

DRESSED UP DOWNTOWN



Monticello is using art to beautify the historic downtown area on the square with a mural on the west side wall of Options, Inc. The mural was painted by local artist Erin Ashcroft.

FIRST BABY OF 2021



Meh'lanie Reign Harris was the first baby to make her appearance at Drew Memorial Health System in 2021. Meh'lanie, who weighed in at 4 pounds 15 ounces, greeted her mom and siblings, Ry'leigh and Ky'leigh Sheets, along with her mom's doctor, Dr. Kelly Shrum at 6:34 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 2.

ADVANCE-MONTICELLONIAN

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NEW YEAR'S SPECIAL SECTION

Year in Review

JANUARY

Third generation sworn in as judge

By MELISSA ORRELL reporter@monticellonews.net

With his swearing in on Friday, Jan. 1, as Circuit Judge, Division 3, 10th District, Robert B. Gibson III, became the third generation to hold the position after winning the election and replacing his father, Robert Bynum Gibson, Jr., who retired this year.

The family tradition began when Gibson's grandfather served 22 years as the Municipal Judge for Dermott before being appointed as Chancery Judge for the 10th Judicial District by then Governor Bill

Clinton. He was sworn in as the Chancery judge in 1987, before the position was redesignated as Circuit Judge. Gibson's father, won the seat in the 1998 election and was sworn in as Circuit Judge Division 3, 10th District in 1999 and held the seat until his retirement this year.

"The significance of this opportunity, to serve as my father did, and as his father before him served, is not lost on me," said Gibson. "I will be forever indebted to the people of Southeast Arkansas for giving me the honor and privilege to continue

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Photo courtesy of Robert B. Gibson III

SWEARING IN, A FAMILY TRADITION. Robert B. Gibson Jr. swears in his son, Robert B. Gibson III, Friday, Jan. 1 at the Ashley County Court house. Gibson is the third generation to hold the Circuit Judge Division 3, Tenth District seat. Pictured in the back ground is left to right, Gibson's sons Charles Turner and Robert; wife, Macy; brother, Clay; and mother, DeDe.

APRIL

Drew County Quorum Court tables sirens

By MELISSA ORRELL reporter@monticellonews.net

Future plans for the County's tornado sirens still hang in limbo after the Drew County Quorum Court decided to table the Resolution they had voted to approve in the March Drew County Quorum Court meeting after citizens across the county contacted their Justices of the Peace expressing concerns about the loss of the warning system.

During a "show and tell" to show the court and Drew County residents what goes into the estimated \$20,000 a year cost to maintain the 27 sirens across the County, Office of Emergency Management Director Jessie Grif-

fin, broke down the different components needed to keep the sirens functional. These include

- Four batteries per tower at \$70 a piece with an 18 month warranty
• Transmitter radio, one per tower at \$20 per radio
• Four chargers per tower (one per battery) at \$70
• Charger for board inside tower, one per tower at \$40
• Ten fuses

The initial cost of the towers was \$435,950 that was paid for with a grant, according to Griffin, the sirens worked great the first three years and it was at this time that the maintenance and cost of the

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FEBRUARY

Winter storm covers Monticello



Jackie Tyler/Advance Monticellonian

A Cardinal sits on a fence in Drew County in the snow Monday, Feb. 15. The state was blanketed with snow which began to fall Sunday, Feb. 14. Monticellonians woke up on Monday to a town covered in white.

JUNE

Hutchinson visits Winchester, declares disaster

By MELISSA ORRELL editor@monticellonews.net



Melissa Orrell/Advance Monticellonian

Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson visits with farmers at the Winchester Cotton Gin Friday, June 11. Several counties in Southeast Arkansas, including Drew County, were declared in a state of emergency from heavy rainfall and flooding.

Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson declared a state of emergency on June 10 in response to the record rainfall and flooding in the southeastern area of the state.

The declaration allows the governor to direct \$100,000 from the Governor's Disaster Fund to the Arkansas Division of Emergency Management, to be used at the discretion of the agency's director, AJ Gary.

"After discussions with community members, local leaders, and the Division of Emergency Management, it quickly became clear that assistance is needed," Hutchinson said in a news release. "Business owners, farmers, and everyone in the area are feeling the impact of this weather event, and we're

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MARCH

UAM Weevils capture first GAC Championship Tournament Title

By JEFF YOUNG Advance Correspondent

The University of Arkansas at Monticello Boll Weevils entered the Great American Conference Championship Tournament on March 3 as the number one seed out of the GAC Eastern Division facing the number four seed from the



Jeff Young/Advance Monticellonian

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SEPTEMBER

Veasey takes command; works to help veterans, community

By MELISSA ORRELL editor@monticellonews.net

With 40 years of military service under his belt, Melvin Veasey, is no stranger to giving to his community and to his brothers and sisters in arms. He is now continuing that service as the Commander for Veteran's of Foreign Wars post 4515 with one of his goals to reestablish the VFW Auxiliary for the post.

Veasey began his military career serving as an active duty soldier in the infantry as a mortarman in Fort Campbell, Ky., for four years, followed by time served in the Reserves, National Guard and as an active Guard Reservist. He didn't stay a mortarman for long, Veasey also worked in the Nuclear, Biological, Chemical, or NBC field, administration, supply, truck driving and finally,

operations before concluding his career. Giving him a wide range of skills and experiences that will serve him well during his tenure, which began in July of this year. This is also not the first time Veasey has served in the local VFW, serving as the Jr. Vice Commander at the Post in the days leading up to the Iraq war in 2002.

He earned his place among the brave in the VFW during Desert Storm in Iraq while serving in the National Guard, he also served in support roles in the United States during the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Since becoming Commander, Veasey is working to bring more awareness to the VFW in order to let local veterans know they still have a place to serve and give back, as well as a brotherhood here at home who are willing to help in

any way they can, including with the Veterans Affairs and claims.

"I want the veterans to know the VFW is here to help them, I am here to help them," Veasey said.

Veasey is working on a multiple prong attack to bring visibility to the organization by working to re-instate the VFW Auxiliary for the post. The post needs 15 active members to restart, they currently have 12 people who have signed on and are looking for at least three more.

The VFW also normally has semi-annual poppy sales but hasn't been able to offer the poppies to the public due to COVID restriction where the veterans normally set up to sale the poppies.

"We are working on setting up at Atwoods in October or November," said

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## JANUARY HIGHLIGHTS

### UAM faculty, student awarded ArPA awards

By MELISSA ORRELL  
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Two faculty members and a student from the University of Arkansas at Monticello, gave the University a reason to celebrate as they swept the Arkansas Psychological Association statewide academic awards this year. Dr. Richard Clubb, Dean for social and Behavioral Sciences, and Dr. Seungyeon Lee, Associate Professor of Psychology, were selected as co-winners of the ArPA Academic Psychologist of the Year award for 2020 and Magnus Gray of Warren, a senior double majoring in psychology and business administration, was named the ArPA Psychology Student of the Year. Out of the awards given every year three are academic and this year all three were awarded to Weevils.

"Psychologists from across the state were nominated," said Dr. Eric Prichard, Vice President of ArPA, who was the secretary of ArPA when the awards were decided. "Nominations were entailed a written argument for the nominee. The board of directors then discussed the nominations and the decision was made by our outgoing president for the 2020 year, Dr. Kamra Mays."

Gray is the current president of the UAM chapter of Psi Chi - the International Honor Society in Psychology. As an exceptional undergraduate student, Gray has already authored a study. Along with his faculty mentor Dr. Lee, Gray recently published research on psychometric properties of a newly developed questionnaire called College Student Planning Scale (CSPS) in the academic journal, *Experimental Results*. His findings show that the CSPS is a reliable measure which will help others conduct future research related to college students' mental health and professional development.

"An empirical investigation on how COVID-19-related anxiety impacts college students and their career plans should contribute to the current literature and to future researchers involved with the COVID-19 pandemic," said Lee of the paper published by Gray.

They plan to conduct a future study that examines whether emerging adults' generalized anxiety is predictive of the actual population's career planning, rather than their current involvement with the recent pandemic.

"Magnus is only the fourth UAM science student to be published since I have been here in 31 years," said Clubb. "The award was not just for the paper. Magnus has been a very active student in many things. A lot of activities and presentations."

"Magnus was recognized for the research he has done with Dr. Lee. He is an excellent student who has earned an Arkansas SURF, Student Undergraduate Research Fellowship, grant and is a co-author on an upcoming book chapter with Dr. Lee and several of her collaborators," said Prichard. "It is very unusual for someone to have a publication so early in their career. In psychology most of us are in graduate school before we get our first publications."

Lee and Clubb's award was given in recognition of their overarching career and the contributions they have made throughout their careers, even though it is a "of the year" award.

"Dr. Clubb and Dr. Lee shared the academic psychologist of the year award," Prichard stated. "Dr. Lee was recognized in particular for her research on cell phones in the classroom, research on undergraduate learning outcomes and her work for organizations such as Psi Chi and the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) Mentorship of Teachers Award Committee."

Clubb also had praise for Lee and her career achievements.

"Dr. Lee is one of the most prolific researchers we have had so the award was (for her) overall accomplishments," said Clubb. "(Lee and Gray) have been very active in a wide range of areas."

Clubb, who shares the

award with Lee has also had a very distinguished career.

"Dr. Clubb was recognized for his leadership of his academic department during the pandemic and because his retirement is bringing an end to a distinguished career. During the meeting, a board member made the case that sometimes academic unit heads don't get enough recognition for everything they do to ensure the business of effective teaching and research happens on a regular basis. This is especially true during difficult times such as a pandemic."

For the University and for Drew County, the awards showcase the talent that is present at UAM in the faculty and in the students they are helping to shape for the future.

*Editor's Note: Check out www.mymonticellonews.net for more information on the paper and ongoing research by Gray and Lee.*

### City announces F.O.G. Friday

By MELISSA ORRELL  
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F.O.G. Friday is a new initiative by the City of Monticello to raise awareness of the damage fats, oils and grease can do to sewer systems.

During the regularly scheduled January City Council Meeting, Mayor Paige Chase announced the initiative while discussing the City's immunity from torque liability. One of the examples used during the discussion was when sewer backs up into a resident's home. Chase said she has experienced the issue at her own home and understands the burden on home owners when sewers back up. In order to lower the amount of sewer issues in the city, Chase announced the City's initiative to help combat the problem with educating the public about the dangers of fats, oils and grease to the City sewer system. Tips and facts will be posted on the City's Facebook page, Monticello, the heartbeat of Southeast Arkansas every Friday.

A pamphlet is also available at the City Water Office.

Fats, oil and grease, or F.O.G. includes butter, salad dressings, cooking oil, olive oil, gravies, meat fats and milk and cream.

"How you dispose of fats, oils and grease can have a costly impact on your home and the environment. When they are poured into drain lines, they will cool and clog the pipes that remove the waste," reads the pamphlet. "This can cause untreated sewage to back up into your house, your neighbor's house or the yards and streets causing costly repairs and rancid odors."

"F.O.G. will cool and harden causing blockages in the sewer line, running hot water or degreasers only pushes the material down the pipe where it will cool off and harden," it continues. "When cool, F.O.G. hardens and becomes solid. Blocked sewer lines can be caused by:

- Coffee Grounds
- Paper towels
- Baby wipes
- Hair
- Chewing gum
- Plastics

"Sewer systems are not equipped to handle these materials and the best solution is to keep them out of the system and toss with the trash."

#### What can you do?

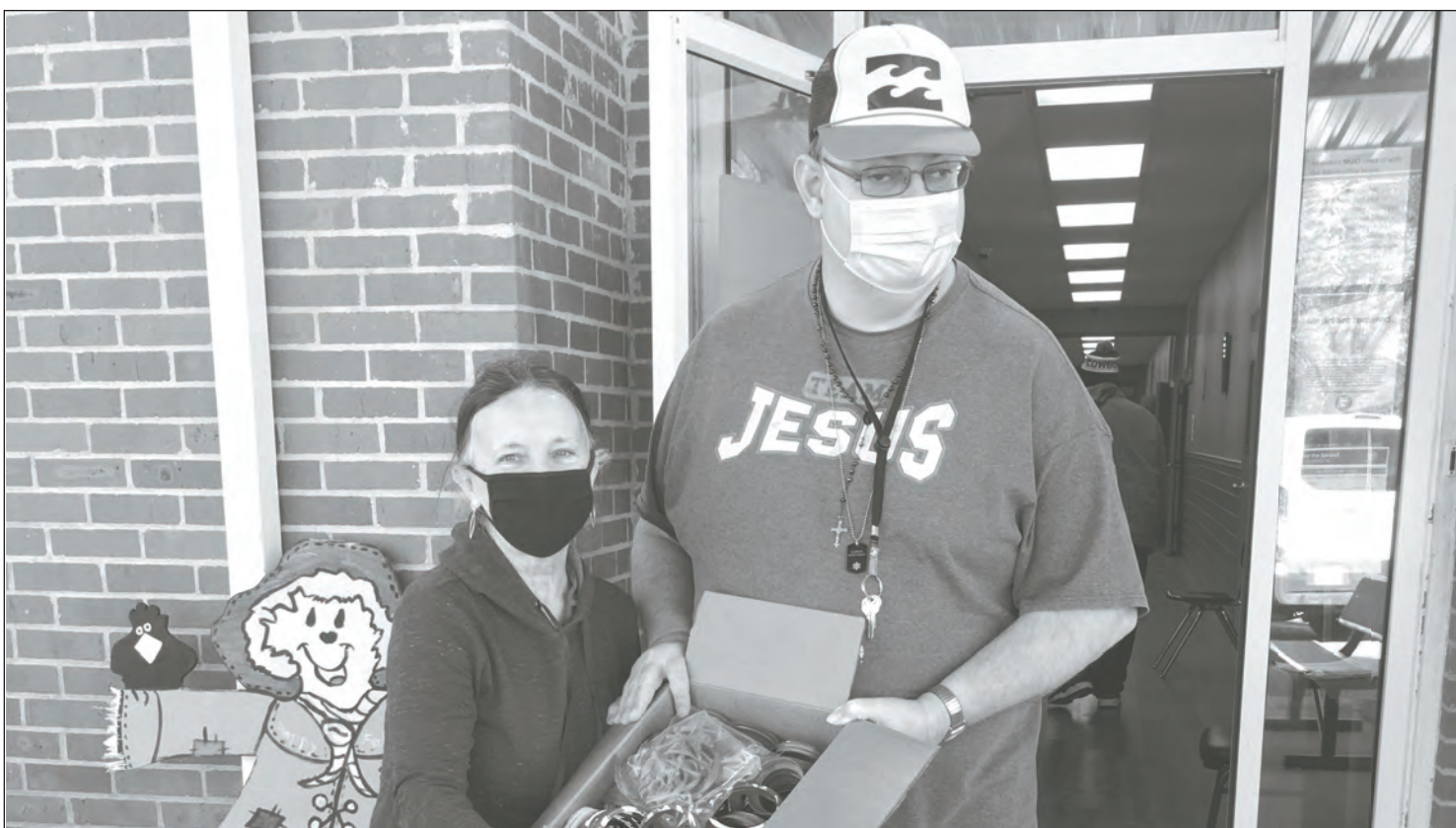
- Do not pour grease products down sinks and toilets.
- pour liquid oils and grease into heat resistant containers and toss into the trash.
- Let the fats, grease and food cool to harden then scrape from plates and cooking utensils into the trash.
- Use strainers in sinks to catch food and empty into trash.

"F.O.G. is the number one cause of sewer back up into homes. It can chemically bond to pipes, be corrosive, harden with iron oxide and can react with calcium forming a tacky substance.

"Every business that generates F.O.G. is required to have a grease trap that must be pumped as needed to prevent these materials from entering the sewer system," according to the pamphlet.

Follow the Monticello, the heartbeat of Southeast Arkan-

## Southside Extension Homemakers Club gives to community



**Top photo: Southside Extension Homemakers Club presented Advantages** with items to make Christmas ornaments. Club member Rondie White presented the items to James Sanders. **Bottom photo: Southside Extension Homemakers Club chose Hope Place** for their Christmas Project in December. They collected 100 pounds of non-perishable food items. They also bought several packages of diapers and socks for women, children and infants. Pictured right to left, Club President Juanita Webb and club member Brenda Chisom took the items donated to Hope Place.

Facebook page for updates every Friday on F.O.G.

### DMHS discusses Pafford flight services

By MELISSA ORRELL  
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Medical Air Services stationed in Monticello may be on the horizon as the Drew Memorial Health System board voted to move forward in discussions with Pafford Medical Services following a pitch by Keith Carter, senior vice president and COO of Pafford EMS, during a regularly scheduled board meeting Monday, Jan. 25.

The arrangement, which would also have to be approved by Drew County, would bring two medical helicopters to Monticello with quick access to a third helicopter and fixed wing aircraft owned and operated by Pafford. The offer being made by Pafford would include a lease with Drew County for the land near the current helo pad located on hospital grounds and could potentially save an hour to an hour and a half when a patient needs to be transported by helicopter, according to Carter.

"We know the times it will be needed, it is going to save lives in Monticello, it's going to save precious time," said Carter. "The biggest advantage is that having a helicopter in Monticello is going to increase traffic to the hospital and there may be times there are certain patients somewhere that you need...to take because you have the staff, we can bring that patients. So there are a lot of advantages and not many disadvantages to having that helicopter on your property."

Pafford would lease the land and build structures to house the two helicopters, as well as facilities for the Air Crew and an additional helo pad designated specifically for Arkansas Children's Hospital air services with no cost to DMHS.

"Very early on, we know that Arkansas is a very unique state with the support that Arkansas Children's and the extremely wonderful helicopter program that they run, they have the staff and the helicopter to do things we can't do," said Carter. "The only patient population that we aren't good at, is that neonatal and sick, sick pediatric patient. We just don't have the space or the islet or the specifically trained pediatric or neo-

nate nurses. We work hand in hand with Children's. What we would want to do is during contraction move east of the help pad and make a help pad during construction for Arkansas Children's Hospital so it would always be open anytime you guys needed that support."

What Pafford is asking from the hospital is a Preferred Partner Agreement and a first call agreement. Carter explained Pafford would honor memberships patients may have with other medical helicopter services but ultimately patient choice would trump any first call or preferred partner agreement with DMHS.

"I would just like to say this board, for many years has done all we can do to make this hospital a destination for the South central and Southeast part of the State," said Carl Lucky, hospital board member. "This is something I don't think any of us ever dreamed was a prospect and I know from your end, I know the investment would be significant, I appreciate you bringing this opportunity to us. It doesn't sound like there is anything but good that can come from this."

Getting the county in the loop and drafting an initial agreement are the next steps in exploring the helicopter service coming to Monticello. The board voted to begin the process in drafting up agreements and to further explore the possibility of bringing the service to Monticello.

The next item on the agenda was a discussion involving the Hospital switching from a fully insured insurance plan for employees to a self-funded plan. The idea was originally floated during last year's benefit's discussion when rates for the plan were raised again. This year when the Hospital began exploring options the self-funded plan was where the board and administration believed they would like to go. However, decreases in premiums offered by benefit providers made the switch this year to a self-funded plan not the best option. Based on recommendations, the hospital will save the difference in costs in order to switch to a self-funded plan maybe as soon as next year. For now, DMHS will retain current benefits package and will further explore the self funded plan next year.

In the financial report, revenue for December was the highest it has been since January 2020 with the COVID surge that occurred in De-

cember and January looks to stay high with a 20 percent increase from November to December. Denials by insurance companies to pay claims have dropped to 7.1% with a goal to further decrease them to 5%.

According to Melodie Coldwell, revenue is up significantly with 235 acute admissions for the month with the patients being admitted being acutely ill. OB and surgery admissions, along with home health and ER visits all trending downward.

Salaries have been over budget due to bonuses given to the staff, which was well received. Along with other medical facilities in the state, DMHS is facing staff shortages, which has caused them

to have to get creative to get nurses to in on off days, but it is not a problem unique to DMHS, with hospitals all over Arkansas also facing staffing shortages.

Contract services were also over budget due to the increased cost of the new anesthesia services contracted by the hospital.

Staffing for nurses is still a problem across the State, according to Scott Barrilleaux, DMHS CEO, with the increase in rates up to \$220 per hour for nurses through staffing agencies. The higher cost is being driven up by neighboring states such as Texas and Tennessee and Barrilleaux doesn't believe the high has been seen yet. DMHS is focus-

## GIBSON

Continued from Page 1

this legacy. My hope is that through my service I give confidence to everyone that their faith in me to serve justice was not misplaced."

Gibson is a graduate of University of Arkansas School of Law. He has been admitted to practice in both state and federal court. Gibson currently serves on the Committee for Model Civil Jury Instructions. This appointment is made by the Chief Justice of the Arkansas Supreme Court.

Gibson is a native of Dermott and Monticello. Gibson and his wife, Macy, have two sons: Robert, age 7, and Charles Turner Gibson, age 4. Gibson and his family reside in Crossett where he also practices law with Tom Streetman at the law firm of Streetman & Gibson, PLLC. Gibson serves on the board of directors for the Ashley County Boys & Girls Club, Crossett Rotary Club, and the Crossett Chamber of Commerce. He and his family attend St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Crossett, Arkansas.



ing on retaining the current staff that has been stressed as the spike in holiday COVID cases filled the hospital, however the decreased cases have been helpful in relieving some stress felt by the nurses. The Health System is actively recruiting a new OR director as well as Registered Nurses and Licensed Practical Nurses, although RNs are preferred, the hospital employs both.

The board also passed a motion to approve a plan that would allow DMHS to involuntarily convert out 401k plans of former employees. Currently, the hospital is required to pay a fee per account. The plans the hospital will convert involuntarily are plans of former employees who have not moved their 401k's out of the hospitals employee plan.

Also brought to the board was a need for computers in 23 rooms that are designated COVID-19 rooms. currently staff has portable computers they carry on a cart from room to room. Due to infection control procedures, the cart, along with the computers have to be disinfected between each room. Purchasing computers for the rooms will allow the staff to be more efficient. The cost of the computers would be fall under COVID-19 funding and would use the money the hospital received as part of the CARES act. The cost to the hospital would range from \$58,000 to \$62,000.

The board had three bids to choose from, all were comparable to the others. The board voted unanimously to purchase the computers from the company High Tech, the lowest bidder.

## FEBRUARY HIGHLIGHTS

### Drew County mourns the loss of A.C. Simpson, Jr.

By MELISSA ORRELL  
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It was with great sadness that the citizens of Monticello and Drew County woke up to the news Monday, Feb. 1, that A.C. Simpson, Jr., a sergeant with the Drew County Sheriff's Office, had passed away Sunday, Jan. 31.

Simpson, who was employed full time by the DCSO, began his career as an auxiliary deputy in 1985, and moved to a full time position in August of 2001.

As the news of his passing spread through the community, many took to Facebook to share their memories of Simpson.

"I lost a great friend this weekend: it was my friend AC Simpson. We may not have gone to the same church or places with the same friends, but AC was my friend," said Drew County resident Beth Thurman, who met Simpson during her college days. "When I started to A & M, college students could ride the bus to school if there were enough room. Then we all piled on Dennis Thurman's bus for him to take us on over to the college. There were about ten of us, and AC was the only African American."

She spoke of how at first Simpson kept to himself and didn't talk much but as the year wore on he began to get used to the strangers on the bus with him.

"Kind, witty, full of fun, AC's character traits eventually came to the surface," said Thurman on her Facebook page. "I often teased him that I wish he'd stayed bashful, but his humor and fun-loving side could not be contained. At ball games, etc., we would pick on one another & discuss how the time since integration and the economy had changed. We both said young people could not begin to imagine riding a school bus to college in 1968."

"Drew County lost a great man this weekend," she stated. "There is going to be a hole in the Sheriff's Department, and I'm not sure there is a plug capable of filling this abyss."

Drew County Sheriff Mark Gober also spoke of Simpson as a friend and colleague.

"AC was my friend and a person that I admired deeply. He never met a stranger, he is someone that held my attention often during our conversations and I will always appreciate his knowledge and input," said Gober in a statement. "With the passing of AC Simpson Jr. things will not be the same for awhile; however,

we were blessed with the time he was in our lives. He will always be remembered and we will always be delighted to speak of our memories of him."

"The family of AC will be honoring his request; therefore, there will be no funeral service," said Gober in a DCSO press release on the loss of Simpson. "We will continue to lift AC's entire family up in prayer. He will truly be missed by his family, friends, this department and this community."

*Editor's Note: As a kid growing up in Monticello I did everything I could to avoid getting pulled over or having any contact with the police. I really hated getting in trouble and I wasn't the type of kid or teenager to just start talking to adults, so I did not know A.C. during my youth. I met him instead the first time I covered the June-tenth Celebration in 2019. He was one of the Sheriff's Deputies working the parade and celebration. I could tell during that time he was a beloved member of the community. After that day, he always had a smile and a hello for me every time I saw him. He was a fixture in the Sheriff's Office and the community and a great friend to many. I will miss seeing him around the county, in the courthouse and whenever I attend events he worked. My heart goes out to his friends and family at this time.*

### Local student losing sight; only chance for treatment travel to Berlin, Germany

By MELISSA ORRELL  
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In June of 2020, Gavin Wear, a Monticello native and a lifelong baseball player, began to notice he was having trouble seeing the ball while playing baseball. This was a problem; he knew he needed glasses.

"He was at baseball practice saying he needed to go see the eye doctor," said Allison Wear, Gavin's mom. "That he couldn't see the ball."

As Allison set up an appointment for Gavin to see an eye doctor, she could have never predicted that phone call would begin a journey of months of doctors and specialist visits. A path that would lead to Gavin being declared legally blind by August of 2020; the cause of the blindness, a rare genetic mutation MFN2 of Charcot-Marie Tooth Disease Type 2A. Only 6% of those with this rare mutation affects their eyes. His only treatment option available to regain any of his sight is at the Fedorov Restore Vision Clinic in Berlin, Germany.

Gavin, who has lived in Monticello all his life, was a normal 16 year old Southeast Arkansas boy who spent his life playing catch with his dad and began playing baseball during his T-ball years, according to Allison.

His love for baseball only grew from there. Prior to high school he spent two days a week an hour and a half away from his home in Little Rock at baseball practice and his weekends playing in a travel baseball league. After losing the majority of his 2020 baseball season to COVID-19, Gavin is still on the roster for the Drew Central Pirates 2021 baseball team and even though he has lost most of his eyesight with only partial sight left in his peripheral vision, he aims to never miss a practice or game.

"He is determined to never miss a game or practice," said Allison. "Even though he can't play right now, he is there every time the team meets."

The first eye doctor Allison took Gavin too could not find fault in his vision, but Gavin was persistent and Allison took Gavin to a different eye doctor for a second opinion. It was then that Gavin was diagnosed with an astigmatism and floaters in his eyes.

"He did have floaters so he told him he needed contacts for playing baseball and glasses for driving," said Allison. "We had to wait for the glasses to come in and we were waiting, of course COVID had everything delayed. Then he came in one evening after work, pretty much pleading with me to tell him the glasses were going to make the black spot go away and the more and more I talked to him I realized he wasn't talking about

a floater."

As a nurse, Allison was alarmed at the information Gavin had just given her. What he was describing is also a sign of a brain tumor. She told Gavin to watch his brother as she drove to the eye doctor to explain what Gavin had just divulged to her.

After describing to the doctor what Gavin had just told her, the eye doctor immediately wanted to see Gavin. During his initial visit, the doctor had picked up a small blind spot during his field vision test but had thought it was a fluke. When Allison got Gavin back to the eye doctor they discovered it wasn't a fluke, and the blind spot, which Gavin saw as a black spot in his vision had grown.

Gavin was sent to have an MRI performed the next day to try and discover what was causing the loss of vision, according to his mom. He did not have a brain tumor or anything out of the ordinary. The lack of answers with the MRI led to a referral to a Neuro-ophthamologist and a string of specialists.

The race against time had begun. Gavin's black spot continued to grow and to spread to include his right eye, effectively taking away all of his central eye sight and leaving a small field of sight in his peripheral vision, which continue to deteriorate.

"We have seen so many specialists," said Allison. "We went to Little Rock and then Monroe and then Shreveport. They thought he had Leber's. We had to get a genetic test and had to wait six long weeks to get that result."

As fate would have it, while Gavin was in Shreveport awaiting the results of his tests to confirm Leber's, there was a pharmaceutical company offering a free genetic test for retinal diseases. His specialist suggested Gavin go ahead and get the testing done, it was free and it couldn't hurt anything.

"While we were waiting on the Leber's test it came back positive for the Charcot-Marie Tooth Disease is with his mutation MFN2," Allison explained. "That specialist didn't think it had anything to do with his eyesight but it was just a fluke and she wanted me to do a genetic counseling session. The lady (who was performing the genetic counseling) calls me and she said let me tell you now the Leber's test is going to be negative. There is no way he is going to have this mutation and the Leber's mutation. I am telling you there is no way."

According to Allison, this ended up being a positive, with Leber's, a patient does not recover any of their eyesight, they go blind. But it was during this time that Allison found out how rare Gavin's particular case was.

"She said with her research, with his disease, only 6% have this mutation with MFN2 that affects their eyes," Allison explained. "Charcot-Marie is not rare, it happens to people. It is his mutation that is rare and affects his eyes. The research she had very few people, 60% of them gain their vision back within 3 to 5 years. So that was promising to me."

Gavin's test for Leber's came back negative. And now the only chance Gavin has to regain his eyesight and retake the baseball diamond is to travel to Berlin, Germany to see if he is a candidate for treatment at the Fedorov Restore Vision Clinic. Treatment that has a chance of giving Gavin back some of his eyesight and possibly getting him back to his game.

For the time being, Gavin is doing his best to maintain his school work and schedule among the COVID-19 pandemic and relearning how to learn without the use of his eyesight. He also has kept and maintained his job at Save A Lot in Monticello, where management has worked with him to ensure he can stay employed and live as normal a life as possible while learning to live with the loss of his eyesight.

Medical bills aren't cheap, trips to Germany aren't cheap either. As a result, the community has pulled together to support Gavin and his family as they jump through all the hoops necessary to travel out of country during the pandemic and to get Gavin the medical attention he needs. For a list of planned fundraising events and other ways to donate, see Page 1B of the Feb. 17, 2021 edition of the Advance.

## MARCH HIGHLIGHTS

### Body of missing Monticello teen found

By MELISSA ORRELL  
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The body of missing teenager, Jordan Robert Lee, was found Wednesday, March 10, at approximately 10:25 a.m. near the I-69 bypass and Midway Route.

An official search for Lee, who had been missing since approximately 7:30 p.m. Monday, March 8, took place on the afternoon and into the evening of Tuesday, March 9. The search was paused overnight at approximately 7:30 p.m. to resume on Wednesday morning. The Drew County Sheriff's Office, along with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, the Arkansas State Police, the Monticello Fire Department and individual residents of Drew County were all actively searching until Lee's body was found on Wednesday.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends," said Drew County Sheriff Mark Gober.

Lee is the son of Bob and Kim Lee and was a student at Monticello High School.

### Quorum Court talks trash

By MELISSA ORRELL  
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The cost of trash, along with the amount of delinquent trash pick up charges dominated the discussion at the regularly scheduled March Quorum Court meeting Monday, March 8, at the Drew County Court House.

With an estimated \$200,000 in uncollected trash fees and the cost the county is charged to dispose of the garbage rising, by a total of \$2 per ton, the County has found itself in need of a method to collect delinquent fees and possibly raise trash rates, according to County Treasurer, Charlie Searcy.

One suggestion made to the court was to refuse collection of real estate or personal property taxes until any delinquent trash pick up charges are paid. However, County Collector Tonya Loveless protested the efficiency of the methods, pointing out that many real estate taxes are collected and paid by mail through escrow accounts. After discussing options to leverage the paying of personal property taxes to collect the unpaid trash pick up fees, the issue of how to ensure the fees are paid was raised with Justice of the Peace Rene Knowles and Loveless protesting to having a resident walk across the hall to get proof of paid fees, using a computer print-out to check for past due fees or putting the amount as second line item on the bill, the Court decided to form a committee to discuss ways to solve the unpaid fees issue and to discuss the possibility of raising existing fees to make up for the added \$2 per ton of trash the County has to pay to get rid of the trash after they pick it up.

## WEEVILS

Continued from Page 1

GAC West, the Southeastern Oklahoma State University Savage Storm in the quarterfinal game.

Due to the Coronavirus, this year's GAC Tournament was moved from the single location at Bartlesville, Oklahoma to allowing the teams with the higher seed to host a tournament game. The finals were decided before tournament play began by a coin toss between the Eastern and Western Divisions to see which team would host the championship game with the East winning the toss. It was decided that the Eastern Division would host the men's championship game with the higher seed being the host team and the Western Division would host the women's final.

Southeastern scored the first five points of the contest before UAM was able to get on the board with a jump shot from Denzel McDuffey. A jumper by Kendal Frey tie the contest at seven and Lemmie Howard gave the Weevils the lead on the Weevils' next possession. UAM never looked back from there as they led for the remainder of the half, leading as much as 15 points, and closing out the half with a 14-point, 40-26 lead.

The Weevils extended the lead to 16 to start the second half with a layup by Alvarez Powell and continued to hold a double-digit lead for the remainder of the contest with the biggest lead coming on the final shot of the contest by UAM with a three by Kyler Haynes that put the final score at 94-63, a 31-point advantage.

Miles Daniels led the Weevils on the scoreboard with 27 points followed by Denzel McDuffey with 18. Max Warren scored 14, Lemmie Howard with 12, and Kendal Frey with 10. DeJuan Jones added six, Alvarez Powell with four, and rounding out the scoring was Kyler Haynes with three.

Advancing to the semifinal round to face Henderson State for the fifth time in the 2021 season, the Weevils saw the Reddies open the contest with a 9-0 run before UAM got on the board with 14:16 left in the half after a two-point shot by Alvarez Powell.

Henderson maintained the lead until UAM gained its first lead of the contest on a three-pointer by Miles Daniels with 5:00 remaining gave the Weevils a 26-25 lead. It would be the Weevils only lead of the half as Henderson State closed out the half with a one-point advantage, 31-30.

The lead would change hands several times over the course of the second half and would be tied at 40 with 15:33 remaining in the half. Daniels gave UAM the lead 30 seconds later with a three and the Weevils would maintain the lead until Henderson tied the contest at 50 with 8:09 remaining.

The contest would continue to go back and forth for the remainder of the contest

with each team having opportunities to hand the side victory in the final seconds of the contest, but neither team could gain the advantage as the game would head to overtime tied at 64.

DaJuan Jones would open the overtime period with a three to give UAM the lead. Jones would connect on another three on the next possession to extend the lead to six. Henderson would cut the lead to two points, but it would be as close as the score would get as UAM would close out the overtime period extending the lead to 10 points for the 80-70 victory, advancing to the championship game against Southern Arkansas University.

With the win, the Weevils record against Henderson State on the season improved to 5-0.

Leading UAM in scoring was DeJuan Jones with 22 points, scoring most of his points in the second half and overtime period. Miles Daniels scored 17, Lemmie Howard, 16, and Denzel McDuffey with nine. Alvarez Powell added seven, Kendal Frey with six, and Keyon Craddock with three.

Entering their third GAC Championship Tournament Championship game in five seasons, the Weevils were still seeking their first tournament crown against conference rival Southern Arkansas University. The game would mark the fifth meeting of the season between the two schools with each team winning two times each with the tie breaking game being for the GAC Championship Tournament title.

UAM found themselves in familiar territory to begin the contest as SAU scored the first five points before UAM got on the board with a layup by Kendal Frey.

SAU would increase the lead to seven points before UAM would cut the lead to two points at the 12:25 mark with a layup by Max Warren put the score 9-7.

SAU went on a 9-0 run, connecting on three consecutive three-pointers, to give the Muleriders their biggest lead of the contest, 20-9, 11 points with 9:20 remaining in the half.

UAM began to cut into the SAU lead and took the lead for the first time in the contest after a three by Kendal Frey gave the Weevils a 26-25 advantage. Both teams would exchange the lead with UAM coming on top in the half 31-30.

Neither team could gain an advantage in the second half. As one team would gain the lead, the other would come back to either tie the contest or take the lead.

Miles Daniels tie the contest at 63 after connecting on three consecutive foul shots and gave the Weevils a three-point lead, 66-63, on his next three with 4:41 remaining in the contest. SAU would battle back to cut the lead to one-point but UAM's Keyon Craddock would extend the lead to four with a three.

SAU's Victor Ihrhri would

See WEEVILS Page 7

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**Passion for caregiving brings mobile shower**

By MELISSA ORRELL  
editor@monticellonews.net

Taking care of people has always been a passion for James and Stacy Williams, founders of the non-profit Vision as We Serve, who moved to Monticello and were semi-retired from a for profit business they ran in Missouri taking care of people with disabilities.

"We owned and operated a for profit for people with disabilities for the state of Missouri," said Stacy Williams. "We have been in the caring business for 25 plus years. We took care of people in their own homes for people with dementia, physical disabilities, assistance, needing help going to the grocery store, going for outings, so we have done this for awhile."

After visiting California several times and seeing mobile showers, the Williams recognized the need in Arkansas, but expanded on the idea to include hygiene services, case management and nutrition support, primarily through showers, laundry, hygiene kits, haircuts, food and clothing.

"They have mobile shower units there," said Williams. "They are big giving people (the opportunity to take) showers, wash their clothes. What we want to do is expand on that. Give them showers, let them do a load of laundry but also get them a haircut. Let them make an appointment at beauticians who will donate their time or effort or a lower amount to do that. We also do case management."

The idea is to allow the homeless community across the state to have these basic needs met and to allow people to prepare for job interviews.

"They can get prepared to do an interview to get a job because we all know that we go in there and the first impression we make is how we look so how do they get past that," Williams explained. "we also do case management, our director she does that now for one of the health agencies and she is going to come on board and do that full time once I can pay everyone, right now, they are doing it for free. If they need to fill out for food stamps, Medicaid, VA benefits. We will set up that so they can come to her and she can help them with the process."

Dignity and opportunities can be a fleeting idea for some people who may have ended up homeless, however they end up in the situation.

"Our mission is to restore dignity, rekindle hope, rekindle optimism, and fuel a sense of opportunity to stop the vicious cycle of homelessness one shower at a time," stated James Williams in letters sent out asking for support for their vision. "Our vision is a community without homelessness."

"Our mobile shower facility is designed to meet the basic health and human need for hygiene," he continued. "A hot shower renews both the body and the soul. Vision as We Serve aims to meet this need and deliver it with warmth, empathy, compassion, while providing supportive services such as case management. The end goal is the same- to lift individuals and families out of homelessness."

The mobile shower facility is designed to meet the basic health and human need for

hygiene.

Vision as We Serve, founded in October 2020, received notification of approval of their 501(c)(3) status in December of 2020.

"Our goal for 2021 is to raise \$115,000 to purchase the mobile shower unit, a truck to tow the unit, and initial supplies," he stated in the letter. "The minimum needed to begin providing services is the \$65,000 needed to purchase the shower unit."

Until the Williams are able to purchase the unit, they have still been working hard to reach out and effect change in the community, some residents may have spotted the pair passing out food around Walmart. Williams stresses that anyone needing help or assistance, for any reason, can contact them and they will find a way to meet the needs.

For more information on services offered or to get involved by helping the organization to meet it's goals to offer their services across the state, visit the website at [4uwerserve.org](http://4uwerserve.org).

**DC fourth graders serve as White House curators**

Special to the Advance

Who takes care of the thousands of historic artifacts in the White House, cataloging and preserving everything from presidential portraits to presidential china? And how does that person balance the needs of a building that is both a museum and symbol of American democracy, as well as a family home? Drew Central fourth grade students engaged in historically-based literacy lessons while learning the history of building the Present's House or as it's known today the White House. Students started their research with the 1792 contest to select an architect with the best design to build a president's home to be built in the new capital city and research ended with the job responsibilities of the White House curator. This position was established by First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy in 1961 to help collect and exhibit artifacts; before this, presidents could throw away or take anything they wished. Now it's all accounted by a team of professionals. To culminate and celebrate their learning, students engaged in real-world experiences as curators. Students filled out a security clearance application, received a Boarding Pass to enter White House to work, researched Interior & Decorative artifacts available from the permanent White House Collection, and used the process of cataloging. Next, as they entered the doors of the White House (classrooms) dressed in formal attire, they went straight to work balancing the needs of a building that is both a museum and symbol of American democracy. They eagerly partnered and designed a concept board to show off and project their design creativity skills. Then miniature 3D White House rooms containing artifacts as décor were crafted to exhibit the best artifacts of American history and culture.

These historically-based literacy lessons were created by a team of teachers from across the nation working at the White House alongside White House curator, Lydia Tederick. Drew Central fourth grade teacher Eva Arrington was one of the teachers se-

**Ryburn donates to four local charities through Toyota Dealer Match Program**



Ryburn Motor Company was able to help four local charities through the Toyota Dealer Match Program. The four nonprofit organizations that received donations were Feed the kids, The Call of Southeast Arkansas, Junior Auxiliary of Monticello, and Feed Our Neighbors. Ryburn Motor Company gave each organization \$2,500 and Toyota matched the donation so that each of the four charities received a total of \$5,000 each. Ryburn would like to thank Toyota for investing in our community and each of these organizations for all they do to better our community.

lected by the White House Historical Association and attended the weeklong White House History Teacher Institute in Washington, D.C.

**Flushed blue jeans cause headache for City**

By MELISSA ORRELL  
editor@monticellonews.net

Monticello City Council's regular scheduled meeting was long and tedious Tuesday, March 23 as the council discussed topics ranging from the City's employment handbook to purchasing a new city map to be used for community planning by the Monticello Planning Commission.

The meeting began with talks of leaks and blue jeans found in the City sewer system. Public Works Superintendent Charlie Hammock reported to the Council the state of water leaks and potholes in the city, reporting three main line leaks were repaired and several potholes over the course of the last month. When asked how the city discovers the leaks, Hammock reported that most leaks are reported by customers. One such leak that was discovered and repaired was caused by half a pair of blue jeans that had been flushed by a Monticello resident. During the discussion, Mayor Paige Chase reminded the Council of the City's No F.O.G. Friday initiative that reminds citizens not to dispose of fats, oils and grease down the drain but also added that many other things are being flushed and disposed of in the sewer system that also causes problems for the City, including flushable wipes.

"I'll just take this opportunity to tell everybody and make sure the public is aware," stated Chase during the meeting. "We have a No F.O.G. Friday campaign going on so every Friday we post about the fact that you shouldn't flush or pour down your drain fats, oils and grease, that does not include baby wipes, diapers, underwear, blue jeans, many, many other things that we find in the sewer."

"When you flush those things, they will stop up, probably not your sewer line," she continued, "but they will stop up your neighbor's sewer line and that neighbor down the stream from them and it causes a real problem. We want everyone to know, please, even those wipes that say they are flushable, they are really not flushable. They will not travel through the whole length of the sewer line and get where they are suppose to go without causing some problems."

City inspector Brian Rodgers reported on the shape of the City's inspection with one property brought to the City for a lien on a property. Later in the meeting the Council approved a resolution to impose a lien on 509 East Gaines in order to clean up the lot. The structure in question is dilapidated with no electricity or water running to the property. The owner has been officially served with no response

to the City after more than the required 30 days.

Students who attend the after school program through the Boys and Girls Club are doing great, according to a letter sent by Bettina Randolph, with good grades and good attitudes reported by teachers and parents. Also in the letter, Randolph stated the Boys and Girls Club will be open for the summer program and will begin posting information next week and will be taking applications in mid-April.

Community surveys, tours of the City and maps were on the agenda for the planning commission as Dan Boice, president, reported on the completion of the Community Catalyst Survey and the next steps the City will take.

"Before we can start making plans or drafting ordinances, state code lays out what the planning commission is supposed to do," Boice stated. "First we have to prepare a comprehensive study of present conditions and probable future growth of the municipality and its neighboring territory. The second thing is the commission will prepare a map showing streets, public ways and boundaries of the area within the jurisdiction for which it will prepare plans, ordinances and regulations. The map shall be known as the planning area map and that jurisdictional area, by the way is set by the state code and includes everything one mile of the city limits."

According to Boice, the commission now has the required map which will be able to be used by the city as well as the planning commission. The commission and Judge Robert Akin have both studied the map and it has been filed with the City Clerk and the County Recorder, according to Boice.

With the map complete, Boice announced the comprehensive study has become the focus of the planning commission for the rest of the year. The community catalyst survey has been completed and a public meeting will be held Tuesday, March 30 at the Fine Arts Center at the University of Arkansas Monticello. Due to COVID regulations, in person attendance is limited to invite only, however the meeting will be streamed live on the UAM YouTube channel and on the Monticello Economic Development Commission's Facebook page. Links will be posted closer to the event.

Although the survey has been completed, the Commission is still actively seeking community input on what residents would like to see in the City of Monticello.

Boice also announced a walk audit that will be completed in April by Crafton Tull civil engineering. The engineers will do a walking tour of the city and report back with recommendations.

Boice along with Nita McDaniel of the Monticello Economic Development Commission both spoke of another opportunity the City

was chosen by the University of Central Arkansas Community Development Institute to receive a First Impressions Tour Assessment.

"A First Impressions Tour is an assessment tool that can provide a community with an unbiased perspective of its strengths and weaknesses," according to the UCA CDI website. "The assessment is truly a 'first impression' of a community. A group of community leaders will swap places with one another to complete an assessment (via a day-trip) of one another's communities using the First Impressions Tour assessment tool (developed by our team at UCA). They will then take their findings and share them via a report and virtual debrief meeting. The information gathered can be used to provide general direction for future community development efforts by identifying broad categories of community assets and/or areas for growth. A FIT assessment includes information gathered through various avenues: demographic and market data, discussion with community leaders and citizens, online assessment and a driving tour of the community. This information is compiled into a simple report that analyzes a community's online, physical, social, and economic infrastructure and provides a list of possible 'Next Steps.'"

According to McDaniel, the City was selected as the advance project for those in the final year of the CDI program. "Monticello, we really are doing a better job working across the board," McDaniel said in reference to City and County governments working together, along with UAM and stressed how intertwined UAM is with the City and County.

Boice stressed that before any planning or actions can be taken, it is important to have a solid grasp on where we are as a City.

McDaniel also spoke of a prospective business that visited Monticello last week and praised the City, County, businesses and citizens for their help in cleaning up the trash on roadways before the prospective business visited.

"I want to take a minute to let y'all know of how proud I am of the economic development team we have here in Monticello," said McDaniel. "Each one at the table did an amazing job at presenting the information the way the prospect needed it. The feedback I have is that...they were very impressed with us."

While the commission is not sure what will happen moving forward at this point, McDaniel asserted the only way the City would not get this business to move to Monticello is only if one of the other city's they are also scouting has something more to offer the company.

Flooding on Davis Street was another issue that was brought to the councils attention with Alderman Al Peer explaining a resident, Bridgette Freeman, had brought it to the City's attention in 2019. Peer explained that with any large rain the city has the street floods and water gets in to all the houses down the street.

Chase explained the issue was being looked into when COVID-19 hit and put a screeching halt to presentations at public meetings. One thing the City had already done to solve the issue was ask McClelland Consulting engineers to look at the problem and make suggestions. At that time, the engineering company found flooding throughout the city and suggested splitting the City into four basins and working on one basin at a time, explaining that when one issue is fixed, it can cause another issues somewhere else. By dividing the City into the four basin regions, the City would be able to work on flooding and drainage issues in "small bites" with repair

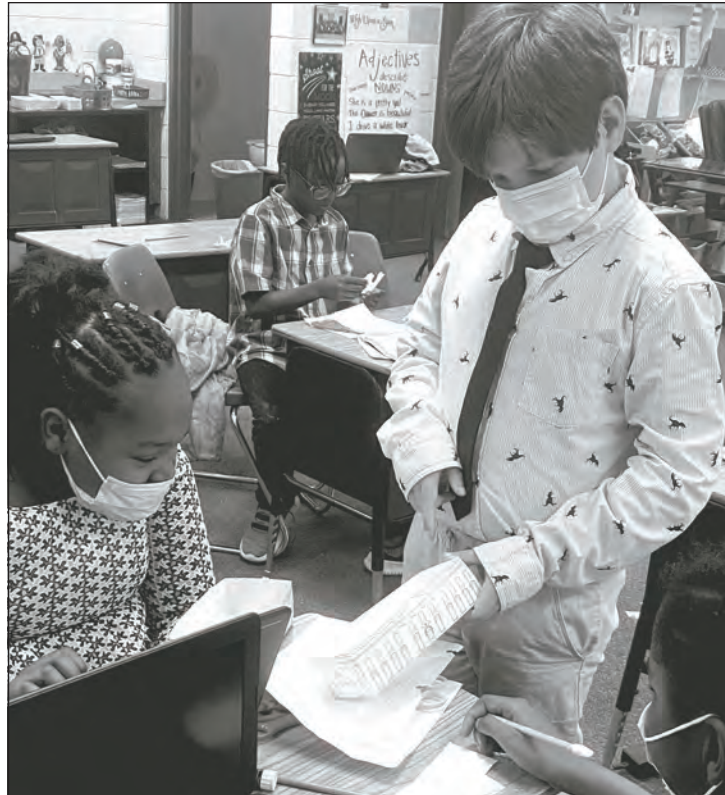


Photo Courtesy of Eva Arrington

Pictured left to right: Mallori Veasy, Zabirion Henderson, Cole Reed and Aquira Johnson.

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costs being very expensive. The suggestion was made to go the basin repair route and begin with the area of Davis street.

The council decided to contact McClelland and have the engineers present their findings, suggestions and estimated costs to the Council.

The council also:

- Approved a resolution to apply for a grant in the amount of \$76,814 to fix the historic post office building. The repairs will stop the leaks that are allowing water into the building and further damaging the building. The total cost is \$115,221. If awarded the grant the City will pay the total cost up front and be reimbursed two-thirds of the cost.

- Tabled changes to the City of Monticello employee handbook pertaining to a catastrophic sick leave bank program. Members of the council raised concerns of the wording of who would be eligible for the program and asked for more time to research the issue.

- Tabled a resolution to purchase software that would allow the City to go paperless for employee forms and would allow the City to conduct training using online training modules. Members of the Council asked the City to research other companies to see if the company the City has been working with is the best company to go with.

- Approved a resolution for the City to pay half of the cost of repair to Robert's Drive in the amount of \$16,708.86.

- Approved a resolution to contract EFS GeoTechnologies to provide maps with layers that show the Public Property layer for a cost of \$2,500, Current Land Use layer for \$6,500, Digitizing Paper Land Use for \$750 and Ariel Photography for \$6,261.18 for a total cost of \$16,011.18. The transaction exceeds the \$10,000 limit the City has that requires local bids, however the resolution also waived the requirement.

- Approved a resolution to pay \$80,723 for 15 units for the Monticello Police Department that include computers, computer hardware and software for police vehicles. The MPD was awarded a grant that will reimburse 90% of the cost at \$69,120.

## EF-2 tornado confirmed in Monticello

By MELISSA ORRELL  
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Storm warnings were issued ahead of a storm system as it slowly churned its way toward Southeast Arkansas and Drew County Saturday, March 27 with tornado warning alerts hitting phones across the county around 10 p.m.

Tornado sirens were audible throughout the county as residents hunkered down in interior spaces in their homes.

One such resident, Destiny Allison, was not as lucky as most other residents, when a confirmed tornado registering as an EF-2 on the enhanced Fujita scale traveled through her neighborhood just east of US Highway 425 near Rose Hill cutoff and Highway 83.

"My husband was looking through the window and around 10 p.m. he closed the curtain and said it was time to take cover," she said Sunday, March 28 outside her home where a tree completely destroyed her garage and damaged other parts of the home. "I know this wasn't straight line winds. I heard the rotation of the wind."

In describing the sheer intensity of the sound of the wind, Allison said it was so loud she didn't even know when the tree hit the house.

"All I could hear was the wind," she stated.

According to the National Weather Service, the tornado traveled a total of 1.6 miles and was estimated at being 40 feet wide with winds up to 115 miles per hour.

Roof damage was seen on other houses close to Allison's, with damage also visible across the road at Rabb's Construction where work trucks had been picked up and landed in a field beside the construction company and a trailer had hit the building.

Signs of debris were also visible down Rose Hill Cutoff where it seems the tornado deposited debris from structures on or near U.S. Highway

425.

## Monticello hears results of Community Catalyst Survey

By MELISSA ORRELL  
editor@monticellonews.net

In an ongoing effort to improve the City of Monticello, the City, along with the Monticello Economic Development Commission and the Monticello planning commission announced the results of the Community Catalyst Survey that was conducted by the University of Central Arkansas Community Development Institute, Tuesday, March 30 at the University of Arkansas at Monticello Fine Arts Center and was live-streamed on the Monticello EDC Facebook page.

Mayor Paige Chase began the event by welcoming everyone and thanking Nita McDaniel with the Monticello Economic Development Commission for applying for the community survey and organizing the meeting, along with UAM Chancellor Peggy Doss and Jeff Weaver, UAM vice chancellor for advancement, along with he City Council members, the Monticello Planning Commission and the Monticello Advertising and Promotion commission.

"They came because they recognize the importance of our citizens' ideas and desires for our city," Chase stated. The mic was eventually turned over to Shelby Fiegel, UCA CDI director, who began to explain the survey and the results of the survey.

Fiegel began by commenting on the difference between the strategic planning that normally takes place in a community and the Community Catalyst program being used in Monticello.

"We did a lot of strategic planning and that planning was awesome," Fiegel stated about the strategic planning communities across the State have done in the past. "We rolled it out in the community we did a lot of think tank exercises, round robins, gathering community feedback. We came up with these amazing awesome goals that would make our communities greater places to live, work and play. But sometimes in that process, once that plan was established and written, it went on a shelf. I think we have all heard that before. Especially from a community perspective you have to have ownership to get things done.

"Through the catalyst program what we really want to bring is achievable, successful goals that will have an impact on Monticello. But we recognize that as a part of that process, we really need get that community engagement on the front end," she said, "make sure everyone's voices are heard. Diverse voices are heard."

The survey ran from Jan. 4 to Jan. 22. According to Fiegel, the turnout for the survey was impressive, even for communities larger than Monticello.

"You had an amazing turnout. Over 500 citizens completed the survey," announced Fiegel. "Knowing community surveys across the State, much larger communities, barely had that turnout so that is a great earmark for success. I also want to say their was diverse representation across the community."

Fiegel then went on to present slides that showed a diverse range across age and professions based on responses received for the survey. Fiegel also pointed out that the survey was not limited to just Monticello or Drew County respondents.

"We asked if they were inside Monticello city limits, inside the county, we also had people from outside the community because we realize that Monticello is really the hub for Southeast Arkansas and we wanted to collect from everyone this process is going to impact," she explained. "So it is not just residents of Monticello, it is community citizens from the surrounding area, even outside the county."

One of the first results Fiegel covered was the answers for how people perceive the community.

The top six responses were small town, traditional, rural living, family-oriented, hunting/fishing and friendly.

"I think that really encompasses your community,"

Fiegel said, "a few people did say diverse, charming, beautiful."

Another question asked was what citizens wanted their leadership to focus on. The top answers were job creation, education and workforce diversity, healthcare, youth and family activities, downtown development and entrepreneurship/small businesses.

"I am very excited to see that Monticello really has a focus on small business, entrepreneurship, downtown development," said Fiegel. "It really shows that you radiate grow your own, focus on people in community, help them grow their businesses and that is really where you are going to see growth in your community."

The survey also include an open response portion. From the over 500 responses the team gathered the most frequently commented on areas. Those include:

- Attracting business and industry. Respondents voiced a desire for more industry and retail businesses in hopes of bringing more jobs. Respondents also mentioned a desire for better variety of restaurants and stronger support for existing small businesses.

- Youth and family activities. There was an expressed need for more kid friendly activities including the idea of an arcade, mini golf, festivals and a community theater.

- Bike and walking trails. Respondents mentioned bike and walking trails to encourage exercising. Trails would be another activity for children and families to participate in.

- Lake Monticello. Respondents shared the need to restore Lake Monticello. The lake could be a great place for recreation and contribute to the beautification of the town as well.

- Community Center. Respondents mentioned a need for a community center for community education and recreation. Mentioned for an indoor basketball court and pool.

Where do we go from here?

- Monticello has been chosen as the CDI 2021 Advanced Year community.

As mentioned at the City Council's March meeting, CDI graduates will utilize a First Impression Tour assessment tool to provide Monticello with an unbiased perspective of it's strength and weaknesses during the week of Aug. 2 through 6, 2021. More information on how residents can be involved in the CDI Advance Year program, conducted in partnership with Simmons Bank, will be announced soon.

- UCA and Crafton Tu; will conduct a walk audit in Monticello

Crafton Tull and UCA will conduct an interactive walk audit with community leaders to develop place making concepts and solutions for circulation (vehicular, pedestrian and bike), parking, universal access, low impact development concepts, way-finding, beautification and community character improvement for a 3 x 3 block area of Monticello. A summary report of findings will be shared with the community.

- Utilize a process called Strategic Doing to move the Community Catalyst process forward.

Strategic Doing is an innovative community development tool that focuses on immediate, impactful small wins and goals to create transformation in communities. We hope to host a Strategic Doing workshop when we can meet safely in-person.

Anyone wishing to watch the meeting can find the recording on the Monticello EDC facebook page or the University of Arkansas at Monticello YouTube channel.

## Solid Waste Committee meets to discuss delinquent accounts

By MELISSA ORRELL  
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The solid waste committee, which was formed at the last regularly scheduled Drew County Quorum Court meeting, met Tuesday, March 30 to discuss updating and making changes to the Solid Waste ordinance.

During the meeting, the members voted to appoint Justice of the Peace Renee

Knowles as chair of the committee. The committee discussed the amount of delinquent trash pick up, which is estimated to now be around \$150,000. The original list that was presented in the regularly scheduled Quorum Court meeting included anyone over 90 days, however, bills are only issued every 90 days. By defining delinquent bills as being anyone who is over 180 days, the amount dropped by an estimated \$70,000.

Another item of contention was the actual list. Knowles insisted that the first step to moving forward was to fix the list of delinquent accounts and to "clean the list up," by searching out the accounts of those who have passed away, been living in nursing homes or who are no longer reachable for a number of reasons. Judge Robert Akin informed the committee that since the Quorum Court meeting about \$10,000 has been written off for legitimate reasons such as death, or being unreachable.

However, tracking down those on the list and finding the delinquent bills that are unable to be collected due to death or a move outside the county, is a tedious process that will take some time to complete.

Drew County Collector Tanya Loveless expressed that she had no issue with collecting the amounts due for the Solid Waste Department but stressed the need for the list to be updated to include parcel numbers or addresses. The list provided to the court only includes names which can lead to confusion if more than one person is living in the county with the same name.

The issue of multiple people with the same name can be solved by generating a new list that includes account numbers and addresses.

County Attorney Cliff Gibson pointed out that the list was more of a clerical exercise while others on the committee contended that Loveless does not have to find the people on the list but instead could check the list and if a name appeared on the list, the person could then be sent across the hall from the Collector's Office in the Drew County Courthouse to the Solid Waste Department to confirm if that particular person had a delinquent account or if the delinquent account on the list was someone with the same name.

As the discussion continued to stall on the list of delinquent accounts with Knowles and Loveless insisting the information on the list was not sufficient for every single situation, the frustration among the members grew.

"The point of this meeting, I think, whether it is to clean up the list, is to figure out the direction to take to try to clean up some of these delinquencies," said Justice of the Peace Frank Appleberry. "The list is part of that process, we are going through some things that we need to address but mainly we need to address how we are going to start the whole process. What are we going to do to start the process, we have to have a process to begin."

Knowles stated that they couldn't begin this year anyway because Loveless has already begun to collect personal property taxes. However, other members of the court disagreed, pointing out that the Court was not wanting to attach the delinquent bills to personal property taxes, but instead would request Loveless check the list for delinquent bills before allowing someone to pay personal property taxes, not collecting the money or actually attaching the amount to the tax bill.

Justice of the Peace Steve Pigott asked County treasurer Charlie Searcy what the total amount of billing was for the County and was given an estimate of around \$700,000 a year, pointing out that while \$150,000 (or the over \$200,000 reported in the Quorum Court meeting that included the 90 day billings that were not overdue for another 90 days) is not as big as it sounds in relation to the total amount owed and mostly paid on time throughout the year.

Another point made in the need to have a scrubbed, cleaned up list, was the fact that even after a trash can is removed by the county, the residents still have a bill that continues to grow as the Arkansas code requires counties to provide trash service to residents. Akin pointed out the practice of removing the trash can is legal and helps to collect from those who have not paid their bill and it was not considered not providing service since Drew County residents can haul their trash to the dump and are not charged for household trash at the County landfill. The requirement for the County to provide trash service to all residents with a 911 address is paid for by everyone with a 911 address and is not voluntary, it is mandatory.

Other points that were made in the meeting included:

- A Class 4 landfill, like the one owned and operated in Drew County, can not accept household garbage. All household garbage taken to the dump by residents must still be taken to Ashley County where they have a Class 1 landfill, and for which the County is charged by the tonnage.

- The discussion involving increasing rates is not related to the past due accounts, instead that has to do with the increase costs from charges from the Ashley County landfill and the ADEQ, which charges by tonnage, as well as rising employee costs, rising gasoline prices and the costs associated with maintaining and purchasing equipment for the service.

- Having the County Collector employees check a list for unpaid solid waste fees before accepting personal property taxes or having residents visit the solid waste office across the hall from the Collector's Office in the court house before paying personal property taxes to check for delinquent accounts.

While details were discussed, Justices of the Peace Pigott and Frank Appleberry reminded the committee several times that the point of

the meeting was to figure out how to move forward.

It was decided in the meeting that Gibson would draft a new ordinance for Solid Waste and send it out to members on the committee who would then be able to review the ordinance against old ordinances and suggest changes that needed to be made.

## APRIL HIGHLIGHTS

### UAM Weevil Stampede a success

By JEFF YOUNG  
Advance Correspondent

It seems to never fail that when it comes time for the University of Arkansas at Monticello to host the annual Weevil Stampede, mother nature generally does not cooperate with the event. After being canceled last year due to the Covid-19, this year's Weevil Stampede came off without a hitch, almost.

The only drawback to the stampede this year would turn out to be parking because of the ground being soft from previous rainstorms, but besides the parking, fans of the rodeo piled in to witness the top schools from across the Ozark Region compete over two nights and on Championship Saturday to determine the top schools in the next stop for the 2021 Spring Rodeo Season.

Competing in 10 events, the schools competing in the Ozark Region include Missouri Valley College, East Mississippi Community College, University of West Alabama, University of Tennessee-Martin, Three River College, Southern Arkansas University, Pearl River Community College, Murray State University, Central Methodist University, and the University of Arkansas at Monticello.

Results in the Saddle Bronc Riding event were Trey Thomas Watts of Missouri Valley College (MVC) with a total score of 135, Tyler Calloway Pruitt from Tennessee-Martin (UNTM) was second with a score of 127, and Ty Carl Pope (MVC) placed third with a score of 130.

MVC would take the top three spots in Bareback Riding with Nick David Pelke placing first with a score of 151, Jesse Alan Pope with a score of 144, and Ty Carl Pope with a score of 142.

Wyatt Gentry Hart of UNTM would place first in Bull Riding with teammate Walter Thomas Smithson placing second, and Brandon James Ballard finishing third from Three Rivers College (TRC).

MVC would take the top two spots in Tie Down Roping. Roy Dillon Lee placed first with a time of 15.7 and Tom Joe Crouse placing second with a time of 17.5 edging out Chasen Lane Thrasher of UNTM with a time of 17.7.

Pearl River Community College (EMSCC) would take the top spot in Steer Wrestling with Pacey Elliott McBride securing first with a time of 7.8 followed by MVC teammates Roy Dillon Lee with a time of

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# SEARK CONCERT CROWNS TALENT HUNT WINNER



Melissa Orrell/Advance Monticellonian

Seventeen year old Bradon Hunter accepts a certificate from SEARK Concert president Clint Young after being announced the winner of the Great SEARK Concert Talent Hunt Showcase. See story on next page and more photos, below.



9.7 and Clay Donald Harper with a time of 9.8.

East Mississippi Community College led in Team Roping Header with Marcus Paul Theriot with a time of 11.3 followed by Three Rivers College's (TRC) Cannon Brock Smith with a time of 12.2. Southern Arkansas University (SARU) placed third with Strand Gillis Barricklow with a time of 16.4.

In Team Roping Heeler, EMSCC's Bently Cole Curry placed first with a time of 11.3, TRC's Kolby Allen Krieger placed second with a time of 12.2, and Sidney Latham Dickson (SARU) in third with a time of 16.4. University of Arkansas at Monticello placed sixth and seventh with Trey Allen Brit with a time of 19.2 and Thomas Cash Davis with a time of 27.4.

Jaylie Paige Mathews (EMSCC) placed first in Barrel Racing with a time of 29.66 followed by teammate Taycie Glyn Mathews in second with a time of 30.35. Kelsi Rose Haller (Central Methodist University) placed third with a time of 30.51.

In Breakaway Roping, Blair Renee Bryant (EMSCC) placed first with a time of 4.9 seconds, Harley Tel Lynn (SARU) was second with a time of 5.2 seconds, and Morgan Irene Chappell (MVC) in third with a time of 5.3. Chappell's teammate Lauren Elizabeth Conkwright was fourth with a time of 5.3 also.

In Goat Tying, UTMN's Lauren Runyon Heck was first with a time of 15.6 followed by Heather Erica McLaughlin (University of West Alabama) with a time of 16.1. Kelsey Elizabeth Dyer (MVC) placed third with a time of 16.3.

Missouri Valley College placed first in the men's division with 1060 total points followed by East Mississippi Community College with 530 points and the University of West Alabama in third with a score of 330. UAM placed eighth with 80 points.

On the women's side, East Mississippi Community College placed first with a score of 545 with Missouri Valley placing second with a score of 265. University of West Alabama was third with a score of 160. UAM placed fifth with a score of 70.

Roy Dillon Lee (MVC) was first in the Men's All-around with a score of 280 with Sheyenne Dakota Anderson (MVC) placing first in Women's All-around with a score of 100.

## MPD updates in car computer system

By MELISSA ORRELL  
editor@monticellonews.net

On board computer systems for Police Department vehicles are the latest upgrade to the Monticello Police Department. During the regularly scheduled Monticello City Council meeting held Tuesday, March 10, the Council approved a resolution authorizing the purchase of the equipment for the MPD and participation in a grant program that will reimburse the city 90% of the total \$80,723 cost of the equipment with the grant totaling \$69,120. The grant works by having the City initially laying out the cost for the equipment and then being reimbursed 90% of the cost. The equipment will improve the time it takes for a traffic stop, help to remove human

error, reduce the amount of time police officers spend reporting to eCrash, an accident reporting system and more.

By having on board computer systems, police officers will be able to scan identifications, in the case of a ticket or accident report, the system will automatically populate the information needed.

"The cool thing about it is it eliminated human error," said Monticello Police Chief Jason Akers. "Just on the citation side when an officer writes a citation there are multiple copies, he has to write legibly, sometime in the rain, sometimes free stand while holding up the ticket book. A four may look like a 9 if a raindrop hits it. So what this is, this will enable them to get a DL, scan it and it will populate the citation. It will take all the information off the license and it will automatically fill it in so there is no writing tickets, per se. There is no transposing numbers."

But it goes beyond eliminating human error in writing citations, it will also help with the common occurrence of running a vehicle's tags and the multitude of things that could go wrong when people are busy in high pressure environments such as the dispatch room, taking pressure off of dispatch and allowing them to focus on other aspects of their job.

"Officers will be able to run tags on cars from their own vehicles," Akers said before explaining a common scenario officers and dispatchers face. "First I have to see (the vehicle and tags), then I have to radio it to dispatch, that is assuming 911 didn't just go off. So now, while I think I may have a stolen car, I'm trying to determine if this tag belongs to that car or comes back to a stolen car, the dispatcher is having to handle a 911 complaint over a traffic accident. Well, another 911 complaint comes in, for the same accident and a second 911 operator is tied up. So while the dispatchers are busy, a patrolman is sitting here waiting on that tag to come back and in the meantime that car has turned on (US Highway) 278, he has followed it out of town, he has gone as far as he can go. (The program) will enable the officer to see a tag, run a tag and get the information back himself in the car. If you think about the tags, some of the agencies have said it has cut their dispatch down 50 percent. That allows dispatch to focus on other aspects of their job."

While many imagine dispatchers sitting in a room answering phones all day, that is a far cry from the reality of their profession and negates the timeliness in which their job is performed.

Akers describes a typical scenario where a dispatcher begins entering a warrant into Arkansas Crime Information Center, having to stop and answer a 911 call, completing the duties associated with the call, sitting back down to finish entering the warrant and then being interrupted again when a patrolman calls in to run a driver's license.

"They will be able to run their own driver's license, they will be able to run their own tags, they will be able to catch a fire arm on the scene of a stop; they can run all it from their patrol vehicle," said Akers. "That is a big deal, too."

Akers then gives another scenario where an officer has called in about a firearm and has given the dispatcher the serial number for the weapon because the gun has been defaced and there is no way to identify it positively without the serial number.

"I gave you a serial number on this gun and you repeat it back to me but while typing it you get a call just somebody, 'Hey what time can I come register for sex offender registry?' and now you have to go back and the dispatcher has to keep the number straight," explained Akers. "Now that officer can look at it and enter it into the system, he can run it on the scene so there will be no more having to relay that traffic back and forth."

The new system will also allow administrators, such as Akers, to look at key demographics for crime rates and keep tabs on officers to ensure correct policing in the City.

"We will be able to go in as administrators of the system and prove how many citations the officer has written in a month, how many citations with a racial break down, a male/female breakdown, a location," Akers explained this is already procedure for his force but this will save time. "Like say this guy seems to always be working in this general area, he is always on (US Highway) 425 South. You can go in and it shows everything, now we have to do it by hand. From a crime mapping stand point, and I am big on that, you follow the data. If you have more theft reports (in a particular area), put more officers there and see what you can get."

As the laptops and systems are put into place, the Police Department will also have a monitor in dispatch that allows dispatch to know where every unit is at any given time while on duty.

"When they get a call in, typically in the past they rotate calls out between officers," said Akers. "Now they will be able to look at that. They can tell officers you are close to this so you will be the quickest one there. We like to evenly distribute the calls amongst officers but we also are more concerned about our response time so an officer may get more calls back to back. If he does, it is because he happens to be closest and they will be able to look at the monitor and know who is closer."

Pursuits will also be able to be more closely monitored without the officer having to know exactly what road he is on at the time.

"If (an officer) winds up in pursuits out in the county they will be able to look at that and know where they are," stated Akers. "Sometime you get on roads and you don't know the name of the road. Dispatch can tell you, you are on such and such road."

As in many professions paperwork is a time drain on officers after making a stop or, especially making accident reports. The new systems will also be able to save time on that and get officers back on the road and back to their jobs, and again help to eliminate human error.

Akers offered another scenario, explaining the process the officers now have to go through to correctly report an accident to eCrash, the accident reporting software the MPD uses.

Officers have to go out to

the scene and collect all the information from the parties involved, this include driver's licenses, proof of insurance, license plates and send the information to the PD where it is then printed out. Once the officer's leaves the scene, he must then return to the PD, get the print out from dispatch and then go to another room where the officer then enters the information into the system.

"Now I can do my report from my car. That saves a big hassle and helps with human error," he explained.

Akers also went over another scenario where the software will be able to help the force. Pointing out that some situations are hectic and ties everyone up. As in the example he used of a multiple car accident where several ambulances, fire trucks and police have responded with dispatch tied up directing different emergency units. At the same time a domestic violence situation has occurred and a suspect has left in their vehicle with a weapon. An officer spots the vehicle and pulls the vehicle over. The officer is presented with a suspect who has no identification but provides a name and birth date. If the officer does not have an on board system he must call in to dispatch and wait for what information will return. On the scene the officer does not have a photo from the information given, dispatch does but isn't on the scene. Akers states that suspects will use other peoples information sometimes but in the scenario of having to call back to dispatch, the officer on the scene will not know that. With the on board system the officer no longer has to wait for dispatch and can run that information from his vehicle and when the information comes back, he will be able to see the photo on the identification does not match the person in the car.

"For the purpose of identifying people it is going to be handy on the scene," he explained.

Since approval of the grant, the police department is now in the process of purchasing and installing the system, the MPD chose to use Panasonic Tough Books for the vehicles and to run the software on.

## MSD board has full agenda; raises salaries

By MELISSA ORRELL  
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With the passing of Senate Bill 504, now known as Act 679, after Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson signed it in to law, the Monticello School Board approved pay raises for school district teachers.

The current Act 679 was passed in an effort to provide funding to schools to equalize teachers' salaries after the minimum salaries were raised last year. In the Act, Monticello Schools will receive \$463,438.70 which would allow the school to skip the 2021-22 approved salary schedule. The law will provide \$185 per student to the schools, however, in order to obtain the funding the schools would have had to meet the \$36,000 minimum pay for a teacher with a Bachelor's degree and no experience.

During the meeting the school board approved

- A \$12,241 stipend with a 200 day contract for a Head

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Jr. High Girls' basketball coach

• A budget for Summer Academic Camps. The Summer Academic camps will be held at all campuses to address credit recover, loss of learning, and remediation for students. The dates of the camps will be held June 7 through June 24. These camps will be Monday through Thursday of each week. Students will be taught by certified teachers assisted by highly trained paraprofessionals. The hours will be 8am-12 noon. Buses will run, and students will receive both breakfast and lunch. ESSER funds will pay each certified teacher \$2,000.00 and each paraprofessional \$1,000, transportation and food service cost and 21CC will pay a site coordinator \$32.00 an hour and Paraprofessional \$21.00 an hour.

• A \$1,000 bonus for full time employees. Any working less than full time will receive a pro-rata share based upon number of hours worked per day. A full route bus driver will receive \$250 and a half route driver will receive \$125. No bonus will be given to employees who only work after school hours.

• Purchase of iPads to replace worn out iPads for \$381,950.08. Along with iPad Crayons for \$43,856. The school will also sell the iPads they currently have.

• Purchase three year subscription for TeachTown Curriculum, a special education online curriculum that is currently used in 5 classrooms. The cost is \$19,350.

• Purchase a lawn mower for \$16,640.35. The district has not purchased a mower since 2017.

• Purchase Ready curriculum for \$16,115.50.

• Purchase TI-84 Calculators to replace worn out calculators in Math classes for \$31,784.37.

• Approved April's pay for extra duty

**Bradon Hunter wins The Great SEARK Concert Talent Hunt**

By MELISSA ORRELL  
editor@monticellonews.net

Months of preparation and county wide competitions culminated Saturday, April 24, with the final competition in The Great SEARK Concert Talent Hunt with Bradon Hunter, coming out on top.

Hunter, a 17 year-old Star City resident performed Endless Dream, a country song he wrote himself. His voice was clear and steady as he crooned his way through the song with the judges and concert attendees, as well as those at home, agreeing he had the best performance of the day. Along with the title of winner, Hunter will receive a publicity package that includes a day in the recording studio, an album, professional headshots, a logo, a press release and consultation with Rob Shirakbari, the music director for pop/soul icon, Dionne Warwick.

The road to the finals took several months as SEARK Concert traveled to a total of seven counties, holding competitions in each county of Ashley, Bradley, Chicot, Cleveland, Desha, Drew and Lincoln. Hunter won the first place spot in Lincoln County before arriving at the Drew Central Earl Willis Auditorium

where the event was moved due to weather. There he competed against Ashley County winner, Chester Huntsman, who preformed "Try a Little Tenderness" by Otis Redding; Bradley County winner, Gwendolyn White who preformed "A Change is Gonna Come" by Seal; Chicot County winner, Reverend RC Barnes, who preformed "The Repentance Song" written by RC Barnes; Cleveland County winner, Wayne Gross, who preformed "Goodbye Time" by Conway Twitty; Desha County winners, The Desha 3 (Azariah Campbell, Kaniyah Davis and Houston Holley), who preformed "God Told Noah" acapella by The Gospel Wonders; and Drew County winner, Mark Kelly Combo, who preformed "Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans?" by Eddie DeLange and Louis Alter.

Charles Graham was the emcee and he preformed God Bless America to entertain the crowd while the judges tallied the scores. Angelica Glass, of Pine Bluff, also entertained the crowd with a moving performance of I Will Always Love you.

The contestants performed for celebrity judges David Leonard, singer/songwriter of All Sons and Daughters, Donna Terrell, Fox 16 Newscaster and Ryan Harmon, singer/songwriter from American Idol.

The Hunt was the alternative to the normal big production live play the Association presents to schools and the general public every year. While COVID hit Arkansas right before the big performance of Sound of Music last year, the Association knew they would have to get creative this year if they wanted to be able to still bring the arts to the people of Southeast Arkansas. The Association sponsored two concerts surrounding the Talent Hunt with a All Sons and Daughters concert Friday, April 23, and a Rodney Block Collective concert Saturday directly proceeding the Talent Hunt competition.

SEARK has began more live performances since the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions with free concerts in schools, local coffee shops and a lyrics workshop presented at The Southeast Arkansas Regional Library, Monticello Branch, 114 West Jefferson Avenue.

**Drew County faces another loss in Jones**

By MELISSA ORRELL  
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Monticello and Drew County lost a pillar in the community Tuesday, April 20, when R.D. Sonny Jones, 79, passed away at the University of Arkansas of Medical Sciences after fighting Non-Hodgkins lymphoma since September.

Jones, a 1959 graduate of Drew Central High School and a 1963 graduate of the University of Arkansas at Monticello, made many contributions to the community over the years.

He was inducted into the Drew Central hall of Fame in 2011 in recognition of his accomplishments.

He built a successful logging company, Carroll R. D. Jones logging with just a few pieces of equipment. In 1991, he along with seven other logging contractors formed the Arkansas Timber Producer's Association. The mission of this group was for the better-

ment of the logging industry in the state. Sonny was elected the first president, a position he held for four years. In the late 1990's he was selected as Georgia Pacific's Outstanding Logger of the Year for the state of Arkansas at which time he was featured in the national magazine, The Logging Times. At the time of his presidency of ATPA, the Log-A-Load for Arkansas Children's Hospital was formed. Sonny and his wife, Phyllis, were volunteers for the first Arkansas telethon and he, along with many others, were instrumental in organizing the first Drew County Log-A-Load. He was a member of the Arkansas Forestry Association for many years.

Sonny's volunteer service to Drew County began when he was in his early thirties. He

was thirty-two years old when he was elected to serve on the Drew Central School Board, a position he held from 1973-1983. During this time he served as chairman. He was in the same year elected to represent Drew County on the C and L Electric Co-op Board, a position he held for 27 years. While serving on the board he was instrumental in procuring the electric sub-station for the Lacey/Ladelle area. During this time he also served on the Drew Memorial Hospital Board and served as interim chairman at one time. In 1998 he was appointed to represent Drew County on the Southeast Arkansas Intermodal Board and was serving as vice-president at the time of his death. He was at one time, a member of the Twenty for the Future, a group working on procuring

industry for the county.

In 1980 he was appointed to the Commercial Bank Board of Directors, a position he held until recently when he resigned due to his illness. He is a member of the United Methodist Church of Monticello and has served on the Pastor/Parish Committee and the Finance Committee.

He was appointed by Governor Mike Beebe to serve on the Arkansas Development Finance Authority in 2011.

Sonny's involvement in logging brought about a strong desire to project a positive image for the industry. This led to his extensive service to the state, regional, and national organizations designed to preserve our natural resources. He was selected to serve on the Drew County Conservation Board; elected

as President of the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts; President of the Southeast Arkansas Resource, Conservation, and Development Council; and President of the regional RC & D Council which included the states of Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. In 2010 he was installed as a member of the Executive Board of the National Association of Conservation Districts. In 2011 he was inducted into the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts Hall of Fame. In 2002 he was selected as the Arkansas Outstanding District Director of the year. This was in recognition of his work in sponsoring both a state and four-state regional forestry contest for high school students.

**WEEVILS**

Continued from Page 3

give the Muleriders a one-point, 70-69, lead with 2:24 remaining by DeJuan Jones' layup in the paint with 1:55 on the clock gave UAM a 71-70 lead. Aaron Lucas gave SAU a 72-71 lead on a jumper in the paint. Ithrihi connected on a free throw to extend the SAU lead to 73-71 with 46 seconds remaining.

UAM missed on its next scoring opportunity and a foul sent Aaron Lucas back to the line for SAU. Lucas connected on one of two from the line to give SAU a 74-71 lead with 18 seconds remaining in the game.

DeJuan Jones pulled the Weevils within one point on a layup with 11 seconds remaining. After a 30 second timeout by the Weevils, UAM fouled Lucas on the inbound pass by SAU sending him to the line for two shots with 11 seconds

remaining. Lucas would miss both attempts with Miles Daniels rebounding the ball and quickly passing the ball off to Jones who drove down court, driving the lane and laying it in with 3.5 seconds remaining in the contest to give UAM a 75-74 lead. SAU would be able to get one final shot away with the Weevil defenders being careful not to foul. The shot was not good as UAM claims its first GAC Championship Tournament title by a score of 75-74.

DeJuan Jones led the Weevils with 22 points followed by Kendal Frey with 17. Denzel McDuffey scored 13, Miles Daniels with nine, and Max Warren with five. Kyler Haynes added four, Keyon Craddock with three, and Lemmie Howard with two.

Denzel McDuffey, Miles Daniels, and DeJuan Jones earned All-GAC Tournament honors with Jones being voted as the GAC Championship Tournament MVP.



MAY  
HIGHLIGHTSGibson awarded 2021 Trial  
Judge of the Year

Special to the Advance

Retired Arkansas Circuit Judge Bynum Gibson, Jr. was recently honored as the recipient of the 2020-2021 Trial Judge of the Year Award by the Arkansas Trial Lawyers Association.

The award is given in recognition of a trial judge's dedicated to the preservation of the American Justice System and the right to trial by jury. "We appreciate your willingness of to solve the problem of how to try a civil jury trial during the pandemic and we appreciate your dedication to justice in South Arkansas," said ATLA President Carter Stein.

Gibson served as the Division 3 judge of the Tenth Circuit of Arkansas. Judge Gibson has sat on the court since 1999 until his retirement in December of 2021. Judge Gibson continues to hear civil cases statewide when assigned to those cases by the Chief Justice.

Judge Robert Bynum Gibson, Jr was chosen for this award because as a jurist, he has a reputation for protecting the rights of litigants and understands the litigant's right to be heard without undue influence or interference from the jurist and recognizes the dignity of litigants and their advocates.

Drainage issues addressed  
in Council meetingBy MELISSA ORRELL  
editor@monticellonews.net

Drainage dominated the City Council meeting as the council discussed the drainage issues the city is facing as older culverts and ditches collapse or are no longer large enough to keep up with the flow of water after a rain.

"The Mayor contacted us probably about a year ago now," said Jay Whisker, McClelland Consulting Engineers, Inc. project manager. "We went out, we got a map, we talked about the drainage in the area and the different parts of Monticello."

They then looked at the city as a whole, the different areas and then focused in on the part that needs it the most, according to Whisker.

He explained that when looking at drainage, the whole area is studied to see where the water comes in and where it goes out. For Monticello, the most important to focus on is the Godfrey Creek area, that runs through Jordan Park. In order to successfully fix the drainage without causing issues with the repairs, it is important to start from where the water leaves the area and work back to the where the water enters the area.

"As you fix the things downstream and work upstream the stuff downstream is already working," he explained. "If you start upstream and work it then the water continues to flood as you go until you get to the very end so."

Watershed two is the one to the East side of the City and includes 40% of the City and includes the Godfrey Creek area.

The project was initially put on hold due to COVID however a grant came through from the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management, McClelland and the City worked together to get the grant application put together. One of the grant procedures was to get a study conducted and paid for. Whisker presented to the Council that what they would like to do is conduct a study on watershed two and then bring a plan to the Council.

"This is the starting step of the plan," said Whisker. "So you can make plans, have some general knowledge on what the costs are going to be and then move forward from there."

In the past month the Fire Department has responded to 25 calls, logged 396 man hours of training. The Fire Department has a lot of training to get caught up on since last year shut everything down. This month the department completed preplanning inspections on all the businesses, there are about 560 businesses in Monticello. Some repairs were made to station 2, a gutter had fallen off and the air conditioner was replaced. They went to a single

phase unit standby generator. Last month, four virtual interviews were conducted for fire marshal, two in person interviews were offered, but they took jobs elsewhere.

Public works has been busy cleaning right of ways and doing smoke tests on the sewer system in search of leaks that allow rain water and other objects into the sewer system. The crews have been finding small leaks and fixing them as well as replacing a fire hydrant. The City also found some manholes that they were unaware of. According to Charlie Hammock, Monticello Public Works, the crews have been inspecting the man holes and will mark them with GPS so they can be added to city maps and will not be forgotten again. The manholes will potentially make it easier to find leaks and fix them in the system, said Mayor Paige Chase during the meeting.

"They are going to go back and GPS the locations of all the manholes, they are going to inspect them all, identify how many inlets and outlets they have," said Chase, explaining the manholes will be put in Edge and mapped. "The next time have a problem with a man hole somewhere or a sewer issue somewhere we can probably locate a manhole and probably take care of that without taking four days."

Ditches were also brought up in the meeting with Alderman Clarissa Pace asking what residents need to do if their ditches and culverts need to be cleaned out.

If any residents have issues with their ditches and culverts, they need to call City Hall and let the City know the address, then the City will come clean it out, according to Hammock. Chase requests that when residents call in, they take note of the person they spoke to when calling.

The Boys and Girl's Club Bettina Randolph gave her monthly report on the kids who attend the after school program. Forty one children were present on Tuesday, April 27, when they received their progress reports from school. Of the 41 present, 36 made honor roll, two missed it by a few points and 3 didn't make it because of conduct scores. The club is also gearing up for their nine week summer program that will begin on June 7 and will run through Aug. 6. According to Randolph the summer program begins a week after school is out to give staff time to prepare the last finishing touches to the summer program. The capacity is capped off at 100 for full time but will take 120 for kids visiting grandparents or other situations. The hours will be from 7 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. in the summer and costs \$35 a week.

In the Monticello Economic Development Commission report, Nita McDaniel reported to the Council that the prospective business that visited last month let her know by email they would be making their decision in the next three months. McDaniel stated she

will continue to be available to the prospective business. A new prospect also visited in April and is still in communication with that business.

The walk audit should have been completed by the meeting but the weather had other ideas.

"We have rescheduled the preassessment meeting for May 3," she said.

With federal funds received for the Scogin Drive project, it is now a federal project. According to McDaniel most of the preliminary engineering has been completed. That planning determined the specific route and is now headed into the right of way acquisition.

Monticello Police Department Chief Akers announced to the council that the Police Department has received approximately \$30,000 in grant money so far this year, which helped to purchase vehicles and equipment. Akers also addressed the Council about conversations he has had with residents of Kennedy Blvd. requesting lighting on the street. Residents have reported issues with people dumping trash down the road.

"A lot of kids, a lot of foot traffic, and as you know juvenile crime with kids is a big problem with us and we think this is probably something good for the neighborhood if you could look into it," said Akers. "Just tonight we got a call about dead animals down there. Maybe something as simple as a well lit area will make a big difference down there and maybe deter some of the foot traffic we are seeing."

Also in the meeting the council

- Approved a resolution to purchase updated municipal code books in the amount of \$7,690 plus tax to be paid for out of the General Budget Fund

- Amended the 2021 Advertising and Promotion Commission Fund Budget to pay for the final invoice for the Monticello welcome signs. The invoice for \$44,000 was approved in April but was not included in the budget.

- Amended the 2021 General Fund Fire Department Budget to help subsidize the AR Local Police and Fireman's Pension fund in the amount of \$37,000

- Amended the Monticello USDA Grant Fund Budget to include the purchase of four new Police Department vehicles, including outfitting them and outfitting one purchased in Sept. 2020. This went with the resolution to apply for the USDA grant in the amount of \$50,000 to pay for the vehicles and outfitting of the vehicles.

Lake Monticello levee  
repair beginsBy MELISSA ORRELL  
editor@monticellonews.net

A sight welcomed by many is taking place at Lake Monti-

cello as contractors begin the long awaited and planned for work repair to the levee. Following a meeting and before the rain hit Tuesday, May 11, the contractors began to remove the top layer of gravel from the levee.

"Right after our meeting today they were getting started," said Mayor Paige Chase of the work crews at the Lake.

The crews will be working from both sides of the levee in order to get twice as much work done in a shorter amount of time, according to Chase. Once the gravel has been removed, the crew will continue by removing the dirt.

"Right now they are taking the gravel off of the levee and are staging it so we can reuse it," said Charlie Hammock, interim Public Works superintendent. "Then they will take the dirt off and stage it."

Once they begin removing the dirt they will continue to lower the levee until they find the weak spot in the levee, according to Chase and Hammock. They will also check the fingers, what allows the water to seep safely through the levee, for blockage or any other kind of issues.

"Once they start putting the dirt back in there they will compress it and make sure it is compacted real good and make sure it is at the correct density and then they will add more dirt and just keep coming up with it," Hammock said. "Then they will get to the gravel and start putting it back on."

There are currently four workers who are on the job and will work seven days a week, when the weather allows, to complete the repairs.

According to Chase, work around the Lake designed to make the Lake more hospitable to wild life, residents and visitors continues in earnest.

"Arkansas Game and Fish are still building habitats with pallets in the Lake bed," said Chase. She reminds visitors to the Lake that the pile of pallets are for AGFC to continue to build more habitats and are not to be taken. Anyone who has pallets that they are not using can still donate them to the City to give to AGFC to build more habitats. Another project AGFC still needs to complete before the Lake is allowed to fill back up is to drain the small ponds in the lake beds that still hold the undesirable fish species that competes for space and food with other fish.

At this time the Highway 35 access to the lake is locked and will not be accessible to citizens until repairs are complete. During the time it has taken to plan and prepare for the repairs, AGFC has not been the only ones busy out at the lakes.

Docks have been repaired with the playground dock and the dock near the levee next on the list to complete before the levee is fixed and the water starts rising.

The plan for the bike trail and disc golf course has been completed, tree thinning has

been completed and plans to improve the lake are continuing. During this time it is important for visitors to the Lake to stay off the lake bed.

"Anyone who wants to watch is welcome to go to the Windy Hills access and watch from over there," said Chase. "No one should be on the lake bed."

Chase and Hammock described how the City has had issues with people driving on the lake bed despite the signs they have posted, which keep getting stolen.

"We will start contacting the Arkansas Game and Fish when we see anyone on the lake bed," Chase elaborated.

After all the planning and coordinating the repairs of the levee, through a pandemic, no less, to see the work get started is exciting for everyone who misses the recreation enjoyed at the lake in years past.

While no one was happy about the Lake having to be drained, the City and her citizens have been busy making improvements along the way.

Drew Central sports year  
comes to an end at emotional banquetBy JEFF YOUNG  
Advance Correspondent

It was an emotional night for Pirate Nation as the 2020-21 sports year officially came to an end. In a school year that was not like any other in history, the theme of the night could have echoed throughout schools across not only Monticello but the entire United States.

In his opening remarks, Drew Central Athletic Director and Girls Basketball Coach, Michael Goad, laid out not only what it was like for coaches during the age of Covid, but also the student athletes and what it took to make it through a trying and emotional year that saw postponements and cancellations.

Goad would go to announce the awards for the first sport of the year, cross country. Goad would explain that Drew Central was only able to compete in a couple of meets with the girl's team being the only team having enough participants to be considered as a full team. Goad explained that this was one of the first real tests of Covid, as most meets are held at state parks that would not allow the meets to happen and other meets had to be canceled because of travel that would mean the team would have to stay overnight and that was against Covid rules.

Next up would be tennis with head coach Becca Greenwood. Drew Central would have seven participants in the 3A State Tournament. Will Watson and Nate Cooper earned a District Doubles Championship with the boy's team capturing the 8-3A District Championship.

Moving on to football, head coach Matt Gonzales would also explain the trails of

coaching during Covid. Drew Central would miss several games due to Covid cancellations. Another aspect of the Covid Year was that normal seasons that allowed for workouts and 7 on 7 contests were not allowed during the preparation period. Weight room workouts were limited. As was on the field preparations.

Gonzales would announce individual awards for the year and would also congratulate Second-Team All-Conference selections Jarius Thomas, Nacaryon Young, and Kaleb Williams and All-Conference selections Connor Doherty, Trent Brown, and Jacob Chapman.

Gonzales announced that senior Jarius Thomas would be playing football at the college level after signing to continue his career athletically and academically at Iowa-Wesleyan in the fall.

For football, the Drew Central Pirates were hit at the end of the season with Covid on the day of their 3A State Playoff game at Prescott. The team had traveled across the state and was eating their pre-game meal when the call came to come home and quarantine, forcing the Pirates to forfeit their playoff contest.

That quarantine would also affect the Drew Central Boys' Basketball season start as well as many of the basketball players were also a part of the football team. Basketball also



Jeff Young/Advance Monticellonian

faced training hardships as the gym was not allowed to be open for most of the off-season. Summer games were not played and when the gym was finally opened there could be no one-one play, no passing drills, and several other Covid stipulations that made it difficult to properly prepare the teams for play.

For the Pirates, Chris Shaw was selected as second team All-Conference with Kade Bodiford, Grealin Thomas, and Tristian Butler being selected as All-Conference and Jaden Golden as an All-State selection. The Pirates also continued their streak of making the 3A State Tournament for the fifth consecutive year.

For the Lady Pirates, Covid cancelled several contests for the Lady Pirates and left them without any senior leadership on the team with the season coming to an end in the district tournament.

For Drew Central Cheerleading, maybe no other group had more to deal with. For the

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cheerleaders, there activities were limited. Most of the season for football, they could cheer at home but not on the road. That would continue for most of the basketball season as well with the cheer teams finally getting to travel at the end of the season.

With softball being next on the agenda, and the start of spring sports, coach Becca Greenwood hand out individual awards. Having only one senior on the team, Coach Greenwood hopes to improve next season on the progress that was made during this season.

Next up was track and field. The Drew Central Girls' Track Team excelled this season with Jalia Bunn taking the District Championship in the 100 meters, Ali Jo Cruce taking the title in 3200 meters, and Jordan Golden placing first in the 300-meter hurdles.

Edriana Hunter, Layna Chrabol, Jordan Golden, and Jalia Bunn placed first in the 4x100 relay. Meritza Spencer, Hunter, Chrabol, and Golden would place first in the 4x400 relay. Cruce would also place first in the shot put and discus.

At the 3A State Championship, Jalia Bunn would repeat as the 100m state champion with a first-place time of 12:43. Hunter, Chrabol, Golden, and Bunn would take home the state championship in the 4x100 relay with a time of 51.36.

The last team award presentation would be the Drew Central Pirate Baseball team and Head Coach Aaron Goad. For baseball, the Pirates announce their Rookie of the Year as Drew Burton and All-Conference honors going to Aiden Jones, Nate Cooper, and Carson Ray. Ray as also selected as an All-State selection.

The final awards of the night were announced for Mr. and Mrs. Pirate of the year with Jordon Watson being selected as Mrs. Pirate and Carson Ray as Mr. Pirate.

### DMHS first in state to access UAMS sexual assault program

By MELISSA ORRELL  
editor@monticellonews.net

Rural living has its fair share of trade offs in services that many living in the area are happy to trade for the rural lifestyle, but sometimes those trade offs can come with a hefty price tag from some. One of those trade-offs that most deal with is a lack of experience for some health care situations. However, having access to specialized care after a rape in Drew County is no longer one of those. Drew Memorial Health System was the first in the state to have access to a new program launched by The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences' (UAMS) Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. The service is a specialized, 24/7 digital health services for victims of sexual assault. This unique care platform will be part of the Sexual Assault Assessment Program in emergency departments and crisis centers across the state.

Through real-time video technology, UAMS will partner with emergency departments and crisis centers in rural and underserved communities to provide trauma-informed, patient-centered care to patients who have experienced sexual violence. Local clinicians are virtually connected with experienced Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFE) or Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE). Together, clinicians provide medical-forensic sexual assault examinations at no cost to the patient.

"In the entire state of Arkansas there are only seven sexual assault nurses," said Kristin Smith, DMH director of Education, Emergency and Maternity Services, who has been trained but has been unable to sit for the exam due to a lack of clinical experience. The lack of experience is due to the limited number of rape cases that come into the ER in Drew County. "Obviously, there is a need for help with that topic. If you think about it that is not going to come to the ER very often. It is one of the main presentations that nurses have the biggest weakness with, across the US, unless you have one of these SANE nurses."

"This new digital health program increases accessibility to expert resources and allows

us to provide victims with the care and support they need," said institute director Joseph Sanford, M.D. "By expanding our reach, we can help more victims and also provide assistance to law enforcement as needed."

"This program ensures patients have access to expert care, regardless of where they live," UAMS SANE assistant director Sherrie Searcy, RN, BSN, SANE-A, added.

The program can be utilized by Drew Memorial by a cart that contains a computer with a direct link to a SANE or SAFE person that the nurse and the patient both will be able to communicate with, according to Smith.

Arkansas is one of four demonstration sites in the country to receive federal funding from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime to establish digital health sexual assault services that will improve care, access and quality of sexual assault forensic exams. The other three sites are Alaska, South Dakota and Texas.

Various UAMS digital health programs and rural sites have collaborated to implement the TeleSAFE/TeleSANE program, which will also include activities and outreach opportunities to educate their respective communities on sexual assault.

NWA Center for Sexual Assault in Springdale and Drew Memorial Health System in Monticello are the first TeleSAFE collaborating locations that, as of today, now offer the extension of digital health services for sexual assault care in their communities. UAMS is prepared to serve an additional 71 locations throughout the state of Arkansas to ensure victims of sexual assault have access to expert care and resources.

### City Council addresses electrical issues; repairs

By MELISSA ORRELL  
editor@monticellonews.net

Delays to the repair of the Old Historic Post Office dominated the bulk of the Monticello City Council meeting Tuesday, May 25, as questions were raised about the handling of electricity issues with utilities that run between the building and the Monticello Police Department by Entergy.

It was reported at the April City Council meeting that the City was having problems with the company in the handling of safely allowing the repair crews to work while still following safety regulations concerning the close proximity to the wires with cutting power to the lines, and the Police Department for up to a week while work was completed. While MPD does have generators to run for emergency purposes, the generator is only capable of running the 911 system and not the rest of the power to the building. This was not a viable option for the Police Department or the City. As such, the City worked to find a solution to the problem before time ran out to take advantage of grant money that was available for repairs.

A discussion with Chris Cook, of Entergy, was on the agenda, however, he was unable to attend the meeting. In his absence the Council continued to discuss the issues the City is facing in repairing the Old Post Office located at 211 West Gaines. Cook sent an email to Chase which she reported to the Council.

"He did email me and stated, 'Unfortunately due to conflicting schedules we could not pull together the pertinent folks for this month's meeting. We would like to attend the June meeting, if at all possible, so we can explain our position and policy to the council,'" she read.

Discussion then began about the issue. Alderwoman Claudia Hartness expressed a desire for Cook to be available to make a public statement regarding why the company has made the decisions they have regarding the issue. Chase verified that Cook does want to come speak to the council but he wants other people with him to explain the policy and their position.

"My question is didn't you state last time that if we waited until June we were going to miss some opportunities," asked Alderman Clarissa Pace. Chase confirmed the City would miss opportunities since the repairs cannot con-

tinue until a solution with the power has been resolved.

"There is approximately \$14,000 that was not going to get used in this grant money. Mr. Clemments and I had hoped that we could use a significant amount of that money, between nine and 10 thousand dollars to do some work," Chase confirmed. "But the grant is closing out and we are going to lose that little bit of money."

"And Chris was aware that waiting so long we would miss that grant?" Pace asked.

Chase clarified she didn't know if she had made him aware of that but she did advise him the repairs were being paid for with grant money and he knows there is a time limit and a time frame.

"I don't want to leave anything to assumption, perhaps, I think that is why I was saying if we need a special call meeting or so fourth and don't miss it, he needs to clearly understand that his actions are causing a problem," Pace asserted.

Chase reported she would be happy to say all that to him, again. But that Cook is going to tell her it "is not his actions, it is Entergy's policy and they are not going to change their policy for us no matter the grant money or time frame."

"Does he have anyone above him and would that make a difference if we have a letter from you and the Council about how we feel about that situation?" Pace said.

"I reached out to the person whom I thought could give me either his supervisor or someone else in a higher authoritative position and I was told very quickly that I did not have a choice but to go through Mr. Cook," Chase said.

"He needs to know that none of us are satisfied," Pace said.

"I think he knows, I think Entergy knows," said Chase. "I had another interaction with another Entergy employee, in fact the employee who handled Kennedy Boulevard for me and he said to me, he started the conversation with I understand that there have been problems between Entergy and the City of Monticello and I want to make sure that you understand as Mayor that Entergy...he wanted to make sure I understood there were other parts of Entergy that were very cooperative and were absolutely willing to help and they believed the relationship they had with us was reciprocal. So he was very kind and he actually took care of the problem I had with Kennedy Boulevard that day."

According to Chase, this is another issue they had with Entergy. When she came into office she was told all street light outages had to be submitted on their website. Street light outages were submitted on their website and none were fixed. Despite emailing and resubmitting the outages nothing was getting fixed, according to Chase.

"A year and a half later, they are still not fixed," she said. "When I spoke to this gentleman about Kennedy Boulevard he gave me his phone number and he asked that I call him whenever we submitted (an out street light) and he would follow that ticket through the process and make sure it got fixed. And have we had luck? We have had luck."

Chase continued that Entergy has had problems, she emphasized that she was not trying to tear down Entergy, they have lots of departments, it's their policy and that is the policy and you have to live with it.

"So, we are going to lose a little bit of money, we are going to talk to them in June," said Chase. "We are already working around how to bury those lines between the two buildings. I think between Chief Chisom, Charlie Hammock and myself we have worked out at least a tentative plan. We have reduced our cost from \$23,000 to maybe \$9,000. So we are working on getting done what we need to get done and spending a lot less money."

She went on to express that the City will still be at the mercy of Entergy, who is eight to nine weeks out getting jobs done and the Police Department will still have to run on generators for approximately four to five hours, as opposed to one week.

In Monticello Police Chief Jason Akers' report to the Council, Akers reported the department had received reimbursement for a COVID

grant the department received for \$17,350. The department also reached a goal of replacing all the handheld radios the officers carry with a smaller lighter radio, the department staggered the replacements in an effort to prevent having to replace the radios all at once when it comes time to repair and replace them. Akers also reported the department had applied for more grant money to obtain more cameras for the City. Currently the City has cameras located at City Park and the intersection of U.S. Highways 425 and 278. According to Akers the cameras have already helped determine the cause of accidents at the intersection.

"We have had really good luck with the cameras we have at the intersections they have really helped," said Akers. "We feel like, for whatever reason, they have lowered the accidents. Our statistics are showing lower accidents. It is really helping us determine who is involved in accidents."

The grant the MPD has applied for, if awarded, will go toward cameras for Jordan Park, to include the Sadie Johnson building.

The department is continuing to address one of their biggest issues, juvenile crime and mental health issues.

"We have reached out to several community leaders and talked to them about juvenile crime," said Akers to the Council. "That is our biggest problem right now; 14, 15 year old kids out carrying guns and roaming the streets. We have reached out to some community leaders, of course everybody works, it is hard to get everybody there at once but the ones that we got there, we basically are taking our problems to them. A lot of these kids don't have problems with the police, that is a common misconception and in society it is popular to blame the cops for everything. That is not the case, these young people are having problems amongst themselves. Law enforcement is having to come in and deal with it, so naturally when something goes bad, we get blamed. So what we have done effectively, in the past, is reach out to the community itself and say, 'Hey, if you know this kid, can you talk to him?' We have started doing that and in the last month we have noticed a significant decrease in the violence between these groups and the overall mood amongst them. As we progress and grow, our city is only getting bigger and we are only going to have more problems to deal with but we can deal with it effectively with our community leaders."

I think that speaks volumes for our Law Enforcement and community leaders." Akers also reported that the department is working with

Delta Counseling to help with the mental health issues when officers come into contact with a case dealing with mental health.

Akers also reported in 2019, at this time, the department took in \$66,000, in 2020 the department took in \$125,000, at the same time, and so far in 2021, the department has taken in \$170,000.

"These guys are out doing their job," said Akers. "They are out enforcing the law. We get some complaints about traffic stuff but for every complaint we get, we get five people saying, 'Hey thank you for slowing these folks down in our neighborhoods and making the streets safer.' It is a holistic approach to the issues we face here in town but I think we are doing a good job."

Monticello Fire Chief Eric Chisom reported last month the Fire Department advertised for some concrete work they needed completed but the bids they received were all over budget and the department decided to put the job out for bid again. It will open again for bid next Tuesday at 2 p.m.

When asked if the price of concrete had risen like the price of lumber, Mayor Paige Chase informed the council that everything had increased in price.

"Everything is up," said Chase. "I got some information today, and I don't want to create a panic, but everything is about to get difficult to get, we aren't going to get pipe, we aren't going to be able to get conduit...there is a lot of supplies that are going to take months before we can get them."

The Barbara Aston Senior Citizen Center is still waiting for information on when they can reopen, according to director Pam McEowen.

"As of right now, we don't have any information to pass as to when we will be opening up," she reported. "We are going to continue to do our curb side lunches from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m."

McEowen continued her report by praising the community for the support they continue to receive.

"We at the center have been truly blessed by the amount of community support," she stated. "We were looking for a refrigerator and we have been donated one."

According to McEowen, the milk cost for the center will be greatly reduced with the addition of the donated refrigerator to the center. She also reported that the Boy Scouts of America, along with donated rock from Select Concrete, are going to begin working on improving the outside of the building.

Raffling of tickets for the lapghan brought in \$616

worth of donations to the center with the Kim Welch as the winner of the raffle. The center will now begin a raffle for a Razorback lap quilt. The raffle will begin in June and will continue through July 30 for the drawing.

Chase took this time to recognize the service to the city of former council members Joe Meeks and Jack Lasiter. Lasiter was appointed following the resignation of Alderman Jonathan Shell when his family moved. Meeks served the council for approximately 8 years and was voted into the position. Chase thanked both of them for their service.

A resolution was also approved to appoint Jo Ann Smith-Lee to the City of Monticello Planning Commission for a term set to expire on Dec. 31. This was a position that came open. According to Chase, the positions on the commission are varying lengths of time and that is why the appointment will expire in December.

The Council also:

- Approved a resolution to purchase a digital color copier for \$5,061.

- Approved a resolution to purchase a Fire Truck for \$287,753 to replace the one that was wrecked last week.

- Listened to an offer to purchase the Armory by a flashlight manufacturing company that will employ a maximum of 45 employees if they expand operations here. Currently the City is in a lease with Drew Memorial Health System through the end of the year.

- Discussed the water issues in the City with the taste and smell of the water. Chase asked that anyone with water issues call City Hall if they are having problems with their water.

## JUNE HIGHLIGHTS

### Tornado warning debate to continue

By MELISSA ORRELL  
editor@monticellonews.net

Tornado sirens have dominated the conversation for the last couple of months in Drew County and that hasn't changed. In the May Quorum Court meeting, Office of Emergency management director Jessie Griffin laid out the reasons he has found to phase out the sirens in the county. A copy of a letter he wrote to Drew County citizens can be found on page 5B. Also during the meeting, Griffin answered several questions the Court had about the cost of maintaining sirens and about alternatives to the sirens.

In the past three years, Mr. Griffin reported, the costs to

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# Lady shooters walk away with silver

By **JEFF YOUNG**  
Advance Correspondent

Monticello's Seventh Grade AAU team the Lady Shooters traveled to Bauxite on Saturday, June 12, to participate in the Slammin' Buckets Nation tournament finishing with a Silver Championship.

Playing in their first contest of the day in a round robin format to determine tournament placement, the Lady Shooter squared off against Beast Mode.

The tournament would consist of two 15-min-

ute half's with a running clock. The clock would stop on timeouts and on whistles with two minutes remaining in the half.

In game one versus Beast Mode, the Lady Shooters would get out to a 12-7 lead after one half of play and would hold their opponent scoreless in the second half to take a 22-7 victory.

Mia Griffith would lead the Lady Shooters with seven points followed by Briya Toney with eight. Nyasha Tatam and Chole Anderson each scored four and Niyya Collins scored two.

Chloe Anderson would round out the scoring with four.

After an hour and a half break, the Lady Shooters would come out on the losing end of their next round robin contest against the Warriors 33-18. The Lady Shooters would score eight first half points and 10 points in the second half being led by Briya Toney with eight. Nyasha Tatam and Chole Anderson each scored four and Niyya Collins scored two.

With the loss, the Lady Shooters would move into the championship bracket where they would go on to defeat Arkansas 3D 23-30 to claim the Silver Division Championship.

With this tournament placement, the Lady Shooters continue to excel in tournament play this summer, placing first in a tournament on May 23 and on June 5 and now a Silver Championship to add to this season's accolades.



Jeff Young/Advance Monticellonian

**MIA GRIFFIN** drives to the basket in Saturday's contest against the Warriors. .

maintain the sirens has averaged \$15,000 per year for all sirens, this include the 10 sirens in the City of Monticello and the one siren Winchester will now maintain financially.

A quarterly inspection is included in those costs, as well as \$625 estimated annual cost for electricity to charge the batteries the sirens run off of. In his presentation to the Court, Griffin laid out the costs for the sirens if they outsourced the maintenance and what they will pay now to maintain the sirens.

If Reynolds Radio Service in Warren were paid to maintain the sirens the break down of the costs are:

Inspect all sirens at a cost of \$112.21 per siren, There are a total of 27 sirens, 16 that the County is financially responsible for. The cost to the County would total \$7,181.44; City of Monticello would be responsible for \$4,488.40 for their 10 sirens and Winchester would be responsible for a total of \$448.84 for their one siren. These costs are annual costs and do not include travel costs to be added as needed, labor or parts. The quotes only cover the inspections for the year. For Drew County OEM the costs are as follows: County, \$8000; City of Monticello: \$5,000 and Winchester \$500. No travel time will be needed or is included in the estimates. The costs of parts will be added as needed.

ASC Mass Notification Solutions out of Milwaukee, Wis. would charge \$9,999 for an annual inspection, that quote only includes the inspection and does not include parts, travel and lodging.

The Court had also asked Griffin what it would cost to upgrade the sirens to an automated system. One of the issues cited with the Drew County sirens and many across the state and country is the fact the sirens are manually operated and do not operate off of an automated system, requiring OEM to monitor weather from the office during storms and set the sirens off once a news station has issued a tornado watch for the area.

"We are watching the same stations you are," said Griffin at the meeting, explaining the way the manual system works. "When a watch comes in, we set off the sirens for the areas in the county that are affected."

In order to update the sirens ASC quoted the county \$9,900 to install Command and Control Server Software. The price does not include travel and lodging or updates but will make the sirens capable of automatic discharge when a watch has been issued. The cost to upgrade the system would be \$94,128.70. This will have the added cost of changing the wiring from 120 volt to 220 volt and would be paid by Drew County plus the county would have to pay the electricians. For a completely new system, Griffin received a quote from ATI Systems Acoustic Technology, Inc. out of Boston at a cost of \$694,000. This would install a complete new system with the software needed. To install the new system completely with solar power package, the cost would be \$755,000.

Griffin also checked on any grant monies that may be available for tornado sirens and discovered only one to install Tornado Warning Sirens, however, Drew County is too large to receive the grant. He found no grants at all to assist with maintaining the sirens once they were installed.

"After spending numerous hours on sirens, it is my personal feelings that Drew County should phase out the sirens over the next 18 to 24

months. There are many ways to receive weather warnings, that are free and work well," Griffin said. "The citizens (some) of Drew County have a false sense of security by depending on sirens which are set off manually and require constant maintenance."

"It is my opinion the County should do the following:

a) Set a budget for sirens in the County of \$10,000 for the next year

b) City of Monticello will continue to maintain 10 sirens until they vote to change and OEM/911 will charge then for all upkeep and bill the City as needed.

c) Not extend the contract with Everbridge and do not purchase a new contract with Hyper Reach, there are too many free services out there

d) Hire a maintenance person to inspect and repair sirens at a cost to the county of \$11.50 an hour with a max of 25 hours per week, this totals \$14,950 annually.

e) Maintenance person would also be able to maintain all OEM/911 equipment

f) To pay for this take \$7,000 from Everbridge and the inspection cost for all other sirens in the City of Monticello and Winchester (which is \$8,500 total annual cost to Monticello and Winchester) that will equal the cost of the part time job.

Also brought up during the meeting was the switch from Everbridge to Hyper Reach. According to County Judge Robert Akin, the money for a mobile alert system is appropriated every year for the cost of Everbridge which is \$7,000. The contract for Everbridge is up for renewal, however, the County has chosen to move from Everbridge to Hyper Reach, which offers more services that Everbridge. Due to the appropriation of the money for Everbridge and the lower cost of Hyper Reach, a decision by the Quorum Court is not needed, however, Akin will be presenting the contract with Hyper Reach to the Court on Monday, June 7 at the next regularly scheduled meeting.

Also discussed during the Quorum Court meeting was the need for NOAA weather radios and Griffin brought several to show the court. The County is now working on purchasing weather radios to distribute to County citizens who have trash pick up. The radios have not been purchased as of yet.

## Protesters seek answers in Martin murder investigation

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

Crying out for justice and answers for the murder of her son, Lakisha Arrington, along with Drew County community members joined together to protest in front of the Drew County Courthouse Friday, June 4.

"We want to know what happened," said Arrington during the protest that was organized to bring attention to the case.

Standing on the square, where part of the protest moved to increase visibility in the case, Arrington pleaded for answers in the death of her son, citing rumors that have been circulating the County for over a year, since the Martin's disappearance and subsequent discovery of his body.

Just outside of Wilmar, Saturday, March 7, the search for the 26-year-old Wilmar man, ended when a body, that was later identified as Martin, was discovered at approximately 7:05 a.m. and pronounced dead on the scene by the Drew County Coroner at 9:40 a.m.

Martin, who was last seen

on surveillance camera at Murphy's USA gas station on Highway 425 in Monticello on Sunday, Feb. 9 at 9:21 p.m., was later reported missing to a Monticello dispatcher on Tuesday, Feb. 11, by a family friend after failing to show up to work at the Special Education Consortium on Drew Central Schools campus, on Monday and Tuesday, Feb. 9 and 10.

The community of Wilmar quickly came together, holding a prayer vigil the evening of Wednesday, Feb. 12, to uplift and encourage one another in the wake of Martin's disappearance.

On Friday, Feb. 14, the Drew County Sheriff's Office, along with volunteers from the community began their first search around 10 a.m. with Sheriff Mark Gober stating at the time that the areas being searched, were just areas to eliminate. The searches continued off and on throughout the following weeks, until Saturday.

On Saturday, March 7, after being missing for just a few days shy of a month, a call came into the 911 dispatch office from a citizen stating they had found a body in a creek, later identified as Alford Creek, just outside of Wilmar on Highway 133.

An Arkansas Game and Fish officer was on the scene moments after the call came in and was there when Drew County Sheriff's Deputies and Arkansas State Police officers arrived.

After pronouncing Martin deceased at 9:40 a.m., the body was recovered and transported to Stephenson Dearman Funeral Home in Monticello while awaiting transport to the Arkansas State Medical Examiner's Office at the Arkansas State Crime Lab in Little Rock.

In an effort to quiet rumors surrounding the ongoing investigation in Martin's murder, The Tenth Judicial District Prosecuting Attorney's Office released the official cause of death in the case in July 2020. According to the State Crime Lab medical examiner report, the cause of death was a gunshot wound with the manner being listed as a homicide. As rumors took over social media, speculation over the cause of death, along with suspects in the case grew.

"A lot was put out there on social media," said Drew County Sheriff Mark Gober. "Speculation about myself and my family, along with death threats."

Rumors began swirling about Gober and his children being involved in the death before Martin was found and grew from there.

"A political opponent and former employee made a post," said Gober about how the rumors began at the time. "He wanted to make a murder investigation a political issue. Say what you want about me but leave my kids out of it."

According to Gober the case is unique with no witnesses, Martin not being found for a month and no crime scene.

Whether the case is unique or rumors were started by a political appointment, Arrington just wants to know what happened to her son and who is responsible and she, as well as the community gathered to support her and her family, will continue to demand answers until they are found.

Martin was employed at the McDonald's in Monticello, where he had just finished a shift before going missing, and at Drew Central Schools as a Paraprofessional in the Special Education consortium.

Martin grew up in the halls of Drew Central Schools and

returned after a few years post graduation. According to Trudy Jackson, Drew Central Elementary School principal, Martin brought an infectious smile and personality to the school and would mentor the students in In School Suspension during his lunch and breaks throughout the day.

This investigation is still ongoing, anyone with information regarding the death of Marquis Martin is urged to contact the Arkansas State Police at 870-226-3713 or the Drew County Sheriff's Department at 870-367-6211. You can submit anonymous tips to info@drewcountysheriff.com or the Monticello Police Department's tip line at 870-723-LEAD (5323).

## Quorum Court considers permits for public gatherings, protests

By **MELISSA ORELL**  
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An ordinance requiring permits for parades and public assemblies was tabled until the next regularly scheduled Drew County Quorum Court meeting after Court members expressed concerns about the legality of the ordinance, the reason why the ordinance was being introduced, the optics of introducing the ordinance at this time and the optics of the first parade or assembly affected being June Dinner and the Juneteenth parade, held annually in Wilmar.

The ordinance states, "it is in the best interests of the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Drew County that parades and public assemblies occurring on public streets, parks and other public grounds within Drew County be regulated through a permitting process."

However, County Judge Robert Akin, made clear in the meeting the protest held on Friday, June 4, at the Drew County Courthouse demanding answers in the Marquis Martin murder investigation was the reason the ordinance was introduced and why the ordinance had an emergency clause that would have allowed the ordinance to go in to effect immediately had the Court voted favorably for the ordinance.

"As most of you know, last week we were kind of blind sided until like two days before to try and get ready," Akin said of the protest. He also cited safety concerns for jury members and employees who work in the courthouse as the reason for closing down the courthouse during the protest on Friday. Akin claimed cred-

ible threats were made over social media that caused him to shut the courthouse down during the protest, although, he did admit the protest was peaceful and that the people who made the threats did not show up for the protest. He also addressed concerns about the legality of the ordinance while introducing the ordinance to the court.

"I have had a couple calls concerning the validity of (the ordinance) constitutionally," he stated. "And I have said, we have courts that if you want to challenge it, then it will go to court... I said I have a really good attorney, so."

County Attorney Cliff Gibson addressed the Court, letting them know that he based the ordinance off of an ordinance already in place in Little Rock and claimed the Little Rock ordinance had been tested and held up in court.

"I don't think the timing is right to pass this ordinance," said Justice Joe Williams, expressing concerns that the ordinance was being introduced immediately following a peaceful protest concerning the murder of a Wilmar man and the first event planned the ordinance would affect would be Wilmar's Juneteenth celebration.

"I had to learn about this through the grapevine and just like you said, we would be immediately affected for our June Dinner," said Wilmar Mayor Toni Perry. "That was a one time protest but the reaction from this one time protests seems like it is going to be effecting things years down the line. This grieving mother is asking for justice. We are the same people that you come and court for your vote but now we seem to be some sort of savages that require and immediate reaction to what we did the other day. I am a peaceful person, I was out there, there were other politicians out there, there were pastors out there, there were all these level headed people out there strictly to make sure everything went peacefully. And this reaction to what we did the other day is insulting. Because it's black folk... there are just as many white people in Wilmar that are upset about the murder of that child as there are blacks. This has affected everyone in the City of Wilmar, the County of Drew, the State of Arkansas, but I was never engaged in the conversation... He consulted all these people, but I am insignificant... but we are the first ones to be affected."

"Local people I was not even worried about that, but some of the threats that came across

were not local people but they could be vicious people, we needed to know about it so we could protect our local people."

Justice of the Peace Orlando Jones reiterated that Mayor Perry felt left out of the conversation as a mayor of a city in the county, especially with the first event that would have been affected being held in her town.

Other concerns were also raised by Justice of the Peace Rene Knowles. The ordinance states that public restrooms will be made available during the protests or gatherings, she wanted to know who would pay for that.

Gibson suggested the County might want to look into getting portable restrooms for future events that will be held, pointing out that everyone has to use the restroom at some point.

Concerns about family reunions or other private celebrations that are routinely held in public spaces, such as parks were also raised. There are no exceptions for those in the ordinance.

"This Ordinance requiring a permit shall not apply to the following:

- (1) Funeral processions;
- (2) Students going to and from school classes or participating in educational activities, provided that such conduct is under the immediate direction and supervision of the proper school authorities;
- (3) A governmental agency acting within the scope of its functions;
- (4) Organized events occasioned by news or affairs coming into public knowledge within 3 days of such event, provided that the organizer thereof gives written notice to the County

Justice at least 24 hours prior to such event; or

(5) Parades or public assemblies in an incorporated town or city in the County for which such incorporated town or city has issued a permit authorizing such parade or public assembly."

There will also be a \$25 administration charge at the time of applying for the permit and review of denials are allowed.

"The County Judge shall act promptly upon a timely filed application for a parade or public assembly permit but in no event shall grant or deny a permit less than 48 hours prior to the event.

If the County Judge disapproves the application, the applicant shall be notified in writing as soon as possible, but in no event not less than forty-eight ( 48) hours pri-



# 2022

## HAPPY NEW YEAR

Hope you have a blast this New Year's Eve!

There's so much to look forward to in 2022, so please remember to celebrate safely and drive responsibly.

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