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MURDER

Melanson pleads out, Fields is charged

Killer's ex-girlfriend to go to court on interference charge

BY VAL GAUGHT
REPORTER

A Crossett man will spend the rest of his life in prison for a December 2016 killing after pleading guilty last week, and an additional person was arrested and charged in relation to the case.



Dillon Melanson, 24, pleaded guilty to capital murder and abuse of a corpse before 10th Judicial District Circuit Judge Sam Pope June 24 in connection to the death of Jeremiah Bynum.

Following Melanson's plea, his former girlfriend, Lacie Fields, was arrested June 28 in relation to the same case. Tenth Judicial District Deputy Prosecutor David Cason, who sat second chair to Thomas Dean on Melanson's case, said Fields will be charged with abuse of a corpse, tampering with evidence and interfering with government operations.

Bynum was reported missing in December 2016, but his body wasn't found until Jan. 26, 2017, See MELANSON, Page 5

RIDENER DEATH

Trial date set for Russell, to appear in court soon

BY VAL GAUGHT
REPORTER

A Crossett man is set to go to trial soon for the death of a local woman.

Brian Russell, 57, of Crossett, was charged with first degree murder and abuse of a corpse after Shannon Ridener's body was found in mid-February.



Russell is scheduled to appear in front of Circuit Judge Bynum Gibson on July 9 for an omnibus hearing, on Aug. 6 for a pretrial hearing and Aug. 21 for a jury trial.

Russell has been incarcerated at the Ashley County Jail on outstanding warrants since Feb. 2. Russell was arrested for a DUI in another county, and his car was impounded. Police reports show that Ridener's shoes were allegedly found in Russell's car.

Ridener was reported missing in late January, and Feb. 15 an off duty game warden found a body near Beech Creek south of Hermitage on U.S. Highway 63. The body was later identified as Ridener, and an autopsy revealed

See RUSSELL, Page 5

Martin challenges McCormick in mayor's race

July 27 deadline to qualify as mayor or council candidate

BY VAL GAUGHT
REPORTER

With less than a month for candidates to collect petitions to run for office, the only contenders in this year's race for Crossett mayor so far looks like a rematch of 2014.

Valerie Martin announced last week that instead of running to maintain her spot on city council, she would instead be running against Mayor Scott McCormick.

Martin ran against McCormick

in 2014 and lost by a handful of votes. The numbers were so close Martin demanded a recount, but the final numbers remained as originally announced at 891 to 875.

Martin said she wants to bring change to Crossett and she feels like she is at a place in her life where she can make focusing on the City of Crossett her full-time job.

"I just believe it's time for a change in Crossett," Martin said.

McCormick was elected mayor



Martin



McCormick

in 1998 and is seeking his sixth term in the office.

Martin has served on the City Council since she was elected in 2016, and will not re-run for her seat at the council table in November.

Martin was also previously on the council before running for mayor in 2014.

Candidates are not allowed to run in more than one race, but regardless of the mayoral race, Martin will keep her seat on the city council until Dec. 31.

In addition to mayoral race, the city council seats are all up for re-election. The current city council members are Martin, Crystal Marshall, Lynn Rodgers, CT Foster,

James Knight, Eddie Rowe.

Potential candidates must have their signatures collected by July 27 as petitions are due between July 27 and August 14.

Candidates must have at least 30 "good" signatures, which means the names, addresses and birthdays provided match the person's voter registration information.

The election packets can be picked up in the County Clerk's office in Hamburg.

Early voting will begin in October and the election will be in November.

The November ballot will also have Congressional and state offices — including governor and attorney general — for electors to choose.

SCIENCE SHADOWING

MASH camp shows students medical possibilities



NEWS OBSERVER/Submitted



Ashley County Medical Center recently hosted its annual Medical Applications of Science for Health camp. MASH is a two-week summer program for high school juniors and seniors interested in pursuing careers in the medical field. During the camp, students follow health professionals and attend training to learn firsthand what it takes to be a healthcare professional. MASH students participate in dissections, CPR training, casting, hospital tours and daily job-shadowing in a variety of health care environments. This year, the MASH students participated at different departments at ACMC and other local locations, including Gammel's Pharmacy and Oak Tree Animal hospital. They were also able to travel to Hope Landing in El Dorado and UAMS in Little Rock.

SAFETY

Despite rumors, Independence Day show still set to fill skies

BY VAL GAUGHT
AND STAFF REPORTS

Despite online rumors to the contrary, the annual patriotic fireworks display is still set to fill the skies near downtown Crossett.

A post from a regional television station circulating social media had residents questioning if this year's firework display would happen, and asking if Ashley County was under a burn ban. The organization that hosted the article later shared an updated version of the story that said the original article, although undated on its Website, was written in 2012 and was mistakenly shared by the readers as current news.

Ashley County officials verified that there is no burn ban and representatives from First National Bank confirmed that the fireworks show is still scheduled for July 4.

The fireworks show will begin at dusk — approximately 9 p.m. — and will be shot over Lucas Pond. The fireworks can be viewed from the Crossett High School football field stadium and surrounding areas.

Though the county is not under a burn ban, state officials are urging caution when using fire during the holiday as dry conditions and weather forecasts for high temperatures and dry air will create moderate wildfire danger throughout the July 4 holiday.

With firework displays planned See FIRE, Page 3

Consultant: City can save with light, fixture changes

BY VAL GAUGHT
REPORTER

The Crossett City Council met last week to hear from the company Entegrity about energy saving solutions for the city.

The city entered into an agreement with Entegrity — a company that analyzes governments, school districts and other large entities to reduce operation cost — in April.

In the agreement, Entegrity states if the company can't prove where they can save the city money, the initial evaluation will cost the city nothing. If they do find areas where substantial savings can be made, however, the city must either enter into a contract to start changes or pay Entegrity \$10,000 for the initial survey.

If the city makes the upgrades or

changes, the survey cost can be paid out of the money the city saves from the upgrades.

Entegrity presented an overview of the cost-saving upgrades they found during the study.

The company found places where Crossett could save money by adding LED lights, correcting low-flow fixtures and upgrading HVAC in the city administration building and police station.

Entegrity will soon file a report with the council with specific details of all of the suggested upgrades.

Once the report is filed, the council will have all of the information it needs to set priorities and decide which projects the members want to move forward with.

"It's all very interesting and we are excited to learn more," council member Crystal Marshall said.

KEEPING ARKANSAS A BEAUTIFUL STATE



NEWS OBSERVER/Submitted

Crossett resident Rosie Henry of Crossett recently worked with the Keep Arkansas Beautiful campaign to organize a cleanup day for Crossett residents. The mission of the campaign is to encourage individuals to accept responsibility for maintaining Arkansas's scenic beauty, environmental health and quality of life as these efforts positively impact civic pride, livability and economic growth — creating communities where people want to work, live and play. Henry said she also plans a cleanup day for the fall.