

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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City is supporting PBSO summer program (Pine Bluff Commercial)

A six-week Pine Bluff School District summer youth enrichment program received a major boost Monday night when aldermen unanimously endorsed the city's collaboration in the effort.

The city council enthusiastically approved the agreement, which was presented as a resolution by Mayor Debe Hollingsworth during a regular council meeting. Hollingsworth said the program would be a "good opportunity for our children" and help in lifting the city as well.

PBSO Superintendent Linda Watson said the summer offering would be free to the district's elementary students and also to their Dollarway and Watson Chapel district counterparts participating in a Pine Bluff Parks and Recreation Department youth program at the Chester Hynes Community Center. Some secondary students might have to pay, said Watson, who added that PBSO would provide bus transportation and two hot meals a day for students. Some University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff students are to be employed in the program, which is slated to run from 7:30 a.m. to about 4 p.m. weekdays. More details can be obtained by contacting PBSO's administrative office.

Hollingsworth said the city is providing \$30,200, all of which is being derived from private donations. As of Monday night, about half of that amount had been collected and the remainder is expected to be received today, with the funds being administered by the city's finance department.

In other business, the council rejected one ordinance, unanimously approved three others and adopted a resolution.

Council members rejected an ordinance sponsored by Alderman Steven Mays that called for providing for an offense of unlawful dumping, increasing monitoring of illegal dumping sites and creating a city account for purchase of video equipment. Mays and Alderman Wayne Easterly favored the measure while aldermen Charles Boyd, Glen Brown, Bill Brumett, Lloyd Holcomb Jr. George Stepps and Thelma Walker cast nays.

However, Mays agreed to have the proposal returned to the council's public health and welfare committee a second time for further review. The panel had previously stated its opposition based on what it deemed a lack of clarity within the legislation's scope.

The three adopted ordinances amended provisions of the non-uniform employees handbook. The approved resolution, which included an amendment, declared certain houses, buildings and/or structures as nuisances and ordered their abatement.

Ordinances receiving second readings called for:

- Specifying that an occupant load notice be posted in a room or space used for an assembly and prescribing the requirements for the notice; and
- Adopting a continuity of operations plan for city government in the event of a disaster.

Ordinances receiving initial readings called for:

- Amending current guidance regarding the meetings, officers and length of terms of the Pine Bluff Commission on Children and Youth; and
- Amending current guidance to provide a penalty for failure to abate a public nuisance.

The latter sparked some criticism from the audience, especially toward Stepps, who was erroneously listed as the measure's sponsor in an agenda packet received by The Commercial last week. Boyd is the actual sponsor, and said he made the proposal based upon the request of Robert Tucker, chief of the inspection and zoning department.

Tucker told the council that he felt such legislation is needed because current guidance doesn't give the city any real authority in citing property owners who fail to abate nuisances as declared by council action. Responding to a question from Brown, Tucker said the average cost of demolishing a house here is around \$3,000, which the city too often has to absorb when owners of declared nuisances fail to act over time.

Brown said residents of "old Pine Bluff" can't afford such an expense themselves.

Stepps asked that the nuisance abatement topic be introduced for discussion at the May town hall meeting. Mays requested the same be done with illegal dumping. Hollingsworth said she had no objection.

Several audience members complimented the mayor and aldermen for the positive and cooperative spirit of Monday's session, and on two occasions the audience applauded the city officials.

Making a difference: 5 Hector School employees who have a positive impact (Russellville Courier News)

Editor's note: This is part of an ongoing series of stories that focuses on people who are making a difference in education in the Arkansas River Valley.

HECTOR — With only 350 students between the seventh and 12th grades, it might be tempting to overlook the Hector School District. But one would be remiss to do so. Just like any school district, its halls are filled with stories of triumph and defeat, joy and sorrow. Mostly, these halls are filled with stories of love.

Just like any school, it's filled with teachers and faculty who have devoted their lives to one cause: enriching children's lives. Here are five people who have made a difference to the Hector School District.

Mark Taylor

In his freshman year as Hector High School's head football coach, driver's education teacher and dean of students, Mark Taylor has accomplished a lot.

Taylor took a football program that struggled to win two games in as many seasons and taught them how to fight to a 5-5 overall and 5-3 2A-4 Conference finish. The Wildcats earned not only a playoff berth, but a first-round game at home.

"Success isn't all about wins and losses," Taylor said.

And those wins don't come just on the football field. As dean of students, Taylor said many of his football-coaching tactics overlap with his dean responsibilities.

"Sometimes you have to let your kids fight through adversity," he said. "We teach them to handle their business and take care of their personal responsibility. I just try and encourage kids and make it fun for them."

Taylor's dean of students responsibilities are similar to that of an assistant principal.

"Basically, what I do is help our principal, Mr. Price," Taylor said. "His plate is full. My role is to assist him in any way that he needs. That has come to include minor discipline issues and being in the hallways and letting the kids see me and get to know me."

Encouragement is important to young minds. Taylor said he has observed within his own kids that they respond much better to praise and encouragement than they do to criticism.

"Some of the kids don't have a lot of positive things said to them throughout the day," Taylor said. "If I had to deal with a kid in the morning for something like tardiness or acting out in class, I try to encourage him or her again by the end of the day."

"We had talked about several different things and that was one of the things we had talked about. At small schools you end up doing a lot of different things. I kinda knew going in but wasn't exactly sure what the role would mean to me."

Jimmy Stroud

Jimmy Stroud has taught business at Hector High School since the fall of 1977. For Stroud, one thing has kept him coming back for 36 years.

"The kids," he explained. "Interacting with the kids, that is what I really enjoy doing."

When Stroud began teaching, it was a different world. There weren't personal computers, much less personal computers that could fit in your pocket. Stroud said his job has been about both teaching business and learning to evolve.

"I had training to teach manual accounting on typewriters," he said. "It's a different world now and I've had to adapt. That's basically what my career has been — changing technology and being able to adapt and keep our kids up to date."

Many small schools struggle keeping pace with the rapid growth of technology, but Stroud said that wasn't the case at Hector.

"Our students are just as equipped in technology as larger school systems," he said. "We're still producing doctors and lawyers and teachers and accountants. Maybe not in large numbers, but we're still producing them."

Stroud said the Hector administration was just as much to thank for that as he was.

"I've always have a very supportive administration who have made sure I had the equipment that I needed," he said. "It's not just being able to buy the equipment, either. It's becoming equipped and getting the training. I have to stay a lot of extra hours, on my own time or over the summer in order to learn the new technologies and to be able to do a good job teaching it."

Stroud is active in more than just business class — he's operates the scoreboard for the basketball team at home games and is the scorekeeper during away games.

"The more you're around your kids, the more you have to pull in and ask them about and relate to them," he said. "There's more than just sitting in front of a class and just teaching. You've got to be able to communicate with them."

Kathy Freeman

Kathy Freeman has spent the last 37 years in education — the last eight as principal at Hector Elementary. Before that, she taught in Plainview and at Benton Harmony Grove.

"I'm a big advocate of smaller communities and schools," she said. "I just see such a strong commitment to the community and the school linked together. My experience is that the students know the teachers very well and the teachers know the parents very well."

When Hector lost a building due to fire in December, Freeman said the entire community came together. It's that sort of togetherness that made her fall in love with small communities such as Hector.

"We have people up here offering to help and do anything they could, and I think that makes our school a stronger school," she said.

Freeman takes her role as principal very seriously. To her, it's more than a job.

“Teaching isn’t a job or a profession,” she said. “It’s a lifestyle. It’s very much a part of who I am and who my family is, and being able to come back to the community I was raised in and see the commitment everyone has for this little school is a blessing. It’s a job that I love. It’s a job that I see as very rewarding, not just because of what I do, but what the school as a whole is.”

Freeman said that in smaller towns, the school plays a larger role than it might in a larger one.

“We have a responsibility,” she said. “As such an important part of the community, we have to be a good neighbor.”

It’s not uncommon to see members of the school district reach out to families in need.

“If a child loses a home to a fire, or they need clothing or food or furniture, our staff will take up a love offering,” she said. “Even if it’s just something small, like something special for Christmas or something. The staff do what they can, where they can.”

Pam Watson

“Everything you learn in life, you learn in kindergarten,” Pam Watson said. She should know. She’s taught for 31 years, mostly at the kindergarten level.

After teaching for so long, Watson said she’s started teaching the kids of parents she taught many years prior. It’s interesting to her how much they are like one another.

“Their mannerisms are alike,” she said. “Sometimes even their behaviors. It’s funny because sometimes it’s not behaviors that they haven’t seen in their mother or father. I guess it’s just inherited because their parents have obviously grown out of those behaviors.”

Watson’s heart has always been for young children. Where many avoid elementary-aged students, Watson embraces them. According to her, they’re eager and full of love.

“They want to learn,” she said. “They’re excited to start school. They’re like a fresh page. There is so much that they have to know and they’re eager to learn all of it. I’ve just always loved little children. They are so loving and they come to school eager and they give so much love.”

In fact, Watson knew before she finished high school that she wanted to teach — further, she knew that she’d prefer teaching the “little ones.”

“I knew before I got out of high school that was the area I wanted to go into and that I’d prefer the little ones,” she explained. “It’s been great. You want to be someone that they can look up to. When people leave kindergarten, you want them to know they can always come back and ask for help if they need it.”

Melody Crane

Not every job in the school district directly works with kids, but all of them strive toward the same goal: creating a better learning environment.

Melody Crane doesn't teach a class, she doesn't coach a sport nor is she a principal — but her job isn't any less important in the impact it has on lives.

Crane is the administrative assistant to the superintendent and business manager for the Hector School District.

"It's a lot of human resources, accounts payable and finance," she said.

A Hector graduate herself, Crane understands the importance the school plays in the Hector community.

"I grew up here," she said. "I come to church out here, my parents live here. I've got lots of family connection and home ties here. The people here are great. I care about the town."

Crane doesn't get a lot of student interaction — most of her duties are with teachers and other staff members, but Crane's influence of the school budget and how money is spent plays a direct role on the student's educational lives.

That's not always an easy job.

"In times like these where money is an issue, you're trying to use taxpayer dollars wisely, plus pay your people what you feel like they're worth," she said.

That's a difficult balance, and to find it Crane said it was important to be honest with staff.

"I try and be genuine," she said. "If I don't know, I'll tell them that I don't, but I can find out. I hope people just see me as approachable and genuine."

Rx Drug Abuse: Schools Monitor Students, Offer Resources (Southwest Times Record, Fort Smith)

Editor's Note: The Times Record today continues its series of reports on prescription drug abuse. Wednesday: Many people do not seek help because of stigma.

Local schools are doing what they can to monitor students so as to intervene more quickly when a child develops a substance-abuse problem or relapses into one, area school officials said.

According to Prescription Drug Abuse by Arkansas Youth, a report by the state Office of the Drug Director, 73 percent of teen study respondents say they use drugs to deal with the pressures of school; 65 percent say to look cool; 65 percent say to feel better about themselves; 55 percent say to deal with problems at home; 40 percent because being high feels good; and 26 percent because drugs are fun.

“Teenagers have a hard time knowing where they fit in,” Van Buren High School counselor Renee Henson said.

Regarding prescription painkillers, 56.4 percent of teen study respondents said they use them to relax or relieve tension; 53.5 percent to feel good or get high; 52.4 percent said to experiment; 44.8 percent said to relieve physical pain; and 29.5 percent to have a good time with friends.

“It’s sad to think there are children who have such severe problems they feel they have to resort to drugs to deal with them,” Van Buren High School Principal Eddie Tipton said.

Drug Testing At Greenwood, Alma

Greenwood Superintendent Kay Headley said her district randomly screens students from middle school through high school.

About 80 percent of the district’s students are in the drug-screening pool. If a child participates in an extracurricular activity or drives a car to school, he or she is placed in the pool, she said. Students who test positive are tested again.

If a child does not pass a drug test, the school mandates counseling and educational programs for the student and his or her parents, Headley said. Mental health counselors meet with students and families. Professional development on student drug use is provided for teachers and is included in the district’s teen suicide intervention training. Home visits sometimes provide information that aids the counseling process, Headley said.

The district’s Parent Center provides educational resources to parents, and Greenwood also provides a series of parenting classes each year. Resources are listed in the student handbooks and educational fliers are available in each school building, Headley said.

Alma High School Assistant Principal Nick Spencer said officials started random drug testing this year at Alma High School.

Alma teachers have been trained to recognize warning signs of possible drug abuse. School counselors have several resources to help students and parents, including local agencies, hot lines and referrals to outside counseling programs.

Fort Smith Schools

The Fort Smith School District does not differentiate among types of drugs used by students, said Communication Director Zena Featherston Marshall.

The Fort Smith district also shies away from applying a label such as “substance abuse” to students, she said.

If a student has drugs in school without permission, such as a doctor’s medication prescription specific for that child and verified by the child’s parent or guardian, the child is considered to have brought

drugs to school, regardless whether the drug brought in is a prescription drug or one considered illegal, Featherston Marshall said.

Featherston Marshall said counseling and referrals made for Fort Smith students who have brought prescription drugs to school without permission are made through the same kind of process they'd go through if they'd brought a substance such as marijuana to school.

Van Buren Schools

Besides an annual Red Ribbon Week focus on awareness, Van Buren School District officials hope to offer a sober high school called Hope Academy. It will be part of the high school, housed with the Career Center on the old J.J. Izard school campus.

The first such school in the state, it will offer regular curriculum classes as well as group sessions and after-school activities starting in August. From 3-6 p.m. on school days is the main drug abuse time for adolescents, Henson said.

Students who come out of treatment programs and return to their regular high school setting face a 75 percent relapse rate, Henson said. With Hope Academy, the district hopes to make a significant dent in the relapse rate.

Henson said students can be referred to Hope Academy from Horizon, an adolescent treatment center at Western Arkansas Counseling and Guidance Center, or they may be court-referred by a juvenile judge. School counselors also will encourage students who they think would benefit to try it at least for a semester.

Tipton said Hope Academy is not a "we gotcha" kind of thing, but rather a "we're going to help you" program.

When students are first caught using drugs, they generally say they started using at least two years earlier. "Most of the time, it is escapism, not recreation," Tipton said.

Over the next couple of years, Van Buren will institute some changes aimed at bolstering a healthy environment, such as increasing parental involvement in decisions regarding the issue. It will mean community meetings and asking tough questions, Tipton said. Parents often have good ideas and perceptions. They know the situation in the community, and they know children, Tipton said.

Although some educators shy away from such a direct approach because they don't want to risk giving the parents the impression there is a drug problem in the school, Tipton said, he prefers a straightforward, transparent approach.

School administrative staff are making small cultural changes, too, such as being more visible among the students. This type of change can have a positive effect on students, not just regarding substance abuse, but also emotionally and academically, Tipton said.

Oak Grove Middle School Wins National FBI Internet Challenge Awards (KARK, Channel 4)

PARAGOULD, AR -- Oak Grove Middle School in Paragould has earned the FBI-SOS (Safe Online Surfing) Internet Challenge's National Award for two consecutive months - February and March 2013 - and is the first school in Arkansas to win the coveted national award.

FBI-SOS is a free, web-based safety program designed to educate third through eighth grade students about cyber safety. The website features six age-specific islands that students visit to learn key cyber-security concepts through fun, interactive content and games. The topics - designed to meet state and federal Internet safety mandates - include cyber bullying, protecting personal information, online predators, instant messaging, copyright and fair use, social networking. The videos include real-life stories of kids who have faced cyber bullies and online predators.

After students have completed all the activities on the island, they are given an exam. Each month, students compete for the national award in three categories. The categories are determined by the number of students participating from each school. Oak Grove posted the best scores in the country in two categories in two consecutive months. The Paragould-based middle school is the national winner for February in the Starfish category (5-50 participants) and the March winner in the Stingray category (51-100 participants). The third category is the Shark category, which recognizes schools with more than 100 participants.

The FBI-SOS Internet Challenge was developed with the assistance of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, with input from teachers and schools. Kids of all ages - and even adults - can explore the site, play the games, watch the videos, and learn about cyber safety. However, the exam used for competing can only be taken by third to eighth grade students whose classes have been registered by their teachers.

Any public, private, or home school teachers who wish to participate in the FBI- SOS Internet Challenge can sign up by logging on to <https://sos.fbi.gov>. For more information about the FBI-SOS Internet Challenge, please contact the Little Rock FBI Community Outreach Specialist, Maria Hoskins, at 501-221-9100.

Child Sex Abuse Prevention Rally at the Capitol (KLRT, Fox 16)

LITTLE ROCK- A non-profit organization dedicated to preventing sexual abuse of children is holding a walk and rally at the State Capitol Saturday, April 20th.

The group Break the Silence-Speak Out America offers hope, help, and healing to survivors of sexual abuse. Miss Southeast Arkansas 2013 Britteny Humphrey has chosen child sexual abuse as her platform because of her own personal tragedy. When she was 8 years old she was sexually abused by her 3rd grade teacher. "I am in college getting my degree, I'm competing for Miss Arkansas and hopefully I'll

become Miss Arkansas and go on to Miss America someday. I want to let kids know they can do that too. They can achieve their dreams and do anything they set their mind to."

Founder of Break the Silence Phyllis Harrington says the goal of the organization is to provide education and training, and help people find their voice. "We want to let children know it's ok to tell when someone is hurting them."

1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually abused by age 18. Alexis Williams is a volunteer with Break the Silence and says 95% of those cases are preventable. "The more we talk to our children the more comfortable they'll be approaching us about this subject if something were to happen."

Humphrey says support from her family, friends, and councilors helped her heal. "You can speak up. You don't have to be afraid. It's not your fault."

Harrington encourages parents to keep the lines of communication open with children. "Parents really need to watch who they allow their children to be around."

Williams says parents need to be advocates for their kids. "We are the protectors. We should not be victimizing children."

The Break the Silence-Speak Out America event is happening Saturday, April 20th on the steps of the Capitol. Registration starts at 7am and the walk is at 8am. The 2nd Saturday of every month Break the Silence hosts classes on child sex abuse prevention. The organization is completely volunteer and is always looking for donations, sponsors, and more people to join.

Registered Sex Offender Arrested after Being Spotted at Elementary School Event (KARK, Channel 4)

SPRINGDALE, AR -- A level 3 sex offender has been arrested after a Springdale school official recognized him at an event on school property.

According to court documents, police were informed by an assistant principal at John Tyson Elementary School that a known sex offender had attended a school meeting on March 1.

The assistant principal said she spotted 30-year-old Christopher Shane Kimberling taking photos of a performance by second graders, and that she recognized him from his picture on the Arkansas sex offenders website.

The school administrator also provided police with a sign-in sheet from the event containing Kimberling's signature.

Police later confirmed that Kimberling was registered as a level 3 sex offender.

According to Kimberling's risk assessment, which was completed after his conviction for sex crimes in 2003, he admits to being sexually attracted to females under the age of 10.

Kimberling was charged with being a registered sex offender on a school campus and taken to Washington County Detention Center, where his bond was set at \$2,500.