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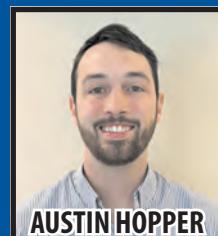
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Dear Readers:

The Advance's staff is delighted to welcome you to the 2024 issue of the Hometown Reflections. Over the past few months, we have been working diligently to create and design this publication highlighting just a handful of things that make Drew County/Monticello such a great place to live. We hope you enjoy this year's edition.

Sincerely, Advance Staff



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SNAP Program: Local people helping local people

By **JEFF McDONALD**
editor@monticellonews.net

One of the many programs offered to help Monticellonians in need is the Special Needs Assistance Program or SNAP as it is commonly called.

The SNAP program is put on by Federal Home Loan Bank-Dallas (FHLB-Dallas) and is in place to aid low to moderate-income families with special needs in preserving their homes.

To qualify for the program, individuals must be aged 55 or older, or have a certifiable disability, regardless of age. The household must have a family income of 80 percent or less of the median area income, this number does change from year to year. A third-party inspection of the property must be submitted within 45 days of the closing of the application window. The applicants must also have ownership of the property at the time SNAP funds are requested.

FHLB-Dallas has set aside \$2 million for the SNAP program in 2024. According to Monticello's Code Enforcement Officer, Brian Rodgers, whenever the program started the grant limit was \$5,000, with local banks kicking in an additional \$1,000



giving a total of \$6,000 for each project. Since then, the program has evolved. The maximum award per household is now \$12,000, and there is no need for additional funds from the local banks.

As of this writing, all of Monticello's

banks are participating in the program. They must partner with FHLB-Dallas to participate. The banks gather information from the homeowners, and Rodgers does a pre-inspection, complete with photographs, of the work that needs to be done.

Rodgers also gathers local contractors who put in bids to do the jobs. Once the jobs are complete, Rodgers does a post-inspection and submits it to the local banks who in

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SNAP

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turn pay the contractors and close out the cases with FHLB-Dallas.

Rodgers has recently taken on a new job title as the city's Code Enforcement Officer. When asked if this would still allow him to participate in the SNAP program he gave the following response:

"I will finish the 2024 SNAP, and if the program continues in the future, I will discuss my role with city leaders."

Monticello began participating in the program in 2014 with only Union Bank and Commercial Bank participating. Parkway

Bank and Simmons Bank joined shortly after. Citizen's Bank began participating this year after Parkway ceased operations.

To date, \$1,131,656 has been secured for Drew County homeowners through this program. Local banks have contributed an additional \$31,850, plus time spent on paperwork and the man-hours needed to process it.

According to Rodgers 187 Drew County families have been helped by this program.

Typically, information begins being gathered in October for the following year's program. Once all of the information is collected it goes to the local banks and then to

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UAM celebrates historic grant

By JOANNA POOLE
reporter@theagledemocrat.com

In a recent interview with Dr. Peggy Doss, Chancellor of the University of Arkansas at Monticello, she talked about the recent changes and upgrades that the university has been and will continue to go through. She opened the interview by saying that the goal at UAM is to constantly improve not only their educational programs but also to make sure that they are maintaining a campus climate and atmosphere that is pleasing and welcoming to students and the community. UAM is the only four-year institution in the state of Arkansas to have two Colleges of Technology, located in Crossett and McGehee. Because of that, UAM offers everything from a technical certificate all the way through to a master's degree.

"Students not wanting to be in a long-term program can choose a shorter-term degree," Doss said. "A certificate of proficiency can be as short as 12 weeks."

Doss also added that UAM understands that there are different kinds of needs and interests for diverse individuals. That also means that UAM is poised to serve not only the region for workforce needs but also the state of Arkansas.

Another point of pride for UAM is the ability for students who are working on acquiring a technical degree to continue to the next level if they desire to do so.

"Because of our degree pathways, if you start a technical degree, you can either continue that pathway to the next degree, whether it's an associate's or a four-year, or you can stop out and go to work."

However, even if a student has stopped and they decide that they want to return and continue their education the hours that they previously acquired will assist them in going back.



DOSS

UAM also takes pride in the fact that they have the only forestry program in the state of Arkansas. Recently they received one-time funding from the state of Arkansas for 16.8 million dollars.

"Governor Sanders was very benevolent in approving that funding for UAM," Doss said. "I have to give a huge shout-out to our legislative delegation as well."

To date, this one-time funding is the largest amount that UAM has ever received for something of that nature. UAM plans on building a research center where analyses of soil samples will be done. Normally samples have to be sent away to other schools like Mississippi State, Crimson, or Auburn, but that will no longer be the case after the new center is built. That puts UAM in a position as a true research interest. They'll not only be a one-of-a-kind facility in the region but also in the southeastern part of the United

States.

The implications of the facility will also impact the agricultural community as well. New ways of looking for new products will be developed. Future research will help in creating new wood products and solutions for problems that are found within the timber industry. With biomass being used to create products, things like biochar which is one of the byproducts of the wood industry will have an agricultural application, meaning that all parts of the tree are now able to be used leaving behind no waste.

In addition, there will be two biology and two chemistry laboratories for the general education programs that will be a part of the new facility. Students who are in other programs such as nursing, premed, agriculture, and forestry will be able to benefit from the labs as well. Every student that attends UAM must have at least eight hours of science and labs so that means that everyone will have the opportunity to benefit from the new facility.

Along with developing new degree programs and refining existing programs to better meet the needs of students, UAM is always in the process of making sure all of

its current facilities are constantly in a state of being upgraded and improved. Recent improvements include new roofs on buildings and improvements to HVAC systems. Another improvement will be the paving of parking lots over Spring Break.

Doss believes that first impressions are critical.

"It is important that when you drive in, the streets and parking lots look nice," Doss said. "I truly believe that UAM is one of the most beautiful campuses."

Recently she and her husband were walking around the campus when a family stopped and asked where a specific building was.

"They were visiting from Texarkana, and they wanted to bring their child who was a senior on a Sunday afternoon to look at our campus," Doss said. "So, before people ever have the opportunity to meet our very friendly and helpful staff, they judge us by what they see."

To be able to keep the buildings as well maintained as they can, UAM has been able to secure funding through the Arkansas Nat-

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SNAP

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FHLB-Dallas for approval. This is usually in February of the grant year. Projects usually begin around April, and projects are usually concluded around July.

When asked if there were any projects that had been completed that stood out, Rodgers gave a couple of examples.

"One was a widowed lady whose floor was caving in and would have been forced to sell her home and move as it was becoming unsafe to live in," Rodgers said. "They repaired her rotting subfloors and she was able to live out the rest of her life in her and her husband's home. Whenever I did

my post report, she was so full of joy that she was overcome and very appreciative of what we did for her."

"Another case was a single mother of a disabled child who desperately needed a new roof on her house," Rodgers added. "The SNAP grant was able to provide that new roof and keep them in the home they dearly loved."

Through the SNAP program, community members lives and futures are being changed for the better. They are getting the needed help fixing problems they would be otherwise unable to attend to. That means they are able to stay in the homes they love and continue to create memories. The SNAP program not only makes change possible but it gives hope to those who need it.

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UAM

Continued from Page 10

ural Cultural Resources or ANCR grants. The most current project that is taking place is renovations to the Trotter House Bed and Breakfast located on North Main Street. Improvements have been made to the exterior of the building and will soon start on the interior.

Another project that is being worked on is the house next door to the Chancellor's home, aptly named the 1937 House, because it was built in the year 1937. The structure is significant in the state of Arkansas because it is one of the earliest examples of a style known as Art Moderne. The house was designed by Little Rock architect A.N. McAninch and after it is restored, will be used as a guest house and small receptions.

UAM has been very fortunate to receive funds from the Windgate Foundation. As the foundation learned more about UAM, they wanted to know how they could support students. They started helping with needs-based and nursing scholarships and they have purchased equipment for the nursing program. The Windgate Foundation showed interest when UAM asked about funding for the art facility.

Another important focus for the university is the athletics program. The Legacy Campaign is currently being run to raise funds

to support renovations of different athletic facilities. The athletics program is a huge recruitment area for UAM and because of that, they need to have those upgraded facilities. This past fall a ribbon cutting was held on the Kenneth H. Hunt Athletic Performance Center, which cost the university a little over one million dollars. It was 100 percent privately funded and completed in a little under two years. There is also a new athletic training area.

"It is unbelievably beautiful, and it is state-of-the-art," Doss said. "We believe that our athlete performance center is the best in the conference."

The new training facility has been a positive for the recruitment of new students and staff. They see what UAM is doing, and they want to be a part of it. The next phase of the Legacy Campaign is the renovation of the football locker room.

"It will be a beautiful new facility with things like laundry services," Doss said.

UAM is also in the process of renovating the softball complex by adding new locker rooms for the players and lights to the softball and baseball fields making it possible for them to hold evening games and regional tournaments in the future.

But UAM's athletics don't stop at football, baseball, and softball. Their rodeo team had two students who went to last year's national rodeo finals held in Casper, Wyoming.

"Rusty Jones, who does a fabulous job for

us, said we anticipate possibly having four or five students going this year," Doss said.

The university has been working hard to renovate its stables by installing new stalls that are not only safe but look nice.

"It's about the safety of the animal and the athlete as well," Doss added.

Another goal the university is working on is building a new rodeo arena and they are currently raising funds to start construction. This year, the rodeo will be held in April and will take place at the diesel technology site. A company will come in and set up everything that is needed but, in the future, the hope is to have an arena owned by UAM.

Doss also talked about UAM's nursing program.

"We're very proud that we have a 100 percent pass rate, which includes our EMT program over at McGehee," Doss said.

But the nursing program isn't the only strong program. The Teacher Education programs historically have been very strong. This year there will be a significant increase in the number of interns they will have in the program.

"Due to the teacher and nursing shortage, it is so important that we're beginning to show an increase in that area," Doss stated.

UAM has recently added sheep to its forum which has become quite the tourist attraction. At the moment, 24 lambs are among the livestock. Last year the agriculture club held a fundraising opportunity in

which people could be photographed with the lambs. UAM is also home to some of the most genetically superior Beefmaster cattle in the state. They host cattle auctions frequently.

"Greg Montgomery, our farm manager, does a phenomenal job of taking care of the animals and making sure that we have the best cattle anywhere," Doss said. "I'm extraordinarily blessed to be working with a talented group of people who all love UAM and work hard to support it."

Dr. Kelsey Englert, who is the Director of Marketing and Public Relations for UAM, commented on the strong social media presence that the university has.

"We're trying to make sure that we reach prospective students and share the opportunities that UAM has to offer them," Englert said.

Initiatives like direct mail pieces going to high school juniors and seniors, social media digital marketing, and direct e-mail campaigns are ensuring that students are getting connected to admissions earlier than ever.

"We want them to know that everybody has a place where they belong at UAM," Englert added.

The University of Arkansas at Monticello is striving to make sure that everyone has a great experience while attending. They want their students to be successful and look back on their time at UAM with fondness.

TechKnow123 is making technology easy

By JOANNA POOLE
reporter@theeagledemocrat.com

Chances are that if you live in Southeast Arkansas, you've heard of TechKnow123. If you drive around the community of Monticello, you've probably seen their trailer sitting outside of local businesses and homes. TechKnow123 has been owned and operated by Kashif Kincaid since 2011. They specialize in IT support, network set-up, video and audio installations, cabling, maintenance contracts, and hardware and software sales.

Kincaid was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, but relocated to Wilmar, Arkansas with his family in the second grade. He married his wife Ashley in March of 2023 and the couple have three children.

When he was in the seventh grade, he realized that he had a gift when it came to computers and technology.

"It's a gift and when it comes to technology, someone can tell or show me once and I retain that information," Kincaid said.

When Kincaid graduated from Drew Central High School, he continued to UAM and

graduated from there as well.

"I took the fast route and excelled, and I've been going ever since," Kincaid said.

From the beginning, Kincaid knew he wanted to use his business as a platform to help out in his community. Because of that, he created a non-profit organization called TechKnow Kids.

"The purpose of TechKnow Kids is to shed positive light on our community and try to create a space where we can strip labels and have a safe space for everyone," Kincaid said. "You're not democratic or republican, lower-class or upper-class, you're just people."

Every year before school starts, TechKnow123 puts together a backpack giveaway. They put together backpacks with school supplies and invite the community of Wilmar to come out for a day of fun. There is always a D.J., food, and a kickball tournament where the "old school" plays the "new school."

"That is our largest event every year," Kincaid said.

They are also in the process of planning

See **TECHKNOW123** Page 13

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TECHKNOW123

Continued from Page 11

an event that will take place in the summer. One of their goals is to have a big brother/big sister project. But Kincaid doesn't want TechKnow Kids to be active in just the community of Wilmar. He sees the non-profit branching out and doing the same thing in other communities.

"Our goal is to grow it in Wilmar and then from there, we can duplicate it and bring it to other smaller towns in the surrounding areas," Kincaid said.

In 2020, many small businesses had to unfortunately close their doors, but Kincaid said that TechKnow123 experienced the opposite.

"We actually blossomed," Kincaid said.

He also said that many of the "mom-and-pop" businesses had the mindset that they didn't need cameras and security until they did. That point in time was also when many churches decided to start live streaming their services due to having to close their doors. More companies started having their employees work from home.

"They saw that they needed to invest in technology to accomplish those things," Kincaid said.

TechKnow123 prides itself on offering affordable maintenance agreements that allow people to stay protected and up to date.

"You can take that money that you save



KINCAID

with us and put it back into your business," Kincaid added.

TechKnow123 doesn't only operate in Drew County. They cover the state of Arkansas as well. They're state vendors with TIPS/TAPS which means that they can work on military bases and municipal buildings. They also cover cities like Texarkana, Monroe, and Greenville.

Kincaid wants to make sure his clients are treated fairly and taken care of.

"We want to do a good job and show up when we say we're going to," Kincaid said. "If we're two weeks out, then we tell clients exactly that."

Sometimes finding good help is hard but with Kashif Kincaid and TechKnow123 you'll see the opposite. He has a great work ethic, and he wants to help others. He lives by what he says, and he runs his business the same way. He's truly a good guy.

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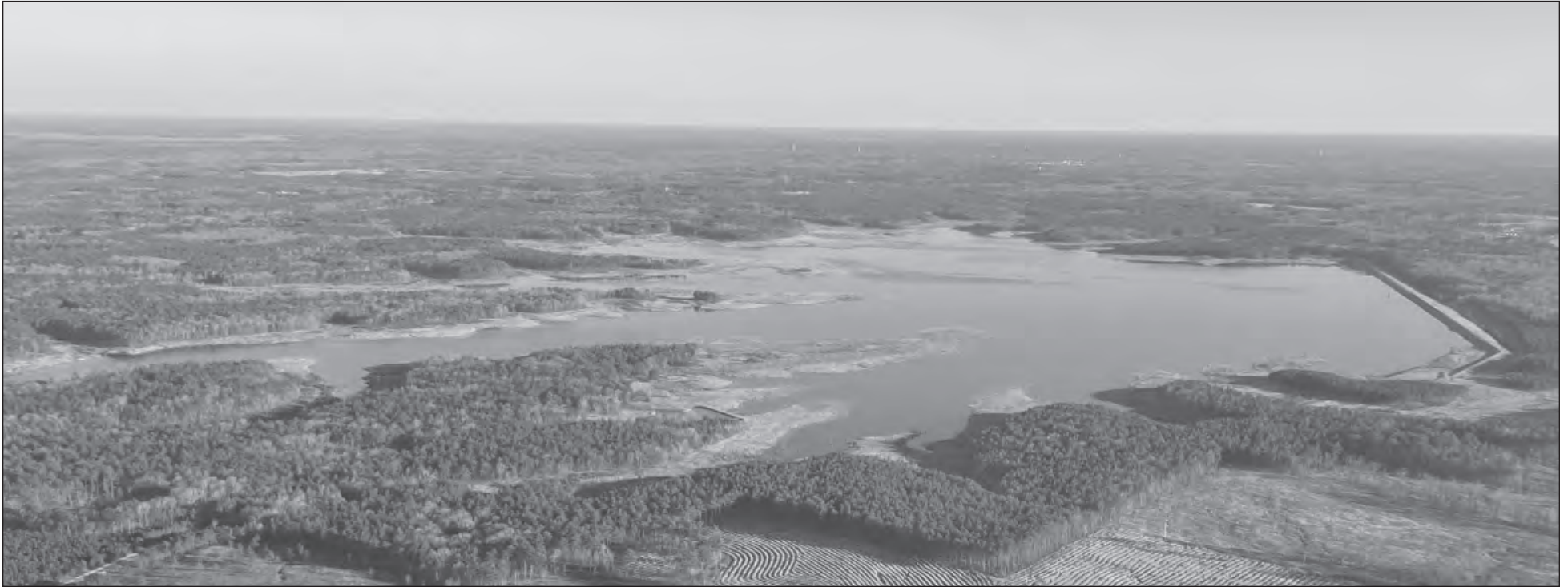


Photo Courtesy of Bennie Ryburn, III

This aerial photo captured by Bennie Ryburn, III shows how much the water has risen in Lake Monticello.

Fired Up Pizza Co. is “lit”

By **JEFF McDONALD**
 editor@monticellonews.net

On Tuesday, November 7, a couple of members of the Advance staff had the opportunity to sit down with Fired Up Pizza Company’s Co-Owners, Brian Smith and D.J. Remick just hours before their invite-only soft launch later that night.

“This is not your average pizza. This isn’t the pizza people are used to getting around here,” Smith said. “D.J. went to New York to be trained, this is the way it’s done in New York.”

Remick stated that they make their own sourdough every day from scratch.

Smith said that depending on how the night’s events unfolded would determine

when they would be able to do a full open. The plan was to take the feedback from the private opening and see what improvements or adjustments needed to be made. Smith said that the ultimate goal was to open over the week-end.

The invite-only opening was a highly successful event. When the 7 p.m. sitting started it was standing room only. The staff was attentive and made sure that everyone was taken care of. The pizza was tasty. The sourdough crust was crunchy while still having flexibility, and the sauce was delicious. It seemed as though everyone walked away satisfied.

The staff took the next day to regroup and then did a couple of days where they took appointments only. After ironing out some more details, they opened at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday,



November 12.

Four months later, Fired Up is still going strong, and adding new items to menu on a

regular basis. If you’re looking for a new take on an old favorite, Fired Up Pizza Co. is highly recommended.

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As one door closes, another opens: Baptist Health holds ribbon cutting at former DMHS

By **JEFF McDONALD**
 editor@monticellonews.net

On Sunday, December 3, the merger between Drew Memorial Health Systems and Baptist Health became official. On Monday, December 4, an official ribbon-cutting ceremony was held at 10 a.m. to formally announce that what was formally known as Drew Memorial Hospital would now be known as Baptist Health Medical Center-Drew County.

Chief Executive Officer of Baptist Health Troy Wells, opened the ceremony by addressing the large crowd that gathered in front of the hospital for the momentous occasion.

“We are humbled and honored to have you all here today,” Wells said. “Today is historic as we bring together and celebrate two historic institutions in Baptist Health and Drew Memorial Health Systems. This is just an awesome day for us all.”

Wells then introduced several members of Baptist’s leadership, several members of the Board of Trustees, and several local dignitaries.

“I want to say thank you and recognize the employees of the former Drew Memo-



Joanna Poole/Advance Monticellonian

Members of Baptist Health leadership, Board of Trustees members, and local dignitaries participated in the ribbon cutting for Baptist Health Medical Center.

rial, who are now part of the Baptist Health family,” Wells added. “Thank you for the work that you’ve done. Thank you for your commitment to your community and to this part of the state, and thank you for joining Baptist Health.”

Drew County Judge Jessie Griffin was

next to speak.

“This is another landmark for Drew County,” Griffin said. “We are now welcoming Baptist Health to be a part of our family here in Drew County. We look forward to

our relationship to continue our services in Drew County. This moment is due to a large number of people doing what needs

See **BAPTIST** Page 18

NEW YEAR’S BABY OF 2024 BORN AT BHMC-DREW COUNTY



Courtesy photo

Princeton La’Mir Robison was born in the Olivia Faith Beebe Nursery at Baptist Health Medical Center-Drew County on Tuesday, January 2, at 7:31 a.m., making him the firstborn baby at the hospital for 2024.

This beautiful baby boy was delivered by Dr. Kelly Shrum. Robison was 20 inches long and weighed seven pounds and three ounces. His mother, Maria Robison, is overjoyed about the precious new addition.

Baptist Health Medical Center-Drew County Auxiliary provides the parents of the first baby born in the Olivia Faith Beebe Nursery each year with a basket of gifts to celebrate their new arrival. This year’s basket included a baby blanket, socks, outfits, toys, teething toys, books, washcloths, and many more items. Auxiliary President, Barbara Brown, presented the gift basket on behalf of the organization. The Auxiliary provides thousands of hours of volunteer service each year to the hospital in most departments and holds many fundraisers to support the hospital’s mission of providing quality health care in the region.

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Doss, Newton receive Woman, Man of the Year



Joanna Poole/Advance Monticellonian

Dr. Peggy Doss (left) and Jeff Newton (right) posing with their Woman of the Year and Man of the Year awards at the recent Chamber of Commerce Awards Banquet.

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Commercial Bank & Trust Company appoints Joe Fakouri as Senior Vice President

SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

Commercial Bank and Trust Co. is proud to announce the appointment of Joe Fakouri as Senior Vice President, effective February 1, 2024.

In his new role, Fakouri will work towards providing community-first values that are vital to Commercial Bank's mission.

"Next month, Joe Fakouri will celebrate 22 years with Commercial Bank," said Todd Smith, President of Commercial Bank. "Due to Joe's outstanding leadership – both inside and outside the bank – the Board desires to recognize his leadership by naming him as Senior Vice President (SVP). Joe's attitude, customer-focused approach, and get-the-job-done mentality have been big winners for Commercial Bank, and this is

the most appropriate way to recognize him for it."

As SVP, Fakouri provides senior oversight of lending to individuals, businesses, and non-profits throughout Drew County.

Fakouri graduated from Pine Bluff High School and received his undergraduate at the University of Arkansas Monticello. He obtained his master's degree from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. For over two decades, he has proudly served Commercial Bank as Vice President of Lending and has helped thousands of local citizens achieve their financial goals. As a native son, his roots run deep in Southeast Arkansas.

Customers can visit with Joe by stopping by his office downtown or by calling 870.367.6221.



Photo courtesy of Commercial Bank & Trust Co.

McDuffie returns to roots, joins Commercial Bank team as Chief Lending Officer

BY ADVANCE STAFF

Bryan McDuffie is far from a stranger to Monticello. He was the third generation in the McDuffie family to graduate from the University of Arkansas at Monticello, and he and his family made Drew County their home from 2010 to 2015 when McDuffie was the branch manager for Delta Farm Credit.

"I am extremely excited to be back in Monticello," McDuffie stated. "My grandfather was born and raised in Drew County on a farm, until the United States draft called him to serve in World War II. After the war, he came back, met my grandmother, and got a degree from Arkansas A & M."

McDuffie graduated as a Boll Weevil in 2008 with a Bachelor's Degree in Plant and

Soil Science with the intent of becoming an agricultural chemical salesman.

With the state of the nation's economy at the time of his graduation, and upcoming wedding, McDuffie needed a steady job and found a great opportunity with Delta Farm Credit.

"I started with Delta ACA in 2010 and was there until the end of 2015," McDuffie added. "That company invested in me and I learned so much about the financial world while there."

In 2015, he, his wife, and two daughters, made the move to El Dorado where McDuffie took a job at First Financial in their agriculture lending department. He was able to help grow the department and received noteworthy promotions.

"My wife and I had a priority shift and I realized, I needed to be with my family more," McDuffie said. "Being at Commercial Bank will allow me to be the husband and father I want to be, as well as being involved in this community that I love."

McDuffie is in the office at 212 West Gaines Street and encourages anyone to come by and see him and let Commercial Bank assist you with financial needs.

"We are very excited to have Bryan McDuffie back in Monticello to lead the lending department at Commercial Bank," Bennie Ryburn III stated.

"Relationship banking is community banking 101, and there's no better example than Bryan McDuffie," Todd D. Smith, President and COO of Commercial Bank said.



McDUFFIE

"Bryan's commitment shines through in the kind of difference a locally-owned and operated bank can make in the lives of its customers and community."

BAPTIST

Continued from Page 15

to be done to accomplish what is best for Drew County. As with anything, there will be some pros and cons no matter what we do, but it is a step forward and a step in the right direction for our hospital, our county, and the people of southeast Arkansas."

"I'm excited to be here," Dr. James Atkins said. "I'm excited to celebrate the grand opening of Baptist Health Medical Center-Drew County. It's a beginning and a new era of health care in Monticello and


Drew County that will positively impact the people of southeast Arkansas. This merger will allow our hospital more opportunities to grow and expand. In combining our strengths, we amplify our ability to meet the evolving needs of our community."

Next to the podium was Monticello Mayor Jason Akers.

"I want to thank Baptist. Since 1921, they have provided services to the citizens of the state of Arkansas. They are the largest non-profit hospital, employing roughly 11,000 people," Akers stated. "We are a

See **BAPTIST** Page 19

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Grimes named UAM Vice Chancellor for University Advancement and Alumni Engagement

SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

The University of Arkansas at Monticello (UAM) has announced the appointment of Dr. Landon Grimes as vice chancellor for University Advancement and Alumni Engagement.

Dr. Grimes, a Monticello native and 1998 graduate of Drew Central High School, has sixteen years of combined experience in both public and higher education. His career in education began at Monticello Intermediate School as a fifth grade teacher for three years before returning to UAM as the training coordinator for the Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center. He returned to Monticello Middle School to teach seventh grade English for two years and then became the assistant principal at the middle school for two years. He moved



GRIMES

to central Arkansas for five years, where he served as the junior high principal at Harmony Grove in Haskell, before return-

ing to UAM. In 2021, he became the partnership coordinator for the UAM School of Education and later served as the assistant dean for the school.

Dr. Grimes earned multiple degrees from UAM, including a Bachelor of Arts in English degree in 2008, a Master of Arts in Teaching degree in 2009 and a Master of Educational Leadership degree in 2014. He also earned an Education Specialist degree from Arkansas State University in 2019 and a Doctorate of Education degree from Harding University in 2023.

“Dr. Grimes is a graduate of UAM with a proven history of leadership as a principal, and most recently, as the assistant dean in the School of Education at UAM,” Dr. Peggy Doss, chancellor of UAM, said. “He has a deep love for the university and is committed to its growth and success.

His enthusiasm and loyalty will serve UAM well as he connects with alumni and works to advance the university’s mission. We are so pleased to have him as a vice chancellor at UAM.”

“As vice chancellor, I’m eager to work alongside our talented team to strengthen UAM’s connections with alumni and secure resources that empower our institution to thrive,” Dr. Grimes said. “We have a vibrant community of alumni, and I believe by nurturing these relationships, we can harness their collective passion and support to propel UAM to even greater heights. I am truly humbled by this incredible opportunity and excited to embark on this new chapter with the passionate UAM community. Go Weevils!”

Dr. Grimes’ appointment began March 1, 2024.

Michael Efirm joins experienced lending team at Union Bank

By ADVANCE STAFF

Long time loan officer and Southeast Arkansas resident, Michael Efirm, has joined the lending team at Union Bank and Trust.

Originally from McGehee, Efirm began his career in banking part-time at McGehee Bank in 1988. Efirm has been in Monticello since 1991, where he attended the University of Arkansas at Monticello.

“I love the people of Monticello,” Efirm stated. “I love how community oriented the residents are, and how giving we are of our time, money, and selves.”



EFIRM

Efirm said he is excited to join the team of highly experienced loan officers that Union Bank has established and is thankful for this opportunity to remain in Monticello and work here.

“We plan to retire here, we love it,” Efirm added.

Efirm and his wife, Jodie, have four children, Morgan (Dalton), Beau, John Michael and Max, and two grandchildren.

“I enjoy working with small business owners and potential homeowners,” Efirm stated. “I believe home ownership helps the community and all those involved. Over my career, I have been fortunate enough to es-

tablish many long term and wonderful loan and deposit relationships, and look forward to continuing those, as well as building new ones.”

BAPTIST

Continued from Page 18

close-knit community. We take care of each other. We argue from time to time, but we are one big family and we are excited to have Baptist here. We have an obligation as Monticellonians to support this hospital, they’ve come in and done great things, and it is our responsibility as citizens of this town and county to return that favor and show that we are worth the investment.”

Following Mayor Akers, former Chief Executive Officer of DMHS, and current President of BHMCD, Scott Barrilleaux took his place at the podium.

“First and foremost, I want to thank you

all for being here, and I want to echo what the mayor said,” Barrilleaux said. “It is a wonderful look from this microphone to see so many faces and familiar faces. This day is a huge milestone for our hospital. The road to this grand opening has been one of dedication, hard work, and collaboration. Countless hours have been invested by a team of individuals who share a common goal to create a healthier community through Christian compassion and innovative services for the people of South Arkansas. Change, especially in the realm of healthcare, can be met with uncertainty. However, I have no doubt that we will be stronger than ever before. Baptist Health will allow us to strengthen our position

See **BAPTIST** Page 22



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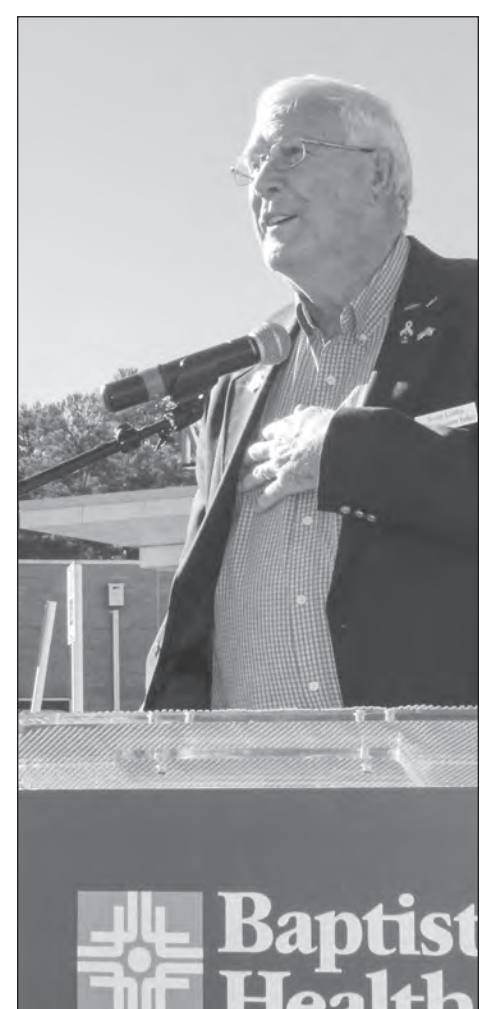
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Photos by Joanna Poole/Advance Monticellonian



BAPTIST

Continued from Page 18

as the hub for healthcare in south Arkansas, which has been a goal of ours for over nine and a half years. Lastly, I would like to thank each and every person who played a role in making this a reality, along with our hospital's incredible staff who continue to show up every day and provide compassionate care to our patients. Thank you all for supporting our hospital over the years, and we are excited to serve you as Baptist Health Medical Center-Drew County. Thank you!"

Following Barrilleaux, Glenda Nichols with the Drew County Chamber of Commerce gave a brief welcome into Monticello and Drew County for Baptist. Ryan Copico followed with an invocation to bless the merger and new business relationship.

After the invocation, Wells held a countdown, which led to new signage being revealed on the building. Immediately following this, the ribbon was officially cut, and a new era of healthcare under Baptist Health was ushered into Monticello and Drew County.

Following the ribbon cutting, a reception was held in the Surgical Center for all to attend.



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OPTIONS HOLD FIRST BANQUET TO HELP RAISE FUNDS FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE



File photo

Options held their first banquet to bring awareness and raise funds for victims and survivors of domestic abuse. The event is a regional event as Options directly serves seven counties, but offers services anywhere they are needed in the state.

MASONIC LODGE PRESENTS CHECK TO JUNIOR AUXILIARY FOR TOY DRIVE



Photo courtesy of Brian Rodgers

WM. Bobby Faulkner (right), of Eureka Lodge No. 40, presented the Junior Auxiliary with a check to aid with their annual toy drive. Accepting the check is Halley Ryburn (left) and Lakyn Collins (center).

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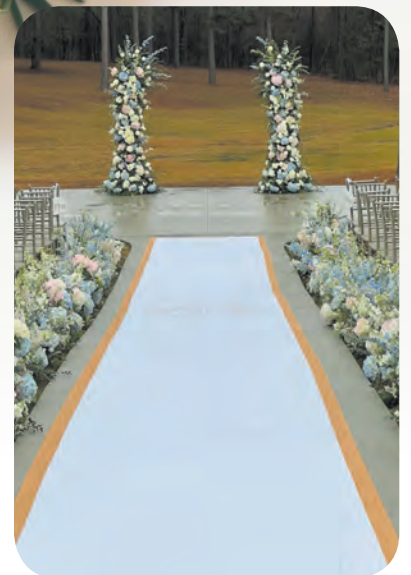
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