

# LEBANON DEMOCRAT

SATURDAY-SUNDAY  
June 27-28, 2020  
lebanondemocrat.com

\$1

## LSSD unveils 'Virtual Academy' plans

On-campus classes expected to resume in the fall as well

BY ETHAN STEINQUEST  
ESTEINQUEST@LEBANONDEMOCRAT.COM

The Lebanon Special School District hopes to have students back in school

Aug. 10, but officials are working on a Virtual Academy program for those worried about coming back to class amid COVID-19.

Director of Teaching and Learning Pam Sampson said 26 teachers and an estimated 349 students have shown interest in the program so far. Signups would commit students to the Virtual Academy through December at minimum, and a registration deadline is expected soon.

"Because of what we've done in our

district since 2014, we feel very equipped to handle a virtual situation," Director of Schools Scott Benson said. "We're going to do it all in-house. We're going to use our existing teachers, we're going to use our existing administrators in this office to help support."

The district has purchased new technology to help with the program, and a parent or family member would be required to provide instructional support for Virtual Academy students during

school hours.

"There's also the responsibility of the parent as being a learning coach to help that child when they're not online with the teacher," Sampson said. "We do not want a child sitting at the computer all day. They need both types of learning, so it's going to take the parent or guardian working with a child and then our teachers working with them online."

SEE LSSD/PAGE A8

## Watertown businesses roll with coronavirus pandemic's punches

Venues, shops find success by shifting gears

BY ETHAN STEINQUEST  
ESTEINQUEST@LEBANONDEMOCRAT.COM

Watertown's sales tax revenue is down slightly from this time last year, but local shops are pushing through the pandemic by adapting or changing their business models.

One of the places most suited to meeting the moment is the Stardust Drive-In Theater, which has been able to book high-profile musicians like Keith Urban and TobyMac for drive-in concerts alongside its usual film screenings.

"Having that venue has always been great, but certainly during this time," Watertown Mayor Mike Jennings said. "It's given people an opportunity for families to get together in an outdoor environment that's almost social distancing by definition. People get stir-crazy inside, and this is something people can go out and do while activities like baseball are cancelled."

Hundreds of visitors have travelled to the drive-in for a chance to hear live music again, though local restaurants say the impact on their



Grammy Award-winning Christian hip-hop artist TobyMac performs at Watertown's Stardust Drive-In Theater with his band DiverseCity on Thursday.

Ethan Steinquest/Lebanon Democrat

own business has been minimal at best.

"We've had some people come through and say they were going to Stardust," Sassy Pecan owner Ka Small said. "We're pulling people especially from Lebanon and Mt. Juliet because word of mouth is getting out."

Small said the Sassy Pecan's sales have multiplied over the past few months after shifting focus toward sandwich and salad lunches. Although the restaurant started serving meals in Jan-

uary, it was primarily known for candies and baked goods before COVID-19.

"When this all started I felt panic, honestly," she said. "We had no idea how our business was going to do since we'd only been in Watertown for 6 1/2 months. But you can either let panic and fear grip you, or you can find out a way to adapt."

ScratchPad Arts & Décor, an art studio typically used as an event venue, is also changing course toward its furniture sales and renova-

tion. Owner Holly Artlip said the furniture business has helped keep the lights on, but the store's long-term success depends on resuming events.

"Right from the beginning of COVID-19 we stalled out," she said. "Before that we'd increased our traffic so much that instead of having walk-ins we had to transition into being an event-only venue ... so we went from moving in a phenomenal direction to having nothing."

SEE ROLL/PAGE A8

## Lee sticks by state's plan for reopening

More testing coming as Wilson County cases surge

BY DEMOCRAT STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

Despite Tennessee's rising number of new COVID-19 cases and deaths, including hot spots in places such as Wilson County, Gov. Bill Lee is showing little inclination to dial things back and reimpose any of the pandemic-era restrictions that he lifted starting May 1 to restart the state's economy.

At a news conference this week at which he highlighted figures showing an uptick in tax collections as signs of a resurging economy, Lee told reporters that he by no means considers the coronavirus threat over.

"There is a genuine understanding that COVID-19 is a serious public health crisis for our state, and we take it seriously every single day," he said in response to a question, later adding, "We are encouraged that we have one of the lowest death rates per capita in the country, but every single death is a very serious issue for me."

Wilson County Mayor Randall Hutto declared a state of emergency Wednesday because of the surge in COVID-19 cases locally. He urged residents to wear masks, wash their hands and practice social distancing.

The state's response has been to send a National Guard team to the Wilson County Health Department to provide drive-through testing.

"The drive-through option will remain in place for as long as needed in Wilson County," said Dean Flenner, the Governor's Unified Command spokesman in an email.

On Friday, he said that the guard's drive-through testing would move from the health department to the Wilson County Fairgrounds in Lebanon and be open from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

"The increase in testing capacity allows

SEE PLAN/PAGE A8

## Law firm to investigate McNeese complaints

Committee vows to make information public

BY MIKE ALEXIEFF  
MALEXIEFF@LEBANONDEMOCRAT.COM

A law firm will investigate the two complaints filed against Wilson County School board member Wayne McNeese and provide the board's three-member ethics committee with its findings

and recommendations.

That decision was made during a brief meeting of the committee, which is composed of board members Linda Armistead, Kimberly McGee and Bill Robinson, Thursday night.

Armistead, who chairs the committee, outlined two options. The first option was to have the Memphis law firm Jackson Shields Yeiser and Holt, already retained by the board because of regular board attorney Mike Jennings' recusal,

conduct the investigation.

The other option would be for the committee to hold a public hearing in which McNeese and his accusers, as well as witnesses, would be heard.

"My thinking is we're going to turn it over and allow the attorneys to conduct the investigation," Robinson said. "But I want to make sure the public is aware of what's going on."

SEE FIRM/PAGE A8

**CONNECT WITH US**

Connect with us socially. Get the e-edition at lebanondemocrat.com.

**OBITUARIES**

Cherry Lynn Chance, Raymond L. Hankins, Wayne Holloman Rogers, Robert H. 'Pete' Barnes, Linda Word Lawrence

Page A3

**INSIDE**

Classifieds.....A11  
Comics.....A10  
Editorial.....A4  
Obituaries.....A3  
Television.....A8-9

**VIEWS. NOW.**

Buchanan says Biden will face tough questions when he emerges from his basement.

Page A4

8 04879 12171 8

Scottd (L-R) Clark McKinney, Co-Owner, Licensed Funeral Director & Embalmer; David Brooks, Co-Owner, Licensed Funeral Director & Embalmer; Standing (L-R) Wayne Foster & Claudcom Bisinger, Funeral Assistants; Jason Ligon, Licensed Funeral Director & Embalmer. (Non Licensed)

Traditional Funerals • Cremation  
Pre-Need Funeral Planning  
Obituary Information 615-444-6600  
Serving Lebanon and surrounding communities since 1920

LIGON & BOBO  
FUNERAL HOME INC  
A Heritage You Can Trust  
241 West Main Street • Lebanon, TN  
615-444-2142 • www.ligonbobobob.com