

2026 Cassville Progress



INSIDE:

Top 5 stories of the year in Agriculture, Business, Community, Education, Health and Tourism

A SPECIAL PUBLICATION OF
CASSVILLE Democrat

Carol Lansdown, center, salutes senior JROTC member Kayli Anderson as she accepts a U.S. Flag, the one used to demonstrate the 13 folds, on behalf of herself and her husband, Dale Lansdown, at the 37th Annual Veterans Day Celebration at Cassville High School on Nov. 11.

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PROGRESS - AGRICULTURE

Land-application, CAFOs concerns in ag news

Purdy farmer places in corn contest; Day campers help at garden

1. DNR finalizing language for amended land-application rule

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is one step closer to issuing new permits to companies that land-apply wastewater and food and meat-processing residuals to farmland across southwest Missouri and elsewhere in the state.

The land-application practice hit a speed bump for some companies after Missouri House and Senate Bill 2134/1956 was passed through an emergency clause in July 2024. The bill established legal requirements for a Nutrient Management Plan, regular soil-sampling, and content-sampling and mandated setback distances for open storage lagoons with a capacity of more than 2.5 million gallons.

While some companies with existing permits were allowed to continue operating under "enforcement discretion" from the DNR, companies applying for new permits, and those who have fallen from grace with the DNR for past violations, are waiting for new permit language to be perfected that would be consistent with the recent revisions in the Missouri Clean Water Law.

Language for the proposed amendment to rules for land-application of wastewater and processing waste residuals is open for public comment through Sept. 23. The language, when approved, will pave the way for permits to be issued to no-discharge operations: companies that do not discharge wastewater from a single established location (such as a municipal wastewater facility), but distribute wastewater or processing residuals across a diffuse area on multiple sites, typically by land-application.

According to DNR's Regulatory Impact Report (RIR), the department's proposed amendment to the rules includes revisions in language to provide clarity, and to provide consistency with the Missouri Clean Water Law (sections 644.016, 644.041, and 644.051, RSMo).

The DNR's report states that the land-application treatment methodology must provide a benefit to soils, vegetation or a specific agricultural commodity, without being detrimental to the environment and to livestock and human health.

The general public and those who wish to land apply industrial wastewater or industrial wastewater treatment residuals can both be affected by the changes in the rules.

According to the RIR, the proposed rule amendment potentially affects 117 facilities currently holding a Missouri State Operating Permit for land-application of industrial wastewater or industrial wastewater treatment residuals as a part of a treatment process. These 117 facilities consist of 89 facilities holding a general permit (for land-application at more than one site) and 28 facilities holding site-specific permits.

While industry representatives voiced concerns about increased transportation costs

with the proposed new requirements, the DNR did not include those additional costs in its RIR, because a couple of the companies (Bub's, Incorporated and Denali Water Solutions) source the majority of their waste materials from outside of Missouri.

According to a July 2023 DNR no-discharge list for land-application process wastes, Denali sourced materials from 99 locations — 66 from out of state. Only one of Bub's Incorporated's waste-residual sources is within Missouri.

According to the DNR's report, while industrial wastewater and wastewater treatment residuals can contain vital plant and soil nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, when nutrients are applied to fields in excess, the potential for nutrient runoff increases. The runoff, the report states, has the potential to enter Waters of the State and cause eutrophication, the process in which excess nutrients enter a waterbody and cause increased algae and plant growth. Eutrophic events include the potential for causing harmful algal blooms and cyanotoxins that can negatively impact water recreational activities, aquatic life and human health.

Eutrophication can affect the clarity of surface water, including lakes and rivers, which in turn can affect nearby property values. When beaches are closed due to eutrophication, closures can negatively impact the recreational opportunities that support the tourism industry, the Regulatory Impact Report states.

The presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in soil and drinking water has become a growing concern for residents across the nation, including many in southwest Missouri. However, the DNR is opting not to regulate the substances, "since PFAS are not included in the text of the law," states the impact report.

"As [PFAS] is a compound for which the regulations, safety thresholds, chemistry, and toxicity are still emerging, the department opted to defer PFAS regulations at this time, until the science and federal regulations are more thoroughly documented and established," the report states.

2. CAFO concerns mounting

Leah Heidlage is sounding the alarm about the increasing number of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) coming into southwest Missouri.

"I'm not against farming," said Heidlage, who raises cattle with her husband, Dennis Heidlage, on a fifth-generation family farm on the Sarcoxie Prairie, northwest of Pierce City in Newton County.

"I'm not against raising chickens, either," she said. "But, these large poultry CAFOs coming into the area are just putting money in the pockets of large corporations; they're not serving family farmers, and they're jeopardizing our natural resources."

Heidlage said there were five separate permit applications on file at the same time

with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recently to construct and operate new poultry CAFOs on properties within a mile or so of the Heidlage farm. The five applications included plans for the construction of 35 broiler houses, with a total capacity of over 1.5 million birds.

If the permits were approved, all of the poultry barns, Heidlage learned, would be constructed in an area just over two miles long, to the north and south of the junction of Highways W and J, west of Wentworth.

"That's too many chicken houses in one location," Heidlage said. "Just think how they will affect the water in our wells. I don't have anything against poultry farmers, but it seems like there should be limits on how many barns can be built in one area."

According to Heather Peters, chief of the Water Pollution Control Branch of the DNR, Missouri has no such restrictions.

"State CAFO law does not establish a maximum number of CAFOs in an area, nor does it establish setback or buffer distances between CAFOs," Peters said.

However, she said, "all CAFO permit applications are reviewed for compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, including buffer distances [and] setback distances [from public buildings, residences and drinking water sources], manure storage and all other relevant requirements."

Large poultry CAFOs are considered Class 1C operations, and, as such, neighbors within 3,000 feet of a proposed construction site must be notified by certified mail.

"Our farm was outside the range to receive a notification, but a neighbor who did receive the notice told us about the proposed CAFOs," Heidlage said. "I sort of panicked. I didn't know what to do, but I felt like I had to do something."

Peters said the DNR may also request Missouri Geological Survey evaluations as part of the review and considerations process for permit applications and associated neighbor notice.

"Our regulations require a geohydrological evaluation for new, expanding, or some modified earthen basins at a CAFO, but not for other types of CAFO facilities," Peters said. "However, the department can (and very often does) work with our geologists to ensure compliance with all applicable statutory and regulatory setback requirements, especially those associated with sensitive features like sinkholes and losing streams."

3. Purdy farmer runner-up in 2024 National Corn Yield Contest

Purdy Farmer Naaman Cullers earned a National Second Place award in the 2024 National Corn Growers Association National Corn Yield Contest with a yield of 364 bushels per acre.

"We congratulate Naaman on this outstanding achievement, which reflects a season



Melissa Hamilton, second from left, Barry County Community Garden manager, Master Gardener and volunteer, poses for a photo with YMCA Day Camp youth after they gave helping hands at the Garden over the summer.

of hard work and crop management skills," said Jamie Horton, DEKALB® brand manager. "We also appreciate these farmers for trusting DEKALB brand to help them attain their wins."

Cullers won with DEKALB DKC68-35RIB Brand Blend in Class I: Conventional Irrigated and is one of the top corn yield producers in the nation.

Farmers who planted DEKALB corn captured the most national awards (15 of 27) as well as 230 state-level awards, including 105 first-place yields. Of all DEKALB winners, 121 achieved yields of 300 or more bushels per acre.

Horton said DEKALB products provide the latest exclusive genetics from Bayer Crop Science's robust global breeding program and are supported by a strong portfolio of crop protection products and agronomic professionals who work with farmers throughout the growing season to help maximize performance.

For a complete list of winners and to learn more about maximizing yield and profit potential with DEKALB products, farmers can visit cropscience.bayer.us/brands/dekalb/hcga or contact their local DEKALB® Asgrow® dealer.

4. YMCA day campers wrap up summer with final visit to Barry County Community Garden

YMCA Day Camp youth wrapped up a summer of hands-on learning and community service with their final visit to the Barry County Community Garden on Aug. 4.

With dirty hands, bright smiles and 50 pounds of vegetables harvested, the campers spent the morning celebrating the hard work they had done over the past several weeks.

The garden, supported by the University of Missouri Extension and maintained by local volunteers, has served as a living classroom for children throughout the summer. Each week, on Mondays and Thursdays, campers arrived ready to dig into lessons about growing food, supporting pollinators and giving back to their community.

"The kids really love coming to the garden," said one YMCA counselor. "They learned how gardens work, where food actually comes from and how even

kids can make a difference."

The YMCA camp partnered with the Barry County Community Garden to give day campers a unique, hands-on learning opportunity. Under the guidance of volunteers, the campers helped plant, water, weed and harvest rows of vegetables and flowers. Along the way, they learned about composting, the importance of soil health and the vital role of pollinators like bees and butterflies.

The garden doesn't just benefit the campers. A large portion of the produce grown there is donated directly to the Cassville Pantry and the Senior Center in Cassville. The children were involved in that process too — picking vegetables each week.

"Knowing that the food they helped grow would go to someone else in need gave the kids a feeling of pride and accomplishment," a garden volunteer said. "They were proud of their hard work, and they should be. They came even during the hottest days in July and worked hard."

During their final morning at the garden, the children enjoyed a mix of fun and remembrance. They picked sunflowers, tomatoes, peppers and beans. As usual, they sampled garden-grown snacks. They even got to take home their own produce and some seeds to continue their learning journey.

During a round table discussion under the shade of the pavilion, one camper said, "I didn't know I would like it so much. I want to grow my own tomatoes now!"

Before leaving, the campers formed a circle to share their favorite memories. From watering rows of vegetables to watching butterflies land on flowers they had planted, the children remembered moments filled with joy, teamwork and discovery.

"The laughter and excitement they brought every week made the garden come alive and made every hot day worth it," a Barry County Community Garden press release said. "They're leaving the garden better than they found it and it left a lasting impression on them too!"

5. Agriculture education impacts Cassville's future this summer

Cassville's elementary students have enjoyed hands-on

lessons about agriculture during enrichment programming this summer.

The school partnered with Missouri Farmers Care's Agriculture Education on the Move (Ag Moves) to provide students with 10 foundational lessons on agriculture topics, teaching students that their food comes from farms and the products used in everyday life come from agriculture. These lessons also made a difference in the life of Ag Moves Educator, Macy Barrett, as she helped Cassville's future consumers make connections to their food, fuel, fibers and farmers today.

Heather Fletcher, program director of Ag Moves, expressed the value of agriculture education in elementary classrooms.

"By empowering young educators and inspiring students through hands-on agricultural learning, we're not just teaching the origins of food and the impact of agriculture on daily life — we're cultivating confidence, communication, mentorship and leadership that can help shape the future of our communities," Fletcher said. "Ag Moves is an investment in the future of our communities. We are thrilled with every opportunity to incorporate Ag Moves lessons into summer classes, and look forward to returning each year."

Cassville elementary students were among more than 4,300 Missouri students that participated in Ag Moves, a proactive, educational effort that brings passionate, trained educators into classrooms across Missouri to build agricultural literacy at elementary ages.

During the STEM-focused program, students learn about crops, livestock, soil and water conservation, nutrition and careers in agriculture through a curriculum which meets grade-level-appropriate state learning objectives in the areas of science, math, social studies and language arts.

During the Ag Moves lessons, students make soybean germination necklaces, corn plastic, butter, animal feed rations, soil profiles to make their learning interactive and fun. Students are exposed to real Missouri farm families and learn about their dedication, compassion, sacrifice, and work ethic on the farm. Ag Moves is provided at no cost to schools or enrichment programs by the Missouri Farmers Care Foundation

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Save big with local business!

Multiple businesses celebrate milestones

Fire district tax passes; Barry Electric building; Daycare issue resolved

1. 50 years in the mix

Fifty years after mixing his first load of concrete, Corles "Corky" Stehlik said the success of Barry County Ready Mix hasn't come from big corporate strategies or flashy equipment — it's come from grit, loyal customers and the ability to keep things running, even when the parts weren't perfect.

"I was born in Springfield then moved to Monett with my folks, and my dad was manager of the lumber up there," Stehlik said. "In 1958, he came down and started his own lumber yard. I was around there growing up, and of course, he had hopes of me following in his footsteps in the lumber business, but it was too complicated for me."

Stehlik said his interest pushed him toward another direction.

"I thought I wanted to be in the ready mix business," Stehlik said. "So, in 1975, I started a little company over at Exeter and was over there about six months, then I got a chance to buy this place [at 14th and Pressley in Cassville] and moved down here in November of 1975."

What eventually became his concrete operation had already been established in various hands.

"Well, two or three people owned it, but Kay Concrete, at the time, owned it out of Monett," Stehlik said. "We've been here ever since, through lots of recessions and lots of winters."

Stehlik said the ready-mix side fit him better than the lumber business.

"I liked trucks and liked moving parts, machinery, plants and stuff," he said. "And I knew all the contractors around through the lumber yard, and they were looking for another source for their concrete."

Stehlik recalled buying, hauling and reworking his first plant piece by piece, learning the business as he went.

"I knew nothing about concrete when I started this," Stehlik said. "But, I hired a guy that had worked here for two or three different owners that knew how to batch concrete."

His own role was sales, customer connections and finding work.

"I was out running the roads, finding work, selling; and we had small, old trucks, and just one thing led to another," Stehlik said. "We started out in a recession, and my competitor came to me and said, 'Hey, there's not enough business here for both of us, won't you just buy us out?' So, I talked to my good banker at First National Bank, Cherry Warren. [Through the recessions], we survived. We had a lot of help, and bankers were good to me, and we tried to do the best we could for our customers and make a good product."

Stehlik, at age 26, established Barry County Ready Mix in Exeter in July 1975, moving to Cassville in October and November of the same year. In the mid-1980s, the business expanded to Shell Knob, then expanded again to Eagle Rock in 1992.

In 1996, Barry County Ready Mix opened Jenkins Quarry, which it sold to Konya Mining Company in 2023. Today, the company still operates its Cassville, Shell Knob and Eagle Rock locations.

Over five decades, Barry County Ready Mix has played a part in numerous buildings, large and small, throughout the county. The company's portfolio includes Cassville, Exeter, Purdy and Southwest schools; commercial and retail developments like Cassville Walmart, Taco Bell, several Dollar General stores, Fastrup, Hudson Feed Mill and Verizon tower; municipal and community projects like sidewalks in the city of Cassville, the Barry County E9-1-1 building, Seligman City Park, Viola substation, Roaring River enhancements and various bridges; and institutional and recreational facilities, like Cassville Baptist Church, Barry Electric Cooperative, Mercy Hospital, Cassville Country Club, the Cassville Aquatic Center and Crowder Cassville.

One of the biggest jobs stands out — the George's plant near Butterfield.

"That one was a continuous pour that took 14 days," Stehlik said. "I didn't get much sleep, not for two weeks. But, I had a lot of good help."

Over the years, staffing

evolved with the times.

"It's a lot harder to get people," Stehlik said. "You know, there's a lot better jobs around now than when we first started."

Still, some employees have built their careers at Barry County Ready Mix.

"We've got some people that have been worth us 25 to 30 years," Stehlik said. "My previous bookkeeper and office manager, she was with me for 40 years of the 50, and now her daughter's working for me."

Demand has also swung with economic cycles.

"At some points, we did over double what we do now," Stehlik said. "And then that was at the peak, when everything was good."

Stehlik said he survived downturns by staying committed and adaptable.

"It could have been some of that, and the fact that I didn't know how to do anything else," he said.

Even after 50 years, Stehlik said he still comes to work with the same approach.

"Oh, I haven't thought much about [the future]," Stehlik said. "I just get up every day come to work."

2. Fire district tax proposal passes

Voters have approved a 1/2-cent sales tax for the Cassville Volunteer Fire Protection District, an election result Chief Derek Acheson said signified the direction residents want the District to take regarding its services.

The only issue on the ballot on Nov. 4, and only open to voters within the district, the measure received 203 votes (67%) in favor and 102 votes (33%) against. The 306 votes represented 7.45% of the 4,110 registered voters.

"With a two-to-one majority, that instills confidence in us," Acheson said. "We are grateful for the folks that turned out and voted. They told us the direction they ant us to go with emergency services, and we're grateful for that."

Acheson said the District will receive its first payment in July 2026, then will receive payments monthly or quarterly, totaling an estimated \$600,000 to \$700,000 annually.

Funds received in 2026 will likely go into a reserve in preparation for a full 2027 budget relying heavily on sales tax revenue. The District's current property tax is expected to be phased out over the next few years, Acheson said.

"The plan is to budget for 2027, and it's up to the board, but we hope to see the 2026 funds be a reserve and close any gaps," he said. "White Rock's fire district is in its second year of sales tax revenues, and they are phasing out their property tax completely. I think we will be in that same boat."

Acheson said plans for the new funds, which more than doubles the \$270,000 budget this year, will first go to facilities, then to staffing and personnel, then to equipment and apparatus.

"The first thing we're proposing to the board is a schedule for improvements we want to see and a timeline on facilities," he said. "We want to work at Station No. 1 first to get a classroom, offices and living quarters done. Then, we want to improve Station No. 2 with living quarters. The last thing would be a training facility, which we hope to build behind Station No. 1, but that location is to be determined."

The District currently has 18 volunteers, many of whom also work full-time in other emergency services. Later next year, Acheson hopes to propose hiring a full-time chief and a part-time deputy chief who would oversee maintenance and operations.

Acheson said the goal with the funding increase is to be fiscally responsible and aim for longevity.

"We're not trying to be the FDNY or anything, just trying to provide a good service," he said. "We will prioritize usability over anything flashy, because we hope for things to be functional and usable for long periods of time, and we hope the people see that effort."

3. Nickle's nods at 35th

Beginning in a small loft building on the Barry County Courthouse Square, Nickle's

Flooring in Cassville has ventured through four buildings and continued expanding its product offerings for 35 years.

Debra and Bruce Nickle, owners of the business, celebrated the 35th anniversary of opening on Friday and Saturday with an event culminating in a free barbecue meal. Specials on many products, Debra Nickle said, will continue through the end of July, and some through the end of summer.

Nickle's Flooring started in 1990 with a small loft office on the southeast corner of the square — selling just carpet — eventually making their way through two larger buildings on the west side of the square before building the current structure on Highway 112 in 2005.

The business started with Bruce, who was working for a flooring company in Flat River.

"He was the top salesman there," Debra said. "So, he thought, if I can do this, why can't I do the rest. He started working in the warehouse, learned how to operate a forklift and learned how to do installs. Bruce is an Army brat and lived all over the world, and when he was living in Hawaii and his father deployed to Vietnam, he moved back home to Cassville for his high school years."

As Bruce began growing, the business began changing. Debra joined in 2001, coming from a background in banking and retail, and set the goal of doubling sales.

"Since then, we've quadrupled sales," she said. "The flooring aspect has changed so much. We started with just carpet and sheet vinyl, and when I joined we expanded to hardwood and tile. Vinyl plank then kind of took over the flooring business, and we started building showers many years ago, all of which are built by our guys certified in waterproofing."

Debra said the business has followed national trends throughout its 35 years, lagging a bit behind the east and west coasts but ultimately seeing the same ups and downs in demand.

"When we're up, we're up, and when we're down, we're down," she said. "We're pretty consistent with the trends."

The biggest trend overall at Nickle's is growth and expanding offerings. Now, with the Nickles' son Jared operating Chief Construction Management, the business is a one-stop shop for everything from flooring to concrete, bathrooms to kitchens and asphalt to roofing.

"Jared was doing construction management-type stuff in St. Louis, and we were always getting questions here like who can do painting, roofing or windows," Debra said. "People trust us and want to know who we trust to do other things. Jared came on and opened communication with people he knew and some new people, and now we have a lot of partners. We have an asphalt partner, Generations Paving; we have a concrete guy, Millwood Roofing out of Joplin has been instrumental in storm repairs in Cassville; and we even have Scott Stephens to do septic. We've expanded to: You name it, we'll get it done. And it's funny, things happen like the other day where Jared sold some flooring and I sold a driveway."

As a general contractor, Chief Construction Management is able to facilitate just about any project, including things like privacy fences and decks, ground-work, interiors and more.

4. Barry Electric begins office expansion

Barry Electric Cooperative Breaks Ground on Office Expansion

Barry Electric Cooperative has announced the groundbreaking of a significant office expansion project, adding over 5,000 square feet to its headquarters.

The ceremony took place Oct. 14, marking a major milestone in the Cooperative's continued growth and commitment to serving its members.

The Board of Directors approved the expansion in July 2025 following extended and thorough deliberation, addressing both the need for additional office space and persistent roof problems that require replacement after multiple unsuccessful repairs.

"The board looked at several different options to solve the



Barry County Ready Mix has been involved in numerous concrete projects throughout the county, including schools, businesses, parks and sidewalks

space concerns of the cooperative," said Dr. David Cupps, board president. "In addition to the need for more space, the current roof is in sad shape and needs to be replaced. A roof replacement project was going to be very expensive, which led us to look at doing roof replacement and office expansion at the same time. This decision was not made lightly — it followed months of thoughtful discussion and planning."

5. Taba's Tiny Town stays put

A three-month special use permit saga has come to a close, with the more than 25 residents attending the July Cassville City Council meeting feeling vindicated for their efforts to obtain the permit for a daycare facility at the Masonic Lodge on Main Street.

At the August City Council meeting, the Cassville City Council approved a planning and zoning recommendation to issue the permit, largely because a sewage issue present the month prior — when it was denied — had been remedied.

Richard Asbill, Cassville city administrator, said the issue arose when the Lodge, zoned residential, rented its bottom floor to Taba's Tiny Town, a commercial establishment.

"When we have certain zoning and a new use in that zoned area, in this case a daycare, with the exception of rezoning, a special use permit allows a business to exist in that residential zone," he said. "There are six things

the planning and zoning committee looks at: the location and size; accessibility of the property; utilities and services, which is where the sewer issue came up; the location of the building and improvements to adjacent properties; adequacy of open space; and the general compatibility with adjacent properties because it's in a residential area."

5. Taba's Tiny Town stays put

Asbill said representatives from the Lodge attended the August planning and zoning meeting, held after more than 25 residents attended the July City Council meeting calling for the Council to reconsider its decision to deny the permit.

"The first round through planning and zoning, there were issues with the sewer, and all six of those standards have to be met," Asbill said. "That issue was not resolved at the time the Council reviewed it in July, which is why it was denied."

By the July City Council meeting, Lodge representatives had determined a sewage pipe was clogged by tree roots, and that the issue had been resolved. That

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8C



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PROGRESS - COMMUNITY

Shiveley retires as mayor of Cassville

Old jail property, Hall Theatre property sells; Youth start prayer group at park

1. A new era 'in there' — excerpts from the Publisher's View

A new era of leadership is coming to the city of Cassville.

For the first time since 2012, Bill Shiveley's name is not on the April ballot for Cassville mayor.

Preceding my 2014 arrival, Bill has served the city honorably and with great dedication, which is all anyone can ask of a public servant.

On of the big points of emphasis in the more than decade of Shiveley's service has been a term I had never heard before arriving in Cassville — I and I (inflow and infiltration). For many years, the city's sewer lines had been struggling, outdated and eroded, allowing runoff to enter the sewer system and forcing the city to process runoff through the treatment plant. At every meeting for years, Shiveley would ask what the I and I was, and in the last year, the city has completed a years-planned sewer project aimed at decreasing the figure.

While it may not be the most visible accomplishment — it is underground after all — the sewer project and Shiveley's persistence and success in limiting I and I is a great benefit to the city's operations.

Another thing I'll miss is a tick I'm not sure he's aware he has, or maybe he does. Anyone who talks to Shiveley and pays attention to words might catch his most-used phrase, "In there." Without doubt, he says the phrase at least a dozen times every city council meeting, typically at the end of a sentence.

As many council and board meetings I have attended in my career, none have been as consistent as Bill Shiveley, and I hope he's proud of his service to the city.

Bill, you did a good job "in there!"

2. Old jail sells for \$60K

Cody Stehlik, of Cassville, purchased the old jail property in a public auction on June 19 with a negotiated bid of \$60,000, which one county commissioner voted against.

The commission first requested bids at the end of March, opening sealed bids on May 26. Three bids were submitted that day. They included:

1. A \$1,000 bid from Debbie Kensing — Kensing and her husband, Mike Kensing, plan to open a domestic violence shelter for local women in the jail after renovations.

2. A \$100,000 bid from Cody Stehlik — Stehlik aimed to use the office and storage areas for his private business, and he was unsure about the use of the jail.

3. A \$75,000 bid from Donnie Stumpff — Stumpff aimed to clean up the property and possibly use the offices for his private business, also unsure of what to do with the jail property.

The bid notice required bidders to include with the sealed bid a cashier's check or money order for at least 5% of the total bid amount or \$1,000, whichever is greater, in earnest money. It also said the County "reserves the right to reject any or all bids and unless otherwise specified by the bidder, to accept any item in the bid."

Kensing's bid was the only

one that met the earnest money qualification, but because the amount was \$1,000, the commission deemed the bid too low and rejected it. Stehlik's and Stumpff's bids were also rejected, as they had not met the qualifications.

In the wake of no bids being accepted, the commission requested for bids again on June 11, with the opening for sealed bids scheduled for June 19.

This time, Stehlik was the lone bidder, offering \$55,000. County Clerk Joyce Ennis said after some negotiations, the commission and Stehlik settled on \$60,000. Northern Commissioner Gary Schad and Southern Commissioner Gene Robbins voted to accept the bid, and Presiding Commissioner Steve Blankenship voted to decline it.

"I wish we could have gotten more, but I feel OK with it," Robbins said. "I'm good with it simply for the reason we no longer have the liability of owning and managing the property. I also hope Cody can improve the area a little bit."

Blankenship said his dissenting vote was rooted in the value, having seen the bid drop \$40,000 from the original offer.

"I wanted to hold on for more money," he said. "I had a price I was sticking to, and I was just being stubborn."

Ennis and the commissioners said this bid process was a unique one, as the county typically sells surplus items that pale in comparison to the jail and administrative offices property, appraised at \$109,000.

Because of the result of the first round of bids, the commission opted to change the structure the second time. Instead of requiring earnest money in the sealed bid, the commission changed the language to allow the winning bidder to submit the earnest money by the end of the business day on which the bid was accepted.

Since the purchase, Stehlik auctioned the jail and offices properties separately, with the old jail going to J.D. Hunter, who is leasing the property to the Generations Project, and the offices going to a neighboring landowner.

3. The Show must go on

Cassville's gala musical production, The Show, marked its 32nd season this year, and when it debuted in 1992, Cassville residents Mary Beck and Trudy Nickle became two of its staunchest supporters.

"Mom came to every performance — Thursday, Saturday and Sunday — every year," said Greg Beck, the brainchild behind The Show, as well as its director and the band's drummer.

The Show's bass player, Bruce Nickle, who has been plucking strings for the band since 1993, said his mother, Trudy, attended every Sunday afternoon performance, every year.

Not a bad record for two women who lived well into their nineties.

Mary Beck will ever be remembered as the lady who, from 1957-2020, taught the art of dance to generations of students in southwest Missouri.

With a taste for jazz, Mary Beck's motto was, "If the music is good, you dance," a sentence she inscribed on a wall in her former dance studio in Neosho.

Beck's students loved her.

According to Greg Beck, his mother began taking dance lessons as a young girl in Joplin, where she and her mother moved after her father's death when she was 2 years old.

Around the time that Mary Beck was taking her first dance lessons, 13-year-old Edeltraud ("Trudy") Anna Verderber and her sister were fleeing the bombing of their homeland in the German-occupied Czech Republic, during World War II.

"Their mother sent them across the Czech border into Austria on bicycles to escape to safety," said Bruce Nickle.

In Austria, Trudy met a handsome young GI from Cassville named Doyle Nickle, who she married in 1948. Bruce was born a few years later.

After Doyle Nickle retired from the military in 1966, he and Trudy made their home in Cassville, on West Third Street, the same street where Mary Beck and her husband Bill (the love of her life) set up housekeeping after they married in 1949.

Greg Beck's mother, Mary, began teaching dance students in her home: 10 at a time, Beck said. In 1957, she purchased a dance studio in Neosho, where 80 students were enrolled.

"In no time at all, she had 120 students," Beck said.

Because a lot of Mary Beck's students were from Pierce City, Monett and Aurora, she opened the Mary Beck School of Dance in Monett in 1961.

"She planned to close the Neosho school after she opened the Monett school, but she had so many upset students that she ended up keeping both studios open for 15 years," Greg Beck said.

While Mary Beck taught dance, Trudy Nickle taught German for a year at Cassville High School.

"Mom had a teaching degree from a college in Austria, and German was her native tongue," Bruce Nickle said.

Nickle said his mother was a firm believer that if you were going to a foreign country, you needed to learn to speak and read the language, and to take a citizenship test, as she did after she arrived in the United States.

After her teaching stint, Trudy became a devoted homemaker and served as a long-time volunteer at Mercy Hospital in Cassville, where she put the workout equipment to good use.

"When I was young, we lived just a couple of blocks away from where Greg Beck's family lived," Bruce Nickle said, "But, because Greg was a lot older, we didn't hang out together much."

Greg Beck graduated from Cassville High School one year ahead of Bruce Nickle. Both boys had in common an insatiable love for music.

Nickle, who had a knack for playing any stringed instrument he could get his hands on, was impressed throughout school with Beck's musical abilities.

"Greg was always a top-notch drummer, and still is," Nickle said.

Nickle and Beck formed their own separate bands during high school and churned out rock tunes from the 1960s into the 1970s.

"We sort of competed for gigs," Nickle said.

In 1993, Nickle agreed to start hanging out more with his "much older" former neighbor, when Beck invited him to play in the band for his up-and-coming production, The Show, then preparing for its second season.

"I've regretted it ever since," Beck quipped. "Bruce is sort of a left-hand man."

Beck had the idea for The Show while he was part of a praise band at First Baptist Church in Cassville.

"I heard all of these fabulous guest vocalists, but, other than church, there was really nowhere else in town for them to perform," said Beck, who remembers, in particular, Cassville resident Kathy Henderson, who had a "Carole King" voice.

"I asked my wife Brenda, 'Why can't we plan a Cassville show, something to showcase all of this talent that we have in our area?' So that's what we did," said Beck, who had experience performing with a band based in Omaha.



Jon Horner, left, newly elected Cassville mayor, thanks Bill Shiveley, Mayor since 2012, for his service and guidance over the years. Horner said Shiveley convinced him to join the Barry County E9-1-1 Board, then later the Cassville City Council, jesting that it has been a long-running inside joke that if anyone wanted him to do something, they just had to have Shiveley ask him to do it. Listening to the tale, at right, is Alderwoman Taylor Weaver.



The Disciples of Jesus Bible study group met at the Cassville City Park over the summer, growing from 10 in attendance on the first day to more than 40 on the last.

The first Show featured a few Elvis numbers among its selection of 24 songs, and had four backup female and four backup male vocalists.

Over the years, core members of the band have grown from 4 musicians to 13.

In years past, some of Mary Beck's dance students participated in The Show, notably, "The California Raisins" and a group who danced The Charleston.

4. Hall Theatre property sells for \$3K; pocket park coming

On the east steps of the Historic Barry County Courthouse in July 2024, a piece of property on the square was sold.

The Hall Theatre lot, at the corner of Eighth and West Streets, sold in a public Trustee's Sale auction for \$3,000, purchased by the City of Cassville with bids from City Attorney Don Cupps.

Sheriff Danny Boyd performed the auction after reading the legal description of the property and sale information.

Cupps acted as the attorney for the debtor, requesting foreclosure on the property after Jerry James assigned his promissory note, in the amount of \$27,974.99, to the city of Cassville. Cupps further noted anyone who purchased the property would be required to pay unpaid property taxes totaling about \$12,000.

The Hall Theatre, which burned down in March 2022, was demolished in 2024. The city has about \$125,000 sunk into condemnation and demolition efforts.

The property also had more than \$340,000 owed in deeds, property taxes and civil judgments levied against it, all of which had priority over the city's stake.

Arvest Bank, with a \$160,000 promissory note, was at the top of the list. Cassville Mayor Jon Horner said the bank gave up its position, moving Jerry James to the top spot, which he assigned to the city.

The city of Cassville is fine-tuning plans for a new pocket park on the site of the former Hall Theater, working through design concepts, cost considerations and community feedback as the project moves toward its next phase.

A committee was formed in July to formulate a plan for the property, which the city obtained in a trustee's sale on July 31 for \$3,000.

The list of ideas for the property included a variety of suggestions, including: a food truck court, parking, a new city hall, a pavilion, a splash park, a garden area, a pocket park, a parking garage or a new commercial building the city would erect and potentially sell.

"As we got started talking,

we wanted to know what's going to be our physical investment ability, and then the next piece is what's going to enhance Cassville and the square area," Asbill said. "We really felt that we liked a public area, and that kind of turned into public park or community park focus."

"A splash park is a very, very expensive — a lot of people think that's a really simple thing but it's actually very expensive to operate," Asbill said. "We just went through those suggestions about what could we do without getting into a significant financial cost."

Asbill said the committee's direction led the city to pursue plans for a pocket park with some green space, a simple space for people to come in and rest, to eat lunch, stretch their legs, go get some ice cream or maybe lunch, and a little area for children to play but not necessarily play all day, Asbill said. Plans also include a smaller covered area.

5. Prayer in the park

Inspired by attending church camp this summer, six Cassville High School students brought the message home this summer via a weekly Bible study group at the Cassville City Park.

Taylor Yarnall, Tomi Blankenship, Taylor Kennedy, Audrey Kennedy, Jaren Stearns and Wyatt Hollingsworth led the Disciples of Jesus Bible study, which had more than 40 in attendance at its final session.

"We got back from church camp and wanted to bring those feelings we had there back to our community," Taylor Kennedy said. "We had this idea to all come together and grow our relationships with Jesus. We wanted people who didn't get to go to church camp to have that experience."

The group, all members of First Baptist Church, attended the camp at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar earlier in the summer.

"We didn't want to let that spirit die down and wanted to be the light here," Yarnall said.

Stearns said toward the end of the summer, a focus on discipleship spawned the Bible study group idea.

"It was our mission to uplift people and not make school feel like a prison," he said.

The first group session was at the end of June, with 10 in attendance. By the final session, the group had grown to more than 40, including some unexpected participants.

"We had kids come from Southwest, Exeter, East Newton and even one kid from Republic," Stearns said.

"We hung up and handed out fliers, and we had an Instagram page," Blankenship said.

Along with the youth participants the Disciples of Jesus attracted, they also brought in a

few adults, including two from a local recovery group.

"Some guys walked up and asked if they could join us," Taylor Kennedy said.

"That was really exciting because every time someone walked by, one of the guys would say, 'Come learn about Jesus with us,'" Hollingsworth said.

Bible study sessions lasted about an hour, typically including music, a devotional and prayer. Some sessions, however, lasted up to three or four hours when individuals were involved and asking questions.

"We did it at the park because we know a lot of people go there in the summer," Audrey Kennedy said. "There was another group having Bible studies there on Tuesdays and Thursdays called Pickle and Praise, and they played pickleball. We also played pickleball before the Bible study."

All six in the Disciples of Jesus group said the best part of the Bible study was watching it grow.

"It was amazing to see how many people showed up," Taylor Kennedy said.

"It was also great to see how we all grew closer to Christ together," Blankenship said.

"We go to see God's work, and how some people were getting one thing and others were getting something totally different," Yarnall said. "It kept us active through the summer and out of trouble, and it made everyone closer."

"It also brought us closer to our classmates," Audrey Kennedy said. "Some people you didn't think would come did come, and it was amazing to see that different side of them than what we see in school."

Feeding off their success, the Disciples of Jesus group aims to have more Bible study opportunities in the future.

"This went from an idea in a group chat to us all saying, 'I guess we'll all be there tomorrow,'" Hollingsworth said. "We just threw it together and hoped for the best."

"We hope in the future to have more devotionals and to invite more people," Taylor Kennedy said. "We want to double our numbers and also do it more days each week."

"We also want to get better music, because some week, we didn't have any," Yarnall said. "And, maybe we can do something like free pizza on the last day."

Ultimately, the Disciples of Jesus hopes to make an impact in the lives of member of the community.

"We hope it will impact their lives because of how much it impacted ours," Audrey Kennedy said.

More about the group may be found on Instagram at the tag, disciples_of_jesus9.

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PROGRESS - EDUCATION

Wild C building comes to fruition

Smart devices banned in schools; D.A.R.E. back in Cassville; Purdy Care to Learn growing

1. Wild C building gets green light

At the end of 2025, Cassville ag students had a new facility geared toward hands-on learning.

In April, the Cassville School Board approved the construction of a 100x40-foot metal building with an 80x20-foot lean-to at the Wild C Research Farm, a 62.5-acre property on 13th Street owned by the district.

Merlyn Johnson, Cassville superintendent, said the idea for the structure came from ag instructor Jordan Ellis.

"It started with Jordan's passion for bringing real-life farming opportunities to Cassville," Johnson said. "The Wild C Research Farm is a nice property we are not using outside of things like farming cattle, learning irrigation and building fences. The building conversation started about three years ago, but we needed to get the Performing Arts Center done first."

Johnson said Ellis presented renderings students helped create, which were presented to the board, and the building was added to the district's long-range capital projects list.

Bids were requested and reviewed, and RE Smith won the construction management contract with a base bid of \$331,000, plus \$69,000 for the lean-to and an additional \$10,000 for the soffit on the lean-to. The total project cost is \$409,900.

"The groundwork will start when school gets out, or even sooner," Johnson said. "We'll spend \$115,000 before July, and the rest will be spent from then to November, with the project anticipated to be completed at that time."

"RE Smith is using some local contractors, and they are not making much money on the project, as they wanted to keep our business for larger projects."

Johnson said the structure is a basic metal farm building, which will offer a classroom space and restrooms, allowing students to go directly from seated instruction to hands-on instruction. The classroom is roughly the same size as the current ag classroom at the high school.

"A lot of districts in the area are watching this because it will give kids the opportunity to do things they have not been able to do in a traditional classroom setting," Johnson said. "This also ties into our Portrait of a Graduate work, as we will be teaching skills like work ethics and problem solving."

Ellis said his inspiration behind the building proposal boiled down to basic opportunities.

"The inspiration for the wild C research farm was just the simple ability to give students more hands-on learning," he said. "The addition of the new building will allow a new learning environment for students to house live animals, to implement their research projects on-site, to get hands on training in large and small animal science, to study farm management and to learn budgeting of a farm."

2. Eyes up, devices down

All six superintendents of schools in Barry County say Missouri's new law banning cell phones during school hours reinforces efforts they have already made to limit distractions and improve engagement.

The ban, signed by Missouri Gov. Mike Kehoe in July, prohibits students from using cell phones during school hours except for emergencies, for students with disabilities or medical needs. The policy aims to reduce distractions, enhance learning, improve student mental health and promote safety via a reduction in cyberbullying.

Merlyn Johnson, superintendent of Cassville Schools, said the legislation is a welcome expansion of existing policies already in place.

"Our existing district-wide policy has long restricted cell phone use, and this new legislation strengthens our ability to enforce consistent expectations across all grade levels," Johnson said. "While our elementary and middle schools have generally maintained high compliance, the high school has presented greater challenges in enforcement due to most high school students having their own phones."

"This law supports what we're already working to prioritize: engagement, relationships and focus in the classroom," said Mark Drake, Monett superintendent. "At Monett, we believe learning should be distraction-free, and this law strengthens our ability to create environments where students can be fully present."

Three days into the new school year, Cassville High School Principal Tyler Willis delivered a report to the Cassville School Board on the effects of the new cell phone ban at the building, informing the group there have been more successes than challenges — and a handful of learning moments.

Willis said the change has been interesting, and the first few days saw no complaints from teachers with increased engagement.

"I've had teachers tell me they've had more eye contact in the past 24 hours than they have in the last three years," Willis said. "Kids are engaged in the lessons. Two kids also came up to Coach [Lance] Parnell unprompted and said they like the ban because kids are actually talking to each other more."

Cassville uses Yondr pouches — secure, lockable bags designed to create phone-free environments by allowing individuals to keep their phones with them while preventing use during designated times — for all students at the high school, which Willis said have been a strong tool in limiting device use.

"We've had only one incident, and that resulted in strict discipline because there was an intent to deceive," Willis said. "We've noticed some other kids doing the same kind of thing, but even if they do, they still have to work really hard to do it while in class. It's difficult."

Administrators have also

performed checks in certain classrooms, asking students to put their Yondr pouches on their desks to make sure phones are secured.

"We've also consulted teachers to see what they hear kids talking about and ways they may try to get away with something," said Jody Cavness, Cassville High School assistant principal. "We're also talking to other districts for strategies to counter any attempts they make."

3. D.A.R.E. returns to Cassville schools

After ceasing in 2020 due to COVID-19, the D.A.R.E. program is receiving a revival this year, courtesy of Zach Thompson, Cassville school resource officer.

Thompson's role goes far beyond law enforcement — it's about education, relationships and ensuring every student and staff member goes home safe.

"I've been raised here in Cassville my whole life," Thompson said. "My first year as the SRO was 2019-2020, which we obviously know that COVID kind of hit at that point in time. So, my first year was a wild one. I got told that we were going to be taking a two-week wellness break, and then we never came back to class."

This year, his responsibilities include running the sixth-grade D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program, which he said has evolved since he began teaching it.

"The D.A.R.E. program used to be about resisting drugs and alcohol," he said. "Now, it's about making smart and healthy decisions. We talk about bullying, cyberbullying, cyber awareness and just making good choices about friends and influences."

Prominent in the 1980s and 1990s, D.A.R.E. was founded in Los Angeles to prevent misuse of controlled substances, gang membership and violent behavior.

Thompson said in Cassville, the emphasis is shifting to a more rounded program addressing not only drugs and alcohol, but also decision-making and digital citizenship.

"There are still elements of the program about resisting drugs and alcohol, but we also talk a lot about safe choices, risk and consequences," he said. "We ask them to stop and think and use the D.A.R.E. decision-making model — define, assess, respond and evaluate — for any problem they may be encountering."

Thompson said discussions around peer pressure and bullying have been engaging, as well as learning steps to say "No."

"The first couple lessons, we discuss health effects of drugs and alcohol and how teens can be more dependent because their brains are still developing," he said. "Then, I've been working with the digital citizenship teacher on internet safety. The kids know a lot from her on that, so it's more of a review."

"On Red Ribbon Week Sept. 22-26, we talked more about prescription drugs, vapes and those types of things. And we talk about bullying. They already know how to access bullying

reports, but we talk about who are trusted adults to give them too, then some on peer pressure and decision-making."

Thompson administered the program to half of the sixth-grade class in the fall, and the other half will do the program in the spring. He said after the first session, he's confident the information is sticking.

"They can spout off the decision-making model pretty easily now," he said. "At the beginning, I let them ask me questions about being a cop and personal questions if they are school-appropriate, then I tell them they can ask three more questions at the end of the program if they go through the presentation well. I think that has helped keep their attention."

4. Co-teaching strengthens inclusion

Five years ago, the Cassville school district opted for a new special education approach, which combined with a change in office location is resulting in improved outcomes and parent participation in the program.

Cassville has 234 total K-12 students in the special education program, an increase of 12 over 2024. The figure represents 12.9% of the entire student body, just below state and national averages of about 13%.

Kendall Ellis, director of student services at Cassville schools, said the previous approach, the pull-out model, removed students from general classrooms and into a separate setting for education.

"While this model allowed for small-group or individualized instruction, it often limited students' exposure to grade-level curriculum and their participation in the general education environment," Ellis said.

The district's review of student progress data showed that students were not showing the expected academic growth under the previous model, prompting a shift to co-teaching.

"To address this, our district shifted to a co-teaching model, where general education and special education teachers work together within the same classroom," Ellis said. "This approach allows students with disabilities to access grade-level standards, receive specialized support in real time, and stay engaged with their peers — all of which lead to improved learning outcomes and inclusion."

Ellis said the district had already been using co-teaching at the high school level for several years, and data supported expanding the model across more classrooms.

"Research consistently shows that co-teaching increases student engagement, academic achievement, and social inclusion," she said. "By combining the expertise of both teachers — content knowledge from the general education teacher and specialized instructional strategies from the special education teacher — students receive a richer, more responsive learning experience."

Though Cassville strives to implement co-teaching wherever possible, Ellis said flexibility

remains key.

"While our district strives to implement co-teaching in as many classrooms as possible, we also recognize that every student's needs are unique," she said. "We utilize a variety of special education service models to ensure that each student receives the level of support most appropriate for their individual learning needs."

Ellis said this combination of inclusion and individualized instruction is what allows the district to best serve students at all levels.

"This flexible approach allows us to provide personalized instruction while maintaining our commitment to inclusive and effective educational practices," she said.

While serving students in the program, Ellis said the district is also continually emphasizing tools that may prevent the need for services for some;

"Cassville has placed a strong emphasis on early intervention, differentiated instruction, and collaborative supports within the general education setting, which help many students succeed without needing formal special education identification," she said.

Ellis said the district's data-based approach ensures that every student receives the right support at the right time.

"Consistent use of data-based decision making and tiered supports through Response to Intervention (RTI) ensures that only students who truly require specialized instruction are identified," she said. "This approach reflects a focus on providing the right support at the right time for each student."

As for whether some students might be overlooked, Ellis said the district's internal systems are strong but that earlier intervention could be improved through community partnerships.

"Cassville does not believe that students in kindergarten through twelfth grade are being overlooked for special education services," she said. "Our identification practices and data-based decision-making processes ensure that students who need specialized instruction are appropriately evaluated and supported."

Ellis said the district is working to strengthen outreach for younger children who may need help before starting school.

"We recognize a challenge in identifying children who may require early intervention services before they enter kindergarten," she said. "The district is actively working to strengthen partnerships with local agencies and early childhood programs to improve outreach and identification efforts for our youngest learners."

5. Small school, big impact

Purdy Care to Learn leaders say the district's chapter, now in its second year, has grown from an idea to a fully functional, district-wide safety net for students — expanding its space, services and impact.

Charity Rakoski, elementary

school counselor, said the program's biggest leap came when administrators dedicated a full classroom to the effort.

"We started with our idea of wanting to create a resource room that was on campus so we wouldn't have to go and get things to meet kids' needs," she said. "We have the best administrative support for our program. Many schools just have a closet, but our admin gave us an entire classroom, so we went from an empty classroom to a combined clothing closet, food pantry and hygiene closet — fully functional, up and running."

Along with the dedicated room, the district recently completed a major renovation of the nurse's office.

"We also now have a washer and dryer," said Lisa Essley, ELL teacher. "They paid to remodel the nurse's office and offer more services for our kids with a shower, washer and dryer. It's really nice. That was probably our biggest project that we've done."

Rakoski said services continue to grow beyond the daily needs met on campus.

"We've expanded our backpack food bag program, and we have the opportunity coming up where we are going to be providing meals for those families over Christmas break that will sustain them the whole Christmas break, plus a holiday meal."

Amy Harkey, High school FACS teacher, said immediate access to the room helped a student whose family was facing hardship.

"On the high school side, we have students whose families have been impacted by a family member being deported," she said. "This student is a member of a very proud family with many siblings. I took that student down to the Care to Learn room, and I gave her a box, and I said, 'I want you to get food for your family.'"

Harkey said the student, who routinely cooks for the large family, initially hesitated, asking only for basic items.

"[The student] wouldn't take anything extra, and seeing that initial stress of the unknown, I told [the student], 'We'll go down here daily if we need to, and you get what you need for your family,'" she said. "That's big because to be able to just take her and for her to know that's there — it wasn't embarrassing."

She said similar moments happen with younger students as well.

"One student needed a new pair of shoes, and she saw all the new shoes that we have and put them on, and she was just like, 'I love these,'" Harkey said. "Just to see that, especially when we're talking about kids that probably get a lot of hand-me-downs, to get something new and that they like is big."

District Nurse Sarai Salazar said having the washer, dryer and shower has changed what she can provide.

"It has impact, a big one in our school," she said. "Just having a washer and dryer, we can

CONTINUE ON PAGE 9C

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PROGRESS - HEALTH

In-home provider saves woman's life

Power of Pink celebrates 15 years, Pantry provides nutrition

1. In-home care provider saves Wheaton woman

Patricia Busch, of Wheaton, always walks with God, but she was happy on July 15 to walk with someone in her life who saved it.

Busch, 75, utilizes Integrity Home Care and Hospice's services, welcoming Julie Phillips, APC (advanced personal care), of Monett into her home three times a week. Last Tuesday, Phillips was able to intervene in a situation that could have turned fatal.

"I was eating a chicken wrap with apple in it," Busch said. "The apple pieces were not that big, but I didn't get one chewed up well, and I started choking. Julie came over to my chair, grabbed my arm and lifted me up. I was wheezing and could not breathe, and she did the Heimlich maneuver and a tiny piece of apple came flying out."

"It was lodged in my windpipe, and if Julie wasn't here, I don't know what would have happened."

Busch shouldered some of the blame for the incident, saying she should have been sitting up straighter when eating, and Phillips said after the Heimlich maneuver worked, she apologized for not cutting up the apple a bit smaller.

"I saw Patricia was holding her throat and hitting her chest, and she couldn't breathe or talk and was leaning back in her chair not able to get up," Phillips said. "I helped her up and got her some water to try to help it go down, but that did not work, so that's when I did the Heimlich. Being trained on it, I was just like, 'I have to do this.'"

Phillips said it was the first time she'd used the maneuver on another person while they were actively choking, but the intensity of the situation did not fluster her.

"It just happened," she said. "Instincts took over. We tried everything before doing the Heimlich, and the best thing to do in those situations is to try not to panic."

Phillips has been an in-home care provider for five years, get-

ting into the industry by chance after completing dental assistant school.

"I started applying for jobs, and this was the first one that called," she said. "CPR training is required, as well as other life-saving measures training like the Heimlich maneuver. But, I've always had this training anyways."

This was not Busch's first near-fatal experience, as she said another caregiver saved her life in Idaho many years ago after she had gone into a diabetic coma. Busch said she was grateful to Phillips for taking action, and grateful to God she was there to be able to help.

"There are no words to describe how much I appreciate Julie," Busch said. "I've been in situations where people just watch or freeze up, even if they are trained. I'm thankful she could do it, and that it was successful."

"I'm so mighty thankful if I had \$1 million, I would give it to her."

"And I wouldn't have taken it," Phillips said.

2. Power of Pink gives 4 women support, love, \$12K

Power of Pink celebrated its 15th year of service to women diagnosed to breast cancer by raising \$49,577.88 to help support the four nominated ladies of 2025.

Janice McCracken, Power of Pink founder and organizer, said with the addition of the four ladies from this year, the organization has helped 58 women in total, and raised \$464,843.40.

"Wow," she said. "Thank you, Jesus, for giving me the vision for this, and the ability to make it happen. Here we are, completing 15 years and being able to help that many women. I'm thankful."

McCracken is also thankful to every person who has supported this foundation over the years.

"I don't do it — the community does it," she said. "We put it out there, and the people have made it what it is today."

People can support Power



Julie Phillips, left, of Monett, saved the life of Patricia Busch, of Wheaton, by performing the Heimlich maneuver on her as she was choking on a piece of apple. Phillips is an APC for Integrity Home Care and Hospice and assists Busch a three days a week.

of Pink by donating, as well as by registering and attending the annual dinner, auction and walk, which are always held the weekend of Mother's Day.

McCracken said she has learned a lot over the years through the women and families Power of Pink has helped.

"Never lose faith in God; he can do more than we can even think of," she said. "Never take your loved ones for granted. They can be here one day and gone the next."

"Life is precious, and our loved ones are precious."

McCracken said she is happy to offer an avenue that allows people to help others.

"Things can happen in a small community," she said. "All you have to do is reach out. A lot of people want to help, and they need an avenue to do that — Power of Pink is that avenue."

Going back to year one, 2010, there were two women who got \$1,000 each.

"Now, I am writing \$10,000 checks almost every year, rais-

ing almost \$50,000 each year," McCracken said. "These women are in a fight for their lives, and we can help them this way."

"They can use this money for whatever they want, to help with bills or medical expenses, or to take a vacation."

Apart from helping women, breast cancer education and awareness is equally important.

"I want to encourage people to get those mammograms, no matter what age," McCracken said. "We have ladies that are younger and younger every year."

3. Feeding the hungry

Cassville Pantry director, Janet Mills, she's never seen days like this.

"People are experiencing increased anxiety regarding food insecurity, because they are facing so many unknowns, particularly with the holidays coming up," she said. "During Thanksgiving and Christmas, people like to be able to provide special meals — beyond the basics — but this year, they're struggling to access even the basics."

The Cassville Pantry provides supplemental food resources to families who are struggling. About 40% of patrons are on fixed incomes: either retirees or disabled, Mills said.

Mills said she was bracing for an increased volume of patrons going into November, so the number of people she's seeing is not unexpected.

"Our volume of requests is up maybe 30-35% over our normal volume, on a daily basis," she said. "For many of those patrons, it's the first time they've asked for food assistance. Many times, it's the last thing people want to do — to ask for help — but it's an important first step. I want to let them know they're not going to be judged for asking and accepting help."

Mills said she and Pantry volunteers are buckled in to serve as best they can during this time of increased volume.

"We're just going along for the ride," she said. "As long as we have food, we'll give it away."

Mills said she refuses to give in to despair, even though there are times she isn't sure where the Pantry's provisions will come from.

"We thrive on hope, and refuse to give in to fear," she said. "We do what we can do."

Contributing even in a small way, like providing a meal, can have a big impact on people, Mills said.

"When you're hungry, you feel disabled from productivity," she said. "My goal, as an agent of Christ, is to help bring people out of despair, show them they're not alone, that they're not abandoned, and to show them the strength they have."

Mills said that Cassville is a community with a big heart, and residents are helping with that ministry.

"We've had a lot of businesses and individuals stepping forward to contribute in response to news about upcoming food shortages," Mills said. "That's why God blesses this outreach, because we care for the people who are hungry. He works on hearts. That's the reason I carry on, because I know there will be provision."

That provision, Mills said, is something she's witnessed numerous times during her 23 years of serving the community.

The Cassville Pantry, located at 798 W. 10th Street, in Cassville, is open to Barry County residents Monday to Thursday, from 9-11:15 a.m., and Thursday, from 3:15-5 p.m.

Half of the proceeds from the Barry County Bake Off & Dessert Benefit Auction, hosted by the Troutman Foundation, will benefit the Cassville Pantry. The other half will benefit The Generations Project, a new Cassville-based non-profit formed to also provide food and other resources to residents in need.

The benefit dessert auction will begin at 5 p.m. at the Crowder Community Center at 4020 N. Main Street, in Cassville. The Rib Steakhouse, a sponsor of the event, will provide a light meal, for \$5 each or freewill contribution. Live music will be provided by keyboard/vocalist Cindy Edwards, of Springfield. Guest speaker Kaitlyn McConnell, publisher of digital magazine Ozarks Alive, will talk about the history of pie suppers in the Ozarks, as well as the makings of her own "pie book," a labor of love consisting of 48 vintage Ozarks pie recipes, as well as the stories of a few Ozarks pie-makers. Cassville auctioneer Donnie Stumpff will begin auctioning pies, cakes and other donated auction items beginning around 6 p.m.

To submit an entry for "Best in Show" in Pie and Cake categories, or to donate desserts aside from the contest, people may visit the event's page on the Cassville Democrat's Facebook page for rules.

To learn more about the Cassville Pantry, people may call 417-846-7871.

4. Share a Heart benefits families

For 31 days, through the end of February, 100% of Share a Heart proceeds supported families of seriously ill and injured children supported by Ronald McDonald House. To recognize the impact of the Houses on their community members, more than 40 mayors — including Cassville Mayor Jon Homer — in the participating region were asked to support the campaign by proclaiming February 9-15 "Ronald McDonald House Week" in their

towns. McDonald's of Cassville participated in the Share a Heart Campaign.

It's hard to imagine receiving the devastating news of a child's serious illness or injury. The Ronald McDonald House was built on the simple idea that nothing else should matter when a family is focused on the health of their child.

Families stay together, near the hospital, and are fully supported during the most difficult times of their lives. Worries about where to sleep and eat disappear and a huge financial burden is lifted. On-site staff is available 24/7.

On any given night, up to 24 families are staying at Springfield's two Ronald McDonald Houses, most traveling far from home for medical treatment. The Ronald McDonald House near Cox South Hospital has 14 bedrooms and has welcomed families for over 37 years, and the 10-bedroom Ronald McDonald House at Mercy Kids has helped families for 13 years.

More than 17,400 families have benefited from Springfield's Ronald McDonald Houses, including 882 Barry County families, 207 of which are residents of Cassville. Profiles of families that stayed at the Ronald McDonald House in the past year will be displayed at the local McDonald's Restaurants, including Cassville's, owned and operated by Daphne Simpson.

The Verde family is one of many from Cassville that has utilized the Ronald McDonald House.

Elizabeth Rose was born in November of 2023, she was diagnosed with Dandy-Walker malformation and hydrocephalus and needed life-saving medical intervention. When she was born, she was taken straight to the NICU, where the doctors and nurses were wonderful in caring for her.

Elizabeth was on and off life support, battling seizures, and required multiple medications. With so much uncertainty surrounding how long she would need major medical care, the NICU team helped get the Verde family set up at the Ronald McDonald House.

"The NICU nurses and doctors were absolutely wonderful," the family's testimony said. "We ended up staying for almost two months, including all three holidays. Our family is so thankful to have had the Ronald McDonald House as our home away from home. It helped us celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's, all while never having to leave our sweet baby alone-providing for our every need. During such hard and uncertain times, they created comfort, kindness, and joyful spaces for our children."

"Our family will never forget what the Ronald McDonald House did for us, and we will forever be thankful"

Another are family benefiting from the Ronald McDonald House is the Reece family, of Rocky Comfort.

Jindy Reece's son, Wyatt, was in an accident that left him on life support for eight days, resulted in a below-the-knee amputation and caused multiple fractures in his leg and back.

"The first three days, we stayed at the hospital in a wait-

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PROGRESS - TOURISM

Dye-tracing findings presented

WOW completes 28th year; Projects at park detailed; Opening Day draws 2,499

1. Dye-tracing scientists present findings

A five-year project to delineate Roaring River Spring's recharge area is complete.

Ben Miller, hydrologist and Cave Research Foundation (CRF) volunteer, was at the Emory Melton Inn and Conference Center in Roaring River State Park on April 18, where he presented information about the study, which he and co-CRF volunteer, Robert "Bob" Lerch completed in late 2023.

"This was by far the largest dye-tracing project I've worked on," Miller said.

Miller, of Nashville, Tenn., and Lerch, of Columbia, made periodic trips to Barry County over a five-year period to inject non-toxic, fluorescent dyes into 43 sites within an ever-expanding circle around Roaring River Spring.

Miller said he and Lerch began their dye-tracing project in 2018 in partnership with Missouri State Parks and with the help of Roaring River State Park personnel. The study was funded by a grant from the Cave Research Foundation, a non-profit organization "dedicated to facilitating research, management and interpretation of caves and karst resources," as well as "to form partnerships to study, protect and preserve those resources" for their long-term conservation.

Miller said Roaring River Valley and the spring that feeds the river are unique among karst features, and are worthy of protection.

A native of Springfield, Miller is well-versed in the karst hydrogeology of the Ozarks, which allows water to travel freely through what he calls a vast "underground plumbing system," characterized by sinkholes, caves, springs, losing streams and blind valleys.

"The results of our study show that Roaring River Spring draws water from a 47.34-square-mile area, with the farthest point located at



Linda Hahn poses with Brittney Alsop and her six children. The Alsups were one of two families who received this year's Eric Lee Hahn Scholarship, which provides tuition and campsites for WOW School at Roaring River State Park.

the headwaters of Shoal Creek [west of Exeter along State Hwy. 76/86]," Miller said.

That point is some 15 miles from Roaring River Spring. (A March 5 article in the Cassville Democrat erroneously reported that the furthest point was near Wheaton, some 25 miles from the spring.)

For the deepest explored spring in Missouri (472 feet and counting), the breadth of its recharge area is not unexpected, Miller said.

"Having knowledge of the size and area of the spring's recharge area can help landowners plan for the best use of their land," he said.

Miller and Lerch's approach to the dye-tracing project was systematic.

Four or five sites at a time were chosen for injection with different colored dyes. From those points, in theory, the dyes would make their way through underground waterways and show up in Roaring River Spring, where teabag-sized, crushed-charcoal packets were in place to absorb them. The charcoal receptors were then sent to labs to determine whether traces of the dyes existed and what colors, which in turn determined their points of origin. If dyes were detected, Miller and Lerch scouted out new injection sites beyond the

first sites and farther away from the spring.

Miller gives credit to the Missouri Geological Survey for donating its resources for most of the lab analysis required.

Roaring River Valley's unique karst characteristics, said Miller, are due to the valley's location along the Eureka Springs Escarpment, the jagged division of the younger and taller Springfield Plateau (upon which Washburn, Cassville and northern Barry County sit), from the older and settled Salem Plateau to the east. According to Miller, the abrupt drop to the valley floor — actually part of the Salem Plateau — is common along the Eureka Springs Escarpment.

"It's an area worth protecting," he said.

2. WOW completes 28th season of outdoor classes

Wonders of Wildlife (WOW) National Outdoor Recreation and Conservation School finished up its 28th annual session of outdoor classes at Roaring River State Park over the weekend.

Even though the classes are held at Roaring River, turns out, many residents of Barry County are unaware of the local outdoor educational opportunity available in their backyard. It's



Cave Research Foundation volunteers, Ben Miller and Bob Lerch, watch non-toxic dye disseminate into a waterway in Barry County. The dye-injection was part of a five-year dye-tracing study to determine the extent of Roaring River Spring's recharge area.

not too late to learn, though.

WOW School offers a packed line-up of outdoor classes to families. According to WOW's mission statement, each class will include outdoor skills, plus a conservation, safety and ethics component. Classes include fare such as beginning fly-fishing, archery, kayaking, backpack cooking, dutch oven cooking, paddle boarding, Missouri rocks and minerals, plein air watercolor art, amateur radio and many, many more.

Next year's WOW School will be held Oct. 9-11, 2026.

"If you'd like to attend the school next year, mark your calendars for Aug. 15," said Misty Mitchell, director of Conservation Programs and Attractions for the Johnny Morris Foundation, which includes the WOW School.

Aug. 15 is the date when online registration will open for next year's classes, Mitchell said, and prospective students need to be ready to seize the moment.

"Since space in classes is limited, the registration event is very competitive," Mitchell said. "We usually receive 75% of our registrants during the first day of registration."

The registration cost is \$70 per student.

That price, Mitchell said, includes six different outdoor classes over Friday, Saturday and Sunday, a fish-fry dinner on Saturday night and a T-shirt. Silent auctions and live auctions are also held.

WOW participants are responsible for their own overnight accommodations and food, aside from the Saturday night meal.

"We had 180 participants in this year's WOW School," Mitchell said. "That number is typical."

According to Mitchell, WOW School students this year were from 11 states. Of the 180 participants, 28% of the students were new attendees, and 30% of the students were under the age of 18.

"We're excited to see the large number of younger students," Mitchell said. "It means we're seeing the next generation of conservationists coming onboard."

WOW School offers a Kids Camp on Saturdays for children ages 5-8. The camp includes age-appropriate outdoor activities for that age group.

"Kids aged 9 and above can attend classes with their

parents," Mitchell said. "We want parents of younger children to have the opportunity to learn skills on their own, while their children are in Kids Camp. Then, when the kids get older and age out of Kids Camp, the parents can help instruct them in the adult classes."

Scholarship opportunities are available for families who might struggle to swing the registration fees for WOW School.

The Eric Lee Hahn Scholarship — established by Gordon and Linda Hahn, of Charlottesville, Va., in memory of their son, Eric Hahn — covers the cost of tuition for a family of four, plus two nights of camping at Roaring River. This year, two separate families were awarded the Eric Lee Hahn Scholarship.

Gordon and Linda Hahn participated in this year's WOW School to learn firsthand what the Eric Lee Hahn Scholarship provides for families, as well as to remember their son on the anniversary of his death.

"I feel close to Eric at the spring," Linda Hahn said.

Hahn lost his life while exploring Roaring River Spring as a member of the KISS

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9C



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PROGRESS

Business: Daycare in Cassville staying at Pythagoras Lodge

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3C

point was made at the August planning and zoning meeting, satisfying that standard, and other questions about square footage, restrooms and staffing were all answered.

make a recommendation unless all six standards are met, and once they were able to verify the standards were met, the issue was resolved," Asbill said.

A neighborhood resident who works from home also

inquired about the noise, and a discussion about the impact on property values was also part of the consideration.

"We made calls to other property owners in the neighborhood, and there were no con-

cerns," Asbill said. "Two or three did not reply or had no opinion, and with no concerns, planning and zoning pushes the permit through."

Tabatha Madison, owner of Taba's Tiny Town, said she appre-

ciated the community's support in keeping the daycare in the Lodge.

"I am extremely grateful for the support of the community, City Council and zoning board for recognizing the importance

of childcare for families in this area," Madison said. "The Masonic Lodge is a wonderful example of giving back to our community, and I'm thankful that together we were able to make a difference. God is good!"

Health: Pink Lady battling cancer shares story, advice for others

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6C

ing room," Jindy Reece said. "We had our other two children with us, along with a host of family and friends. A social worker stepped out and asked if we had thought about staying at the Ronald McDonald House. That was honestly the last thing on our minds. Our social worker helped us apply, and it took us less than an hour to be approved."

"When we walked into the Ronald McDonald House, we were met with smiling faces. Our children were given gifts, and we were given a change of clothes and new socks. It may seem small, but we hadn't planned any of this. We didn't have time to pack. When your child could exit this world at any given moment, you aren't going to travel anywhere to get extra clothes."

Reece said the family was shown to their room, and it was extremely comfortable.

"We were given extra blankets, pillows and toiletries," she said. "We could actually shower! The next week, we were pro-

vided with an amazing dinner every night, along with snacks for our kiddos. In between visiting hours, our younger children could play on the playground or watch movies."

Reece said the family woke up Easter morning preparing for yet another surgery for Wyatt, not even remembering that it was, in fact, Easter Sunday.

"When we opened the door to leave, we came face to face with two Easter baskets full of candy, games and bunny rabbits for our two children," Reece said. "They wouldn't have had an Easter if it had not been for the Ronald McDonald House. We will forever be grateful to every donor who has helped our family and families like ours. The darkest times of your life are spent there in those hallways. RMH is like a shining light. Thank you so much, Ronald McDonald House, for making the worst days of our lives so much easier."

The Share a Heart Campaign raised over \$116,000 in 2025,

helping support 775 families through the Ronald McDonald House program. Donations from the private sector provide 100% of the Ronald McDonald House operating expenses, which exceed \$1 million annually.

5. Family history, genetic testing important factors

Brenda Broughton — a 67-year-old mom of three, grandmother to nine and great grandmother to eight — has spent the last 22 months fighting to be healthy.

"Out of my 16 female cousins, 12 of them have been diagnosed with cancer," Broughton said. "Nine of them had breast cancer. It just never crossed my mind that it would happen to me."

Broughton said she even purchased cancer insurance for her husband, but not herself.

"My mom had colon cancer, my dad had bladder cancer and

my sister had breast cancer," she said. "I just didn't think it would happen to me, but I should have."

Broughton has been getting regular mammograms since she turned 55.

"I found the knot in my breast myself," she said. "I went in and had a mammogram and biopsy on the same day. Within three days I knew I had Infiltrating Ductal Carcinoma."

"When I first felt it, my first thought was to ignore it. I thought it would just go away. It took me two or three days to finally decide to make an appointment."

Broughton's doctor wanted to see her previous mammogram films, so she collected those from her former doctor in Oklahoma.

"I noticed an itchy spot," Broughton said. "I was scratching this spot over and over for a week, then I felt the knot in my right breast."

On Jan. 18, 2024, Broughton had a bi-lateral mastectomy with reconstruction.

"I decided to have both breasts removed, and I figured since they were already in there, they could do the reconstruction too," she said. "I didn't want to wait, I just wanted to get over it."

Less than a month later, on Valentine's Day 2024, Broughton had to go back in to have the reconstruction removed.

"I got an infection," she said. "They had to get it under control. They told me after I got the infection that it is better to wait for reconstruction until after you heal from the mastectomy. I don't know why no one told me that before."

Broughton was on antibiotics for a full year and even had a hospital stay in March 2024 for IV antibiotics.

"Because of the infection, I wasn't able to have chemotherapy or radiation," she said. "It could have been life threatening since chemo is so hard on the body. And, because I had the infection for so long, I timed out. Apparently, there is a time limit after diagnosis to do chemo."

Broughton goes to have her blood tested every three months to check for cancer cells in her body.

"There was no cancer spread to my lymph nodes," she said. "It was as scary, as it could be when they told me I couldn't have chemo, I thought it was a death sentence. The only preventative care I have is the blood tests. We think they got it all, and we pray every day that they did."

Broughton said when she broke the news to her family, they were shocked too.

"My daughters, Melissa (50) and Kylie (46) went to have a mammogram done immediately," she said. "Even my granddaughters who are in their 20s got mammograms."

"My husband has been wonderful, and my son, Tug, and my daughter in-law, Angie, moved

down here from Oklahoma to help take care of me. They stayed with me for months."

Broughton and her husband just celebrated their 51st wedding anniversary.

"We are from Oklahoma, but we live at Roaring River," she said. "My husband works in the office, and we are campsite hosts."

Between January 2024 and January 2025 Broughton had five surgeries.

"Right now, another reconstruction surgery is still up in the air, but I'm pretty sure I will get it," she said. "I have so much scar tissue from all the surgeries, so I am trying to make sure my body has a chance to heal before I jump back into a reconstructive surgery. Maybe this winter."

Broughton said the advice she has for women is to get checked and stay on top of their testing.

"I got the genetic testing done, and I am a carrier," she said. "It is interesting, my son has a higher chance of getting breast cancer from the genes I carry than my daughters do."

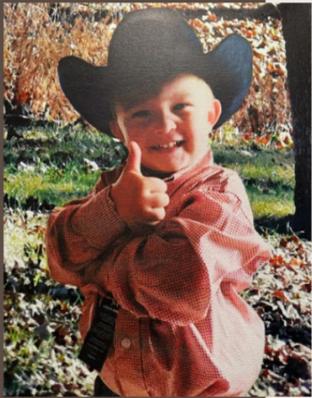
"I was the first in the family to do the genetic testing, and now a bunch of them have, which is good, especially for their kids."

Broughton was one of the Power of Pink "Pink Ladies" for 2025.

"Power of Pink was wonderful and is a wonderful organization," she said. "Janice [McCracken] is amazing. She started this up and turned it into something so great. Her whole family is involved and it is a lot of work, but she always gets it done."

The 2025 Pink Ladies' stories will be printed each week in the month of October in the Cassville Democrat, and 10 percent of all advertising in the month of October will be donated to the Power of Pink.

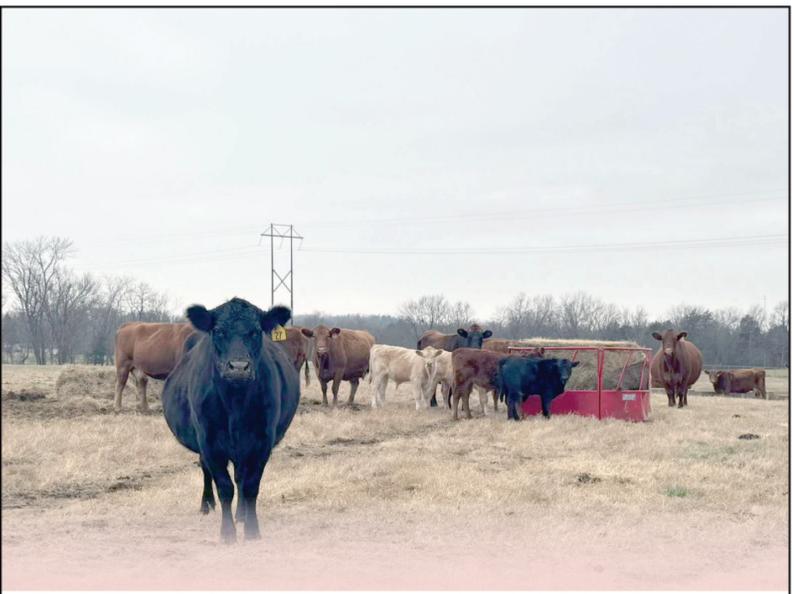
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PROGRESS

Education: Care to Learn has addressed unusual challenges

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5C

actually take care of our kids. It is awesome.”

Harkey said students also embraced helping stock the room after a district-wide food drive.

“When they walked in the door, there was a look on their faces and they asked, ‘We have this? This is so nice,’” she said.

“They were so excited to sort the food and put together meal boxes, and they were like, ‘When can we do this again?’”

Rakoski saw the same response from her sixth-graders.

“They hadn’t even heard of it, and I kind of told them what it was, and they unloaded every single box of groceries,” she said.

“They loved it, and I think that’s good for kids to understand that not everybody’s home looks the same — not everybody’s needs are met in the same way.”

Harkey said even teens who can seem reluctant to work showed enthusiasm.

“It surprised me when we walked in there — it was like

they got excited about it,” she said.

Harkey estimated nearly one out of every five Purdy students have benefited from Care to Learn in one fashion or another.

“I would say 10-20% — that’d be 60 to 120 kids — and it’s probably closer to 20%, honestly,” she said.

Rakoski said the chapter has helped address unusual challenges as well.

“We’ve met some unique needs,” she said. “We have sprayed some homes for pests, and we bought a hot water heater. We gave out food bags during summer school as well.”

Rakoski said the chapter

plans to keep expanding, as well as maintaining its support.

“We’ve come a long way, but part of the agreement with Care to Learn is that we continue to fundraise,” she said. “We have a responsibility, and we’ll continue putting fundraisers out there and asking for donations from the community.”

Tourism: Hatchery to stock 1.8 fish per angler this trout fishing season

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7C

Rebreathers dive team on Oct. 14, 2022. He was 27 years old.

This year, a new scholarship is being formed to honor Diana Tannehill, a long-time participant in WOW School, who passed away in August. Her daughter, Trish Tannehill, has been a GPS and Geo-cache instructor for WOW School for 25 years.

“Mom liked the craft and nature-journaling classes,” Tannehill said. “Several years ago, she began making a quilt out of the WOW School T-Shirts to donate to the school’s fundraising auctions: one quilt per year.”

3. Public meeting highlights connection between park, community

About 50 people, including Roaring River State Park personnel, were on hand for the park’s annual public meeting at the Emory Melton Inn & Conference Center on June 5.

Roaring River State Park Superintendent Mike Busekrus, who accepted the position in August 2024, said he found himself looking into a lift station during an ongoing wastewater renovation project at the park, wondering what he had gotten himself into. Taking on the leadership of Roaring River State Park, which annually sees over one million visitors — the fifth highest in attendance of Missouri’s parks — represents a leap in responsibility, toilets included, for Busekrus, who previously managed the Nathan and Olive Boone Homestead, near Ash Grove, which garnered some 6,500 visitors a year.

“You don’t often think about what happens after you flush a toilet in a state park,” Busekrus said. “But, just like at home, there has to be a sewer or septic system in place.”

With the help of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, the wastewater project — which involves piping the park’s sewage below the river and rebuilding every lift station in the park — is nearing completion.

A March 1 Cassville Area Chamber of Commerce ribbon-cutting, attended by park personnel, park fans and chamber members, marked the official re-opening of Campground 3 after the installation of new concrete and full hookups (water, sewer and electric) at the campsites.

Under Busekrus’ watch, other improvements grace the park: a new swing set in Zone 1 to replace the vintage swings taken out by last year’s May windstorm; a “Grab & Go” snack center in the park store; a facelift for the amphitheater; four functional electric vehicle chargers; propane system improvements at the Park Office and Camp Smokey; the installation of R60 installation in CCC Lodge, work on the HVAC system in various park structures; the installation of a new composite shake-shingle roof on the campground office and a metal roof on the maintenance building; the renovation of four showers at Campground 3; the elevation of some campsites in Campground 2; and the installation of two storm sirens with voice capability.

“We’re still working on getting the voice function operational,” Busekrus said.

Busekrus gives full credit to his staff for pulling off the seemingly impossible.

“How we got some of these projects done, I don’t know,” he said. “I present the staff with a crazy idea, and they just go out and do it.”

Busekrus credits the park’s concessionaire, ExplorUS (branded locally as Roaring River Adventures), with taking the park in a new direction.

According to Busekrus, per Roaring River State Park’s concession contract with Roaring

River Adventures/ExplorUS, money from concession revenue is set aside each month and tagged for maintenance projects within the concession-operated footprint. Busekrus cites examples such as an HVAC unit in a cabin, or repairs to the kitchen equipment that serves the restaurant in the Emory Melton Inn.

“Year-to-date, we’ve spent approximately \$150,000 on various projects, including HVAC units at the Inn, park store and a few cabins, improvements to the kitchen and to the propane system in the Inn, and purchasing new furnishings for the Honeymoon Cabin,” Busekrus said.

Jotham Brown accepted the position of concessions manager for Roaring River Adventures, replacing longtime manager David Waugh.

“I’m excited to become a part of the Roaring River community,” he said.

Brown said he hopes to partner with local vendors for providing healthy food options at the park’s restaurant in Emory Melton Inn.

4. Making memories, crafting traditions

After firing the gun to open catch-and-keep trout season on Sunday, Larry Quinalty reflected on the experience as more than 2,000 anglers cast their first lines of the year, surmising making memories — like shooting the gun — was the most important thing Roaring River State Park has to offer.

“It was fantastic,” he said. “I told [Hatchery Manager] Brad [Farwell] when we got to 10 seconds, we should count down together. I’ve been here in the area for 50 years, and the atmosphere is wonderful. It makes me appreciate being alive because I can enjoy this and see people happy and making memories. I believe in making memories — that’s what carries us through.”

While it did not approach the record of nearly 3,000 tags sold, Sunday’s opening in mild conditions drew a significant number of anglers from near and far. By 7 a.m., 2,006 tags had been sold. By noon, the total grew to 2,280, including 1,824 adult tags and 456 children’s tags.

Once again, Roaring River reigned supreme among the state’s three trout parks. By noon, Montauk State Park had sold 1,856 adult tags and 317 children’s tags for a total of 2,173, and Bennett Spring State Park had sold 1,601 adult tags and 197 children’s tags for a total of 1,798.

Final numbers for all parks at 4 p.m. included: Roaring River, 2,482 total (1,967 adult and 515 children’s); Montauk, 2,251 (1,915 adult and 336 children’s); and Bennett Spring, 1,919 (1,691 adult and 228 children’s). Farwell said the final total at Roaring River was 2,499 for the day.

The tradition-steeped Opening Day experience was one Quinalty said brought friends together, new and old.

“One woman I hadn’t seen in a long time came up and hugged me and we took a picture, and I had not seen Rosario Keele in a long time. I met some people from Jefferson City who’d heard my name but not been here I was here. My kids, a daughter and two sons, were also just as excited as I was. All three of them were in scouts.”

Despite kicking off the season, Quinalty said he did not plan to fish on Sunday. Instead, he went to the Roaring River Restaurant for breakfast, then went to church.

Young anglers were sprinkled throughout the park on Sunday, making memories with family and friends as they fished together. Jake Henderson, of Purdy, had his 6-year-old son, Corbin Henderson, with him on the banks on net duty.



Jacob Eidel, of Humboldt, Kan., removes his 5.45-pound trout from the lunger weigh station on Opening Day. The 27-year-old said he’s been fishing since he was 5, and this was his first-ever lunger. Kyle Troutman/ktoutman@cassville-democrat.com

“We come down quite a bit, and this is Corbin and I’s second year together on Opening Day,” he said. “I like to spend time with him here. I used to come with my dad all the time, and it means a lot to me, being an outdoorsman, to pass this on to the next generation. Patience is the best lesson.”

Corbin Henderson said he enjoys the park because of the fish, though they can be a bit tricky to catch, even with the net.

Just down the bank, Jeff Holtcamp, of Billings, was the first to reel in a trout in the pool across from the gazebo where Quinalty fired the gun, taking less than 30 seconds to do so.

“I’ve been coming here 50 years with family and friends,” he said. “My dad and son-in-law are here with me, and my dad and I have been coming since the early 1970s. We come down several times a year to fish and camp. It’s just a tradition. And you may not know people around you, but everyone helps on another all morning. We met some people from Indiana who came down for their son’s senior trip because his grandpa did that — that’s a story in itself.”

A traveler from further away, Kevin Willey, of Wills Point, Texas — who had netted a couple trout within the first half hour — said he grew up in Joplin and came to Roaring River frequently with his parents.

“I always come to Opening Day and try to make it up here a couple times a year,” he said. “I love being here with the crowd.”

While some families have decades of Roaring River memories, others are just getting started. Tyler and Keisha Kuhler, of Sarcoxie, are relative newcomers to the Opening Day scene with their two children, 7-year-old Ensley Kuhler and 10-year-old Easton Kuhler.

“Ensley caught her first trout this year, and it’s her first time on opening morning, and Easton limited out in 29 minutes,” Tyler Kuhler said. “My family brought me down here years ago, and I brought it back last year. It’s kind of stuck. We get to watch the kids fish, be excited, wake up early and feel the anticipation — it’s a whole experience.”

“I hope they make memories of spending time with family, and I want them to come back with their kids as they get older. It’s a new tradition.”

5. Hatchery manager details projects, plans for year

Brad Farwell, Roaring River Hatchery manager, said regular-season stocking calculations are driven by projected attendance and a targeted fish-per-angler rate.

“From March 1 to October 31, we stock fish every night,” Farwell said. “We base it off historical tag sales, weather forecasts and holidays. We take that anticipated number of anglers times 1.8, and that tells us how many fish to stock.”

“We’re still doing a renovation project right now down here at the hatchery,” Farwell said. “We were doing an oxygen line replacement. We had a temporary oxygen line running across the ground for the last couple of years, so they’re reburying a new oxygen line and getting that taken care of.”

The original buried line deteriorated beyond repair. “The old oxygen line started leaking underneath the ground, and there wasn’t a feasible way to fix it,” Farwell said. “When they looked at the copper, it was getting too thin in too many spots, so they wanted to redo the whole thing.”

Crews also replaced another key fuel line serving hatchery facilities.

“They put in a new propane line also,” Farwell said. “They buried that propane line from the tank all the way down to the hatchery building and over to the bathroom.”

Inside the hatchery, a multi-unit ultraviolet treatment system is being installed to reduce fish disease losses.

“They’re doing a UV upgrade in the hatchery,” Farwell said. “They’re putting in four UV units now in the building instead of one, so we shouldn’t have issues with bacteria or parasites.”

Disease-related loss has significantly reduced output in recent years.

“It should make our loss rate extremely low,” Farwell said. “We’ve been having issues with Aeromonas bacteria.”

The difference in survival rates can be substantial.

“If I got 200,000 eggs and they hatched out and

got Aeromonas, I might get 50,000 to 75,000 fish out of it,” Farwell said. “Before having the Aeromonas problem, it would be 150,000.”

The new system is expected to improve fingerling survival and reduce treatment needs.

“The new UV units will probably increase fingerling production by decreasing the loss from Aeromonas bacteria,” Farwell said. “If they get disease in the hatchery, you’re treating them with antibiotics multiple times.”

Renovation work has temporarily reduced hatchery capacity.

“The hatchery building itself has been shut down since about September, and we’ve had 17 out of the 40 pools shut off because of the renovation project,” Farwell said. “We’ll start ramping back up production as soon as the project’s done.”

Staffing levels remain stable heading into the 2026 season opener.

“My end is good and I don’t have any openings or much turnover,” Farwell said. “I’ve got the same crew I’ve had.”

The hatchery operates with a mix of full-time and hourly workers covering multiple shifts.

“I’ve got six full-time employees and six hourly,” Farwell said. “Two work mid-night to eight on the weekends and alternate.”

An intern is also assigned to assist with operations and learn department procedures.

“I also have an intern working Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from eight to four, learning how conservation works,” Farwell said.



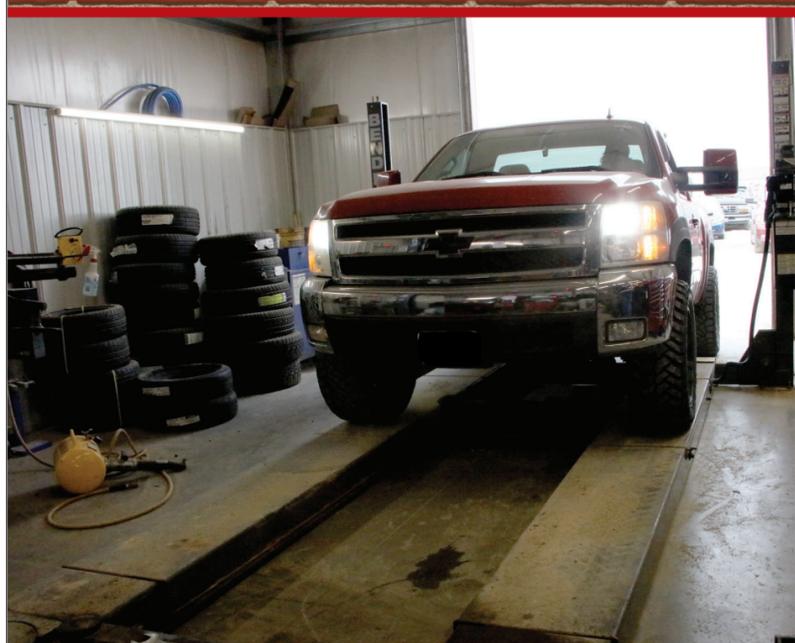


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PROGRESS

TOP 5 PHOTOS OF 2025



1. Cassville High School art student Audrey Kennedy completes a sky scene as part of the "7 Valleys" mural on the southwest corner of the Barry County Courthouse square, on the wall of You Name It Collectibles.



2. Cassville Primary student Logan Schoelzel showed off his "Hero" speed during the Word Parade at Cassville schools on Thursday. Students pick a word, then create a poster with its definition and examples of its meaning, with costume examples also encouraged.



3. The CCC Camp in Shell Knob provided a picturesque line of sight for the Shell Knob Fire and Thunder fireworks show at the Highway 39 bridge over Table Rock Lake. The Shell Knob Area Chamber of Commerce funds the annual display.



4. Emerie Declue, 5, of Neosho, makes sure her stamp has ample ink at an activity at Kids' Fishing Day at Roaring River State Park in August.



5. Jeremiah Blankenship, as Chef, performs in the "Cafe Murder" play put on by the Cassville High School drama program in November at the performing arts center.



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