Junior Olympics boxing
PAGE 6

Armadillo Pageant
PAGE 7

May 2 2018

THE ASHLEY News Observer

Volume 80, No. 18 Crossett, Ark. | On the World Wide Web at www.ashleynewsobserver.com | 12 pages, 1 sections | $1.00

Clock running out on ambulance agreement

ACMC announces end of funding in open letter

STAFF REPORTS

Ashley County Medical Center's financial support of an ambulance service in the Hamburg area will end with the month of May.

The service agreement the hospital had with with FAST ambulance was initially for six months but was extended several times. FAST would have closed its doors in June 2017 because of financial insolvency, but the county-owned hospital entered an agreement that allowed it to help the company break even month-to-month while Ashley County's county and municipal officials tried to fund a longer-term solution.

Those discussions have not made significant progress over the course of the year — several plans have been floated and then scuttled — and Tuesday the hospital's board announced in an open letter that it would be ending its funding of FAST.

The letter reads, in whole:

"To continue our 110-year legacy of service to the citizens of Ashley County, we at Ashley County Medical Center (ACMC) believe that you cannot put a price tag on a life. With this mission, we took it upon ourselves to sustain Ashley County's current Emergency Medical Service when approached by FAST ambulance service in April 2017. That is when the service agreement between FAST and ACMC was formed. Since the formation of the agreement, ACMC has spent $132,000 in keeping FAST ambulance service open with April and May of this year, still outstanding. Realizing that this was not a sustainable option for ACMC, we began discussing with community leaders, mayors, and physicians the vital importance of an ambulance service to serve Ashley County.

"In keeping with our mission to care for the citizens of Ashley County, we determined that a partnership was needed with the citizens and our elected leaders in order to provide a sustainable Emergency Medical Service. Beginning May of 2017, ACMC made multiple proposals to the Quorum Court; one of which was selected but required a $542,000 subsidy per year to sustain this Emergency Medical Service. To

See ACMC, Page 5

Crossett Council: Funding key to further discussions of shared service

BY VAL GAUGHT
REPORTER

The Crossett City Council said Monday it would consider further discussions about running an ambulance service for Ashley County only if the county government put a fee in place to guarantee funding first.

Crossett's City Council met Monday night to discuss the possibility of the Crossett Fire Department's ambulance service taking over the entire county, but reaching a solution before FAST ambulance closes their doors June 1 may be out of the question.

FAST, whose coverage area consists largely of Hamburg and the mainline, would have already closed in June 2017 had it not entered into an operating agreement with Ashley County Medical Center that helps the financially struggling service break even every month. The Ashley County Quorum Court has also contributed a $5,000 monthly subsidy in recent months. The hospital's service agreement — which has been extended several times — is set to expire in June.

At the meeting Monday, Crossett Fire Chief Bo Higgonbotham presented the council with packets full of projected scenarios and proposals on how a county-wide ambulance service operated through the Crossett station could work, but the issue of funding was a question no one could answer.

Higgonbotham's proposals had a list of what-ifs, mainly on the financial side, with the explanation to the council being that he wasn't sure which budgets would be funding which areas of the ambulance service and didn't know how to calculate a direct cost for the City of Crossett.

"There is so much that we don't know," Council Member Valerie Martin said.

See COUNCIL, Page 5

SCHOOLS

Hamburg High selected for development program

STAFF REPORTS

Hamburg High School was among eight schools selected as part of the Arkansas Department of Education's Professional Learning Communities at Work project.

Hamburg's selection in the project was announced last week.

As part of the project — which is in conjunction with educational publisher and professional development provider Solution Tree — the schools will receive up to 50 days of training, coaching, and support to build and sustain a strong culture of collaboration that will enhance student learning.

Streeter

Selected schools will be matched with a certified PLC at Work associate from Solution Tree and receive intensive job-embedded training, observation and coaching. The schools will create action plans that focus on increasing student achievement through aligned curriculum, formative assessments and proven instructional strategies. During the second year, schools will deepen their understanding and focus on implementing multitiered systems of support, followed by strengthening their systems and sustaining the process in year three.

"It has been exciting to see how the PLC at Work process is benefiting not only our teachers but our students here in Arkansas," ADE Commissioner Johnny Key said in a news release. "I have seen first-hand how schools are collaborating and effectively implementing the process so that each student is showing growth. Our statewide PLC project supports the growth we expect to see with the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act this fall."

Superintendent Tracy Streeter said district personnel have previously interacted with Solution Tree, including attending conferences where they heard Solution Tree speakers. Streeter said Solution Tree is, "the best in the business."

HHS Principal Tim Outlaw said the school already emphasizes cross-curriculum learning, and the new program will help in further implementation of those practices.

"I'd like to get, say, math and English together," Outlaw said. "How would these students' writing

See HAMBURG, Page 2

'AMAZING SERVICE FOR THE COMMUNITY'

Gov. Asa Hutchinson addresses medical foundation's annual banquet

BY VERSHAL HOGAN
MANAGING EDITOR

Rural health care is a key component in a growing state economy.

That was the message Gov. Asa Hutchinson brought to the Ashley County Medical Foundation's annual banquet Friday.

Hutchinson was the keynote speaker at the event for the Foundation, which doesn't fund the hospital, but raises money for purchases for the hospital. Past foundation purchases have included comfortable chairs for the oncology patients taking treatments, gift bags for new chemo patients, and equipment for the nursery such as incubators and onezies for all new babies, among other things.

The goal for this year's fundraiser was $50,000. The banquet raised $57,000, which a hospital spokesperson said was a new record.

When Hutchinson took the microphone at the banquet, he discussed growing up in a rural area, which he said has informed his understanding of the issue. His home was 25 miles from the nearest hospital.

"We also understood in that rural community how important health care is," Hutchinson said. "It means something when you have that health care in your community."

In addition to its annual fundraising capacity, the banquet was celebrating ACMC's 110 years in Ashley County, and Hutchinson noted that — in addition to providing services even some larger hospitals in the state don't have — ACMC serves as a critical access hospital for the region.

"That is amazing service for the community," he said.

The governor also discussed the state's expansion of the Medicaid program under the Affordable Care Act, saying that at the time there were 250,000 Arkansans who were working to move up the economic ladder but still needed access to health care.

"We heard from rural communities that access to health care, and that option that allowed them to pay for that health care, was important," Hutchinson said.

VERSHAL HOGAN/News Observer

Gov. Asa Hutchinson speaks at the Ashley County Medical Foundation's annual banquet Friday, which was hosted in the area of the Mia Rose Hollis Memorial Garden, below. The banquet raised approximately $57,000 for the foundation.

Even among Republican primary voters, a plurality of Arkansans supported the expansion under the Arkansas Works program, he said.

"They believe in this access for all parts of Arkansas," he said.

The state has adopted a reform to the Arkansas Works program that will require recipients who are able-bodied and don't have dependent children in the home to work, a move that Hutchinson said, "emphasizes responsibility."

"If we can take these individuals who want to work but don't have the training, we can get them that training, and I think that is important," he said.

The governor also addressed recent state moves to regulate pharmacy benefit managers and to fight prescription drug abuse.

Hutchinson likewise said he is a supporter of telemedicine, especially for rural areas, and that that the state needs to work to ensure Medicaid and Medicare can cover the costs so they are properly reimbursed.

Early voting returning to Crossett, starts next week

BY VERSHAL HOGAN
MANAGING EDITOR

Early voting for Ashley County's preferential primary election will begin next week, and Crossett-area voters will again have a chance to cast an early ballot in Crossett.

Three contested local races ,Äî including county judge ,Äî will be decided because all of the candidates who qualified are running on the same partisan ticket.

Early voting will be 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday May 7 to 11 and May 14 to 18, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 12 and 19. The final day of early voting will be 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. May 21.

Election Day voting will be 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. May 22.

Early voting will be done in the Ashley County Courthouse and the Crossett Economic Development building at 125 Main St.

Election Commission Member Terry McDermott said the commission decided to bring back early voting in the Crossett area after hearing from the voters.

"We had a lot of people come forward from Crossett who said they would like to have it back," McDermott said.

The decision to suspend early voting in Crossett in previous elections came at the request of the Ashley County Quorum Court, which told the commission the county was in a financial slump at the time.

"(A Quorum Court member) came to (the election commission meeting) and said everything was OK for it to go back," McDermott said. "We had nobody at the meeting to come up and object to early voting."

Those candidates who will appear on the ballot on the Democratic ticket include:

For governor, Jared K Henderson and Leticia Sanders

For Egypt Township Constable, Robert Steven Hampton and Franklin Tanksley

For Justice of the Peace, District 8,

See ELECTION, Page 5