

3rd Quarter 2014 Top Stories:

7/1/14 The felony case against McCracken County Judge Executive Van Newberry and Deputy Judge Executive Doug Harnice looks like it's headed for trial, as the officials rejected a plea deal Wednesday in McCracken Circuit Court.

Special Prosecutor G.L. Ovey said Newberry and Harnice were given time to consider the offer since their last hearing on May 30, and since both have turned it down, the case will now be left up to a jury to decide. The trial is set for Jan. 6 of next year.

On Jan. 10, a McCracken County Grand Jury indicted Newberry and Harnice on one count each of tampering with records in connection to changes made in county zoning after Newberry took office.

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7/1/14 The US-45 Brookport Bridge is about to be closed to allow for the installation of a 52-foot long lighted underpass that will connect two sections of the Greenway Trail in Paducah.

Paducah Public Information Officer Pam Spencer says Crews with Harper Construction, LLC will start putting up detour signs on Monday, July 7 to get ready for the Tuesday closing of the bridge. The work is expected to take about 21 days to complete.

“We know that the public is eager for the Greenway Trail underpass to be completed to allow for the safe crossing of U.S. 45. Once it is installed, Paducah will have more than four miles of trail to enjoy. However, for public safety reasons the City needed to wait for the completion of IDOT’s I-24 Ohio River Bridge project before we interrupted the Brookport Bridge’s traffic flow.” said City Engineer-Public Works Director Rick Murphy. The work to install new joints

and a deck overlay on the I-24 bridge began in Sep. 2013.

In addition to the underpass installation, signage, quarter mile markers, intersection safety devices, and a shelter will be installed in this phase of trail construction.

In September 2013, the City approved a \$672,502 contract with Harper Construction for the construction of the 1.2 mile concrete pedestrian and bicycle trail on the City's flood wall levee between the Skate park at Noble Park and US-45 behind the Smoke Shop.

Two sections of the trail are already available to the public, including a 1.75 mile trail segment between Noble Park and County Park Road, and a 1.67 mile segment between Campbell Street and U.S. 45. Once the latest phase is complete, the trail will span 4.6 miles.

Once the underpass is finished and connections are made, the Greenway Trail will be 4.6 miles long, stretching from County Park Road near Stuart Nelson Park to Campbell Street near the Paducah Expo Center.

#####

7/3/14 The Livingston County Sheriff's Department is searching for a missing optometrist that was last seen walking away from the Marina Village / Canal Campground area in Grand Rivers.

The Livingston County Dispatch Center tells West Kentucky Star, 60-year-old Dr. John P. Lyles, Calvert City, has been missing since around noon Wednesday afternoon.

Of a major concern, is Lyles' health condition. Officials say Lyles has a serious medical condition, and takes several different types of medication. He took nothing with him when he left the campground area.

Search crews from several different law enforcement agencies used boats and a helicopter to search for Lyles until a little after 2 am, Thursday. Volunteers began searching with law enforcement officers at 7 am, Thursday, and officials say they expect the search to go on well into the night.

Dr. Lyles was last seen wearing a green shirt and khaki shorts.

Anyone wanting to help with the search, or anyone who may have information about Lyles' whereabouts, is being asked to call the Livingston County Sheriff's Dispatch at 270-928-2122.

#####

7/3/14 Paducah based Dippin' Dots Franchising, LLC, the franchising arm of the flash frozen ice cream maker Dippin' Dots, announced Tuesday that it has acquired snack franchisor Doc Popcorn, innovator of fresh-popped, kettle-cooked popcorn. Based in Boulder, Colo., Doc Popcorn's franchise footprint includes nearly 100 franchise partners in 30 states, Japan, Mexico and Puerto Rico.

#####

7/7/14 The Kentucky State Police are searching for two escapees from an institution in Paducah Sunday evening.

According to the KSP, at around 8:50 P.M. the Keeton Correctional Institution in Paducah contacted troopers and notified them that two inmates were missing.

The first escapee, 35-year-old Steven Vargason, is described as a white male, between 6-feet-2-inches and 6-feet-4-inches with a muscular build and a shaved head. Vargason was last seen wearing shorts with a white and grey tank top.

The second escapee, 30-year-old Zachary Clevenger, is described as a

white male, approximately 5-feet-9-inches with nearly shaved dark hair and short facial hair. Clevenger was last seen wearing blue and white shorts with a white shirt.

The KSP is investigating the escape. If anyone has any contact with the escaped inmates, they are asked to call the Kentucky State Police, Post 1 in Mayfield.

#####

7/8/14 The search continued Monday for a missing Calvert City optometrist who hasn't been seen since last week, when he walked away from the Marina Village/Canal Campground area in Grand Rivers.

The Livingston County Sheriff's Department says 60-year-old Dr. John P. Lyles has not been found, and a health condition requires him to take several different types of medication, but he took nothing with him when he left the campground area last Wednesday.

Deputy Kenneth Vincent said help from other agencies has dwindled, but the search continued Sunday near Barkley Lake, Kentucky Lake, and the Canal area. He said Monday's search on horseback concentrated on areas near Grand Rivers, Marina Village, Scenic Overlook, and Nickel Branch.

Vincent said due to the nature of the ongoing search and investigation, they are not accepting volunteer help at this time.

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7/8/14 Engineers are continuing to work toward the start of demolition on the Old Ledbetter Bridge between Livingston County and McCracken County.

KYTC Spokesman Keith Todd said a contractor plans to start demolition prep work as early as next week, while Jim Smith

Contracting will help clear brush to improve equipment access on the McCracken side of the river.

Since April 30, when two approach spans dropped suddenly, the bluff on that side of the river has continued moving. So far, one land-based pier and two approach spans have fallen, and another pier and span could fall any time. So far, none of the spans above the river navigation channel have been affected.

A detailed blasting plan will be submitted soon to the US Coast Guard for their review.

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7/10/14 The body of missing optometrist Dr. J.P. Lyles was found Wednesday afternoon, after a week long search.

The Livingston Ledger reported on their Facebook page that Lyles' body was located near Dover & J.H. O'Bryan Rd., about a mile from where he disappeared.

Lyles had last been seen walking away from the Marina Village/Canal Campground area in Grand Rivers last Wednesday, July 2. The Livingston County Sheriff's Department said he took nothing with him, and had been taking several types of medication. His Facebook page indicated he was being aggressively treated for pancreatic cancer.

An intense search with multiple agencies and volunteers lasted through the weekend, but was scaled back to just Livingston County authorities by Tuesday.

Dr. Lyles was 60 years old. There's not yet any official word on the cause of death.

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07/14/14 The two remaining escapees from the Keeton Correctional Center in Paducah have been captured.

According to Kentucky State Police, at approximately 6am Saturday, the Hopkins County Sheriff's Office received an anonymous tip that Michael Houston and Joshua Barber were staying at a home in the Nortonville Community of Hopkins County.

Sheriff's deputies and Troopers from Post 2 in Madisonville converged on the home and located both Houston and Barber in the back yard.

Both were taken into custody without incident, and both men were booked into the Hopkins County Detention Center.

The two other escapees from Keeton Correctional Center were located on Thursday night near Henderson, KY. State police said Zachary Clevenger and Stephen Vargason were located after another tip led to their discovery.

#####

7/15/14 The Paducah Police Department is suspending its traffic enforcement division, with officials citing a staff shortage as the reason.

Paducah Police Spokeswoman Robin Newberry told West Kentucky Star that due to four officers retiring at the end of this month, and one resignation from an officer that is moving out of state, the city has too many vacancies to keep the division operational at this time. Traffic laws will still be enforced, but it will now be the responsibility of all officers, instead of the traffic enforcement division.

Newberry says Paducah Police Chief Brandon Barnhill brought the unit back from a 15-year hiatus about a year and a half ago. During that time, she says the city saw crashes go down by double digits in

some areas.

Newberry says it is the Police Department's intention to bring back the traffic enforcement division once the vacancies have been filled.

#####

07/22/14 U.S. Sen. Rand Paul says Fort Knox has been talked about as a possible site to temporarily house immigrant children pouring across the country's border. But a Democratic congressman indicates the Army post is not under consideration as a place to shelter young migrants.

Paul said in a speech Monday that "it looks like" some of the unaccompanied youngsters might end up at Fort Knox temporarily.

The Kentucky Republican said the children should be treated humanely but returned to their home countries.

Paul spokesman Dan Bayens says Paul's office was notified that Fort Knox has been talked about as a potential place to provide shelter.

A spokesman for U.S. Rep. John Yarmuth says the congressman was informed by the Department of Health and Human Services that Fort Knox is not under consideration.

#####

07/23/14 The rough year for Murray's court square continues. After a building collapse and a roof collapse affected two businesses on the historic square earlier this year, at least 2 more buildings have now been impacted by fire.

Firefighters started battling the blaze about 2 am.

One of the businesses impacted is Wilson's Florist. Police say all

motorists should avoid Murray's Court Square until further notice, and that Main Street and Maple Street are closed between 4th Street and 6th Street.

This morning, Murray Assistant Fire Chief Matthew Tinsley told WKYX-WNGO/West Kentucky Star property and business owners probably won't get access to the damaged buildings for a while.

The State Fire Marshall is now on the scene, and has called for additional investigators to help. The cause of the fire hasn't been determined yet, and it may be a day or two before they know.

State transportation officials say Highway 94 is open and traffic signals are working, but local officials are asking drivers to avoid the area due to ongoing work and clean-up. Some side streets may be closed.

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07/25/14 Former Marshall County High School Head Football Coach Ron Barnard has been indicted on felony charges stemming from his alleged involvement with a 15-year-old student. Tim Brockwell reports.

Former Marshall County High School Head Football Coach Ron Barnard has been indicted on felony charges stemming from his alleged involvement with a 15-year-old student.

A Marshall County Grand Jury returned a true bill Thursday, indicting Barnard on felony and misdemeanor charges including; solicitation of the use of a minor in a sexual performance; use of electronic means to induce a minor to engage in sexual or other prohibited activities; sexual abuse first degree; and distribution of obscene matter to minors.

Police said Barnard's arrest on June 4 was the result of a six month

investigation, opened after they were contacted by the school in December of last year.

Barnard's arraignment is set for August 4. Special Prosecutor Jeffrey Prather, Assistant Attorney General will be prosecuting the case.

#####

7/30/14 A federal judge has released details of the case against a southern Illinois man accused of killing two women during a Cairo bank robbery.

The judge on Tuesday unsealed a warrant which describes in detail the alleged crimes of James Watts.

The 30-year-old Watts of Cairo is charged with attempted armed bank robbery resulting in death. Killed were Anita Joe Grace of Olive Branch and Nita Jo Smith of Wickliffe, Kentucky.

KMOV in St. Louis reports the warrant indicates that during a standoff with police, Watts allegedly asked them if the victims were dead. When police said they were still alive, Watts allegedly answered they were dead because he "made sure of it."

Watts also called his mother during the standoff and allegedly said "I killed that woman."

#####

08/1/14 A strike at Honeywell Metropolis seems imminent, since the company and the United Steelworkers Union are apparently at a negotiating impasse, and their current contract is set to expire just before midnight Friday.

Honeywell issued a press release Thursday night saying they presented the union with a comprehensive six-year contract, hoping

the union will vote on it Friday. But the USW local 7-669 also issued a statement, saying the company "broke off negotiations" with a final offer. The union had already voted unanimously at their Thursday afternoon meeting to authorize a strike any time the bargaining committee deemed it necessary.

The company said their offer includes a 2 percent raise in each year of the contract, with no changes in health care benefits or pension programs from the current contract. The union statement said they are disappointed in the company's position and feels there is plenty of negotiating left to be done relating to job security, healthcare, health and safety, and employee fairness, among other issues.

Union president Stephen Lech, said, "Our members simply cannot accept an agreement that doesn't secure their jobs and insure acceptable conditions."

Honeywell's statement said the contract is good for employees while keeping the company sustainable in a challenging and competitive marketplace. They noted that with overtime and benefits added, the average compensation for union workers exceeds \$102,000 per year.

Union Media Secretary John Paul Smith said in an email Friday that the insurance plan being currently offered by Honeywell is not the same as before, and would cost members \$8,000 more per year.

He added, "We are trying to meet the company in the middle somewhere, but they have to be willing to negotiate."

In spite of the vote by its members Thursday, Smith's email said the union is not expecting to strike at this time.

#####

8/05/14 T-Mobile users could soon have better coverage in the Paducah area. In a plan filed with the FCC, T-Mobile says they have

purchased more available bandwidth that cell phones use to make and receive calls and data in the Paducah and Evansville, IN areas.

The nation's 4th largest cell phone carrier has been on the hunt for extra bandwidth that would strengthen their network for their users. Earlier this year, T-Mobile announced the purchase of \$2.4 billion dollars worth of frequencies from rival Verizon Wireless.

T-Mobile has announced that they plan to roll out the better coverage they purchased from Verizon sometime in the 3rd quarter of this year. It's not known if Paducah will be included in that roll out, or at a later date.

#####

08/08/14 The annual Emancipation Celebration Parade will be held at 11 a.m. on Saturday. Parade line-up begins at 10 a.m, and the parade will start at Walter Jetton Boulevard and Washington Street, traveling south on Walter Jetton Boulevard until it reaches Robert Coleman Park. Festivities and vendors will be at Robert Coleman Park immediately after the parade and throughout the afternoon. Various activities and vendors will be held at Robert Coleman Park on Friday and Saturday. For the safety of the festival-goers on those days, Caldwell and Husbands Streets between 9th Street and Walter Jetton Boulevard will be closed to traffic. Ninth Street also will be closed between Husbands and Caldwell Streets.

A complete schedule of 8th of August activities is at westkentuckystar.com

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08/12/14 McCracken County Judge-Executive Van Newberry has decided to end his bid for re-election. Tim Brockwell reports.

McCracken County Judge-Executive Van Newberry has decided to end his re-election bid for County Judge-Executive.

In a press release issued Monday evening, Newberry said his trial in January 2015 should not be a distraction to voters in the November election, "when we have real and serious issues to deal with."

Former Judge Jeff Hines, a Democrat, and State Senator Bob Leeper, an Independent, remain on the November ballot for Newberry's current office. Newberry and his Deputy Judge, Doug Harnice, switched their party affiliation from Democrat to Independent last December.

Newberry stopped short of endorsing either candidate, but gave them an idea of what to expect in the office.

Newberry's biggest challenge will be his trial for tampering with records, in connection to changes made in county zoning after he took office. Newberry said he did not commit that crime, and he looks forward to the trial and his eventual acquittal.

#####

08/13/14 Kentucky officials videotaped the last moments of three condemned inmates' lives as a team led the men to the execution chamber in Eddyville and prepared them to die.

The Associated Press learned of the existence of the tapes through public records requests.

The videotapes have never been made public. The AP uncovered references to the videos in a notation in a personnel file of a former prison employee and when the Department of Corrections rejected a records request from the AP for the videos.

The reason for the videos made before an electrocution in 1997 and a lethal injection in 1999 are unclear. They apparently do not show the execution, but include procedures with the inmates in preparation.

The AP has not been granted permission to view the tapes.

Experts who track capital punishment procedures believe such video recordings to be highly unusual.

#####

08/19/14 The Nuclear Regulatory Commission says they have scheduled a public meeting to discuss the process for terminating the certificate authorizing uranium enrichment operations at USEC, Inc.'s Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant.

The meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Aug. 28 at 7 p.m. CDT at the McCracken County Public Library, 555 Washington St., in Paducah. The public is invited to attend and is encouraged to provide comments and ask questions during the meeting.

According to the news release, The Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant was built by the U.S. Government in the 1950s to enrich uranium for military purposes. In the 1960s, it began enriching uranium for commercial nuclear reactors.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission says uranium enrichment no longer occurs at the facility, which prompted USEC to request the termination of its certificate of compliance, which in essence is its license to possess and process uranium.

#####

08/21/14 Very little progress has been made this week in negotiations between Honeywell and United Steel Workers in Metropolis.

Honeywell spokesman Peter Dalpe issued a statement saying they made counter-proposals Wednesday morning, relating to vacation policies and grievance procedures, after reviewing union proposals from Tuesday. The union said those moves by the company were very minor.

A USW Local 7-669 statement said their negotiating team took the rest of the day to re-evaluate their proposals in order to address the company's concerns and preserve what the membership has mandated.

Honeywell said they remain committed to bargaining in good faith, but told union negotiators that any new contract must control costs and have operational flexibility so they can compete in the global market.

The union claims the flexibility the company wants to preserve includes contract language that would allow subcontractors to replace them one-at-a-time.

Both sides return to negotiations Thursday.

#####

08/28/14 Paducah is listed in the top five in a National Geographic Traveler article describing the fifty "World's Smartest Cities."

The article in the October issue, which just hit news stands, lists essential places, people, trends, and ideas that have turned the world's most intelligent cities into hot tickets for travelers. The magazine says the cities included have heart and soul, are well-connected, and have a sustainable lifestyle.

Paducah is at number five, because it's listed as one of seven UNESCO Cities of Crafts and Folk Art, with the National Quilt Museum and the Lowertown Arts District as top draws - for potters, painters, jewelry makers, fiber artists, and anyone who appreciates their creativity.

Laura Schaumburg, Marketing Director for Paducah Convention & Visitors Bureau, said it's an honor for the city.

Lexington, KY also made the list at number 24. Chattanooga is number 10.

#####

09/08/14 A Murray woman died over the weekend in Chile.

According to WKYT-TV in Lexington, 22-year-old Erica Hagan of Murray was found unresponsive in her South American apartment on Saturday morning.

Officials there are investigating her death as a possible homicide.

She was an English assistant at Georgetown College. The graduate went to Chile in July 2014.

She was scheduled to return home in December.

A memorial service will be held this week at Georgetown College.

#####

09/12/14 A 17-year-old Mayfield HS student has been killed, and his mother has been kidnapped.

According to the Graves County Sheriff's Department, the incident happened Friday morning at 411 Fairlane Drive in Mayfield, where the teen was killed, and police say 34-year-old Kim Thomas was kidnapped by an ex-boyfriend, 40-year-old Terry Froman of Brookport, IL.

The couple was seen in Paducah in a 2004 white GMC Yukon with Illinois plate "TRICKE1", last seen at a 5-Star convenience store, where the woman apparently tried to get away, but the man dragged her back into the car.

Mayfield High School has been notified that one their students has been killed, and counselors are being made available for students.

Police are asking for anyone who has seen them to call state police or local law enforcement.

Police say nobody should approach the vehicle or those involved, since the man is considered armed and very dangerous.

The investigation is continuing, and we will have more details as soon as possible.

#####

09/18/14 The Paducah Area Chamber of Commerce has sent a letter to one of its own members, over concerns about how much that member is charging customers for their services.

The Chairwoman of the Chamber, Deborah Edmonds, sent a letter to Paducah Power System this week regarding the recent spike in power costs to Paducah Power customers. The letter addressed to Paducah Power General Manager David Clark, says its members are concerned about the amount Paducah Power is charging for electricity.

The letter said the Chamber represents more than 1,000 businesses in our community, and reminded Clark that power costs are a key component of economic success for everyone. The letter strongly urged the management and Board of Paducah Power to evaluate all possible avenues to obtain more stable and competitive electric rates for its customers.

They also asked the Board and General Manager of Paducah Power to talk with the Chamber regarding the high rates.

Paducah Power General Manager David Clark is expected to address the Paducah City Commission during their meeting on Tuesday, September 23, about the rates.

#####

09/22/14 Ray McLennan, Chairman of the Paducah Power System Board, stepped down Monday at their Board of Directors meeting.

The resignation came at the request of the Paducah City Commission, telling McLennan in a letter, saying, "We believe that a change in leadership is in the best interest of the ratepayers of Paducah." (see photo of letter)

McLennan's post will be filled by Vice Chair Hardy Roberts, who was named Interim Chairman.

The board met to discuss their high rates at the request of Paducah Mayor Gayle Kaler, The Paducah Area Chamber of Commerce, and others. They took comments from the public after they handled board issues, with ratepayers complaining about their extremely high electric bills.

The utility's rates are currently the highest in the state, partly because of the high start-up cost of the Prairie State Energy Campus in Illinois, which ran way over its projected budget.

#####

09/26/14 Police from Western Kentucky are looking for a woman who escaped from custody.

According to the Caldwell County Dispatch, 40-year-old Michelle Hodge escaped after being brought back to the Caldwell County Jail. Hodge had been taken to nearby Lyon County concerning charges there.

Police say a deputy jailer from Lyon County took her back to the Caldwell County Jail and opened the door to let her out. That's where she started running barefoot.

Hodge is 5' 3", 160 pounds, blue eyes, and blonde hair. Police say she was last seen wearing an orange one piece jumpsuit. Her hands were handcuffed in front of her. She has ties to the Eddyville and Brookport areas.

Anyone who has seen her is asked to call their local law enforcement agency or the Princeton Police Department at (270) 365-2041 immediately.

#####

09/26/14 United flights from Paducah to Chicago could be impacted. You might want to call ahead to confirm your flight.

A fire at a suburban Chicago air traffic control facility halted to all flights in and out of the city's two airports.

It was the second time since May that a fire at one of the Chicago area's major control facilities prompted a ground stop at O'Hare and Midway international airports.

The fire led to the evacuation of the Chicago Air Route Traffic Control Center in Aurora, Federal Aviation Administration spokeswoman Elizabeth Cory said.

One injury was reported, Cory said.

#####

09/30/14 Paducah Power System General Manager David Clark submitted his resignation to the Board of Directors at the end of Tuesday's board meeting.

PPS Director of Community Relations & Marketing Andrea Underwood said the resignation is immediate. PPS Director of Engineering, Rick Windhorst was named the interim general manager.

The board also approved the hiring of Dowdy Recruiting to begin the search for a new general manager. The search is expected to take 120 days.

Last Monday, Chairman of the Paducah Electric Plant Board Ray McLennan resigned and walked out of their meeting. The next day the Paducah City Commission, which oversees the board, demanded an investigation into how the decision was made to invest in the Prairie State Energy Campus, which has not performed as well as expected since it was built.

Paducah Power has had to continue purchasing electricity from outside sources, while also paying their portion of the investment and start-up cost for the plant. This has caused cutomers' electric bills to increase dramatically.

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