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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1, 2025

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SERVING DREW COUNTY SINCE 1870

NEW YEAR'S SPECIAL SECTION

Year in Review

JANUARY

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



Courtesy photo

**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 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.

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 cele-

brate 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



Jeff McDonald/Advance Monticellonian

Several local fishermen taking advantage of the fact that Lake Monticello was recently re-opened to the public. The City of Monticello officially opened the lake at 8 a.m. Friday, May 31. All are encouraged to go out and enjoy the lake and all of the other amenities offered.







MARCH

HIGHLIGHTS

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 community.

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 Achievement 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 events.

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 ago.

“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 Wildlife Refuge near Crossett, Arkansas. From 2000 through 2008, 55 adult female bears and 116 cubs were moved from the Dale Bumpers/White River National Wildlife Refuge to the 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 experi-

enced members of the team, entered the dense woods just off of the highway to locate the tagged sow.

The first team’s objective was to locate the den and subdue 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.

begin adult life and hopefully, establish breeding patterns.

Female bears can begin

breeding as early as three years old but typically wait until they are closer to five. According

to Hooks, the average lifespan of a female bear in the proper conditions is 25 to 30 years.

MARCH

HIGHLIGHTS

COLLINS AWARDED CHIROPRACTOR OF THE YEAR AT CONVENTION



Courtesy Photo

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.

HAPPY

NEW YEAR

As we wrap up the old year and ring in the new, We're so very grateful for good friends like you.

Hope your new year is truly special.

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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



Photo courtesy of Ryan Tow

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.

RAY'S

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 County)
- 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 (Pulaski County)
- Woods Place (Ouachita County)



Jeff McDonald/Advance Monticellonian

- Doe's Eat Place (Pulaski County)
- 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 County)
- Hugo's (Washington County)
- Taliano's Italian Restaurant (Sebastian County)
- Brave New Restaurant (Pulaski County)
- K Hall & Sons (Pulaski County)

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

Arkansas Food Hall of Fame Committee.

"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.

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 business

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/BetterTogether](http://www.FirstStateWarren.com/resources/BetterTogether) and [www.Commercial-Bank.net/resources/BetterTogether](http://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.'

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# 2025

**HAPPY NEW YEAR**

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# RAY'S

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FRI.-SAT. 9-12 • SUN. 9-11



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 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 Monticellonian

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 Monticellonian

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.

HAPPY

new year

2025

Best and brightest wishes to everyone we know!

SERVING DREW COUNTY SINCE 1870

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JANUARY

HIGHLIGHTS

ARBY'S HAS GRAND OPENING; RIBBON CUTTING



Jeff McDonald/Advance Monticellonian

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, January 4.



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.

AUXILIARY

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-

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

JUNE

HIGHLIGHTS

1ST CHOICE HOME CARE RIBBON CUTTING



Jeff McDonald/Advance Monticellonian

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

REMODELED AND READY TO SERVE



Jeff McDonald/Advance Monticellonian

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

HIGHLIGHTS

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.

ty healthcare to the residents of Drew County.

We wish you happiness, peace and prosperity all year!

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**2025**

HAPPY NEW YEAR

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!

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**2025**

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



Jeff 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.









OCTOBER

HIGHLIGHTS

The future is now

By ADVANCE STAFF  
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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 with.

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-to-day 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 week-end 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

OCTOBER

HIGHLIGHTS

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

SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

The Arkansas Forestry Association (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.

NOVEMBER

HIGHLIGHTS

A HAVEN FOR THOSE IN NEED



Ashley Hogg/Advance Monticellonian

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 TimberStrand® 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 Arkansas.

“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 late 2027.

“The City of Monticello is proud of its contributions to this project and the work of all the City, County and State entities 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

and excitement relating to the announcement of a major new manufacturing facility to be located in our Regional Intermodal 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.”

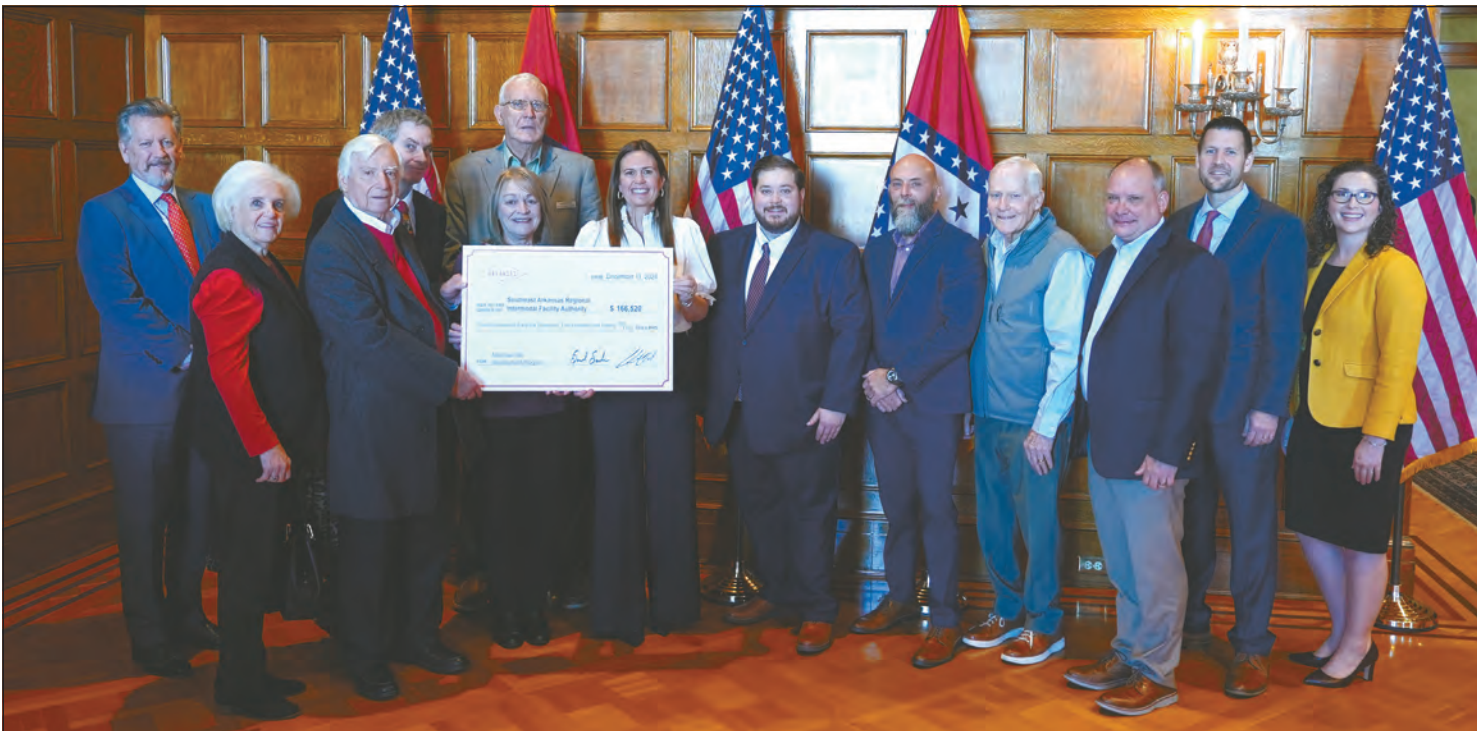
Under Governor Sanders’ leadership and in partnership with the Arkansas State Legislature, AEDC developed and announced the Arkansas Site Development Program in June 2024. Eligible recip-

ient 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 Commission. “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



Courtesy photo

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 – SEARIA Board Member, Clint O’Neal – executive director Arkansas Economic Development Commission, Olivia Wommack – Director of Business Development AEDC.

development projects in the years to 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

costs for site improvements, including 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.

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, \$698,845
- Conway County Economic Development Corporation- Morrilton, \$109,800
- Economic Development Corporation of Clark County – Arkadelphia, \$1,013,710
- Forward Searcy Inc. – Searcy, \$314,165
- Hempstead County Economic Development Commission – Hope, \$4,602
- Hot Spring County – Malvern, \$133,250
- Jonesboro Unlimited – Jones-

- boro, \$2,000,000
- 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.

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 Arkansas Regional Intermodal

Authority. We look forward to the new jobs and the utilization

of our natural resources being created.”

HAPPY  
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YEAR

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