monticello are feeling left out because there is such focus on tourism and how to bring in people from the outside. It was suggested that the people in each community where parks and other attractions are, be asked what they want and what they would like to see happen.

McDaniel pointed out that getting community feedback isn't always easy to obtain, citing Monticello's poor performance on the 2020 Census.

"We failed at the 2020 Census," McDaniel said. "We all did. And because of it, we are losing funds and being restricted."

Planning Commission member Ray Ryburn suggested that these inter-commission meetings be held quarterly. The next scheduled meeting is for Monday, March 7, 2022.

MPD awards citizen of the year posthumously

By MELISSA ORRELL
editor@monticellonews.net

Tragedy in Monticello led to lives lost and saved Thursday, June 24, 2021, when Rebekah Reynolds and her fiancé, Harley Clark were killed during a domestic violence incident. Now, the Monticello Police Department have posthumously awarded the pair the 2021 Citizen of the Year Award.

"In 2021 a young man named Harley Clark, while mortally wounded himself, killed a suspect who had shot him and two other family members during a domestic violence incident," the MPD said in a statement. "One of those shot by the suspect was his mother, Grace. Harley's

actions ended a nightmare for the families involved and no doubt saved responding MPD and MFD personnel from encountering a barricaded, armed suspect. Harley was brave beyond his years and loved his family.

"Rebekah Reynolds was also shot by the suspect," the statement read. "Rebekah was an organ donor. Due to the outstanding work of local EMT's, Rebekah was transported and stabilized until she passed away. Due to Rebekah's kindness and her mother, Regina, the loss of Rebekah led to five organs being harvested and donated, giving life and hope to five people Rebekah never knew."

For both Harley and Rebekah's actions, MPD's Citizen of the Year Award was (for the first time) given to two citizens, Harley and Rebekah. The awards were presented to Ms. Regina Henthorne, on behalf of Rebekah, and Ms. Grace Kerr, on behalf of Harley.

The murder of a child, even an adult child is a tragedy no one wants to face, yet in the United States more than 2,000 people were killed by domestic violence-related shootings in 2020, a 4% increase over 2019. In 2021, in Monticello three people were killed during a Domestic Violence and potential mental health crisis in June of 2021.

Rebekah, who was living with her fiancé, Harley Clark, and his mom and step father win Monticello, texted and talked to Regina everyday; on Wednesday, June 23, Rebekah texted Regina and told her the two needed to talk.

"As soon as I was able, I called to see what was up," Regina said. "She told me she wanted to move in with me. She wanted to get a job and start saving to get her and Harley a place."

Harley was planning on going into the National Guard and the young couple were working to get their lives together, according to Regina. Regina, for her part, tried to get Harley and Rebekah to come that night but Rebekah said no, not wanting to put her mom out in any way.

On Thursday, June 24, Regina didn't hear from Rebekah and that was not normal. Then Regina received news no mother wants to get.

"Around noonish, I got a Facebook message from a nurse at St. Vincent looking for family," said Regina, who at first thought the message was a potential scam and didn't respond immediately. "Not long after I got the message, the Monticello Police Department called me."

Regina was asked if she was Regina and asked if she lived in Monticello.

"I told her I was, but that

I lived in North Little Rock," Regina stated. "She told me to hang on a moment. She came back to the phone after a few minutes and asked if I could be reached on this number at any time."

She said she could and asked if her daughter was OK.

"She said that's what they needed to talk to me about and then hung up the phone," Regina recalled.

"My boss immediately came around the corner to check on me. I told him about the message from the nurse and the call from the police department. He told me I needed to get to the hospital. My co-worker drove me."

As the two pulled into the ER, a surgeon called.

"I told her I was in the ER and she said she would meet me inside," Regina said. "They took me to a room to talk to the surgeon. As she was telling me everything it just didn't seem real."

The doctors did everything they could to give Rebekah a fighting chance.

"She had a five percent survival rate," said Regina. "They said if she did survive, she would never come off the vent. She would live her life just laying in bed never speaking, eating, having any emotion. That is no kind of life to live."

Regina knew Rebekah's preference for her death because the two had discussed it before.

"Rebekah and I talked about death more than we probably should have," explained Regina. "When we talked about her being an organ donor, she said, 'Momma, I'm going to be dead, what good will my organs do me. Let someone have them that needs them.' She spoke of the research that could be done in case one of her organs couldn't be used.

She thought that was the coolest thing. But for some reason, (Arkansas Regional Organ Recovery Agency) allowed her father to stop that process. Rebekah was 19 years old and a registered organ donor. This process should have never been allowed to have been stopped. This was a choice she made on her own. No one should have been allowed to say she couldn't do what she had already put in place."

"On July 30, 2001, at 6:42 p.m. I watched my little angel take her first breath of air. On June 28, 2021, at 3:14 p.m., I watched my little angel take her final breath of air. This is not something any parent should have to go through. I watched the monitors and the nurse's face. I could tell the time was getting close. Kristi gave us a warning sign stating her stats were dropping and it would happen soon."

Domestic violence took

Rebekah from her family. She was part of the 20% of domestic violence homicide victims who are killed every year who are not the intimate partners themselves, but are instead family members, friends, neighbors, persons who intervene, law enforcement responders or bystanders.

"The following is the truth as we know it as to why the above events took place," Regina said. "This is information gathered by the Monticello, Arkansas detectives, and the recollection of events as told by Harley and his mom Grace. Harley and Rebekah were engaged to be married on July 28, 2021. They lived with his mom and stepdad."

"At approximately 7:20 a.m. on June 24, Rebekah became a victim of domestic gun violence. Rebekah and Harley lived with his mom and stepdad," she explained. "On the morning in question, Manuel (the stepdad) thought someone was trying to kill him. He woke up his wife Grace and told her to go to the kitchen and get the kids up. Manuel walked into the hall next to the kitchen and shot Grace. He just missed her heart by 3 inches."

"He then turned in the hall and faced the kid's room and shot, Rebekah," she stated. "He then shot Harley. Harley was able to shoot and kill Manuel and call 911 to try and save the others. Harley died on his way to the hospital."

"Manual was believed to be an undiagnosed paranoid schizophrenic," Regina said. "Rebekah was shot in the head. The bullet went in on the left side and shattered as it went through her little brain," she explained. "There was no exit wound. The bullet shredded the main artery in her brain."

"Domestic violence is very real," Regina said. "Mental health is very real. Either one that goes untreated can and will be deadly."

"My daughter suffered from something very treatable...domestic violence and mental health disorders," she said.

"If you or someone you know is in a bad situation such as domestic violence or you know someone with a mental disorder not being treated, please seek help for these people," Regina pleaded. "The last thing you want is for your loved one to become a statistic."

Rebekah's story, unfortunately is not unique like many would like to believe. on a typical day more than 20,000 phone calls are placed to the National Domestic Violence hotlines nationwide. Seventy two percent of all murder-suicides involve an intimate partner, ninety-four percent

Happy New Year 2022

Thanks to everyone who has blessed our year with friendship and support!

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Busby served the Monticello community during his time on the parks and rec committee and through his work at Edward Jones Investments.

According to his obituary, he had many loves in his life but most of all he loved being part of a large loving family, the foundation of which was his love for his wife, Katelyn. Of all the roles he played, that as father to his two children was

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of the victims are female and the presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation increases the risk of homicide by 500 percent. "Rebekah became a horrible statistic. But, because of the decision she made several years earlier, she saved five lives on June 28," Regina concluded. "If you are not an organ donor, I urge

you to think about it. You could save countless lives. Like my daughter said, if she isn't using her organs, then just maybe someone else can have another chance at life. We have donor cards provided by ARORA." If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence, there is help, contact Options, Inc. at their 24

hour crisis hotline at 1-870-355-2802. You are not alone. Beginning in 2019, MPD began recognizing citizens whose contribution to our community sets the example for us all to follow and shows the rest of our state the quality of people we have in our town. "Of all the negative aspects shared daily in today's

society, I think this action that honors these two young Monticello citizens and their mothers highlights the sacrifices and gifts of

these two young Monticello residents. I hope you finding it worthy of sharing to show how much our town loves and supports them,"

said Monticello Police Chief Jason Akers. "We may be a small town, but these are the types of people here in our community."



May the coming year bring you and yours much cause for celebration. Thank you for giving us so much to be thankful for!

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Brightest Wishes

As another year comes dancing in, we can't think of better partners than all of you! We thank you, and we wish you all the best in 2022 and beyond.

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