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# ADVANCE-MONTICELLONIAN

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1, 2025



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# **NEW YEAR'S SPECIAL SECTION** Year in Review

JANUARY



#### SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

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 thousands of hours of volunteer baby born in the Olivia Faith service each year to the hospital basket of gifts to celebrate their many fundraisers to support the 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 Beebe Nursery each year with a in most departments and holds hospital's mission of providing quality health care in the region.

### **MARCH**

**MEDDERS FUNERAL HOME OPENS** 



Ashley Hogg/Advance Monticellonian

Medders Funeral Home in Monticello is now open and ready to serve the community. "We are so excited and very grateful for the opportunity to serve the families of the Monticello area. The outpouring of support has been overwhelming and very much appreciated. Our office hours will be Monday-Friday 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Saturday & Sunday closed unless we are serving families.'

**APRIL** 

# 2024 Eclipse happened April 8



Photo courtesy of Keith Wallis

### MAY

# Ray's announced as 2024 Arkansas **Food Hall of Fame finalist**

SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

Finalists have been announced for the 2024 Arkansas Food Hall of Fame, and Monticello's own, Ray's, has been named as a finalist.

"It certainly is an honor for Ray's to be recognized by the committee as a finalist for the Arkansas Food Hall of Fame," Chris Ray said. "My Grandfather, CL Ray and my Father, Mark Ray before me laid the groundwork for the business many years ago and our family has dedicated our lives into keeping the business thriving thru the years....

We are certainly grateful for our many loyal customers in Monticello and throughout the state who

have made this possible." Launched in 2016 by the Division of Arkansas Heritage, the program celebrates Arkansas' unique culinary heritage by recognizing its best restaurants, proprietors and food-themed events.

"This year's finalists embody the flavors, traditions and stories that define Arkansas," said Marty Ryall, director of the Division of Arkansas Heritage. "As we celebrate these restaurants, we honor not only the dishes they create but the communities they feed and the legacies they preserve."

Arkansans nominated their favorite restaurants earlier this year in these five categories:

- People's Choice
- Gone But Not Forgotten
- Food-Themed Event • Proprietor of the Year
- Arkansas Food Hall of Fame Finalists include:
- Ray's (Drew County)

See RAY'S Page 4C

### MAY

### LAKE MONTICELLO REOPENS



#### **JANUARY** HIGHLIGHTS

#### **AR 4-H Foundation creates Bragg Family Memorial Scholarship Fund**

SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

A member of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture family and her husband and children who died suddenly in December will be memorialized by the Arkansas 4-H Foundation.

The foundation has created a scholarship in memory of Hope and Don Bragg, as well as their son Kenny, 22, and daughter, Elizabeth, 19. The four died December 30 in a house explosion while visiting family in Michigan. Their son Stephen, 16, and Hope's father, Richard Pruden, survived.

On Friday, the Division of Agriculture announced a \$5,000 donation to the fund.

The Bragg Family Memorial Scholarship Fund honors Hope Bragg who was a 4-H STEM instructor with the Division of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Service. Her husband Don was a project leader for the U.S. Forest Service with an office at the University of Arkansas at Monticello.

"I want to thank John Thomas and the 4-H Foundation for quickly establishing a scholarship in honor of Hope and the Bragg Family," said Deacue Fields, head of the Division of Agriculture. "This scholarship will honor their memory for years to come by helping young people achieve their college goals."

The Braggs were beloved by friends and co-workers, many of whom have donated to the fund. With the Division's gift of \$5,000, the foundation has now raised \$16,000, said John Thomas, the foundation's managing director. The foundation needs \$25,000 to endow the fund, so that scholarships can be awarded from interest earned on the money while preserving the capital, he said.

"Losing a beloved colleague so suddenly has been a shock to all of our 4-H, extension and Division of Agriculture family," said John Anderson, director of the Cooperative Extension Service. "We all wanted to do something that would honor the Bragg family and their love for Arkansas 4-H, education and particularly the sciences. We hope this scholarship will enable 4-H members to further their education and pursue their own passions for the sciences."

The scholarship will be awarded annually to an Arkansas 4-H member high school senior who plans to pursue a college degree in natural resources or in the science, technology, engineering and math fields. Archaeology will also be an eligible field of study.

Both Hope and Don were members of the Arkansas Archaeological Society, and their son Kenny was on track to graduate this spring with an archeology degree from Michigan Tech. Their daughter, Beth, was a freshman at the University of Arkansas, and Hope was pursuing a Ph.D.

"This is our way of ensuring that the passions these Bragg family members had for 4-H will not only be remembered but also will be passed on to future generations of Arkansas 4-H youth," Thomas said.

Both Hope and Don shared a profound love of education.

"They were both so focused on educating youth," said Debbie Nistler, assistant vice president for 4-H Youth Development with the Division of Agriculture. "If you had the opportunity to see either one of them work with youth, you couldn't help but get excited. We want to make their passion for education a legacy."

For more information about the Arkansas 4-H Foundation and the scholarship, vishttps://www.arkansas4hfoundation.org.



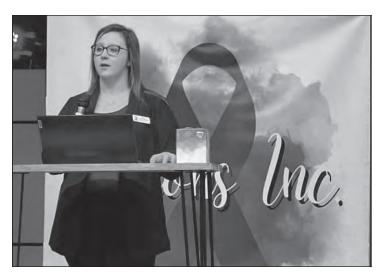
# JANUARY

#### Options hold first banquet to help raise funds for victims of domestic abuse

SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

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





Top photo: Danna Carpenter, Director of Options, Inc. speaking at the banquet. Bottom photo: Board member, William West addressing the crowd at the Options Banquet.

#### **FEBRUARY HIGHLIGHTS**

YEAR IN REVIEW

#### **UAM Animal Science Pro**fessor awarded Veterinarian of the Year

By LON TEGELS

College of Forestry, Agriculture and Natural Resources

University of Arkansas at Monticello

The University of Arkansas at Monticello's Rocky Lindsey has been awarded the Arkansas Veterinarian of the Year for 2023. The presentation was made in Hot Springs at the winter meeting of the Arkansas Veterinary Medical Association (VMA) in early February. Lindsey is an Associate Professor of Animal Science at the College of Forestry, Agriculture, and Natural Resources. This award is given annually to recognize the outstanding contributions and accomplishments of a member of the Arkansas VMA.

Arkansas veterinarian Mike Beard of Animal Care Veterinary Center in Conway

nominated Lindsey for this distinction.

"I first met Rocky, I guess right after he graduated from veterinary school. He was the new graduate veterinarian on the Board of Managers for the Arkansas Veterinarian Medical Association. It says Veterinarian of the Year. I always think of the award as a career achievement," Beard said. "It is based on what you have done for your community, association, and profession. Rocky checks all the boxes. He is at every meeting every year. He's our go-to guy for spiritual guidance as well. Those are the things that stood out to me."

"I did not know that that award would be given to me that day. It was quite an honor," said Lindsey. "From what I understand, they appreciated the work I do with missions where we take a lot of pre-veterinary students. We go to Belize twice a year to do humanitarian veterinary work overseas. Many of my previous students here at UAM have a lot of experience that looks good on a resume. Then they appreciated the work that I did for the association over the years and the teaching component that I have here at the college."

"The value that he contributes to the profession is bringing on Baptist Church in Monticello. the young people who want to be veterinarians, guiding them, and helping them get into veterinary school," Beard said. "He does

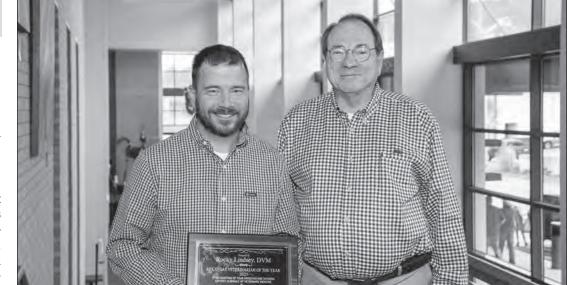


Photo courtesy of Lon Tegels

Dr. Rocky Lindsey (left), winner of the 2023 Arkansas Veterinarian of the Year pictured with Dr. Mike Beard (right) from Conway who nominated Lindsey for the award.

such an excellent job at that. Most of us in practice have some influence on the youngsters that are coming along and try to guide them. But we don't have nearly the influence that Rocky has being on the staff at UAM."

"I used to have two veterinary clinics, and many veterinarians in the state know that I had two successful practices," said Lindsey. "You're awarded, or other veterinarians in the state nominate you. I understand the previous award winners vote on who gets the award."

"Rocky was on the board of a bank in Warren; he's active on his farm and was voted 2022 Drew County Farm Family of the Year," Beard stated. "He's also very active in his church. He has written a spiritual book, Real Life Devotionals: A Year-Long Daily Devotional. In that book, it said that Rocky is just your average Joe, which I don't think is true. I think he's above average, but that's how Rocky is. He seems like an average guy you like, but he seems to get many things done. I thought Rocky deserved to be recognized as the veterinarian of the year. I was happy to nominate him, and I also got to introduce him at our awards banquet."

Greg Montgomery, farm manager at the University of Arkansas at Monticello, is a longtime friend of Lindsey. They serve as Deacons together at Pauline Montgomery knew of Lindsey through his veterinary business.

"I knew what kind of business he was running, a very successful

veterinarian," Montgomery said. "If you know Rocky, then you know Rocky's faith. That's just all it is to it. I mean, he's so open with his faith. First and foremost, Rocky is a Christian man who wants to impact people's lives. He's here for that reason, and he uses the platform he has."

Montgomery said Lindsey is integral to his success at UAM. Dr. Lindsey arrived at UAM in 2017, shortly before a reorganization of its cattle herd management. Montgomery credits Lindsey with developing a business plan to make the cattle herd profitable. Lindsey helped formulate some five-year goals.

"Together, we put a business plan on paper that we could take to the Chancellor and the Dean of Agriculture," Montgomery said. "Here's a way that the program can be financially independent."

Montgomery now leads the UAM breeding program for Beefmasters cattle, and the program is thriving. The students assist in running the beef program through activities such as hands-on vaccinations and deworming the animals.

While Lindsey appreciates the honor of his statewide award. he really wants to see more students succeed in their desires to become veterinarians. A recent study from veterinarians. org revealed that Arkansas has an average of 14 veterinarians per 100,000 people, making it the state with the least number of employed veterinarians in the

"Many kids dream about being

a veterinarian," said Lindsev.

"We talk to students about becoming a veterinarian and potentially attending UAM as a pre-veterinary student. We want to be honest with them that getting into veterinary school is highly competitive, " Lindsey added. "We currently do not have veterinary schools in Arkansas, although there are a couple in the works that hopefully will be open in the next couple of years. Getting into veterinary school as an Arkansas student is very difficult. We try to be honest with them and that the curriculum will be challenging."

"If they do what we tell them if they'll study, get good grades, and then come here and take advantage of what we have here at UAM, they have a leg up on getting to the veterinary school," said Lindsey. "That's because we get them very hands-on involved, especially with cattle, sheep, goats, and horses. We have a companion animal class, giving them a lot of practical hands-on ability and knowledge they can apply in veterinary school. Veterinary schools appreciate our approach."

"We've enjoyed a high success rate of our students getting into veterinary school in the last few

That's a testament to the quality of students we have and the amount of experience we give them. The national average was around 17 percent of students who applied were successful. Our average is over 50 percent," said Lindsey.

#### MARCH **HIGHLIGHTS**

### McFarlands contribute \$20,000 to UAM Athletics Legacy Campaign



(left to right) Hud Jackson, Ronald McFarland, Betty McFarland, Dr. Peggy

### BY KELSEY ENGLERT

The University of Arkansas at Monticello has received a donation of \$20,000 from Ronald and Betty McFarland to support the UAM Athletics Legacy Campaign.

The UAM Athletics Legacy Campaign focuses on enhancing the support of student-athletes through major facility improvements. The campaign aims to have 250 donors join each year, generating a yearly revenue of \$250,000 toward improving various facilities.

Hud Jackson, director of Athletics and head football coach at UAM, thanked the McFarlands, stating, "We are so grateful to the McFarland family for their generous donation to our Legacy Campaign. Mr. Ronnie and Mrs. Betty are

great people who want to be part of the improvements to our athletic department and our football program. They have made a huge impact."

"I want to extend my sincere gratitude to the McFarlands for their generous donation to the UAM Athletics Legacy Campaign," stated Dr. Peggy Doss, chancellor of UAM. "Their contribution will significantly enhance the experience of our student-athletes at UAM and help us to improve our facilities. This is essential to our recruitment initiatives and will allow us to continue to provide our student-athletes with the resources they need to succeed both on and off the field."



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#### **MARCH** HIGHLIGHTS

YEAR IN REVIEW

#### **Chamber of Commerce** holds annual awards banquet

By Jeff McDonald editor@monticellonews.net

The Monticello/Drew County Chamber of Commerce held its annual awards banquet at 6 p.m. on Monday, March 4, at the Gibson Center on the University of Arkansas at Monticello campus.

Jeff Newton and Dr. Peggy Doss were awarded the 2023 Man and Woman of the Year. Bill and Beverly Burchfield won the Lifetime Achievement Award.

UAM chose Dr. Amber Turner as their Educator of the Year. Kelsey Tucker took home the award for the Drew Central School District, and Mrs. Bennie Vincent won the award for the Monticello School District.

Hales Repair Service was awarded the 2023 Small Business of the Year, and Maxwell Hardwood Flooring took home the award for the Large Business of the Year. Feed the Kids was honored as the 2023 Non-profit of the Year.

2023 Man of the Year Award winner Jeff Newton is a Monticello native who graduated from Monticello High School and UAM. He serves as a deacon at the Monticello Church of Christ, where he attends with his wife Sara and their two sons.

Many people know Newton for his work as a photographer, where he has taken countless photos of many families' most treasured moments.

His most recent endeavor has been working on the development of the Lakewood Trails located at Lake Monticello. Newton has spent countless hours working on the project, has helped to secure multiple grants to fund different areas of the project, has organized many fundraisers, and has spent out of

his own pocket to see the project succeed.

Newton also started the first National Interscholastic Cycling Association Mountain Biking Team, which he will be coaching. He has also worked with Monticello Schools in developing the All Kids Bike program which resulted in the school receiving 24 strider bikes along with helmets for the "Little Billies" bikers.

Newton also serves on the Monticello Youth Baseball Board, and serves on the Monticello Parks and Recreation Commission. He also volunteers with the swim team.

Additionally, Newton can be seen on stage at SEARK Concert Association productions. He has frequently played leading roles, including Peter Pan in the upcoming production, over the past five years. He is often seen encouraging younger cast members and helping make sure they have a positive experience.

Dr. Peggy Doss, 2023 Woman of the Year, has a lifetime of experience in the education field. From the classroom setting, to be the leader of UAM, Doss shows a level of passion and love for the students that is unmatched.

She has been instrumental in sustaining and enhancing the university's impact on the com-

Dr. Doss has strengthened the ties between the university and the surrounding community during her tenure as chancellor. She focuses on providing invaluable opportunities for students to connect with and contribute to the city of Monticello. Doss' commitment to student success is evident by her initiatives and improving retentions rates and promoting timely graduation thereby preparing the future leaders and workers of the Monticello community.

With a wealth of experience in education and a strong academic background, Dr. Doss brings a unique perspective and depth of knowledge to her role as Chancellor. Her leadership is characterized by integrity, dedication, and a genuine concern for the welfare of others, leaving a lasting impact on the university and it's stakeholders.

Dr. Doss has worked tirelessly with legislators to ensure that UAM is always at the forefront of their minds as they go into sessions. She uses every opportunity possible to tell of all of the good things happening on campus and to remind all of the economic impact that UAM has on not only Monticello, but the entire southeast Arkansas region.

Dr. Doss earned her Bachelor's Degree from UAM and is the only UAM graduate to serve as the university's Chancellor. She serves as a true example that you can take a South Arkansas girl and do great things.

2023 Lifetime Acheivement Award winners Bill and Beverly Burchfield are staples in the Monticello community. The generous and extremely talented couple has made it their life mission to reach out and share their musical talent with the people of Drew County. The Burchfields sponsor the "Old Time Hymn" singing event each year.

The couple is dedicated to education and continue to work diligently with the Pauline Baptist Church college ministry, as well as being members of the Pauline Paces.

They also have a Sunday morning gospel music program on Facebook as part of their extended outreach ministry.

Additionally, the couple makes themselves available to provide inspiring and comforting music for families during some of the families most important life

Added to all these services is their willingness to offer their talent, whenever needed, by serving as substitute musicians in many of the churches in our area, to provide beautiful and inspiring piano and organ music for congregations.

2023 Small Business of the Year, Hales Repair Service, has been in business in Monticello and Drew County for over 40 years. Not only do they serve Drew County, but they also serve Ashley, Bradley, Chicot, and Desha Counties as well. George Hales and his son Chris are unfailingly pleasant, honest, dependable, and trustworthy.

Hales' wife answers the phone calls, and George and/or Chris take care of the service calls, and clean up whenever the job is done. They even have the ability to deliver unwanted and expensive news in a pleasant manner.

They attend regular trainings to stay current on today's appliances.

This is a family owned business with a stellar reputation.

The Large Business of the Year for 2023 is Maxwell Hardwood Flooring. Since 1992, they have been a staple in Monticello and Drew County, and an integral part of the economic growth of the county.

The family owned and operated company has grown from just 33 employees to over 170 dedicated and skilled craftsmen in the hardwood flooring industry.

Maxwell Hardwood Flooring is among the top three producers of unfinished solid and engineered wood floors in the nation, with their flooring in some of the most prestigious places around the state and country, including Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, the Governor's Mansion in Little Rock, and The White House in Washington D.C.

Over the last several years, the company has made substantial capital investments with

upgrades in new equipment throughout the facility. These investments ensure steady employment for families in Monticello and Drew County.

Helping communities and families has always been a top priority since the company began, they have always put people first. Early on, Beth Maxwell initiated training and development programs for their employees, for both professional and personal growth. These programs are still implemented today and are an important part of the success of the organization.

Locally, the company supports numerous organizations such as UAM, Vera Lloyd, Monticello and Drew Central Schools, Junior Auxiliary, Hope Place, The Call, and Log-a-Load.

Nationally, Maxwell Hardwood Flooring has been a supporter of the Gary Sinise Foundation, which helps built smart homes for injured veterans and first responders. Maxwell has also supported industry wide programs to train hardwood flooring professionals and helped provide industry scholarships through the National Wood Flooring Association.

The 2023 Non-Profit of the Year winner, Feed the Kids, was born from a Drew Central field trip in 2006. During the field trip a hungry child was identified. While the other children played, this child sat at a table and slowly ate her lunch. Her teacher gathered unopened chips, snacks, and some fruit and placed it in the child's backpack at the end of the day.

"She only eats at school," the teacher explained.

A circle of women at the First Presbyterian Church heard this story and decided that no child in Monticello should have to go without food whenever they are not in school. They chose Matthew 25:35 as their verse, "For I was hungered and you gave me meat..." as their guide verse.

They created a snack bag with enough food to sustain a child for a weekend. They chose a test grade at Drew Central and identified students who may need assistance.

The response was overwhelming and soon students in grades K-3 at both Drew Central and Monticello received a snack bag over the weekend. These bags contained two breakfasts, two lunches, and two suppers, as well as snacks and a drink.

First Presbyterian Church serves as the assembly and storage site for the bags. First United Methodist Youth have adopted the project as a mission project with support from other community youth groups, businesses, and civic groups who volunteer to pack the bags monthly.

To qualify, any school employee can recommend the children, or the child themselves can request their own bags. The bags are placed in the child's backpack at the end of the school day on Fridays. The only criteria is that the child is hungry over the weekend.

The project has expanded over the years. Approximately 100 students receive bags each week. That's over 3,600 bags per school year, and over 67,800 over the past 18 years. The cost of each bag is \$7.25 which equals nearly \$3,000 each month.

Funds are locally provided through donations from individuals, business, churches, and some grant funding. Every cent donated goes to buy food for the snack bags.

For 18 years, Feed the Kids has quietly met a need in the Monticello community to feed children who may not have enough food to eat on the weekends.

#### MARCH **HIGHLIGHTS**

#### **Black Bear population alive** and well in Arkansas

By Ashley Hogg publisher@monticellonews.net

Recently, an Arkansas Game and Fish Commission Certified Wildlife Biologist spoke to the Drew County Rotary Club regarding the black bear population in the area.

Marks Hooks, a Supervisor of Wildlife Management with AGFC, addressed the Gulf Coastal Plain Bear Project that began more than two decades

"The objectives of the Gulf Coastal Plain Bear Project have been targeted at monitoring black bear population densities, health, reproduction, and denning chronology specifically in South Arkansas," Hooks stated. "While this project has been ongoing since the summer of 2022, the road to this point really began in 2000 when the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission collaborated with several partners to translocate female bears with

cubs to the Felsenthal National enced members of the team, Wildlife Refuge near Crossett, Arkansas. From 2000 through 2008, 55 adult female bears and 116 cubs were moved from Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge."

At the conclusion of the Rotary meeting, I asked, almost jokingly, if there was a chance for a member of the Advance-Monticellonian team to accompany AGFC officers the next time a bear in the area was going to be monitored. To my pleasant surprise, Mark Hooks agreed to allow us to experience the once in a lifetime opportunity to be up close and personal with a black bear in its natural habitat.

We had a briefing about the expectations of the day, which included information about why the bears were relocated to this area to begin with.

When the signal from the bear's tag came in, a small group including Hooks, a Veterinarian, and other experientered the dense woods just off of the highway to locate the tagged sow.

The first team's objective the Dale Bumpers/White River was to locate the den and sub-National Wildlite Refuge to the - due the sow in order to safely sedate her while the Veterinarian made sure she and the cubs were healthy.

After approximately 20 minutes, the rest of the group was taken through layers of briars and cold mud around a half a mile into the woods. Faint sounds of small cries were heard, then the three cubs were presented to the group.

We backed into an opening among the trees as the approximately five-week-old triplets were wrapped in blankets and gently passed to us from the AGFC officers.

Hooks explained that the cubs will stay with the mother through the summer and winter in her next den cycle. When they emerge around this time next year, the male cubs will be released from the den to find their own "territory" and to



Ashley Hogg/Eagle Democrat

Arkansas Game and Fish had a successful day checking on three five week old bear cubs. Mom is recovering well after giving birth and the cubs are healthy and thriving.

establish breeding patterns.

begin adult life and hopefully, breeding as early as three years to Hooks, the average lifespan

old but typically wait until they of a female bear in the proper Female bears can begin are closer to five. According conditions is 25 to 30 years.

#### MARCH **HIGHLIGHTS**

### **COLLINS AWARDED CHIROPRACTOR OF THE YEAR AT CONVENTION**



The Arkansas Chiropractic Physicians Association held its annual Spring Convention at the Delta by Marriott in Little Rock on March 2, 2024. The association recognized members of the profession for their outstanding work for Arkansas Chiropractors. Dr. Tyler Collins of Monticello was awarded Chiropractor of the Year.



**BUCK & BENNIE HENDERSON, OWNERS** 

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#### APRIL **HIGHLIGHTS**

#### **OPEN FOR BUSINESS**

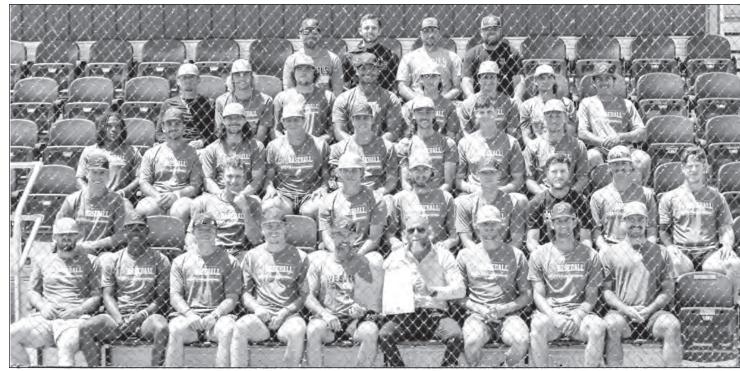


Jeff McDonald/Advance Monticellonian

Dollar General is excited to announce that it's new store, located at 1943 US Highway 425 N is now open for business. To commemorate the location opening, DG plans to donate 100 new books to a nearby elementary school to benefit children in grades K-5.

#### MAY **HIGHLIGHTS**

#### **MAYOR DECLARES MAY 16 UAM WEEVIL BASEBALL DAY**



To show the City of Monticello's support for the Great American Conference's Conference Champion University of Arkansas at Monticello Boll Weevils as they prepared to travel for Regionals, Monticello Mayor Jason Akers declared Thursday, May 16, 2024, UAM Boll Weevils Baseball Day.

The Weevils got a police and fire escort out of town as they traveled to compete and represent UAM. "These young men and their Coaches have represented Monticello, its people and UAM with professionalism, dedication and a fighting spirit," Mayor Akers said. "They are all representing us well, and we owe them our support". The Weevils would beat Arkansas Tech in the regional tournament to advance in the bracket. They would then face Missouri Southern State. The Weevils would finish this contest with a 7-4 victory. The Weevils would defeat Missouri Southern in a final game to advance to the Super Regionals where they would lose the back to back games to the University of Central Missouri.

Continued from Page 1C

- Top Dog Catering (Lonoke County)
- Bennett's Seafood (Garland County)
- The Purple Banana (Benton
- County) • BubbaLu's (Garland County)
- Beech Street Bistro (Ashley
- County) Anderson's (White County)
- Juanita's (Pulaski County)
- Polar Freeze (Lawrence Coun-
- Arkansas Pie Festival (Sharp County)
- Mayhaw Festival (Union County)
- Mt. Nebo Chicken Fry (Yell County)
- Slovak Oyster Supper (Arkansas County)
- Soup Sunday (Pulaski County)
- · Crissy's Pub Style (Saline County)
- Tusk & Trotter American Brasserie (Washington County)
- · Loca Luna and Red Door (Pu-
- laski County) Woods Place (Ouachita Coun-
- ty)
- Doe's Eat Place (Pulaski Coun-
- Big Banjo Pizza Parlor (Jefferson County)
- · The Faded Rose (Pulaski
- County)
- · Charlotte's Eats and Sweets (Lonoke County)
- · Herman's Ribhouse (Washington County)
- Daisy Queen (Searcy County)
- The Dixie Pig (Mississippi County)
- Old South Restaurant (Pope County)
- Dairyette (Montgomery Coun-
- Hugo's (Washington County) • Taliano's Italian Restaurant
- (Sebastian County)
- Brave New Restaurant (Pulas-
- ki County) • K Hall & Sons (Pulaski Coun-
- ty)

Award finalists were announced at an event hosted by the Division of Arkansas Heritage. Ryall was accompanied by Shea Lewis, secretary for the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism, and members of the

Jeff McDonald/Advance Monticellonian Arkansas Food Hall of Fame Com-

mittee. "Food is such a defining feature of Arkansas, having the potential to tell stories with just one bite," Lewis said. "Our finalists are perfect examples of this, and we're honored to recognize their impact on the state's dynamic food culture."

Honorees were inducted into the Arkansas Hall of Fame during a special event in September 2024. More information about the Arkansas Food Hall of Fame can be found at ArkFoodHOF.com.





WED. 9-11 • THURS. 9-11 FRI.-SAT. 9-12 • SUN. 9-11

#### APRIL **HIGHLIGHTS**

#### **Commercial Bank and First** State Bank to join together to benefit customers

SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

Commercial Bank & Trust is proud to announce a strategic initiative to unify sister bank, First State Bank of Warren, into the Commercial Bank operation effective June 24, 2024. Given the proximity of locations, unifying as one bank under the Commercial Bank charter will aid customer access and convenience. Customers will have access to a total of eight banking offices and nine ATMs in the southeast Arkansas communities of Monticello, Warren, Hermitage and Hampton.

Both Banks were purchased by Bennie Ryburn, Sr., more than 50-years ago, and have operated as separate and distinct banks since that time. Todd Smith, president of Commercial Bank and First State Bank of Warren was asked about the reason for the change and described it this way, 'Joining the two banks together will remove back-office redundancies and allow us to offer greater convenience, and better products and services such as enhanced technology for customers. It will also allow our staff to spend more time with customers and less on administrative duties that act as a barrier to service. It's a win-win for the communities we serve because no staffing, philanthropic-giving or community development will be reduced. We will eliminate the structural red tape of operating with two names.'

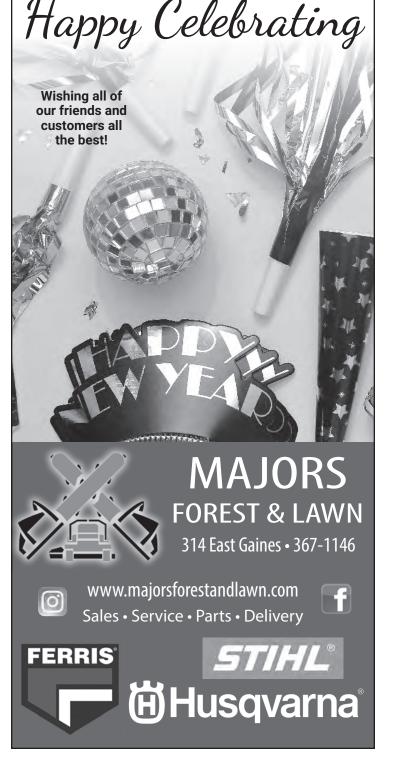
The Bank will convert its computer systems in mid-June, and open June 24, 2024, as a combined institution. Customers will be able to do busi-

ness at any of the Bank's eight offices and nine ATMs effective June 24, 2024. "Unifying our banks under a common name and charter allows us to leverage our strengths as we continue to invest in our employees, our customers, and the communities we serve," stated Bennie Ryburn, III, Chairman and CEO. "Operating as one bank will be a game-changer for customers on day one while we focus on the things that set us apart, 1) local bankers making local decisions, 2) investing in our relationship-based model to satisfy customer needs, and 2) actively serving the Southeast Arkansas communities we call home. After all, we live here, and succeed when you succeed."

Both First State Bank and Commercial Bank customers should continue using their existing deposit accounts, loans, debit cards, and digital services. First State Bank will notify customers in writing with any updates regarding the rebrand to Commercial Bank.

The Banks websites have links at www.FirstStateWarren.com/resources/Better-Toegether and www.Commercial-Bank.net/resources/ BetterTogether to answer FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions). First State Bank executive Hugh Allen Quimby stated he is excited that customers of both Banks will have double the number of locations and ATMs to use. Mr. Quimby added, 'Bennie Ryburn, Sr., was all about customer convenience. That's why he bought the banks in the first place. He'd be pleased to know local people still have a local bank designed with them in mind.'





#### MAY HIGHLIGHTS

#### Caters named 2024 Drew Co. Farm Family of the Year

By JEFF McDonald editor@monticellonews.net

As spring comes around each year, with it comes the beginning of a new season of farming for many across the United States. In the South, Farmers are not only responsible for much of the food, produce, and goods we consume, but they also make some of the biggest impacts on the local economy.

Each year, a board in Drew County chooses a family that they feel exemplifies farming and agricultural excellence in the county. This year, the board has selected the Dr. Jason and Sara Cater family as the 2024 Drew County Farm Family of the Year.

Jason and Sara, along with their sons Weston and Tanner, currently have a beef cattle ranch, four house layer hen



Photo courtesy of Sara Cater

**FARM FAMILY** The 2024 Drew County Farm Family of the Year, Dr. Jason, Sara, Weston and Tanner Cater.

farm, hogs, row crop farming, registered Quarter Horses, and timberland.

The Cater family previously pub won this award in 2013.

The annual Farm Family section with full coverage of the Caters and their farming operation published this past summer.

# JUNE HIGHLIGHTS

#### Baptist Health Medical Center-Drew Co. Auxiliary donates \$21,000

SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

Baptist Health Medical Center-Drew County (BHMC-Drew County) is thrilled to announce a generous donation of \$21,000

from the BHMC-Drew County Auxiliary team.

This significant contribution was presented during the Annual Auxiliary Luncheon held at the hospital on Tuesday, June 11, 2024.

The donated funds were utilized to enhance patient care and

staff appreciation at BHMC-Drew County. Specifically, the donation facilitated the purchase of new bright pink wheelchairs, which will provide much-needed assistance to our patients. Additionally, new gifts were distributed to all staff members in celebration

See **AUXILIARY** Page 6C



Photo courtesy of BHMC-Drew Co.

### JUNE HIGHLIGHTS

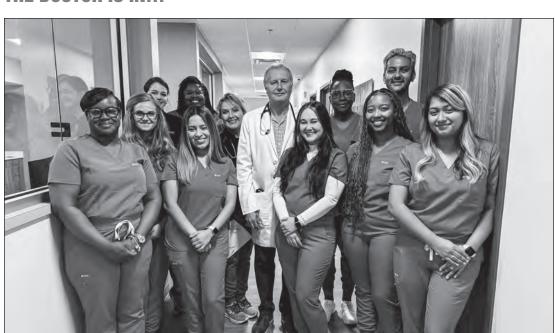
#### **GRAND OPENING**



Jeff McDonald/Advance Monticelloniar

Dr. Jay Connelley officially opened his office in the Allegiant Medplex on Monday, June 3. Thanks to Dr. Connelley and staff for taking a moment out of their hectic day for this photo op.

#### THE DOCTOR IS IN...



Ashley Hogg/Advance Monticelloniar

Dr. Jeffrey Reinhart started seeing patients in his new office in the Allegiant Medplex on Monday, June 10. Dr. Reinhart's new office was the second phase of opening the Medplex, as Dr. Connelley opened his office the week before. Both doctors say that they expected Dr. Worku to open her office sometime this summer. The Allegiant Medplex is located at 1222 Old Warren Road.



## JANUARY HIGHLIGHTS

#### **ARBY'S HAS GRAND OPENING: RIBBON CUTTING**



Above: The first 25 patrons to dine in during Arby's grand opening received free Arby's for a year. The line started at 3:30 a.m., and the final members of the 25 showed up around 7 a.m. Below: Many local dignitaries, along with Arby's regional management were on hand for the ribbon cutting which took place at 9:30 a.m. on Thursday,



#### **OFFICIALLY OPEN FOR BUSINESS**



Jeff McDonald/Advance Monticellonian

Wilkerson Real Estate Company had a ribbon cutting ceremony at 11:45 a.m. on Wednesday, January 24.

#### JUNE HIGHLIGHTS

#### **1ST CHOICE HOME CARE RIBBON CUTTING**



1st Choice Home Care had their ribbon cutting at 11 a.m. on Friday, June 7. Staff members, employees from Arkansas Hospice, and Chamber members were on site for the occasion. They also had hot dogs and bottled water for all in attendance.

#### **AUGUST HIGHLIGHTS**



Breaker held a Grand Re-Opening ribbon cutting at noon on Friday, August 16. Mayor Jason Akers wrote a proclamation honoring the Reese family for their resilience in the face of adversity. Clarissa Pace honored the Reese family on behalf of the local NAACP chapter for having the longest black owned business in Drew County with over 40 years of service. Monticello's Breaker is a Drew County landmark, and the only Breaker Drive-In remaining in the United States. Breaker opened to the public at noon on Saturday, August 18.

### SEPTEMBER

#### DREW CENTRAL GETS DENTAL CLINIC



Ashley Hogg/Advance Monticellonian

On Friday, September 13, Mainline Health Systems, Inc. held a floss cutting to celebrate the opening of their dental clinic at Drew Central Schools. The clinic was funded by the Delta Dental Foundation and supported by local businesses and dental professionals. The clinic will be under the direction of Dr. Terri Eubanks, DDS.

Continued from Page 5C

of Hospital Week, recognizing their unwavering dedication and hard work.

During the luncheon, BHMC-Drew County took the opportunity to honor five exceptional members of the Auxiliary team for their longstanding commitment and service to the facility. These

remarkable individuals are:

• Ira Watkins – Over 15 years of service

 Bobbie Everett – Over 15 years of service

• Shirley Kizer – Over 20 years of service

• Regina Dunn – Over 20 years of service

• Norma Houge - Over 25 years of service

"We are very grateful for the unwavering support and gener-



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osity of our Auxiliary team," said Scott Barrileaux, President of BHMC-Drew County. "Their dedication not only enhances the experience of our patients but also

boosts the morale of our staff." The BHMC-Drew County

hospital community, continually working to support the facility through fundraising and volunteer efforts. Their contributions play a crucial role in the ongoing mission to provide high-quali-

We're so grateful to all the folks who have made our year a success, and we'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your generous support and trust in us!















Auxiliary is a vital part of the ty healthcare to the residents of Drew County.



May 2025 bring you countless reasons to celebrate!

Best and brightest wishes to everyone we know!

Happy New Year!

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## SEPTEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

#### **OPTIONS, INC. HOLDS GRAND OPENING**



ff McDonald/Advance Monticellonian

After months of moving, cleaning, and organizing Options, Inc. had their grand opening on Monday, September 9. They would like to thank everyone who has helped them move, sort, and build walls, hangers, bins, and ramps. They are thankful for their new space that gives them so much room to serve the community as they continue to serve families in the area. Their new location and new store hours are located on their Facebook page. Please remember that they are only taking donations during business hours and no longer taking outdoor drop-offs.

#### MEDDERS HOLDS GRAND OPENING AND RIBBON CUTTING



Jeff McDonald/Advance Monticellonian

On Tuesday, September 10, Medders Funeral Home held a Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting. They are open and looking to serve families in the Drew Co. area.

# NOVEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

#### **HONORING DREW COUNTY VETERANS**



Jeff McDonald/Advance Monticellonian

On Monday, November 11, Veterans Day, The Drew County Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony at 10 a.m. at the Drew County Courthouse. The ceremony was to dedicate the new Never Forget Garden. The garden is a place to honor the veterans of Drew County, and offer a place to sit and reflect on their many sacrifices.





#### JUNE HIGHLIGHTS

#### MAIN STREET ART HOSTS SUMMER ART CAMP



Main Street Art hosted a summer art camp in conjunction with Art Education Opportunities (AEO) June 24-28. Participants worked in pottery, painting, book binding (art journals), collages, and pastels. They also learned about artists such as JWM Turner, Rene Magritte, Georgia O'Keefe, and Henri Matisse. All proceeds from the camp will be donated to the AEO Scholarship Program.

#### **AUGUST** HIGHLIGHTS

### ROTARY HONORS KNOBLOCH



On Thursday, August 22, the Monticello Rotary Club posthumously honored K.C. Knobloch as a Paul Harris Fellow. Pictured is Brandon Hogg (left), past president, presenting the Paul Harris Fellow award to Knobloch's family and friends who were in attendance.

#### **AUGUST HIGHLIGHTS**

#### **Drew County Game Warden** wins AGFC's Officer of the Year

SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

Going the "extra distance" was something Austin Powell strived for to be a college athlete, and putting that motto to use as an Arkansas Game and Fish Commission game warden has helped him make several big cases in just four years on the job.

The 26-year-old, based out of the AGFC Enforcement Division's Monticello office, dedicated many man hours to his caseload, but he also put time this past year into building a love of the outdoors among youths through such events as the National Wild Turkey Federation's JAKES Day in Rison. For his work, Powell became among the youngest winners ever of the AGFC's Monty Carmikle Officer of the Year Award, presented in late July.

"I've got to be honest, it's a really humbling deal," he said following the AGFC Enforcement Division's Awards Banquet at the Delta Hotel in west Little Rock. "There are several other people in the Year, received a Lifesaving



Courtesy photo

Game Warden Austin Powell (middle) receiving his award.

this room that deserve the award just as much as I do. I'm just the one that was blessed to be up there and receive it. Day in and day out, every guy and girl that works for the agency goes to work for conservation, and you know it's a blessing to be able to receive the award I received today."

Powell, who was also named the NWTF's Arkansas Officer of Award along with Game Warden Aaron Dillard. Powell and Dillard saved a girl who was being swept downstream by Mississippi River current and barge wakes, quickly getting her into their boat and safely to shore.

Coincidentally, an Arkansas island in the Mississippi River is where Powell made a case featured in a "Scales of Justice" article in the March/April issue of Arkansas Wildlife. He used shot shell forensics and DNA analysis to prove two Mississippi turkey hunters were using Arkansas licenses to hunt turkeys illegally and bring them back to their home, where the turkey season was underway.

"His innovative use of technology has allowed him to investigate and prosecute violations that would have gone unchecked in the years past," Col. Brad Young, chief of the AGFC's Enforcement Division, said.

Powell played college baseball at Arkansas State, Itawamba Community College in Fulton, Mississippi; Ole Miss; and finished his career at the University of Arkansas at Monticello before going straight to the AGFC's Enforcement Cadet School at Mayflower in 2021. Teamwork and determination are integral parts of his makeup.

"In our district we have a pretty good mix of everything," Powell says of his Drew County base. "Turkey is definitely one of our busier seasons. Especially this year, we had a really good turkey season and were able to help keep violators out of the woods. That case on the island was pretty unique. We started with a little bit of nothing and were able to figure out the two guys that were responsible for the turkeys. So, to say that turkey is the top thing would be hard, but it's definitely one of our higher priorities.

"There's a burden of proof that has to be met before you do anything to that extent," he said. "Just going the extra distance sometimes helps you get that."

Powell issued 248 citations last year with an average fine rate of \$300 per citation. His focus on major violators led to 12 charges of night hunting, 13 for road hunting, 17 for hunting during a closed season (including seven turkey cases and one bear), four for boating while under the influence, five cases of hunting turkey over bait, eight for hunting without permission, four for hunting waterfowl over bait and three for falsifying information.

"We're very very proud of him," Young said. "He had some very hard to make cases. It took a lot of hours to apprehend some of those violators."

Powell was among 12 game wardens from around Arkansas nominated for Officer of the Year. Others nominated were Caleb McClanahan, Jake Stanford, Bradley Huggins, Cody Standifer, Brian Tatum, Ashton Neece, Cody Stone, Roger Tate, Ethan Moore, Troy Faughn and David Bennett.

#### **OCTOBER** HIGHLIGHTS

#### **The CALL in Southeast Arkansas marks 10 years** of transforming lives

By JEFF McDonald editor@monticellonews.net

On Saturday, September 28, The CALL in Southeast Arkansas held their 10th anniversary event at New Life Assembly of God. The evening began at 5 p.m. with a silent auction that ran throughout the evening. Items of all different varieties and price points were donated to be bid on. At 6 p.m. a buffet-style meal was catered by

Following the meal, Betsy Anderson, County Coordinator for The CALL, took the stage and played a video that detailed how the Southeast Arkansas affiliate of The CALL got its start 10 years ago. Anderson reported that the impact that The CALL has had in this region has been significant,

with much of that impact and growth having occurred within the past year. In 2014 foster and adoptive families began to be trained. A decade later, The CALL has recruited and trained 25 new foster and adoptive families. Anderson also noted that the Southeast Arkansas affiliate is currently the largest affiliate of The CALL in Arkansas. The CALL has also, as of 2023, been able to open affiliates in every county in the state.

It was also reported that within the local CALL community, 19 children have been adopted over the past 10 years, and six of these have been since 2023. In the last decade over 100 support events have been held as well, these range from training, to support, and anything the families need.

Over the summer of 2024, The CALL opened The CALL Support Center for Southeast Arkansas in Monticello. This year a church from Ashley County and Lincoln

County each opened family visit spaces as well.

The CALL has also employed a "foster care informed and adoption competent" Mental Health Therapist. There are currently five families in the area who are using these services.

"A total of 30 foster and adoptive families, representing more than 90 children, have been supported by The CALL in 2024," Anderson said.

Following Anderson's presentation, several individuals spoke to the attendees about their personal experiences with The CALL. The evening also had a live musical performance and an awards ceremony to honor the families and volunteers who keep The CALL going strong.

The evening ended shortly after 8 p.m. with Anderson thanking those in attendance and encouraging anyone interested in helping out to volunteer.



Joanna Poole/Advance Monticelloniar



James Insurance Agency



Wishing you and those you hold dear an abundance of happiness and good fortune in the coming year! May it be filled with laughter, grace and all the love your heart can embrace.

> Happy **New Year!**

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#### OCTOBER **HIGHLIGHTS**

#### The future is now

BY ADVANCE STAFF editor@monticellonews.net

On Monday, September 30, Union Bank unveiled a new level of banking technology at their University Branch. Two Interactive Teller Machines (ITM) are the first of what is expected to become the norm for customers at Union Bank. Starting Monday, Lanes One and Four are still open in the drive-thru while Lanes Two and Three will be closed. There will also be no access to the lobby with these changes. Customers will however still be able to interact with tellers who are located inside the building, the same friendly faces that they are already familiar

While ITMs are new in Monticello, the technology is not new in the banking industry. In bigger

cities across the U.S., many banks have gone to ITMs for all day-today banking procedures.

Union Bank, as is their custom, made the call to be the first bank in Monticello to bring this technology to their customers.

"Union Bank has always been prideful on being the local market leader when it comes to innovation and technology," Dave Dickson, President of Union Bank said. "Interactive Teller Machines (ITM) are the latest example of our leadership in introducing new technologies to our customers. Union Bank was the first local bank to offer ATMs, Online Banking with Bill Pay, and Mobile Banking."

Dickson noted one perk that will come with the new ITMs, and that is extended hours. The new hours at the University Branch are 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. during the week, and 8 a.m. until 2 p.m. on Saturdays.

"To me, the best part of this is that it will allow us to better serve our customers with expanded operating hours," Dickson added.

Dickson added that for the first three weeks, any customers who use the ITMs will be given incentives or prizes.

"We are very excited to bring this technology to our market," Dickson said. "Union Bank will be offering incentives to customers who use the ITMs over the next few weeks."

For those interested in seeing what the ITMs are all about, Union Bank employees will be posted up in the drive-thru to help customers navigate the interface and technology. Once the customer is engaged, a teller with whom they are familiar will assist them in their transactions. Customers can perform all of the same bank-

ing functions that they have been able to, from cashing checks to making deposits, all services are still available.

Dickson added that it is the goal of Union Bank to switch to ITMs at all locations, including Warren, which would also bring weekend banking back to the Bradley County location. There is no concrete date for the full transition, but Union Bank customers should be prepared to see more ITMs in the future.

It sounds scary to not be face to face with your banker, but after seeing how the operation works, customers will still receive the same quality and level of service that they are used to. Also, "robots" have not taken anyone's job. The same employees who have been in the branch are still the ones who are handling all of the banking business for the branch.



Jeff McDonald/Advance Monticellonian

### NOVEMBER

**HIGHLIGHTS** 

#### OCTOBER HIGHLIGHTS

#### **Arkansas Forestry Association Names John** McAlpine 2024 AFA **Communicator of the Year**

SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE The Arkansas Forestry Asso-

ciation (AFA) recognized John McAlpine as the 2024 AFA Communicator of the Year at the association's Annual Meeting held in Hot Springs on October 10.

John F. McAlpine graduated from UAM in May 1998 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry. He is a second-generation forester and grew up on his parents' Christmas Tree Farm where he helped his father with logging and timber management operations. John began his professional career with Kingwood Forestry Services as a laborer/extra help in

January 1998. He now is Manager of the Monticello operations, President of Kingwood Forestry Services, Inc., and a member of the Board of Directors for the company.

Kingwood Forestry Services has 18 full-time employees with three offices.

Kingwood manages approximately 400,000 acres for a variety of landowners, conducts timberland appraisals, and offers timberland brokerage.

AFA Communications Coordinator, Seth Stephenson, presented the award and said McAlpine is always someone the association can count on to further tell forestry's story.

"John is constantly working with us and other forestry organizations on one project or another," Stephenson explained. "He understands how important communication is in forestry and strives to make sure landowners, other forestry professionals, and even those outside of our industry know that what we are doing in our forests is done responsibly and sustainably."

Organized in 1947, AFA is the only private, nonprofit organization representing the entire forestry community in Arkansas. AFA has over 1,200 members who join in AFA's mission of advocating for the sustainable use and sound stewardship of Arkansas's forests and related resources to benefit members of the state's forestry community and all Arkansans today and in the future.



Grand Manor held a grand opening for their new Memory Care facility from 2-4 p.m. on Sunday, November 24. The memory care will specialize in offering care and services to those experiencing acute dementia or Alzheimer's. The goal is to create a secure, encouraging, well organized, and loving environment while offering compassionate care and support to those who need this care.

### NOVEMBER

### HIGHLIGHTS

#### **Weyerhaeuser Company** announces plan to build new facility in south **Arkansas**

SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

Weyerhaeuser Company, one of the world's largest private owners of timberlands, has announced an estimated \$500 million investment to build a new, state-of-the-art Timber-Strand® facility near Monticello and Warren. This investment is expected to create 200 high-quality jobs in the south Arkansas region.

"This \$500 million investment and 200 new jobs are pivotal for towns like Monticello and Warren," said Governor Sanders. "I was at the University of Arkansas at Monticello last month to break ground on a new Forest Research Center my administration helped fund by directing \$16 million to the school. Between Weyerhaeuser's announcement and UAM's expansion, we're growing that portion of the state and investing in Arkansas' forestry industry for generations to come."

The new facility will expand Weyerhaeuser's engineered wood products capacity, adding approximately 10 million cubic feet of annual production capacity. Using southern yellow pine as the primary feedstock, Weyerhaeuser will manufacture TimberStrand®, a laminated strand lumber, at the Arkansas facility and will use a biomass-fueled cogeneration system to fully supply the plant's electrical needs.

"This is an exciting opportunity to grow our EWP business, expand TimberStrand® into the U.S. South and provide an additional outlet for our fiber logs in Arkansas," said Devin W. Stockfish, president and chief executive officer, in the company's release. "Of the wood products we produce, EWP has the strongest tie to single-family housing construction activity, and this new facility aligns with our conviction that U.S. housing demand will remain favorable over the long term. In addition, this plant will allow Weyerhaeuser to better serve other customers and end markets in the region, including mass timber applications, and it supports our broader sustainability ambitions. I'd like to thank the state of Arkansas and local officials for working with Weyerhaeuser to site this facility. We look forward to building

on our long history in the state and providing new employment opportunities in the Monticello

community." This is Weyerhaeuser's third manufacturing facility in Arkansas, in addition to a lumber mill in Dierks and a plywood and veneer plant in Emerson, as well as a seedling nursery and multiple offices. Weyerhaeuser currently employs more than 700 individuals across Arkan-

"Weyerhaeuser's \$500 million investment is an incredible milestone in Arkansas's rural economic development momentum," said Clint O'Neal, executive director of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. "This project will be transformational for Southeast Arkansas, strengthening our state's timber industry and creating 200 new jobs. We are grateful for Weyerhaeuser's commitment to Arkansas, and we congratulate the local leadership for their hard work in securing this major economic development project."

### operations planned to start in and excitement relating to the Weyerhaeuser

Weyerhaeuser plans to source more of its fiber log requirements from company-owned timberlands in the south Arkansas region. The company owns approximately 1.2 million acres

of timberlands in the area. Construction on the facility is expected to begin in 2025 with

ties that came together to make this happen for our people," said Monticello Mayor Jason Akers. "This is what happens when people work together for the greater good."

"On behalf of the City of Warren I express our pleasure

the City, County and State enti-

announcement of a major new "The City of Monticello is manufacturing facility to be loproud of its contributions to cated in our Regional Intermodthis project and the work of all al complex," said Warren Mayor Gregg Reep. "A lot of work has gone into bringing this project to fruition. It will mean jobs and economic growth to both cities and counties along with the entire Southeast Arkansas region. The taxpayers of Warren, Monticello, Bradley and

See **FACILITY** Page 10C





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### DECEMBER

**HIGHLIGHTS** 

#### **Governor Sanders, AEDC** award \$10M to 13 AR communities for industrial site development

SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders today joined the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) to award 13 communities with \$10 million through the Arkansas Site Development Program. This funding will be used to enhance industrial sites across Arkansas, increasing their readiness for job-creating economic development projects.

The communities receiving funds include Arkadelphia, Berryville, Hope, Jonesboro, Little Rock, Malvern, Monticello, Morrilton, Newport, Prescott, Searcy, Stuttgart, and Texarkana.

"The sky is the limit for Arkansas' economy when our government and private sector work together to grow investment and jobs," said Governor Sanders. "The Arkansas Site Development Program tells companies worldwide that Arkansas is open for business and will help each of the recipient communities attract new businesses."

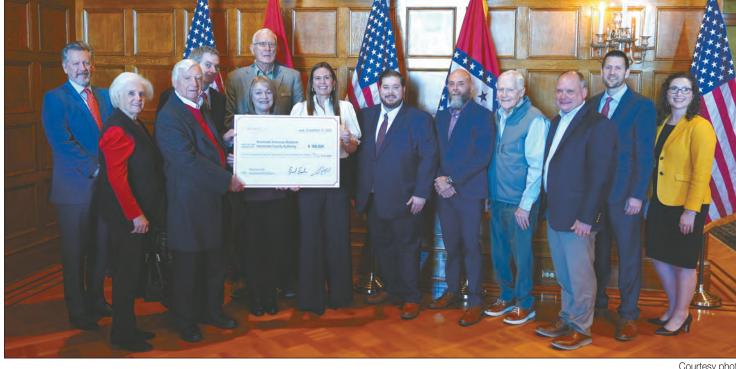
Under Governor Sanders' leadership and in partnership with the Arkansas State Legislature, AEDC developed and announced the Arkansas Site Development Program in June 2024. Eligible recipient locations are industrial sites of at least 30 contiguous acres of land, listed on the Arkansas Site Selection Database, and owned or optioned by the applicant.

"Ensuring that our communities have company-ready sites is critical for Arkansas' economic success," said Secretary of Commerce Hugh McDonald. "The Arkansas Site Development Program has been a model of collaboration between Governor Sanders, the Arkansas General Assembly, the Arkansas Department of Commerce, the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, and local stakeholders to build a program that will set a course for future success across our state.'

AEDC received a total of 28 applications for the Arkansas Site Development Program, totaling \$44,646,370.37 in requested funding.

"Strong communities with

competitive industrial sites are essential for winning economic development projects, and the Arkansas Site Development Program will play a major role in equipping our state's communities to win," said Clint O'Neal, executive director of the Arkansas **Economic Development Commis**sion. "The Arkansas Site Development Program is the first program of its kind in our state, and it is an important step that will help us continue to secure economic



In the photo from left to right: Secretary of Commerce - Hugh McDonald, Janelle Lipton, John Lipton - President of SEARIA, Tim Kessler - SEARIA Board Member, Nita McDaniel - MEDC & SEARIA Board Member, Drew County Judge Jessie Griffin, Governor Sarah Sanders, Senator Ben Gilmore, Mayor Jason Akers, Bryan Martin – SEARIA Board Member, Michael Effird – SÉARIA Board Member, Clint O'Neal – executive director Arkansas Economic Development Commission, Olivia Wommack - Director of Business Development AEDC.

development projects in the years costs for site improvements, into come. This program would not have been possible without the support of Governor Sanders, the Arkansas General Assembly, and the local communities that applied for funding – we appreciate their support and look forward to continued success."

The funds can be used for a range of site development projects, including the extension and improvement of public infrastructure to the site; right of way acquisition; easement acquisition; soil borings and analysis; construction cluding drainage improvements, easement, dozer or dirt work. grading, site mitigation, and site rehabilitation; due diligence study costs; and other site development-related activities deemed necessary by AEDC to improve a site's competitiveness.

YEAR IN REVIEW

See the Arkansas Site Development Program awards below:

- AR-TX Regional Economic Development Inc. (REDI) - Texarkana, \$2,000,000
- Berryville Business Park -Berryville, \$400,000
- City of Prescott Prescott, boro, \$2,000,000 \$698,845
- Conway County Economic Development Corporation- Morrilton, \$109,800
- Economic Development Corporation of Clark County - Arkadelphia, \$1,013,710
- Forward Searcy Inc. Searcy,
- Hempstead County Economic Development Commission -Hope, \$4,602
- Hot Spring County Malvern, • Jonesboro Unlimited – Jones-

- Little Rock Port Authority -Little Rock, \$2,000,000
- Newport Economic Development Commission - Newport, \$335,700
- Southeast Arkansas Regional Intermodal Facility Authority -Monticello, \$166,520
- · Stuttgart Industrial Development Corporation - Stuttgart, \$823,408

The Intermodal Authority will use these grant funds for engineering a new water well for the upcoming Weyerhaeuser facility.

Continued from Page 9C

Drew counties are to be thanked for helping to make this happen. We look forward to a bright future with new job opportunities."

"Having had the honor of serving Bradley and Drew Counties for 15 years as State Representative, this announcement of \$500 million in a new manufacturing facility creating jobs for our people is most rewarding," said Arkansas State Representative Jeff Wardlaw. "It is a great pleasure to witness how our regional efforts have worked to secure a sound future for generations to come."

"I would like to thank all the people involved with this project who have been dedicated from start to finish in seeing this great opportunity for Drew County," said Drew County Judge Jessie Griffin. "The new jobs that will be created will help to grow and strengthen our County, City and Southeast Arkansas. We look forward to welcoming new families to our area."

"It has been a pleasure working alongside the Southeast Arkansas Regional Intermodal Authority, comprised of Bradley & Drew Counties and the cities of Monticello & Warren, and the Arkansas Economic Development Commission to locate this project for the company," said

Nita McDaniel, Executive Director of the Monticello Economic Development Commission, Inc. "This announcement gives evidence that our regional efforts have been well placed. I value greatly the confidence which Weyerhaeuser has placed in our communities and in our people through this investment and job creation." Nita McDaniel, executive director,

'We welcome this new facility to southeast Arkansas," said John Lipton, President of the Southeast Arkansas Regional Intermodal Authority. "This shows what the working relationship between Bradley and Drew Counties and the cities of Monticello and Warren can

achieve through the Southeast Authority. We look forward to of our natural resources being Arkansas Regional Intermodal the new jobs and the utilization created."



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