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The Newport Plain Talk

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COCKE COUNTY'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER SINCE 1900

69 children reported COVID positive in seven-day period

STAFF REPORTS

COCKE COUNTY—With only nine new COVID cases reported on September 20, case numbers continue to cool down in the county. In the last seven days, there have been 240 new cases reported, which is down from the 384 cases over the previous seven days.

According to state data, there were approximately 69 cases in residents aged 0-18-years-old from September 13 through 19. Of those, 10 were 0-4-years-old, 17 were 5-11-years-old, and 42 were 12-18-years-old.

As of September 20, there were 451 active COVID cases in the county, which is down from earlier in the month, but still on par with figures from early January.

No new deaths or hospitalizations have been reported to the county dashboard, leaving the toll at 104 deaths

SEE COVID, PAGE 4A

County in the running for three major industrial projects

BY MATT WINTER

NPT ASSISTANT EDITOR

COCKE COUNTY—Cocke County is currently in the running to land multiple large-scale projects according to Lucas Graham, Cocke County Economic Development Director and Partnership President.

Graham provided a brief update on the projects during the most recent meeting of Economic Development Commission (EDC). Project Gold Star started as a nationwide search that has been narrowed to a select number of states.

The company has an aggressive timeline and is currently looking to make a decision by October. "I'm working with the CEO and VP and it's been a back and forth process," Graham said.

SEE PROJECTS, PAGE 4A



SUBMITTED

Submit your scarecrow decoration photo to the Chamber of Commerce before Sept. 30 to be included in the voting process. Voting will take place on the Chamber's Facebook page from Oct. 1-31. Winners will receive gift cards and local business promo items.

Chamber of Commerce holding scarecrow decorating contest

The Cocke County Partnership Chamber of Commerce is inviting Cocke County businesses and homes to participate in a scarecrow decorating contest. Gift card prizes and bragging rights are sure to rev up the competition.

Creativity and imaginations are welcome; there are no limits on how crazy you can be. There are no restrictions on design; however, please be family friendly. The community will be voting so be creative, festive and

SEE CONTEST, PAGE 4A

County Fire Department can proceed with budget transfer despite CLB objection

BY MATT WINTER

NPT ASSISTANT EDITOR

COCKE COUNTY—A budget transfer requested by the County Fire Department led to a lengthy discussion at Monday's County Legislative Body (CLB) meeting.

The initial request was presented to the County Budget Committee earlier this month, and passed on to the CLB for consideration.

The position of assistant chief has been vacant for some time at the department, which led Chief Bryan Southerland to remove the position and request those funds be used to increase salaries for all firefighters.

Included in the move would be a new position that will carry the title of Senior Captain. No new dollars would need to be added to the budget to make the request work.

A motion was made to approve the request, but it failed with eight commissioners voting against the measure.

After that vote occurred, County Mayor Crystal Ottinger told the body she would let the department proceed with the request despite their disapproval. She said it may result in a small blip on the county's audit report but would be worth it in the end.

"I'm going to go ahead and allow them act as if this was approved," Ottinger said.

"This should only result in an audit footnote and not a finding when the time comes, but I'm willing to do that to get them the money they deserve."

Several commissioners feared that approving the request would open Pandora's box.

"If we allow the fire department to do this what will stop everyone else from doing the same," CLB chair Clay Blazer asked?

"I'm torn by this decision because I know our employees



MATT WINTER

Commissioner Clay Blazer was reappointed to serve as chair of the County Legislative Body Monday evening. He took his oath during the meeting, which was administered by Lydia Shelton. Commissioner Norman Smith will serve as vice-chair for the 2021-2022 year.

deserve more pay."

Commissioner Gayla Blazer agreed that most employees deserve an increase in pay but preferred it be done through the budget process. She also questioned the salary increase for the chief.

The request would see Southerland's salary increase by \$4,400 per year.

"The chief knew the salary when he took the position," Blazer said.

SEE CLB, PAGE 4A



MATT WINTER

Mayor Crystal Ottinger and members of the County Legislative Body took time Monday evening to honor Marty Ricker. Ricker passed away on July 30, 2021. Ricker covered local meetings for years and most recently served as news director for WLK in Newport. Pictured are Crystal Ottinger, Kyle Shute, Brian Evans, Jay Braswell, Angie Wilkerson, Michael Ricker, Shelby Ricker, Gayla Blazer, Terry Dawson, Clay Blazer, Christopher Ricker, Gary Carver, Norman Smith, Forest Clevenger, Jeff Eslinger, Barry Ford, Casey Gilliam, Pete Bright and Calvin Ball.

City School Board approves substitute pay raise

BY ERIC RHODES

NPT STAFF WRITER

NEWPORT—The Newport City Board of Education held their September meeting in the Newport Grammar School auditorium on Monday night. Items included the approval of an increased pay rate for substitutes to help mitigate the effects of an ongoing labor shortage at the school.

The board also discussed incentives for the staff and faculty as a reward for Newport Grammar's recent accolades as a Level 5 reward school on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS).

The meeting's workshop began with a COVID-19 report from Michelle Black and Kathy Ragan, who shared that 11 students had been exposed to COVID-19, one student had tested positive, and 26 students were using distance learning. One staff member had tested positive, but that member had been absent from work due to other health reasons and had not been in the school for over a week.

Cafeteria Manager Christina Leas followed with her report of the last month. In the 14 operating days of August, NGS had served 2,443 breakfasts and 5,265 lunches.

The school's new combination oven has been installed and was working

properly. Leas shared that, due to the lack of functioning air conditioning in the kitchen, the freezer had broken down and she had to request help from Thermo King, who donated a freezer truck while the school's freezer was being repaired.

Leas also shared that the cafeteria has been struggling with food and supply shortages, as manufacturers were understaffed and could not produce enough product to meet demands. Finally, Leas shared that the cafeteria had been affected by ongoing labor shortages, but she reassured the board that the children are being fed.

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TODAY

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