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EDUCATION

HSD forum discusses needs, tax proposal School board must still vote to seek millage election

BY VERSHAL HOGAN
MANAGING EDITOR

The Hamburg School District's superintendent made the case to the public for improvements she said are needed at the schools.

The potential funding for the improvements could come from a tax millage increase, should the school board decide to seek it, Superintendent Tracy Streeter said.

Streeter first approached the HSD board about the needed improvements in September, and the board requested that she take the discussion to the public before they take it further.

"This is your money, your school district, and they felt it was important," Streeter told those in attendance at Monday's meeting.

The superintendent said the millage increase was part of the discussion in part because demographic shifts around the state are taken into consideration in the state's school funding formulas.

"The schools that are growing are getting that money," she said. "Southeastern Arkansas is not growing, so we are not getting that money. But it doesn't mean that we don't have those needs."

During the meeting — which included question and comment portions for the public — Streeter said the total cost of improvements in her presentation was \$6,110,456, though some of the items

See SCHOOL TAX, Page 3

Annual Hamburg Holidays event will be Thursday, parade to follow

BY VAL GAUGHT
REPORTER

The City of Hamburg will host its 19th Annual Hamburg Holidays Thursday.

This year's theme is "All Roads Lead Home" and this year's event will start at 4 p.m. Dec 6, with arts and crafts vendors and the opening of Santa's workshop. Live entertainment on the square will begin at 4:15 p.m.

The annual Little Red Wagon Parade will be at 5 p.m., and the gingerbread house competition at 5:30 p.m.

Those interested in entering may bring a decorated gingerbread house for the contest.

A reading of the Christmas story will be at 5:50 p.m. and the annual Christmas parade begin at 6 p.m.

The Hamburg East Lab students will light up the squares and there will be arts, crafts, food and other vendors there all evening. Santa's workshop will consist of pictures with Santa by Delores Cook, ornament making, reindeer food and letters to Santa.

Parade organizers asked that those riding in the Christmas parade be at the Ashley County Fairgrounds no later than 5 p.m. for lineup.

"We are hoping to make Hamburg Holidays bigger and better for our community," event director Melissa Chapman said.

McCormick, Martinie carry runoff votes

BY VAL GAUGHT
AND VERSHAL HOGAN

With the votes counted following Tuesday's runoff election, unofficial results show that Crossett Mayor Scott McCormick will keep his position and Dale Martinie join the Crossett City Council.

McCormick's margin of victory over Martin was a slim 24 votes, but was a better performance at the polls for him than during the Nov. 6 primary when — with three candidates on the ballot — McCormick was 137 votes behind Martin.

In Tuesday's count, McCormick received 481 votes to Martin's

457, or approximately 51 percent of the vote to 49 percent.

While early ballots are considered a reliable predictor of final results, the race was neck-in-neck when the early voting results came in on Tuesday evening. McCormick led by only two votes, 264-262, and only when the absentee ballots and Election Day results were calculated was McCormick's victory clear.

McCormick told Martin that he would miss seeing her on the city council and hoped she would still help around the city. Martin will leave her seat on the council at the end of the year because she could not run for re-election there at the same time she sought the mayor's seat.

See ELECTION, Page 5



McCormick



VAL GAUGHT/News Observer

Mayor Scott McCormick hugged Councilwoman Valerie Martin after election results were announced at the Ashley County Courthouse Tuesday. McCormick won the race, which was the second time Martin had challenged him for the seat.

MOVE-IN READY Students adjust to change as they attend classes in new school building for first time

BY VAL GAUGHT
REPORTER

Students may have needed maps to help them find their classes, but officials said the first day in the new Crossett High School facility went overall smoothly as they occupied the campus for the first time Monday.

"I've been coordinating this dance for a long time," CHS Principal Anthony Boykin said.

Boykin has spent the last several weeks working with the students and staff, giving tours of the school and doing whatever he could to help make the transition as easy as possible.

"There are still a few kinks to work out, but I think overall the first day went very well," Crossett Superintendent Gary Williams said after spending most of his day at the new campus.

Williams said the tech crew was still working to get the doors programmed to unlock with the bell schedule and touch up a few minor issues.

Even as classes started, the move-in from the old building was ongoing. Available students helped librarian Lisa McCaughn in the library. Many of the books were still in boxes, but McCaughn said the school hoped to have the library up and running soon.

A few of the classrooms still require unpacking and the auditorium is still under construction, but other than that the new school was ready by its move-in date.

Students said they had mixed emotions about the new location.

"Today is really bittersweet and I will miss the old school, but the new school is amazing and I am very proud to be a part of the first senior class to attend and graduate here," senior Alyssa Price said.

Some students were concerned with being late and felt their classes were stretched out much further apart. Others said they were afraid to take short cuts available through the amphitheater for fear of getting locked out.

"That could be a real concern today, actually, because we are working to get the doors on scheduled, but that won't be an issue once we get everything moving along and working properly," Williams said.

Student Paige Thompson said that it would take some getting used to, but she liked that the building had just one straight hallway instead of a maze-like layout similar to the old building. Even faced with learning to navigate an entire new campus mid-year, Thompson said she is really enjoying the new campus and the amenities that come with it.

"We have so much more here, look at our shop — this shop is so much better and 10 times bigger," Thompson said.

Student Keenan Perry said that the new facility would definitely take some getting used to, but all in



VAL GAUGHT/News Observer

Students make their way through the halls of the new Crossett High School building, which they attended classes in for the first time Monday. Below, some students found their classes with the aid of maps.



all he was happy with the move.

The building is full of updated technology, more science labs, better classroom equipment and it even features private bathrooms. The students no longer have to use stalls, but instead will be able to use one of the 14 private bathrooms available on campus.

Some of the students said they loved the idea of private bathrooms, but were concerned about their availability.

"I could be wrong, but I really just don't feel like there are enough," said Maddi Murphy, a CHS senior.

Murphy emphasized the point that the students only have five minutes to get where they are going, which may or may not be close by, and waiting in line for a bathroom could take up time that they don't

have. Eleventh grader Gracie Riley, however, said she thought the single-stall bathrooms were a nice new feature and didn't really think there would be any issues.

School Resource Officer Robert Black said that he felt like the private stalls would make managing vandalism and irresponsible bathroom users much more efficient.

"We will know exactly who went in and at what time, there won't be guessing if they went in and just didn't go to one particular stall, they will be in there and they will either be the one who did it or they will have seen it when they went in," Black said.

Black said that he and the administrators plan to routinely check in the bathrooms and radio to the office to let them know that they are clear. That way if an issue does arise, they only have to pull camera as far back as the last "clear" report.

Office employee Joanna Lum said at midday she thought the day was moving along smoothly and she felt like she was going to enjoy the new setup, and that the new windows and door system were going to make it much easier for her to check in and manage guests.

Anyone interested in touring the new building or saying their goodbyes to the old one may do so on Saturday.

Williams will be hosting an open house Saturday afternoon in both buildings.

'Whispers' historical exhibit opens at Felsenthal

BY VAL GAUGHT
REPORTER

The Ashley County Historical Society and The Crossett High School East Lab joined together last week to unveil a project they've been working on for years.

The Whispers of the Swamp exhibit was unveiled on Friday morning at the Felsenthal Wildlife Refuge Welcome Center.

"Whispers of the Swamp is a collection of memories from the basin told by those who knew it well," Wilkinson said.

Members of the historical society dressed in period clothing as they greeted guests and showed them around the new exhibit as well as the

special exhibits set up in the event room displaying the information they collected as they worked.

The new exhibit gives guests a brief look into life on the Ouachita River before the refuge existed and gives guests other interesting facts about the area. The exhibit features residents who lived in areas near what is commonly known as Brown's Landing and Old Beer Joint Road.

Refuge spokesperson Amanda Wilkinson welcomed guests and praised the Crossett EAST Lab. The EAST lab students filmed and edited interviews with people who lived in the Felsenthal area before the refuge was founded.

Wilkinson also said the Ashley County Historical Society and

Historical Society member Nancy Toon played key roles in building the exhibit.

"I soon learned she could tell me everything I needed to know, Mrs. Nancy is a historian in her own right," Wilkinson said.

Wilkinson also talked about what inspired the exhibit and a special display window in the exhibit, which was made from the wood from the Ramsey house.

Wilkinson said the Ramsey house was a large house located in West Crossett down a road before the refuge.

"Pearl Ramsey didn't actually live in the refuge, but she was such a legend out here, I found we couldn't



Members of the Ashley County Historical Society wore period costumes at the opening of the "Whispers of the Swamp" exhibit.

See WHISPERS, Page 5