

FORMER POLICE OFFICER ARRESTED

17-year officer facing child porn charges in Lawrence County. — PAGE 3



MONETT Monthly



DECEMBER 10, 2025 | FACEBOOK.COM/MONETTMONTHLY

LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

What: Drury University's 14th annual Leadership Summit in Monett
Speakers: Ethan Forhertz, Kari Walden and Randy Little
Advice: On best practices, qualities of a leader

Drury Leadership Summit explores strategies

3 speakers discuss cultivating influence, success

BY MURRAY BISHOFF

Special to the Monett Monthly

Three prominent area business leaders spoke on cultivating successful leadership strategies at Drury University's 14th annual Leadership Summit in Monett on Nov. 13 at the City Park Casino.

Hosted by the Foundations of Organizational Leadership class at the Drury GO campus in Monett, Ethan Forhertz, Kari Walden and Randy Little offered insights from their experience and recommendations for the college students.

Rhonda Schilly, senior director of Drury's Monett campus, stood in for class educator Joel Thomas as master of ceremonies for the evening. She introduced past speakers in attendance, noting how the event had grown from the first session held in the basement of the Monett campus.

Ethan Forhertz

Ethan Forhertz, vice president and national spokesman for Convoy of Hope, is best known as a TV journalist for 15 years with KY3. He noted that everyone, whether aware of it or not, has influence. "Leadership is not about a position," he said. "You don't need a corporate post to have leadership. You can lead a family, a class, or a friend group."

Forhertz discussed keys to leadership that can start at any time. He drew a distinction between motivation, "telling people what to do," and inspiration, which "pulls people along to join you." He added, "One pushes from behind. The other pulls."

Leadership also means providing clarity and trust, but he cautioned, "Clarity without trust produces fear. People do their best work when they know what is expected of them."

Leadership also means being proactive, Forhertz continued. Forward thinking means deciding actions before a crisis, setting goals. "Leadership is not about putting out fires." He added one leads through influence,

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DRURY HOSTS FIRST MULTICULTURAL FAIR IN MONETT



Dance performance by the Hmong group at the inaugural Culture and Community Event. Contributed photo

8 cultures offer dance, singing, fashions

BY MURRAY BISHOFF

Special to the Monett Monthly

Drury University, Monett Area Chamber of Commerce and the City of Monett partnered to create an inaugural Culture and Community Event.

The Multicultural Fair was held on Oct. 18 at the First United Methodist Church in Monett.

The event took place on a rainy Saturday and was relocated to the First United Methodist Church for shelter from the weather. Mayor Randy Burke opened the event with an official greeting.

The four-hour event featured eight different cultures represented through dance and singing performances, runway showcases, and displays.

The cultures represented at the event were Hakha Chin from

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



Crowd photo taken of a Karenni member at the inaugural Culture and Community Event. Contributed photo

City approves ordinance for possible commission

Vote may bring election of 13-person commission to draw up charter for new city government

BY JESSICA BREGER

Special to the Monett Monthly

The Monett City Council took the next steps in re-organizing the city government during its Nov. 13 meeting.

The city approved an ordinance calling for the April election asking the question "Shall a Commission be Chosen to Frame a Charter" and if passed, elect 13 commissioners to draw up the charter.

"This is about changing the form of government from what we have now," said Mayor Randy Burke. "A month ago, we all unanimously agreed that we needed to do that and we

passed an ordinance. And what will happen is it will be on the ballot for the April election.

"What the citizens will be voting on is whether or not they want a commission of thirteen people to write a constitution for the city of Monett."

The mayor reiterated that the council will not be choosing the commission members, as they will be voted on by the citizens.

After being selected, the commission will have approximately one year to write the new charter. The charter itself will then go on the ballot to be approved by the voters.

Burke said the ordinance passed in the November meeting provides all the rules for candidates so they can be on the ballot.

The packets opened to the

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MONETT ATHLETES COLLECT POSTSEASON HARDWARE



Emma Velton earned All-Conference honors for the Lady Cubs this season. MSL Photography/Special to the Monett Monthly



Dylan Washick was one of a host of Cubs to receive postseason honors. MSL Photography/Special to the Monett Monthly

Football, softball, soccer, volleyball awards earned

BY JARED LANKFORD
Special to the Monett Monthly

While the fall sports season has officially given way to winter, the time of postseason honors for fall athletes has been fruitful.

Monett football, softball, soccer and volleyball players claimed their fair share of accolades for their performances on the fields and court.

Football

Collecting First Team All-Big 8 Conference honors for football was Alex Meeks, wide receiver. Earning Second Team honors were: Antoine Smith, running back; Carson Nestleroad, wide receiver; August Black, defensive back; and Camden Towles, defensive tackle.

Honorable Mention accolades were earned by Dylan Washick, quarterback; Miles Young, wide receiver; Collin Umfleet, utility; and Tucker Anderson, linebacker.

All-District and All-State honors were not available at press time.

Softball

Kilee Wilson, pitcher, and Emma Velton, catcher, earned First Team All-Conference recognitions for the Lady Cubs softball team. Wilson was also named Co-Pitcher of the Year with Abby Jamros, of Seneca.

Brilynn Doss was selected to the Honorable Mention squad as an infielder.

Wilson and Velton also earned First Team, Class 3, All-District 6 awards. Doss found a home on the Second-Team squad.

Soccer

The Cubs soccer team tallied up several Class 2, All-District 5 spots.

On the First Team were: Santiago Bernal, forward; Israel Valdez, midfielder; Josue Alberto, defense; and Alex Patino, goalie.

Earning Honorable Mention nominations were: Jose Garcia, defense; Jabier Alvarez, defense; and Fidel Valenciano, forward.

Volleyball

On the volleyball front, Peyton Brandy was named to the First Team All-Big 8 Team, and Meredith Merriman was selected to the Honorable Mention squad.

Monett claimed multiple spots in the Class 3, All-District 12 Team.

Brandt and Brycelynn Courtois were named to the First Team. Merriman and Carsyn Goetz were named to the Second Team, and Morgan Wright claimed a spot on the Honorable Mention squad.



Kilee Wilson Earned First Team All-Conference and All-District accolades this season. MSL Photography/Special to the Monett Monthly

Oh deer: Gun season numbers in for Missouri

Bi-county area sees decrease in deer harvested

BY JARED LANKFORD
Special to the Monett Monthly
More than 70,000 deer were harvested by Missouri hunters in the opening weekend of firearms season, an increase from last year but sharply lower than

average totals from the previous five years.
The Missouri Department of Conservation reported Monday that 70,173 deer were harvested during the opening of the November portion of firearms season on Nov. 15 and Nov. 16.
Barry County checked in with 1,384 deer harvested, of which 838 were antlered bucks. In Lawrence County, 1,214

deer were checked into the Conservation Department, 703 of which were antlered bucks.
Both counties were down in deer taken compared to 2024. Last year, Barry County reported 1,671 deer taken, while Lawrence County recorded 1,424 harvests.
The top harvest counties were Franklin with 3,609 deer, followed by Howell with 2,974

and Wayne with 2,713.
While the number of harvested deer surpassed the 68,057 recorded during the opening weekend of 2024, totals were significantly lower compared with years prior.
The state regularly averaged between 89,000 and 90,000 deer, reaching as high as 99,470 harvested in 2018. Conservation officials told state media outlets

that warm temperatures likely factored into the state's low deer totals this year.
Opening weekend deer harvest totals since 2018:
2025: 70,173
2024: 68,057
2023: 90,253
2022: 93,355
2021: 89,939
2019: 88,760
2018: 99,470



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NEWS BRIEFS

Monett YMCA hosting Open House

The Monett Area YMCA, located at 115 S. Lincoln Ave., will host its Winter Open House on Friday, Dec. 12, from 6-8 p.m. Visitors may meet Santa, explore programs and discover benefits of being a YMCA member. The event is free and open to everyone. Along with a photo with Santa, people may swim in the pool, scale the rock wall, tackle the challenge course, lace up roller skates, try a class or learn about programs, as well as meet the YMCA team. There will also be a chance to enter to win a YETI cooler.

Monett Christmas Parade set for Saturday

The annual Monett Christmas Parade will be held on Saturday, Dec. 13 at 11 a.m. Participants will line up on Front Street, stretching from 1st Street to 8th Street, and will make a large loop heading east on Broadway through downtown Monett. Leading the parade this year will be Santa himself, arriving on a train for a memorable experience. Great Dave's Coffee, located at 404 E. Broadway, will be also offering free hot chocolate from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Blood Drive on Dec. 15

The American Red Cross will host a Monett Area Blood Drive from 1-6 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 15, from 1-6 p.m. at Monett Community Church's Fellowship Hall, located at 2101 Cleveland in Monett. People may call 1-800-7332767 or visit RedCrossBlood.org and enter LIFESAVER to schedule an appointment. Each donor will receive a \$15 Amazon gift card.

Photos with Santa at Great Dave's

Great Dave's Coffee, located at 404 E. Broadway, will host a picture day with Santa on Saturday, Dec. 20, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The event is free for all, and those wishing to take photos should bring their own camera.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Services upcoming

Monett Nazarene Church, located at 2142 Hwy. 37 in Monett, will host a Christmas Eve Candlelight Service starting at 6 p.m. The service will feature music and a brief message, all by candlelight. First United Methodist Church, located at 1600 N. Central Ave. in Monett, will also host a Candlelight Christmas Eve at 6 p.m. The service will include the Christmas story, carols and communion. People may also access the service online at www.funmonett.org/watch.

Publisher's note: Do you have an event coming up? Publish it free in news briefs by emailing: monettmonthly@outlook.com

Former police officer arrested on child porn charges

Gaston being held on no bond; has not worked for MPD since August 2024

BY KYLE TROUTMAN
monettmonthly@outlook.com

A former police officer was arrested on Dec. 3 and charged with two felonies related to alleged possession of child pornography.

Scott Gaston, 49, of Marionville, who previously worked at the Monett and Aurora police departments over a span of 17 years, is charged in Lawrence County with possession of child pornography, a Class B felony, and second-degree promoting child pornography, a Class D felony. He was arrested on Dec. 2 and is being held in the Lawrence County jail on no bond.

George Daoud, Monett police chief, said the city of Monett is aware of the arrest.

“The City of Monett has been made aware of the arrest of former employee Scott Gaston in a neighboring community the morning of Wednesday, December 3, 2025,” he said. “Gaston served as an Police Officer with the Monett Police Department from July 30, 2012, through August 4, 2024.”

According to a probable cause statement file by Christopher Corbett, a detective with the Lawrence County Sheriff's Office also assigned to the Southwest Missouri Cyber Crimes Task Force, on Oct. 9, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children transmitted to law enforcement a CyberTip Report from Google created on Sept. 20 identifying a user account that had allegedly uploaded 29 video media files of suspected child pornography to the Google photos infrastructure on or on about Sept. 19 at 2:35 a.m.

The report identified two mobile numbers and an IP address allegedly having been used to access the account shortly before the incident, and the same IP address was previously associated with an internal investigative case,

linking the CyberTip Report to an active investigation.

A search within law enforcement databases and other databases revealed Gaston as a suspect.

A sample description of files included three videos: A 1:23 long video depicting an adult male sexually abusing a child, as young as 3 years old, via genitalia contact; a 24-second video depicting sodomy of an infant by an adult male; and a 58-second video depicting oral sodomy of an infant by an adult male.

On Oct. 27, Google responded to a subpoena for subscriber information, allegedly identifying Gaston as the owner of the IP address that uploaded the media. The records provided by Google included subscriber information, recovery information and Google Pay financial data; as well as verified a phone number and residential address and a bank account belonging to Gaston tied to the same phone number and address.

On Nov. 15, Yaana Managed Services responded to a subpoena for Optimum Online allegedly confirming the IP address in question belonged to Gaston at the time of the incident, active at that location since 2004. It also allegedly verified at least one phone number matched the Google account, linking the internet service and Google service records.

On Nov. 19, during surveillance, a vehicle allegedly parked at the residence in question showed to be registered by Gaston's domestic partner, with Gaston listed as the transfer on death. On Nov. 20, a vehicle registered to Gaston was allegedly observed parked at the residence.

On Dec. 3, members of the Southwest Missouri Cyber Crimes Task Force, assisted by the Missouri State Highway Patrol, Homeland Security Investigations and the Lawrence County Sheriff's Office, executed a search warrant at the residence, allegedly occupied by Gaston and another individual whose name is redacted in the probable cause statement, as well as four children approximately 12 years of age and younger.

Numerous electronic devices were seized, as well as multiple firearms, significant quantities of ammunition and large amounts of cash, according to the probable cause statement.

Corbett contacted Gaston and conducted an audio-recorded interview beginning at 6:47 a.m., during which Gaston allegedly provided his date of birth, confirmed his telephone number, gave an email address and confirmed he resided at the residence at which the warrant was executed. The statement said Gaston was read his Miranda rights at 6:49 a.m. and agreed to answer preliminary questions.

Under Miranda, Gaston allegedly stated his cellular provider as Verizon, electric provider as Liberty and internet service provider as Suddenlink, now named Optimum Online. Gaston also said he, another adult and four children all have access to the internet. He also allegedly reported that he had provided the wi-fi password to friends and family in the past, though he stated the last time a visitor may have used the wi-fi was “many months” prior.

Gaston went on to say he has a high school education, specialized technical training and completed a police academy. At about 6:54 a.m., after learning the nature of the investigation, Gaston stated, “I am going to invoke my Miranda rights at this time, and I do not want to be involved with this at all.”

Corbett said in the probable cause statement, “The information obtained during the warrant execution and interview corroborates the identifiers contained in the CyberTip Report and related subpoena returns. Gaston was located at the residence associated with IP address, the same address and IP tied to the Google account that uploaded suspected child sexual abuse material. The phone number, residence address, and email address provided by Gaston match or closely match identifiers contained in the Google and Optimum Online records, including the CyberTip Report-related address and subscriber information. The confirmation of Suddenlink as

the internet provider is consistent with Optimum Online records showing that the same residence and IP address were active during the CTR incident.”

Corbett also said in the statement he believes Gaston will not appear in court due to having “17 years of prior law enforcement experience, giving him extensive knowledge of investigative procedures, court processes, and the potential consequences of the serious felony charges he is now facing. This level of familiarity increases his ability to evade court obligations and avoid prosecution. The evidence directly linking him to the possession and distribution of child sexual abuse material, combined with the substantial penalties associated with these offenses, provides a significant incentive for him to flee or refuse to appear if only summoned. These factors create a substantial risk that he will not comply with a criminal summons.”

Corbett added he believes Gaston poses a danger to the community or any other person because, “The defendant's 17 years in law enforcement give him specialized training, tactical knowledge, and familiarity with firearms that elevate the level of danger he presents. During the search warrant, investigators located multiple firearms, large quantities of ammunition, and significant amounts of cash throughout the residence. Four young children also live in the home, and the criminal conduct under investigation involves the exploitation of minors. The combination of his training, access to weapons, the seriousness of the offenses, and the instability indicated by his recent termination from employment demonstrates that he poses a credible and ongoing threat to the safety of the community and individuals around him.”

Gaston is being held in the Lawrence County Jail on no bond. He has waived arraignment, and as of presstime, a bond hearing was scheduled for Dec. 8 at 9:30 a.m. in the courtroom of Judge Don Trotter.

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CORRECTIONS

Monett Monthly corrects factual errors or clarifies information promptly and courteously. If you have a correction or clarification, please email Publisher Kyle Troutman at monettmonthly@outlook.com.

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ABOUT

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LOCAL

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The purpose of the Commentary page is to provide a forum of various opinions, and we highly encourage letters to the editor. The opinions of columnists are not necessarily shared by *Monett Monthly* or its staff. If you have an opinion, send a letter to Kyle Troutman, Monett Monthly, P.O. Box 486, Cassville, MO 65625, email ktroutman@cassville-democrat.com or scan the QR code to the right to submit a letter online.



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Local Death Notices

Linda Sue Redshaw • Purdy • Jan. 28, 1953-Oct. 30, 2025

Hoy Bilyeu • Monett • Aug. 10, 1933-Oct. 31, 2025

Doris Sisco • Purdy • March 5, 1938-Nov. 2, 2025

Tammy Sue Dunaway • Monett • Sept. 13, 1971-Nov. 9, 2025

Steven Doss • Mt. Vernon • July 23, 1956-Nov. 14, 2025

Benny Mathews • Verona • Aug. 6, 1957-Nov. 14, 2025

Guy Kent Jackson • Monett • Dec. 1, 1950-Nov. 18, 2025

Betty J. Meier • Monett • March 10, 1935-Nov. 21, 2025

Mar Mo • Monett • Jan. 1, 1949-Nov. 23, 2025

America Salas Fernandez • Monett • Dec. 18, 2005-Nov. 23, 2025

Freida Crawford • Aurora • March 24, 1934-Nov. 24, 2025

Brenda Williams • Monett • July 17, 1963-Nov. 29, 2025

Clarence Abramovitz • Monett • April 26, 1933-Dec. 2, 2025

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LOCAL DEVOTIONAL

Is Heaven perfect?

God loves and created everything in our world with goodness so that we might love God in return. In fact God created humans as “very good,” in God’s own image. Did God create a perfect world? Probably not, though many believe God did, and that some at least are destined to be returned to a perfect heaven. What else could heaven be if not perfect? Let us think about this from a different perspective.

God certainly created our world and ourselves “good” so that we might love God and one another back or in return for God’s eternal love. But “perfection” is something quite different from “goodness.” In truth perfection is the enemy of goodness. Many things can be very good and still not be perfect. Humans are one of these. We were created good but not perfect.

The flaw in our goodness is freewill. God knew when God created us that to love God back we must be free not to; maybe not always but at least on occasion. Not even God or anyone can require or command us to truly love another unless it is in our hearts to do so. True love requires freewill or love is not possible. God created us to be good but not perfect.

Human perfection is not possible on earth nor

in Heaven. Self righteousness is never the pathway to God!

My friend belongs to AA (Alcoholics Anonymous). He has been sober now for several years and remains active in the rehabilitation of many others. At every AA meeting they begin by saying “I am an alcoholic. I have been sober now for so many days or years,” as may be the case.

Once an alcoholic always an alcoholic. There are no exceptions. There are only alcoholics or hopefully reformed alcoholics.

It is the same with sin. There are only sinners or those who are reforming of sin or forgiven sinners both on earth as well as in heaven. Love is never perfectly possible. It is, however, always good wherever and whenever it is experienced on earth or in heaven. Only God’s love is perfect; though God certainly enjoys our goodness. Perfection is only goodness that is under reconstruction (transformation) both now and in the afterlife.

Have you ever wondered why the Bible speaks and God promises in both the Old and New Testaments a “new heaven and a new earth:?” (Isaiah 65:9 & Rev. 21:1-4). We certainly acknowledge the need for a new earth; but why a new heaven?

I believe it is because Heaven is not yet perfect because it includes sinners and sinners who are forgiven and transformed.

That includes everyone because once a sinner always a sinner though all are in the process of becoming more like God intended and created us to be perfected in the image of God, conformed to the likeness of Christ in Heaven and Jesus while on earth.

Every person is born with a “spark of kindness” within them, whether they acknowledge this “spark;” force, spirit, power, etc. or not. It doesn’t matter what this “spark” is called or even that it has a name. It is a given even when denied.

This “spark” is enough to save everyone; though the prospects of denial can be disappointing or disastrous in this life.

The purpose of this “spark” is to help everyone become their better selves in this life and to prepare them to have an even better life and eternity after death. Of course many believe this “spark” has a name and presence. Let’s simply call it Love.

Love is something that most can agree on and can’t fully live without.

Death on the other hand is something that cannot be denied; it is universal — all die. To live is a choice to be made in

this life. To choose life is to accept love, for without love there is no life. The denial of a presence beyond ourselves is possible, of course, but denial doesn’t make such presence any less true.

There is something beyond ourselves that is present in every person whether believed or not. Some or many may discover and accept the offer of a better life only after their death. Does it matter? Yes!

Much may be lost in this life without it; but eternal life is a gift for everyone because God or whatever name given to this “spark” within us has the presence, power, and will to love and accept everyone into the eternal kingdom; even the power to change the worst in life into a member of eternal worth.

One doesn’t have to be good to have God love them; God loves and provides for everyone because God is good. Goodness, that “spark” of kindness in us never dies because love like God’s is eternal. In the end everyone is saved by grace, the true gift of a loving God.

Rev. Raymond Ticknor is a retired Christian Church (Disciple of Christ) pastor living in Monett. He may be reached at rudith.ticknor@yahoo.com.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Life is nothing but a series of relationships. Be creative. Be positive. The speed of the leader determines the speed of the bat. Get people involved. Surround yourself with better people than yourself. Choose in a different direction. Become a leader naturally.”

— RANDY LITTLE, FOUNDER OF PFI WESTERN STORE IN 1975 AT THE DRURY LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

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LOCAL



Santa is ready to welcome guests to The Monett Historical Society and Museum and show them his favorite cookie jars from a local collector this Christmas. Jessica Breger/Special to the Monett Monthly



The Monett Historical Society and Museum invite guests to experience the whimsy of cookie jars during the baking season and find jar that is hidden amongst the Christmas trees. Jessica Breger/Special to the Monett Monthly

A sweet display at the Museum

Santa, cookie jar collection open for vieweing

BY JESSICA BREGER

Special to the Monett Monthly

The Monett Historical Society and Museum is decorating for the holiday season, inviting locals to wander by the many Christmas tree displays throughout the building.

While the familiar face of the museum’s animatronic Santa stands at the door to greet guests, visitors won’t see the same holiday look as last year.

Each year, the museum decks its halls differently, featuring not only holiday decor, but conjoining displays as well.

Past displays have featured such items as Santa figurines and Christmas toys. This year, Santa stands at the entrance right next to jars meant for his favorite treat.

The exhibit displays a selection of cookie jars on loan to the museum by local resident Roberta Wormington, who has collected the jars for over two-and-a-half decades.

Museum volunteers made sure to find a special way to intertwine the decorations and exhibits this year. Each tree displayed is individually decorated, and some may even hide a surprise.

In a recent social media post, the museum showed that one cookie jar is out of place and hiding amongst the trees. Guests are invited to explore the museum to discover which tree hides the cookie jar.

The museum also celebrates the holidays with dated, commemorative ornaments they sell every year depicting different aspects of Monett.

The Museum is open five days a week, Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free.



The Monett Historical Society and Museum invite guests to wander in its forest of tree displays this holiday season. Jessica Breger/Special to the Monett Monthly



The Monett Historical Society and Museum shows its fun side with hidden Christmas decorations such as these carolers tucked away in a favored room. Jessica Breger/Special to the Monett Monthly

Monett chess teams earn top finishes at Fall 2025 Forsyth Open

Monett chess teams earned top honors at the Fall 2025 Forsyth Open, held Nov. 1, at Forsyth High School.

The event brought together student players from across southern Missouri, including teams from Monett, Willow Springs, West Plains, Mountain Grove, Gainesville, Rolla, Fairview, area homeschooled groups, and host Forsyth.

The tournament was part of the Ozark Mountain Chess League, which promotes scholastic chess competition and collaboration among schools throughout the region.

Monett’s K-8 team claimed first place, while the K-12 team finished third overall.

In the K-8 division, team points came from Michael Albig (2nd

place), Riley Wilson (3rd place), Owen Crim (8th place) and Eli Boucher (9th place).

For the K-12 team, points came from Kanden Craker (5th place), Diego Murillo-Arreola (9th place), and Violet Samson (10th place), and Carter Hedgpeth contributed to the third-place finish.

In the K-8 division team results, Monett took first, followed by Willow Springs and Forsyth. Final results for the K-12 section placed Forsyth first, Mountain Grove second, and Monett third.

The Monett Chess Club meets Tuesdays and Thursdays at Monett Middle School and is open to all Monett students in grades K-12. Students of all experience levels are welcome to participate and learn more about the game.



Kanden Craker, left, plays chess at the Forsyth Open in November, finishing in fifth place overall. Contributed photo

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Group picture featuring participants from Karenni, Thailand, Guatemala, Mexico, Hmong and Nepal. Contributed photo



Dance performance by the Karen group. Contributed photo



Runway showcase by the Hakha Chin group. Contributed photo

Multicultural: Plans underway for next year

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Myanmar; Karenni from Myanmar; Karen from Myanmar; Nepal; Guatemala; Mexico; the Philippines; and Hmong, which was represented twice by two different groups.

“Each group proudly took the stage and turned the event into something beautiful,” said Jasmine Canales, one of the organizers with Drury. “We can say that the first Culture & Community Event exceeded our expectations. We knew it was going to be a great event, but underestimated how beautiful it would turn out to be.”

The event had a total of 230 attendees. Canales credited leaders in each of the participating organizations for their efforts.

Other community programs that provided support included the Migrant Education Program, Monett R-1 School and Welcome Center, and the International Institute of Southwest Missouri.

“We can proudly say that the event left the attendees wanting more and looking forward to next year’s event,” Canales said. “A highlight was seeing groups take photos, exchange cultural gifts, and even form new friendships.”

Plans are underway to hold the event next year.

“This event brought our community together and allowed us to celebrate each other’s unique traditions,” Canales said. “We truly believe everyone should have the chance to experience what we witnessed on October 18.”

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Master's program available for teachers

Evangel partnership program free to teachers who complete it, commit 5 years to district

BY JESSICA BREGER
Special to the Monett Monthly

Monett schools will soon be adding new learning opportunities for their teachers.

During the Nov. 20 meeting of the Monett School Board, a new program presented by Assistant Superintendent Isaac Sooter was approved to introduce a Master's of Curriculum and Instruction program for district teachers.

The partnership with Evangel University would allow staff in the district to administer the course to 10 people every 18 months.

"We will run them through a master's program that we will teach," Superintendent Mark Drake said. "When I say 'we,' I

mean anyone with a specialist or higher. We can tailor that to what Monett needs. There's no set curriculum that we have to follow for them to get the degree. We really have complete ownership of that program.

Drake, who along with Sooter holds a doctorate, said this program is being implemented in approximately 13-14 districts in Southwest Missouri, including Mt Vernon.

Through the program, the instructor would earn the degree with the agreement to work for the district for five years after the program completion.

The program would be paid by the district with the five-year agreement. Should the instructor choose to leave before the five years, they would then be asked to pay the program back.

The district will be paying a discounted rate of 20% for the program through the partnership with Evangel University.

The program is estimated to cost \$76,800, or \$7,680 per participant, and not to exceed \$100,000.

Sooter said at least 1% of district funds must already go to professional development, so funds would simply be routed to the new program.

"Historically, districts send teachers to training and conferences — which, some are great, some can not be great, but the return on investment is much higher putting teachers through a master's program," Sooter said.

While this program is set to be recurring, the board also approved a one time doctoral program for district administration. This program would be administered by Evangel instructors.

The doctoral program would not be fully funded by the district and would ask participants to pay for 21 of the 50 credit hours earned in the program.

The budget on this program is set not to exceed \$65,000, and participants would be expected to remain with the district through at least June of 2031.

Drake noted that not only will the programs increase teacher attraction and retention, but would ultimately be providing higher quality instruction for Monett students.

Sooter said that while the district already has good teacher retention, these programs help ensure the same for the future.

"We do have to work a little harder compared to Joplin or Springfield, so we always want to be proactive, not reactive," Sooter said.

In his first year as assistant superintendent, Sooter oversees professional development. Sooter said that he has been familiar with the Evangel program for some time and was excited to introduce it to the

district.

The board also received updates on safety projects in the district, heraing that MODOT has provided the district with anticipated signal light equipment and software at no cost.

The school-day schedule has already been uploaded, and lights will flash one hour before and after school to aid in traffic safety.

Work on updates to the welding ventilation system that were approved earlier this fall is scheduled for Christmas break.

It was also announced that candidate filing to join the school board is to run from Dec. 6 through Dec. 30 with three seats available.

The Monett School Board meets at 6 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month at Board

Administrative Meeting Room located at the District Office.



Speakers at the 14th annual Drury University Leadership Summit in Monett were, from left, Ethan Forhetz, Kari Walden, and Randy Little, with Rhonda Schilly at right serving as master of ceremonies. Murray Bishoff/Special to the Monett Monthly



Summit: Questions from audience answered at live at leadership event

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

that there is a distinction between positional leadership with a title and relational influence, where people follow "when they want to." His formula stated time plus concern and care equals influence.

Finally, Forhetz declared the Golden Rule: "Lead like what you would want to follow." He urged celebrating people publicly, as opposed to complaining, which would make others not want to be there.

"Leadership is not about being in charge — it's about caring for people who are in your charge," he concluded.

Kari Walden

Kari Walden, assistant general counsel at the Jack Henry company, where she has worked for more than 15 years, framed her presentation around a photo of a tractor raking hay in a field. At Jack Henry, she noted, her role is risk mitigation, doing a job the best possible way so both Jack Henry and the client are successful; not an adversarial position, like many attorneys.

She recalled her father would talk about doing a job, like haying, in terms of how it would impact the next person, like the bailer. A hay row cut too close to the fence would pull the bailer into position to damage the fence, making a bad day for everyone. Walden would think of the next person when she raked hay as a girl.

"Leadership does not mean management," she said. "It's what you do to influence those around you."

Successful leadership, she continued, begins with authenticity.

"Leadership is easy when it's profitable," she said. "It plays out when things are hard. It's different as a woman. It's how you show up yourself.

You think you have to be perfect, but that's not as powerful as showing up flawed as your authentic self and saying, 'We'll figure it out.'"

Walden observed part of authenticity comes from how you deal with stress, how you support your time, and persevere in difficult times.

"The answer is always with the people around you," she said. "It's never just about you. The way to persevere is how you build trust and connections."

Leadership also includes adaptability and resilience. Walden noted that 15 years ago, when she started at Jack Henry, widespread use of cellphones was new, and business involved creating new products for mobile use. Today's market involves dealing with artificial intelligence and cryptocurrency, things that barely existed a few years ago.

"The way to be resilient is to be resourceful," she said. "I'm never the smartest person in the room. People taught me to be resilient. You may have to pivot and change your approach. There's no limit to what can be done. You just have to adapt. My dad would tell me, 'Make hay while the sun shines.' There's a lot to learn about leadership and how we support one another."

Randy Little

Randy Little, founder of PFI Western Store in 1975, a business he sold after 47 years, today runs Missouri Berries in Republic with his wife, Johnelle. They also operate a Branson attraction. He serves as the current commissioner of the Missouri State Fair, holds leadership roles with the University of Missouri, and runs a 1,000-acre cattle farm.

Little spoke about founding PFI in 1975 and

growing it into the largest single-store retailer in the nation. He wanted to be in business for himself, requiring him to think in a different business model and "dream a little harder." He boiled leadership down to respect, desire, and determination.

Little stressed having respect in anything you do, and determination that cannot waiver. If encountering people who doubt your path, he urged finding better relationships, like a banker who believed and would stand with you.

"Life is nothing but a series of relationships," Little said. "Be creative. Be positive. The speed of the leader determines the speed of the bat. Get people involved. Surround yourself with better people than yourself. Choose in a different direction. Become a leader naturally."

Little spoke about having a plaque on his wall for years that said, "Act instead of react." He used that as a motto and a business model.

Audience questions

In taking question from the audience, the speakers were challenged to show the difference between quick wins and sticking to a long-term strategy. Forhetz urged a combination of both, celebrating the wins to keep morale high and looking ahead for what can be celebrated week-to-week and month-to-month.

Walden urged knowing where an effort leads.

"The low-hanging fruit helps you toward a longer vision," she said.

Little said at PFI, his business had to create items a year in advance to market them.

"Get a game plan. Follow the plan. Buy into it. Deliver on it," he said.

Asked about the most

important quality to building lasting success, Little said flatly, "Pay your people a lot. I was never an easy boss. I wanted to think how we could be bigger and better all the time. My people stayed with me. We were family. Take care of your employees."

Walden noted that in a large corporation, authenticity penetrates the authority chain.

"When you give people the freedom to be honest about their whole lives, they are more likely to be honest in their work," he said.

Forhetz, in offering advice on making a positive impact in the community, said to "start something small." He related how Hal Donaldson, founder of Convoy of Hope, struggled in her personal life after his father was killed

and his mother was debilitated in a car wreck when he was young. As a teen, grasping at opportunities, Donaldson found himself at one point interviewing Mother Teresa.

She asked him, "What are you doing to help the poor and suffering?"

Donaldson said he was doing nothing, and she responded, "Everyone can do something. Just do the next kind thing that God puts in front of you."

Touched, Donaldson took all his \$300 in savings, bought groceries, and gave them away. That led to working with a handful of farmers and ultimately to founding Convoy of Hope, which has helped more than 3.1 million people to date.

Walden added, "Show up. There might be little opportunities, places you will see if and when you

look for them."

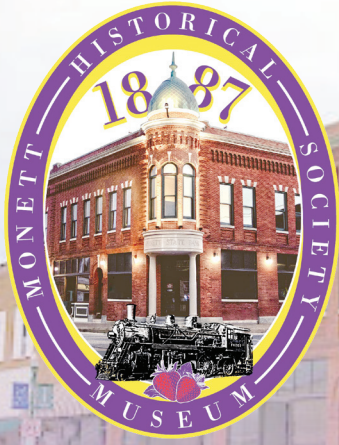
Asked what they would do if they knew at a younger age what they know now, Forhetz said, "Understand failure isn't fatal. It's OK to fail. You want to learn from it."

Walden added, "You don't have to have all the answers. Be willing to say no. You can go up or sideways. Don't be unwilling to change."

Schilly ended the evening with a quote from pastor Craig Groeschel, who said, "People want to follow a person who is real, not always right."

A reception preceded the program. Those attending had additional opportunities to chat with the speakers after the presentations. For the first time, a busload of middle school students from Aurora attended the summit.

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LOCAL

11th annual Monett Halloween costume contest winners announced



Murray Bishoff, Monett Halloween costume contest host, speaks with Yviana Heredia as Snow White in age 1 and under. Contributed photo



Murray Bishoff, Monett Halloween costume contest host, presents the age 4-5 group. Contributed photo



Murray Bishoff, Monett Halloween costume contest host, talks with Taylor Swift, an entrant in the ages 9-12 group. Contributed photooutlook.com



A late arrival to the Monett Halloween costume contest provided the cuteness as a strawberry. Contributed



Murray Bishoff, Monett Halloween costume contest host, presents the ages 13+ group. Contributed photo

More than two dozen contestants participated in the annual Monett Halloween costume contest, hosted for the 11th year by the Monett Lions Club. Serving as judges at the Monett Intermediate School cafeteria were Cassie Villandry, Lauren Weston, and Dorie Minton. The Lions provided cash prizes for the top three in seven categories, and candy for all participants. Murray Bishoff served as master of ceremonies. Taking top honors were Yviana Heredia as Snow White in age 1 and under; Yalitza Alvarado as a corpse bride in ages 2-3; Everleigh Crim as a snail in ages 4-5; Ethan Brite as Travis Kelse in ages 6-8; Yvalyn Valenciano as a Disney gorilla in ages 9-12; Yvette Valenciano as Maron from Dragonball Z in ages 13 and up; and a family group as the Dragonball Z characters for the group. Photos and results from the contest were not available at presstime for the November issue of Monett Monthly.

Council: Amazon right-of-way 'Seasons of the Heart' performance enjoyed

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

public Nov. 14. Potential candidates must visit City Hall, where they can pick up a packet from the city clerk.

The packets include the ordinances that have passed in October and November pertaining to the restructure.

It will also include a petition, the number of signatures needed, a notice to candidates for filing and the rules and requirements for filing. Candidates were able to file with the city beginning Dec. 9.

“What you’re seeing in front of you everyone is the last commission form of government in the state of Missouri, us three,” said Commissioner Darren Indovina. “And, what we’ve brought upon you as a city is a question, will you allow us and yourselves to change city government? Would you like to see a charter form of government in your town?”

Indovina said there will be many steps along the way for voters and potential commission members.

“Welcome to city government,” he said directly to attendees. “We’re all in this, in a way,

together.”

The council also addressed the role of city officials in the Monett Main Street program. When the program began, the city was very involved, holding two voting seats on the board of directors.

The ordinance passed at the November meeting retains the two seats, however, it changes them to non-voting positions.

The change is meant to give the city a voice and involvement without compromising the independence of the Main Street program by removing city power within the decision making processes.

The council made a right-of-way motion that would progress the recently announced addition of an Amazon facility in Monett, as well.

“This is a \$22 million dollar facility and would hire about 100 people,” Burke said.

Regular City Council Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. at the Monett School District Board Room, with video available on the city’s website the following day.

The multimedia performance of "Seasons of the Heart" was enjoyed by many area residents on Nov. 7-9 at the Monett Missouri Stake Center, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

This was its third year running and featured three musical artists, Scott Decker (singing "Like a Child, Don't Let Go"), Cathryn Burt (singing "Peace in Christ, Not Too Far From Here"), and Brent Christianson (singing "Savior Redeemer, Broken"). All three concluded with the Genri song, "Home."

Decker, of Joplin, grew up singing with his family, who sang, through the years, for a variety of church functions. He also sang while performing for the Neosho Community Theater. While attending Crowder College, Decker danced and sang with the show choir, where he met his wife, Missy. He also performed and sang in "Grease" and in "Melodrama" at Neosho Park.

Burt, of Granby, majored in vocal performance from



From left, Scott Decker, Cathryn Burt and Brent Christianson after singing the Genri song, "Home." Contributed photo

Missouri Southern and has taught choir at East Newton for the last 23 years. Music has been a lifelong passion for her.

Christianson is now in Idaho, however, he raised his family in Grand Junction, Colo. While there, he performed in "Fiddler on the Roof," "Sound of Music," "The King and I," "Music Man," "Shenandoah," "Howard Keel," and many others.

When thanked for coming from Idaho to perform in Seasons of the Heart, Christianson said, "I love

doing this kind of stuff."

Many thanks goes to the technical crew: Scott Westwood, of Carthage; Shawn Nugent, of Carthage; and Joseph Holmes, of Monett.

"Seasons of the Heart" presented such questions as "Where did we come from?" "What is courage?" "How do we hold onto hope?" "Where can we find peace?" and "Is there a God?"

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Q: What do you call an old snowman?

A: Water.



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Q: What did one toilet say to the other?

A: You look flushed.



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3	2	5	1	7	6
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Monett Ranks in Top 20% Statewide

Monett Schools is highlighting a major achievement this year, earning an 87.2% on the 2024–2025 Annual Performance Report (APR) from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This score places the district among the top 20% of school districts in Missouri, reaffirming Monett’s reputation as a district where students thrive and excellence is a shared goal across the community.

The Annual Performance Report measures how well districts prepare students for success by evaluating academic achievement, continuous improvement, attendance, and postsecondary readiness. Monett’s strong results reflect years of focused effort, collaboration, and a commitment to excellence across all grade levels.

District Highlights:

- On Track or Target in 3 of 4 academic areas (ELA, Math, and Social Studies)
- 99%+ participation across all tested subjects
- Exceptional Continuous Improvement at 98.3%
- 100% graduation rate, demonstrating sustained excellence in postsecondary readiness
- College & Career Readiness achievement, with Advanced Credit at 100% Target
- ELA and Math growth at the Target level, showing strong instructional impact

Monett Schools attributes its continued success to its core values, collaboration, strong culture, and future-ready growth, known collectively as The Monett Way. These principles guide the district’s mission to prepare students for the opportunities of tomorrow through innovative learning experiences and community partnerships.

A New Pathway for Teacher Growth

A district partnership with Evangel University is creating a pathway for Monett educators to earn a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction Leadership without leaving the district.

Beginning in Spring 2026, a cohort of 10 Monett teachers will have the opportunity to pursue an advanced degree through a district-based, hybrid program taught by Evangel faculty and Monett instructional leaders. The coursework will be closely connected to Monett’s goals, our classroom practices, and the priorities outlined in The Monett Way.

The partnership was designed to strengthen instructional leadership across the district and create a sustainable pathway for professional growth. By offering an affordable, accredited, and locally accessible master’s program, Monett Schools is helping teachers continue their learning while staying connected to the classrooms and students they serve. When teachers are supported in growing their expertise, students benefit from stronger instruction, more innovative classrooms, and highly qualified teachers who are committed to Monett.

This partnership represents an important step toward strengthening instructional excellence and creating a district where every educator has meaningful opportunities to grow and lead. It is one more way Monett Schools continues to ensure that every student learns from highly qualified, student-centered, and future-ready educators.

Advancing Through Language Growth

The Monett School District celebrated 75 students who graduated from the English Language Development (ELD) Program during a special ceremony held on Thursday, November 20, at the Monett Intermediate School cafeteria. The event, led by ELD Director Daphne Hensley and the district’s ELD teachers, brought together students, families, and staff from across the district for an afternoon filled with joy, pride, and community.

The celebration included students from all grade levels who have worked hard to reach English proficiency. Their success represents not only their perseverance, but also the strong support system provided by their families, teachers, and the Monett community. Light refreshments were served, and the cafeteria was filled with families from many backgrounds, each one adding to the uplifting and welcoming atmosphere of the event.

Two retired Monett ELD teachers, Brenda Shell and Latricia Davis, returned to celebrate the students’ accomplishments. Their presence served as a touching reminder of the lasting relationships and commitment that continue to shape the program.

The ELD Program plays a meaningful role in Monett Schools. In a district of roughly 2,350 students, Monett proudly supports 30 languages spoken among students. This diversity enriches classrooms, strengthens cultural understanding, and reflects the growing global connections within the Monett community. The district’s ELD team works daily to ensure students build strong academic English skills while honoring their home languages and cultural identities.

“Our students bring incredible strengths and perspectives to our classrooms,” said Daphne Hensley. “This celebration is about recognizing their hard work and honoring the families who support them. It is also a reflection of Monett’s commitment to creating a welcoming, inclusive learning environment for every child.”

Monett Schools remains dedicated to ensuring all students feel valued, supported, and prepared for future success. Friday’s celebration captured what makes the district special, a community united in pride, diversity, and shared achievement.



Aviation Team Lands at SRTC

Students at the Scott Regional Technology Center experienced a hands-on look at emergency response careers during a Mercy Life Line Air Medical Services demonstration on campus. The team’s pilot, aviation mechanic, nurses, and medics showed how aviation safety and medical care work together in real-world missions. The visit was especially meaningful as Aviation Mechanic Troy Peterson, a Miller High School graduate and Scott Tech alum from the Class of 1983, returned to speak with students. The district also recognized former Scott Tech Health Occupations student Tara Swearingen, for coordinating the event. The Monett Fire Department assisted with the helicopter’s safe landing, ensuring a safe and impactful learning experience.



The Cubbies | Celebrating Staff Who Embody The Monett Way

 <div>MECC Samantha Holt</div>	 <div>MES Jaime Obermann</div>	 <div>MIS Carmen Tharp</div>	 <div>MMS Amber Tinsley</div>	 <div>MHS Amanda Gautney</div>	 <div>SRTC Jason Smith</div>	
 <div>MECC Kristen Earnest</div>	 <div>MES Patty Armstrong</div>	 <div>MIS Carlos Hernandez</div>	 <div>MMS Kelly Kellner</div>	 <div>MHS Gerarda Barrientos</div>	 <div>SRTC Ron Lee</div>	 <div>District Jesus Ceceñas</div>

Board of Education Highlights

The Monett Schools Board of Education focused on student progress and continued improvement during its November meeting. Members began by taking part in the English Language Development celebration, congratulating each student who completed the program and thanking the staff who supported them along the way.

The board reviewed the district’s Annual Performance Report and discussed how the results will guide future priorities. Members also approved a new partnership with Evangel University that will provide master’s and doctoral opportunities for Monett educators.

Board members also shared what they learned at the MSBA Annual Conference and discussed how those insights can support their work moving forward. Their conversation centered on continuing to strengthen their role and support district goals.



Did you know?

Board members complete ongoing training each year to stay informed about state laws, safety updates, and student learning trends.

At Monett Schools, every decision is guided by our vision to prepare students for the future.

We are proud to grow learners, thinkers, and leaders, together with our community.



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