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Taylorville council offers alternatives to curfew law

Downtown businesses have been vandalized for years.

By AMY BURCH
H&R Taylorville Bureau Chief

TAYLORVILLE — City leaders appear poised to get tough on the youth in Taylorville, but a proposed curfew for the downtown square didn't get enough support to pass the city council's ordinance committee Tuesday.

Instead, the committee voted against drafting a curfew law and agreed to explore alternatives — like writing laws to keep the kids who loiter in the square on the sidewalks and to limit the sizes of crowds.

"This is a big bear to wrestle," Alderman Ernie Dorchine, chairman of the committee, said. "That (the square) is kind of a safe place. They will go some place else. Will that be a safe place?"

Taylorville Mayor Jim Montgomery Jr. and police Chief Greg Brotherton proposed a curfew that would pertain only to the square with the hope that, if enacted, it would reduce the crowd size. They have long believed that adults are causing many of the downtown problems — urinating and throwing glass bottles on business windows and doors.

"Most of the problems we have down there seem to be from older people," Brotherton said. "I think if after 10 p.m. you eliminate their audience, they won't have a reason to perform."

He admitted that the law would be a difficult one for Hoochi Romano, the city's attorney, to write.

"The curfew law has been challenged several times," Brotherton said. "It has to be drafted in a way they can't take it into court and challenge it."

Ideally, the police chief would like to eliminate all loitering on the square because of the vandalism downtown business owners receive.

"Initially what I was looking at is something to help our merchants downtown. They've been complaining for years," Brotherton said. "I don't care if they're 30 years old, if they're up there (on the square) for an hour and they don't have a purpose, I'd like to move them on."

Montgomery supported the curfew proposal but said if it were to be enacted, it would be in favor of stricter enforcement of existing ordinances and possible new, less drastic ones.

Another group of juveniles, however, will likely be facing a tougher city law.

The committee voted 3-1 to ask Romano to write an ordinance making it illegal for juveniles to possess tobacco in Taylorville.

"I just can't imagine not having it," Brotherton said of the law. "If tobacco is bad for the kids, and you can't sell it to them, why wouldn't you have (the law)?"

Alderman Frank Mathon, the dissenting vote, proposed sending a resolution to state lawmakers asking them to rewrite the state law so it follows the laws regarding minors and alcohol, which is illegal for people under 21 to buy or possess. Under Illinois' law, tobacco is illegal for minors to buy but not illegal for them to possess.

"I think tobacco should be bumped right back up to the state ... using the same rationale as alcohol," Mathon said. "They're dumping that onto us."

Mattoon council undecided about city administrator position

One of the members who voted for the position changes his mind.

By DEBBIE PIERCE
H&R Mattoon Bureau Chief

MATTOON — The Mattoon City Council on Tuesday again wrestled with whether it should change its form of government — and once again, came away with no decision.

The subject has been battled around for the better part of this year, fueled by a recommendation from the strategic planning committee to change Mattoon from a commission style of government to that of a city manager.

Last month, the council voted 3-2 to have an ordinance drafted that would cre-

ate a new position — that of city administrator — rather than going with a manager. Both positions would be filled by full-time professionals who would help the part-time council sort through the complexities of government; however, a manager would have statutory responsibilities including hiring and firing that an administrator would not. Changing to a manager form requires a majority vote of residents.

At its last meeting, after City Attorney John Heffner drew up a tentative ordinance creating an administrator's position, the council determined it didn't have enough information to vote. Now, one of the three commissioners who originally voted for the administrator has changed his mind.

Commissioner Gene Baker admitted he'd had "a terrible time" casting his vote for an administrator in the first place. Since then, he said, he's talked with numerous residents "who don't want a change."

He recommended the city let the media educate residents on the particulars of each option, then let voters decide if any change is necessary.

Commissioners Bud Raboin and Ed Neal agreed. "I've been trying to say the same thing for a long time," Raboin said. Added Neal, "The problem with an administrator is, there's no guarantee the council will let him run the (various) departments."

oversee departments such as streets, water and sewer.

Mayor Wanda Ferguson argued an administrator "would be good right now." She said an administrator would facilitate communication between department superintendents and commissioners. "I've said it before," Ferguson noted, "People elected me to do what I thought best. You can't put everything on the ballot."

Commissioner Lois Vonderheide said a public works director is needed, but she views creation of an administrator as a good start "to get coordination among the departments."

The council gave no indication whether the subject would come up again at its next meeting.

Hundreds celebrate reading

More than 500 children attend storytelling program with their parents

By VALERIE WELLS
H&R Staff Writer

DECATUR — More than 500 children brought their parents to the Decatur Public Library on Tuesday for Celebrate Reading 2000.

"I can't think of a better way to spend an evening than reading with your child," said Cathy Fleming, circulation sales and marketing director for the Herald & Review. The newspaper sponsored the event, along with Archer Daniels Midland Co., Decatur Memorial Hospital and Illinois Power Co.

Parents and children thronged the upstairs children's room of the library, standing in long lines to sign in for the program, which included stories read by Bruce Hollibaugh, regional manager for Illinois Power; children's librarian Katie Gross, and children's author Lynn McElfresh.

Hollibaugh's two selections, a book called "Cape for Sale" and a poem about "Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout, who would not take the garbage out" were obviously familiar to the children who crowded into the reading room. As Hollibaugh read about Sarah's garbage piling ever higher, complete with colorful descriptions of items like "dried-up pizza crusts" and "curdled cottage cheese," the children enthusiastically shouted "Ewww!" at the end of each line.

Gross said she was thrilled to see so many in attendance.

"I hope you'll all go home and spend the rest of the week, the month, the year, and read, read, read to your children," she told the audience.

Eric Cunningham, 7, has been reading on his own since he was 4, said his proud mother, Lashell Johnson.

"I'm amazed at the way he reads," she said, adding with a smile, "He reads everything, signs, mail, catalogues."

Johnson said she started Eric out with BabyTALK's lapsits — sessions at the library where parents and kids read, sing and play together. And she plans to do the same with his little brother, D'Monte Evans, 2.

"We've got to start this one off the same way, and maybe he'll learn to love to read just like (Eric) does," Johnson said. "With all the negative stuff there is to do, he might as well get out and do some positive things. If you start them in the right direction, maybe they'll stay that way."

Claudia Quigg, executive director of BabyTALK, said she hadn't dared hope for such a large turnout on a school night. She had expected about 100 people, counting



STORY TIME: Robin Keyes of Decatur brought her daughter, Anna, 4, to Celebrate Reading 2000 at the Decatur Public Library Tuesday evening.

both parents and children. BabyTALK activities promote reading and parent/child bonding.

"What a wonderful celebration of our new library," Quigg said from her seat in the toddler area, where she'd been reading to the little ones. "It's just a gift. There are so many other things in our community that make you sad, but this library just makes you happy. It's a great place."

There were far too many attendees to fit into the children's reading room, and the overflow crowd was directed downstairs to the auditorium, where a second storytelling session was quickly arranged to accommodate them.

City librarian John Moorman hadn't

known what to expect, he said.

"I think next year we need to plan a little differently," he said. "We need more programs over a longer period of time to make sure everyone gets in and gets a chance to see what they want to see."

Robin Keyes' children participate in Pizza Hut's Book It program. For every so many minutes of reading, children earn certificates toward free pizza. The family had attended a Home and School Association meeting at St. Patrick School on Tuesday and heard about the Celebrate Reading program at the meeting.

"We buy books, we bring them to the library, and they bring home books from the library," Keyes said.

Students give their all in Millikin food drive

More than one ton of food items was collected through first-time project.

By BOB FALLSTROM
H&R Community News Editor

DECATUR — Everybody was a winner in Millikin University's Food Fight '99.

The most unlikely winner was the Go-Gos, a commuter group of seven students who collected the most items in the 21-unit housing division.

"We wanted to be a part of the food drive, even though we live off-campus," explained Christine Smith at the Tuesday celebration/awards program. Others in the group were Autumn Trimble, David Stewart, Glenn Roundtree, Leah Lookabaugh, Brian Carpenter and Chelli Paiser.

The drive was a first-time project of Rick Bibb's marketing management class. The results were impressive. Three truckloads of nonperishable food items — 2,700 pounds — were collected and donated to the Northeast Community Fund, the Salvation Army and Catholic Charities to be distributed to needy families. It's enough food — cereal, soup, vegetables, fruit, spaghetti, macaroni and cheese, chili, cake mix, crackers, gelatin dessert, beverages, baby food — to feed 372 people.

"We heard the food banks were running low," Bibb said. "This was a tremendous learning project."

In addition to the Go-Gos, major prizes for collections went to the Taber School of Business and the Kappa Sigma house. Runners-up included the admissions office, Alpha Chi Omega and Blackburn 2.

"The students did a fantastic job in a first-class way," praised a grateful Jerry Peltz, longtime director of the Northeast Community Fund. "It's good practical application for the students and very positive for the community." Peltz said that the applications for food are up, even though employment is higher than in the past.

Also expressing gratitude were Maj. John Wilkins of the Salvation Army and July Rogers of Catholic Charities. "This food has already gone out to families in need," Rogers noted.

"proceed to do exactly what it would have done if Jesse Jackson had never been here," he said.

Meanwhile, state Sen. N. Duane Noland, R-Blue Mound, expressed growing frustration with how the school situation has played out. Noland and state Reps. Bill Mitchell, R-Forsyth, and Julie A. Curry, D-Mount Zion, released the statement Monday night supporting the school district's decision.

Noland said he is willing to consider any legislation that provides a "reasonable solution" but wanted to avoid "knee-jerk reactions to this issue."

He said Obama's recommendations sound reasonable, and he too supports alternative education as a last chance for troubled students. But he defended the Decatur school board's actions, because only the board has the information necessary to make a decision.

State senator calls for changes to school expulsion laws in wake of Decatur dispute

Chicago lawmaker says alternative programs should be a requirement before expulsion.

By JOHN C. PETERSON
H&R Decatur Bureau Writer

SPRINGFIELD — The full session of the legislature had barely begun Tuesday when a state senator from Chicago, who also happens to be running for Congress, sent out news releases calling for changes to school expulsions laws in the wake of the ongoing controversy in Decatur.

State Sen. Barack Obama, D-Chicago, said state law should require students be enrolled in alternative education programs before they are expelled. Current law allows school districts to send troubled students to alternative programs,

but does not force them to.

"My attitude is that to the extent that we're dealing with nonviolent offenders or students who haven't struck teachers or used weapons, that probably it makes sense that we have a mandate that in fact these children attend alternative schools," Obama said in an interview.

"One of the most difficult things we as a society have to decide is how we deal with young people who have engaged in antisocial behavior. If we simply throw them out ... we can anticipate that over time a good number of those people will end up in the prison system," Obama said. "On the other hand, when it comes to schools, we have to create a safe environment."

He said his goal is to provide guidance through the state laws.

Obama is running for the 1st Congressional District seat now held by U.S. Rep. Bobby L. Rush, D-Chicago. State Sen. Donnie E. Trotter, D-Chicago, also is running for the seat. Rush has been in Decatur marching with Jackson.

All three politicians are black and the district has a predominantly black population. Tuesday provided Obama an opportunity to join the publicity, although he denied that was his motivation.

"I've got a long track record working on juvenile justice issues. I'm not a Johnny-come-lately. Certainly given the prominence the issue in Decatur has taken that it gives us an opportunity to engage in a dialogue about how we can improve the system," Obama said.

His news release comes a day after another legislator urged colleagues not

to grandstand during the fall session and to leave the Decatur situation in the hands of locally elected school officials.

State Rep. Mary Lou Cowlishaw, R-Naperville, said outsiders should respect the decisions made by the Decatur school board. Cowlishaw is a former school board member and the top Republican on the Illinois House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee.

"I have great respect for Jesse Jackson. He is a very articulate, very dedicated man," Cowlishaw said. "I would defend against all comers his right to go to Decatur and speak his mind. But the decision is not his. The decision is that of the local school board. He is answerable to those taxpayers. He is not."

She recommended the school board