

The Warrensburg Star-Journal's Progress edition is a special supplement to your weekly paper that explains how the community has progressed over the past year. The special edition includes content covering the topics of Government, Education, Business, Health, Faith, Community, Sports and Arts and Entertainment.

Progress

.....Business • Health • Government • Education



City Clerk Jodi Schneider and Police Chief Andy Munsterman shake hands after Munsterman is sworn in on Jan. 27 at the Warrensburg Municipal Center. FILE PHOTO BY MELIAH VENERABLE | STAR-JOURNAL

School district completes new CSIP, focuses on Tiger Pride

New superintendent joining in July

By Nicole Cooke
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WARRENSBURG — As the Warrensburg R-VI School District completes a school year highlighted by increased involvement, a new CSIP, and Tiger Pride, it will enter next year with new leadership.

June 30 will mark the last day for Superintendent Andy Kohl as he enters retirement. The Board of Education has hired Dr. Steve Ritter, who will take over the position July 1. Kohl said Ritter has started the transition by meeting with principals and attending district meetings. He added that they hope to have a “seamless transition” this summer.

Ritter is currently serving as the superintendent of the Sherwood-Cass R-VIII School District, a role he has held for the last six years.

This winter, the school board approved a new CSIP (Comprehensive School Improvement Plan) after the district received feedback from the community, staff, and students.

“That’s quite the accomplishment, but it’s an accomplishment that leaves you with 17 goals,” Kohl joked. “But we’ve already made some significant progress on some of those goals. That’ll be a guiding document going forward for the district and for the buildings.”

Kohl said the district is also working to strengthen its relationship with Whiteman Air Force Base



Warrensburg School District Superintendent Andy Kohl speaks at the Community Update Breakfast hosted by the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce in April at the American Legion. Kohl is retiring from the district on June 30. FILE PHOTO BY NICOLE COOKE | STAR-JOURNAL

to offer more support for military-connected families. The assistant principals, Assistant Superintendent Dr. John Finnane and Matt Bax at Warrensburg High School have been working on that initiative.

Kohl added that the district has been fortunate to have six of its schools named Purple Star Schools last year – the first in the state – and to have the district named a Purple Star District this year.

“It’s something we need to continue to work on and improve on and get feedback from our military families on that going forward to make sure we’re continuing to improve processes and remove any obstacles that we can for those families as they transition in and out,” he added.

See **SCHOOL**, Page A6

Emergency services make upgrades, struggling with employee retention

By Meliyah Venerable
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JOHNSON COUNTY — All of Johnson County Emergency Services will be receiving a new radio system by January 2025.

The Johnson County Emergency Services Board approved the Capital Communications Project during the Feb. 21 Board meeting. The funds will support the infrastructure project and equipment, as well as the ongoing support and maintenance of equipment.

The multi-million dollar project is going to be funded by the revenue received from the recent 1% sales tax that Johnson County voters approved in November 2022.

The project consists of the construction of new communication towers and

equipment upgrades to a modernized radio communications infrastructure, which will provide better radio communication capabilities in Johnson County.

The project was prompted by failure and inconsistency with the current radio systems that emergency services use to communicate.

“Our current radio system does not provide adequate radio communications throughout our cities and rural areas of Johnson County,” Executive Director of JCCD Kimberly Jennings told the Star-Journal in February. “Our in-building radio coverage is even less reliable in our most vulnerable areas, such as schools and our hospital. This creates a serious safety issue for our emergency service personnel who cannot call for assistance when needed.”

See **UPGRADES**, Page A5



Shane Lockard and Kimberly Jennings sign the contract with Motorola Solutions during the Feb. 21 Board of Directors meeting. PHOTO COURTESY OF KIMBERLY JENNINGS

WMMC advances patient care, begins new programs

By Meliyah Venerable
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WARRENSBURG — This year, Western Missouri Medical Center has been working on expanding services and hiring new physicians. It has hired Hand Surgeon Dr. Alex Palmer, Ortho Physician Assistant Tina Carter, Dr. Evan Neuls in General Surgery and Dr. Andrew Morris in Urology.

In July, WMMC received a five-star rating for overall hospital quality from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). This rating is the highest rating that a hospital can achieve.

WMMC Director of Quality and Risk Amanda Lankford said

this is the first time the hospital has received an overall five-star rating, and it is a testament to the hard work and commitment the staff devotes to their patients.

WMMC President/CEO Darinda Dick said the rating can assist patients in choosing the right hospital to visit, and WMMC receiving the highest achievable score will guide patients to the best care.

“If you’re trying to plan a trip, you’re probably going to review the various accommodations in the area you are visiting. As you do so, you’re going to encounter a hotel star rating system that allows you to make a decision on where you stay,” Lankford told the Star-Journal in August. “This day and age, hospitals are part of the consumer market as

well, patients have choices of where they wish to receive care just as the accommodations on a trip. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) uses a five-star quality rating system to measure the experiences Medicare beneficiaries have with their health plan and health care system — the Star Rating Program.

“Health plans are rated on a scale of 1 to 5 stars, with five being the highest. This rating allows patients to make a conscious decision when choosing where they receive care. The star rating is important for the hospital because it facilitates the organization’s reputation for quality of care and the experience.”

See **WMMC**, Page A5



From left, Abbie Flamm, Jen Miles, Melanie Spinelli, Carly Kellogg and Dr. Amira Ghazali on Tuesday, Dec. 6. at ReDefine Medical Spa, 220 Maynard St. FILE PHOTO BY MELIAH VENERABLE | STAR-JOURNAL

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City of Warrensburg strives to develop community

By Meliyah Venerable
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WARRENSBURG — This year, the City of Warrensburg has been focusing on building a community that people want to be in. Many street and business development projects have been started to help Warrensburg be safe and easily accessible.

The city placed a question on the April Municipal Election ballot to add a 1% sales tax increase that would go to the general fund and help fund public safety.

The voters did not approve the tax, leaving the city and the public safety departments to find other options to find the funds.

City Manager Danielle Dulin said she wants to be transparent and informative with the community and voters about the city's budget.

"We want to share with the community what our general fund is," Dulin said. "We're budgeting to bring in \$11.4 million in the general fund. Seventy percent of that is dedicated to personnel, another 10% is utilities and supplies, another 5% of that is community agreements and that does not leave a whole lot of extra for programs...We just don't have a lot of flexibility in our budget to provide a lot of those quality services that we know the community wants."

Dulin said that to continue to grow Warrensburg and the economy, things like public safety will be important. She said people want to feel safe where they live.

"We talk about trying to grow our economy and trying to grow retail businesses that we have and recruit industry and workforce," Dulin said. "All of those things and trying to create a place and placemaking. Trying to create a place that businesses want to grow and want to join our community... that all takes streets that are drivable, safe streets through the police department. People want to know that if they do invest millions of dollars in a facility, that if something terrible does happen, that the fire department is going to show up and be able to put the fire out."

The City of Warrensburg is beginning the Sidewalk Improvement Program that the Warrensburg City Council approved in late 2022.

The goal of the program is to improve the walkability, accessibility and connectivity throughout the city's residential sidewalks.

"The City wanted to upgrade and revamp the long-standing Sidewalk and Curb Program," Assistant City Manager Enrico Villegas said. "The old program worked on a complaint-driven basis where a citizen at large



City Manager Danielle Dulin and Police Chief Andy Munsterman share a handshake after Dulin welcomed attendees to Munsterman's swearing-in ceremony Friday, Jan. 27.
FILE PHOTO BY MELIYAH VENERABLE | STAR-JOURNAL

would request that their sidewalk be fixed and the city would fund a portion of the project and the citizen would cover a portion as well.

"Under this paradigm, there were several shortcomings. It was usually the same demographic of citizens that would participate in this service, it only tackled spot repairs, and we weren't addressing the larger problems."

The city will be divided into separate zones. Each zone will be inspected annually.

Brick or stone sidewalks that abut a property that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places may have the portion of sidewalk that abuts the property replaced in-kind.

In all other circumstances where brick or stone was used to construct the sidewalk, and the property owner requests that the abutting sidewalk be restored with brick or stone, the City will request that a 50/50 cost share agreement be reached. If there are no requests to keep the original material, it will be replaced with concrete.

The City will select a zone each year to inspect sidewalks for noticeable defects, hazards, or gaps that may be interfering with pedestrian travel. The inspections will help evaluate which sidewalks require repair, replacement, or some other form of treatment.

"With the new program, we can address wholesale changes by leveraging City purchasing power and resources by addressing the City's entire residential sidewalk network zones at a time and making the necessary repairs and covering at the city's cost," Villegas said. "As well as shifting the curb and ADA ramp repairs to the street maintenance

program where we can touch everything all at once instead of hitting the same street and/or neighborhood twice."

City staff has been working on making their map accessible to the general public, but at this time, the map is not ready for public access.

The city has been in negotiation with an engineering firm for the Maguire Street Corridor.

The Maguire Street project is funded by general obligation bonds the city received last year.

"We are very excited about the Maguire Street Corridor," Dulin said. "We are excited to be working with this firm... This is a project that the city of Warrensburg has known is needed for 10 to 15 years. It's really exciting to have such a generation project like the Maguire Street Corridor renovation."

Dulin's vision for Maguire Street is to make it a place the community wants to visit rather than avoid.

"To be able to recruit that retail, continue building that economy and creating a place that people in our community want to be," Dulin said. "For me, I want people to no longer avoid Maguire but want to drive down Maguire and stop at those businesses

or spend some time along Maguire... So that it becomes a destination or amenity for people in our community."

A project that will be starting soon is the Cooper Boulevard extension. The project will be extending Cooper Boulevard from Simpson Drive to Hawthorne Boulevard and is funded by the Transportation Development District tax money.

The City recently applied for a Community Development Block Grant for the rehabilitation of Market Street. The project will be a complete reconstruction of Market Street, including stormwater and sidewalks.

Dulin said the city will be trying to use the Market Street rehabilitation as a pilot street to show what can be done to Warrensburg neighborhoods. The project will be around \$375,000. If the city is not approved for the grant, the project will move forward.

The most recent project the city has started is the solid waste study. So far, more than 1,000 people have responded to the survey. The city will be hosting open houses and work sessions to complete the study.

Meliyah Venerable can be reached at 660-747-8123.



City Clerk Jodi Schneider swears in new Warrensburg City Council member Jan Jones on Monday, April 10. Jones was elected in the April 4 municipal election.
FILE PHOTO BY MELIYAH VENERABLE | STAR-JOURNAL

JCEDC continues small business support

By Meliyah Venerable
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JOHNSON COUNTY — The Johnson County Economic Development Corporation was developed in 1995 and has since continued to develop a thriving and diverse economic community.

JCEDC works with Johnson County businesses and residents as well as city leaders, public officials and state legislators.

The top 20 employers of Johnson County employed 14,500 people. Whiteman Air Force Base was the top employer for 2022, employing 8,588 people. The Uni-

versity of Central Missouri is the second in the county employing 1,050 people. EnerSys Energy Products, Western Missouri Medical Center and Warrensburg R-VI School District make up the rest of the top five.

Executive Director Tracy Brantner assisted the Johnson County Commissioners

with several requests for proposal and qualification processes in the last year. Some of the programs included the Johnson County Courthouse HVAC RFQ, Johnson County Sheriff Security Controls and the Johnson County Security Fence RFQ.

Johnson County has received a total of \$10.5 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds.

"These ARPA funds are once-in-a-lifetime, transformational, infrastructure-led opportunities to support long-term growth and investment for all of Johnson County," Brantner said.

The commission announced the Water Resource Match program in June. The program was funded through ARPA. It assisted local entities by leveraging the county ARPA funds for cost share.

"My fellow commissioners and I feel strongly that assisting local entities by leveraging the county ARPA funds as a portion of local cost-share will further invest in our county's future," Presiding Commissioner Densil Allen said in June. "If approved by Missouri DNR, these seven unique projects will greatly impact access to safe water resources for citizens and businesses in Johnson County."



Lisa Dean works on renovations at Bar-B Mercantile's new location at 427 NE Highway 13 in Warrensburg, which opened in September 2022.
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE JOHNSON COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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2023

Progress

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Co-Owners Brandy Wormsley and Stephanie Main stand outside of the Birkin Brewing Co. coffee trailer on Monday, Dec. 5. FILE PHOTOS BY MELIYAH VENERABLE | STAR-JOURNAL



Owner Woods Prael is seen inside Gunzil and Bowser Children's Bookstore on Wednesday, Dec. 8. The new bookstore is at 112 W. Gay St.



Brandon Brown cuts the ribbon surrounded by RISE Racks Thrift Store employees, community members and Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce members on Friday, Nov. 18 at the grand opening and ribbon cutting for RISE Racks, 1125 N. Simpson Drive Suite K.



Dane and Bailey Ross pose for a photo in front of their new business, Old Drum Coffeehouse and Eatery, in July 2022. The couple purchased the business at 211 N. Holden St. last summer in hopes of continuing a Warrensburg tradition. FILE PHOTO BY DILLON SECKINGTON | STAR-JOURNAL

New shops open, relocate across Johnson County

By Star-Journal Staff

While business news wasn't non-existent during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic changes were slow. After several years of announcements from the Johnson County Economic Development Corporation and numerous national and local retailers settling in the city, the business front was quieter than usual in 2020-21, but 2022 saw a resurgence of countless new small businesses.

Small businesses seemed to pop up left and right in 2022 and into early 2023. The long but not necessarily complete list includes BLUSH Bootcamp, Always Vintage, 660 IV Health, Birkin Brewing, Gunzil and Bowser Children's Bookstore, ReDefine Medical Spa, RISE Racks Thrift Store, The Malted Cow, Green Orange Airsoft Tactical Site (GOATS),

Xpress Yourself Landscaping, Dogwood Outdoors LLC, Sweet Treats Ice Cream Truck, Street Foods and Catering, and Woodchux.

While not yet open, the Wahn family announced in December that they plan to open a bowling alley, Alley Cats, at 822 S. Maguire St. The bowling alley is undergoing construction and an opening date has not been set, but the family said they hope to open by Memorial Day.

And that just includes new retail in Warrensburg and Johnson County, not to mention the countless new businesses in the surrounding area in West Central Missouri.

A few businesses also closed their doors over the last year, such as Clubs & Cleavers, which opened in September 2021 but closed in January 2023, Brick House Coffee, Juanito's and Mazzio's. Mulekicker BBQ announced on social media it purchased the

former Juanito's building last year, with plans to open its first brick-and-mortar location this summer.

Old Drum Coffeehouse and Eatery got a facelift and new ownership in 2022. After a four-month remodel, the downtown shop reopened in May. In July, ownership changed hands, and Bailey and Dane Ross now operate the 211 N. Holden St. coffeehouse.

A few businesses found new homes, such as PCMR LLC moved to 107 E. Culton St. and ECHO Pest Control moved to 611 Creach Drive. Johnson County native Lisa Dean and her business, Bar-B Mercantile, received a microloan from the JCEDC's Microloan program, which allowed her to renovate her new location at 427 NE Highway 13 in Warrensburg.

Mike Keith Insurance and MKi Pavilion hosted its ribbon cutting and

open house in June, which followed a 1.5-year remodel, relocation, and change of ownership process. Located at 101 Ming St., the insurance agency is now in a more suitable building with a pavilion to host social or business events.

Over the past 12 months, several leadership changes were announced at businesses across the county, ranging from industry to retail to service to business to business. Several businesses also announced changes in offerings, such as new products or increased technology efforts. Many were recognized for their work locally through organizations like the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce and Warrensburg Main Street or on a state or regional level.

Warrensburg's historic downtown district is continuing to thrive, with new public art, continued community events, numerous

new businesses and more on the way.

Over the past year, several businesses have joined downtown Warrensburg, including Moonlit Petrichor, ReDefine Medical Spa, Street Foods and Catering, and Woodchux.

Retrograde Charitable Toy and Videogame Museum found a new home at 112 E. Market St. in the downtown district. The nonprofit community-organized museum/arcade was founded in June 2017. Retrograde was previously at 112 W. Gay St. in a two-story house that was converted into a business.

Moves were also made in the local health care industry.

Western Missouri Medical Center announced a number of changes, some that have been completed and some that are still to come.

The hospital hired Hand Surgeon Dr. Alex Palmer, Ortho Physician Assistant

Tina Carter, Dr. Evan Neuls in General Surgery and Dr. Andrew Morris in Urology. WMMC is also actively recruiting for several other positions.

WMMC opened a physician-led medical spa, ReDefine Medical Spa, in December in downtown Warrensburg. WMMC general surgeon Dr. Amira Ghazali leads the spa, which offers acne reduction, cellulite reduction, laser hair removal and other aesthetic and wellness services.

During the Community Update Breakfast hosted by the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce in mid-April, CEO Darinda Dick offered a preview of what's to come, including advancing the hospital's neonatal care plan, expanding radiology capabilities to support cancer, stroke and cardiovascular care, and opening a cardiology clinic this fall.

JCEDC

Continued from Page A2

Seven projects were pre-approved by the Johnson County Commission for a total of \$1.1 million, but the projects have yet to be approved by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources and were placed on the waitlist. The

Recovery Advisory Team is still considering options for funding these projects.

All ARPA funds must be expended to cover obligations and all the work must be completed by Dec. 31, 2026.

The JCEDC has been delivering no-cost technical business assistance to entrepreneurs and existing small business owners in Johnson County. From October 2021 to September 2022, the JCEDC has assisted 589 small businesses, hosted 39 business training and workshop opportunities and had 190 regional training participants.

Along with small business development, JCEDC announced the hiring of a new Small Business Development Counselor, Sandra Elwell. Elwell will be focusing on small business counseling and support for Johnson County's existing small businesses as well as developing new businesses.

Small business development has been a goal for the JCEDC. So far this year, the JCEDC has loaned \$142,500 to Johnson County small business owners and entrepreneurs with the JCEDC Microloan program.

The JCEDC microloan program offers loans up to \$10,000 and allows small business owners to finance start-up or established businesses, including both home-based and storefront.

As the loan borrowers repay their loans, these "revolving funds" are used to make more loans to other businesses to create more jobs and investment opportunities.

Lisa Dean and her business, Bar-B Mercantile, have received a microloan from the JCEDC microloan program. The loan has given Davis a chance to renovate her new location.

Dean applied for and received the \$10,000 JCEDC microloan, just in time for the finishing touches on the new

business, which opened last year.

"I really like the education that came along with it," Dean told the Star-Journal in September, just before her business was set to open at 427 NE Highway 13 in Warrensburg. "They are not just like a bank that does lending. They actually walk you through a whole business plan and help clarify things and bring things to a business owner's attention. Especially for a first-time business owner like myself."

This year, the Whiteman Area Leadership Council was awarded \$33,500 through the Military Community Reinvestment Program. The grant will be used for the Child Care Assessment and Action Plan for a 30-mile radius of Whiteman Air Force Base.

The past two years have been vital in rebuilding the economy of Johnson County after the pandemic. Businesses are taking the opportunities that have been made available. Brantner is happy to see that and is optimistic for the future of Johnson County.

"We were still feeling the effects of COVID this time last year," Brantner said. "People are taking advantage of the resources regarding recovery funding. Whether that is a small business person or the local government, they are trying to make sure that they are investing long-term in our growth here in Johnson County, not only for their business but for our communities. So I think we are in a really good place. We're poised to take advantage of some of these programs."

Meliyah Venerable can be reached at 660-747-8123.



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Multiple school districts see administration changes over the past year

By Star-Journal Staff
Over the past year, multiple school districts have seen administration changes with new superintendents, principals, and more.

Warrensburg R-VI School District

In January, the Warrensburg R-VI School District announced the hiring of a new Superintendent, Steve Ritter. He will resume the position on July 1 after Superintendent Andy Kohl retires.

Ritter is currently serving as the superintendent of the Sherwood-Cass R-VIII School District. Before Sherwood, Ritter was the director of academic and student services in Harrisonville Cass R-IX School District for two years and four years as the principal at Lake-land High School. His administration career began in the Clinton School District, where he was a teacher, coach and high school assistant principal.

Also in January, Anne Lovercamp was announced as the new assistant principal at Warrensburg High School for the 2023-24 school year.

Lovercamp has been employed in the district since 2018 and has taught American Government, Advanced Placement Human Geography and Geography courses. She began her teaching career as an American Government teacher

at North Kansas City School District, where she was also an assistant swim coach.

In February, the district named Andrew Wakeman as the new Director of the Warrensburg Area Career Center. He will replace WACC Director Rusty Sproat, who is retiring at the end of the 2022-23 school year.

Wakeman currently serves as the Computer Technologies Teacher for the career center, where he has worked for the last five years, and as a Second Lieutenant — Platoon Leader in the Missouri National Guard. In 2013, he began teaching as a long-term substitute teacher in the Holden R-III School District. From 2014 to 2018, Wakeman was the middle school Business/technology teacher in the Holden School District.

Johnson County R-VII School District

The Johnson County R-VII School District will have a new leader for the 2023-24 school year after the Board of Education hired Dr. Heather Gross.

Gross, the current Assistant Superintendent of Student Services in the Excelsior Springs School District, has been in education for 26 years. She began her career as a music teacher after graduating from Southeast Missouri State University in 1997 with a Bachelor's in



Steve Ritter



Andrew Wakeman



Anne Lovercamp

Music Education. She taught music at the elementary, junior high and high school levels for 15 years in several districts.

Morgan County R-II School District

This spring, the Morgan County district announced the hiring of Marc Spunaugle as its next superintendent, effective July 1. Spunaugle has been the Leeton superintendent since the 2021-22 school year.

Spunaugle has been in education for 30 years, including the last 13 as an administrator. His first job in public education was at Warrensburg High School. He then worked in Maysville, followed by Warsaw, the last district where he worked in a classroom. After teaching and coaching for 17 years, Spunaugle moved to administration. Spunaugle was a

principal in the Windsor School District for a year and then was named the Lincoln Middle/High School Principal in 2011.

Leeton R-X School District

With the upcoming departure of Spunaugle, the Leeton district has hired Adam Easterwood to fill the superintendent position starting July 1.

Easterwood is the associate principal at Knob Noster High School. During his 19-year career in education, he has served as a teacher, coach, athletic director, and building-level administrator. Easterwood has helped develop academic programs in robotics, cybersecurity, aviation, computer science, and a robust Advanced Placement program for the Knob Noster district.

Leeton has also hired Lisa Siegfried as its middle school/

high school principal for 2023-24.

She began her education career teaching sixth grade at Leeton, followed by seventh and eighth grade English at Crest Ridge, then high school special education at Crest Ridge, followed by Knob Noster. She returned to Crest Ridge for her current position, where she teaches high school business and is a secondary curriculum coach.

Siegfried will be replacing Kyle Stoecklein, who is leaving the Leeton district to become the new Holden Middle School principal. Stoecklein is replacing Dr. Chris Lake, who is retiring June 30.

Stoecklein's first job in education was teaching math at Smith-Cotton, where he also coached the robotics program and football. He has also taught

SCHOOL

Continued from Page A1

The 2022-23 school year has also seen the return of more family involvement in schools after the COVID-19 pandemic. Kohl said parents are returning to district buildings for parent nights and other activities. Field trips have resumed, and students have been involved in the community in various ways, such as the schools that Warrensburg Main Street recognized for community service and Warrensburg Area Career Center students participating in mock interviews.

COVID also caused learning loss for many students. The Warrensburg district used federal funds to place interventionists in its buildings to focus on helping students catch up. He said other teachers also help, but the interventionists work with smaller groups of students to help them get on track.

"I think that has been extremely productive," he said. "We have our tiers of interventions normally without COVID, but this was able to ramp that up a little bit because we had more students needing a higher level of interventions with the COVID loss. I think those teachers have really helped us meet the needs of those students who need extra assistance."

He said elementary students

have more time to overcome their COVID learning loss, while students who were in high school in 2020 and 2021 may see a learning gap as upperclassmen or in college.

Kohl said the district added assistant principals at the elementary around the same time, and they've been able to help students with the social/emotional side of COVID learning loss. The district hopes to maintain the new interventionist positions for at least another year, and then administrators will evaluate the budget and student needs for 2024-25.

Last spring, the district was looking for a way to enter the new school year on a positive note after so many changes during the pandemic.

"As things started to open up, we felt like the mood was just so down. Things were so divisive in COVID. It seemed like there were two camps and it became such a struggle," Kohl recalled. "Our administrators, kudos to them, they got together and said, 'What can we do?' That's how we came up with Tiger Pride. And our board talked about it too, so it was across the board that we felt there was a need for something like that."

Kohl said building and district administrators and the athletic department de-



Assistant Superintendent Dr. John Finnane, third from left, holds a plaque honoring the Warrensburg School District for being a Purple Star District during a ceremony in mid-April in Jefferson City. He is pictured with state officials, including Missouri Commissioner of Education Margie Vandeven on his left. PHOTO COURTESY OF WARRENSBURG SCHOOL DISTRICT

termined what "Tiger Pride" means and how it can be incorporated into the school year. That led to Hi-5 Fridays, with high school students greeting elementary students on Friday mornings with high-fives as they head into the building. WHS students and community members also participated in

elementary school assemblies with character trait themes, sharing with young students how to exemplify those traits in their lives.

"It's neat to have other people that they don't see every day talk about those things. It's been great," Kohl said. "... Telling them 'what does respect mean to me.' When you hear it from a high school student and you're a third-grader, that means a lot."

While there have been many highlights for the Warrensburg School District over the past year, that doesn't mean there haven't been challenges. Like countless other districts across the country, Warrensburg is facing staffing challenges. During the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce's Community Update Breakfast in mid-April, Kohl included bus drivers, paraprofessionals, teachers, food service workers, custodians and substitutes on the list of staffing needs.

"It's across our nation and I don't think it matters what business you're in, there just seems to be a lot of staffing issues," Kohl said. "I think COVID had something to do with that. I think there are parents who are staying home with kids rather than both parents working. From my perspective, I applaud that. ... I don't know what the other factors are, whether we just have a younger workforce that isn't interested in 40 hours a week, maybe that's part of it too. I also think their generation has it figured out a little better than my generation with the whole work-life balance too."

Kohl said he thinks there are many younger people who would've normally filled the open 40-to-60-hour jobs but are now saying they want different schedules to enjoy their personal time. He noted fewer people are graduating from universities with education degrees, impacting the candidate pool.

"We've had to focus on how do you retain people," Kohl said. "Dr. Finnane has tried to work through exit surveys on what we're hearing from people – why are they going to a different district or why are they leaving the teaching profession and then just trying to look at those factors, and is there something we can do to make changes there. Are there barriers we can remove?"

He said the district offers a good insurance plan but that staff pay at all levels is less competitive than it needs to be with area schools and comparable districts. As the state legislature considers increasing the minimum teacher salary, Kohl said Warrensburg is working to reach that level.

"We have to remind young people why those of in education chose education as a career. What are the good things about it? ... Really be honest about what education's all about and the benefits to spending your life impacting the lives of young people and trying to help them grow and be productive citizens in our society. Like I told our future teacher group, after 35 years, I don't regret it for a minute."

Nicole Cooke can be reached at 660-530-0138 or on Twitter @NicoleRCooke.



Warrensburg Main Street Executive Director Jill Purvis and representatives from the Warrensburg R-VI School District, the community partner award winner, pose for a photo during Warrensburg Main Street's Evening of Excellence on Tuesday, Jan. 24. FILE PHOTO BY MELIAH VENERABLE | STAR-JOURNAL

The Warrensburg Star-Journal's Progress edition is a special supplement to your weekly paper that explains how the community has progressed over the past year. The special edition includes content covering the topics of Government, Education, Business, Health, Faith, Community, Sports and Arts and Entertainment.

Progress

.....Community • Sports • Arts • Entertainment



Warrensburg Parks and Recreation interim Director Chris Deal speaks to the community about the reopening of the pool and the anniversary celebration of the community center on Thursday, Jan. 5.

FILE PHOTOS BY MELIAH VENERABLE | STAR-JOURNAL

Old Drum Animal Shelter sees success after rebuilding staff, board

By Meliah Venerable
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WARRENSBURG — Old Drum Animal Shelter has undergone various changes within the last year.

After the resignation of Shelter Director Kayla Frank and WAR Board member Mason Wirsig, who served in various roles, including Treasurer, President, and Community Coordinator, in July, the Warrensburg Animal Rescue Board of Directors was almost completely rebuilt.

Tracy Poston served as interim director from August to November, until she was able to connect with current shelter director Bobbi Yeo.

Yeo found her first executive director position at a small shelter in Alabama, where she said she learned a lot about running shelters and the best practices to use in shelters. After about two years in Alabama, Yeo moved just across the border to a much bigger facility in Georgia.

At the Old Drum Shelter, Yeo had a goal to continue the basics of running a shelter and eventually develop more programs that not only help the shelter

but dog owners around the county.

Since starting her position in Warrensburg, Yeo has been working on getting the shelter to full staff and has begun training staff and volunteers to make the shelter run smoothly.

"I feel like we're doing some great things," Yeo told the Star-Journal this month. "I am really excited about it. We are staffing up a little bit...Once we get more staff, we will be able to work with behavior work with animals...We have sent staff to Wayside Waifs in Kansas City. They have a well-developed behavior department there and they do a lot of work with dogs who are shy and fearful and dogs they call arousal dogs...our staff is starting to really work on the competency in that area."

Bobbi said in the past, the shelter staff has done whatever needed to be done. Now she has added specific positions for staff members. They now have an adoption, transport and volunteer coordinator, an animal health coordinator, an animal care coordinator and an office manager.

See **SHELTER**, Page A10

'25 Years of Fun'

Warrensburg Community Center celebrates anniversary, anticipating equipment upgrades

By Meliah Venerable
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WARRENSBURG — In January, the Warrensburg Community Center indoor pool reopened after nine months of closure.

The pool closed in April due to 40 feet of ductwork falling inside the facility. It was believed the age of the ductwork caused it to fall. The ductwork is original to the building, which was built in 1997.

While closed, the pool has undergone some much-needed maintenance.

"We have restored the strength of the heating and ventilation vents as well as completely sandblasting and refurbishing the pool surface," interim Parks and Recreation Director Chris Deal told the Star-Journal in January. "Also, we painted all the



The indoor pool at the Warrensburg Community Center is seen Wednesday, Jan. 4. In April 2022, fallen ductwork covered the south wall. After nine months, the pool was ready to reopen.

pool surfaces, gave it a very in-depth detail clean, a very in-depth look and maintenance on the pump room.

"The pump room needed new pump motors and work on the pool heaters. We were fixing things that are related to age and

things that needed to have restoration of the mechanical operating equipment."

See **POOL**, Page A11



New Shelter Director Bobbi Yeo sits for a photo in November inside Old Drum Animal Shelter. She started her current position in Warrensburg in November.

FILE PHOTO BY MELIAH VENERABLE | STAR-JOURNAL

Five seasons in, girls wrestling keeps growing

By Joe Andrews
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Though Knob Noster junior Abby Sader did not win her state championship match this season, she still had plenty to be proud of.

"It's disappointing to get second," Sader said. "It's sad, but I'm the first Knob Noster girl to be in the finals, the highest placer. I'm proud of what I accomplished this season."

Sader became the second Knob Noster girls wrestler to appear at state twice through the course of her high school career in March, though she was the first to appear in a state championship match in the five seasons of MSHSAA-sanctioned girls wrestling.

She is one of two Johnson County girls wrestlers to have reached a cornerstone state match, joined by Holden's Macey Greene. Greene reached the feat as a freshman, also becoming the first state runner-up in Eagles

girls wrestling history.

"It was kind of crazy," Greene said. "I was definitely surprised, especially being a freshman. I took it match by match and period by period. It just turned out this way."

Sader and Greene were a part of 46 different athletes to be listed on an MSHSAA.org girls wrestling roster between Knob Noster, Holden and Warrensburg this season.

A number slightly impacted by injuries and other factors, 20 appeared in a district tournament, while nine advanced to state.

Holden had the most numbers across all three distinctions. The Eagles had 16 wrestlers on their MSHSAA.org roster, while nine wrestlers competed in districts and seven moved on to state.

With its seven state qualifiers, the Eagles became the first Johnson County girls wrestling team to win a district championship.

See **WRESTLING**, Page A11



Knob Noster senior Abby Sader wrestles in the MSHSAA Class 1 155-pound state championship match Feb. 23 at Mizzou Arena.

FILE PHOTO BY JOE ANDREWS | STAR-JOURNAL

Visitors Center begins construction, increases community engagement

By Meliyah Venerable
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WARRENSBURG — Since purchasing a building at 205 N. Holden St., the Warrensburg Convention and Visitors Bureau has been prioritizing the renovation to soon offer the visitors of Warrensburg a new Visitors Center.

Construction on the building began on Jan. 2. The building on Holden is the main focus of WVCB, according to Director Marcy Barnhart.

“Last year was a whirlwind,” Barnhart said. “In 2022, we started on the contract and designing of the architecture at 205 N. Holden to serve as the home of the Warrensburg Visitor Center. That was a project that was identified by the WCVB board in 2017 when I started. It has continued to be a number one priority... The lodging tax is what funds the WCVB. That money from the hotels is remitted to the City of Warrensburg then the city remits it to the WCVB. We have a contract for services, we have objectives and goals that we have to meet. It is an incredible partnership. We wouldn’t be where we are without the City of Warrensburg.”

Once construction is complete, the building will serve as the new Visitors Center.

The WCVB is trying to use its own funds to pay for all the costs of the project; Barnhart said they do not want to finance anything. The WCVB has received American Rescue Plan Act funds from the city to help fund the project, as well as a \$250,000 Local Tourism Asset Development Grant from the Missouri Department of Economic Development that was also funded through ARPA and Gov. Mike Parson’s Fiscal Year 2023 budget plan.

The location of the new visitors’ building is something that was considered when purchasing the building.

“205 N. Holden will be centrally located in our historic downtown area,” Barnhart said. “It is not too far from the Johnson County Courthouse, the Amtrak station. We’re a hop, skip and a jump away from the UCM campus. We are planning to offer the information that we currently offer in the visitors’ center – community information from Warrensburg and Johnson County, we also have information about locations around the state and state tourism.”

The building is still undergoing construction, and there is no predicted finish date.

The WCVB is now offering a new 2023 Sponsorship Program.

WCVB currently offers a grant that supports tourism in Warrensburg. The grant is split into two sections, sports and tourism marketing.

The grant is available for 501c3 and 501c6 nonprofit organizations. Grant recipients also must demonstrate that their event will bring in overnight stays in Warrensburg and reserve a block of rooms or room within 14 days of receiving the award notification.

The WCVB Sponsorship Program will be available to entities that don’t currently qualify for the WCVB grant but still could benefit from the funding.

Organizations will still be required to be a nonprofit, as well as demonstrate there will be an overnight stay in Warrensburg for those attending the event.

Like the original grant program, those applying for the grant must fall into the two categories of sports or tourism marketing.

The committee is also proposing changes to the current grant program, such as simplifying the application process and supplying more money that can be granted to entities.

The current award amounts are \$1,500 for sports and \$2,000 for tourism marketing. In the 2023 proposed amounts, the maximum award amount is \$2,500 for sports and \$3,000 for tourism marketing, leaving \$7,000 to fund the sponsorship grants.

The changes include making UCM Family Weekend and UCM Homecoming blackout weekends so the lodging will not be overbooked. The program will now fund a budget year instead of a calendar year. And the WCVB will be requiring documentation of how the WCVB was recognized in the event promotion and during the event.

The three reimbursement forms are now going to be condensed into one form to make the process easier for both parties.

In October, the WCVB hired a new Communications Coordinator, MaKHi

Thurman.

“MaKHi Thurman joined us in October,” Barnhart said. “He is our part-time communications coordinator... I’m very excited to have MaKHi join us. He is leading that effort of our outing in the ‘burg where we go to an attraction or a business and we promote them on social media.”

Thurman has been using the WCVB’s Facebook to interact with the community and help promote local businesses.

For the new Visitor’s Guide, Barnhart said the WCVB is looking to get away from the pamphlet they currently have and switch to a magazine. The magazine will allow each business and destination around Warrensburg to be highlighted with a story and photos. This way, visitors can get a more impactful experience and know more information about the businesses they will potentially visit.

Meliyah Venerable can be reached at 660-747-8123.



Warrensburg Convention and Visitors Bureau Director Marcy Barnhart, Tranquility Shop owner Becky Axton and WCVB Communications Coordinator MaKHi Thurman pose for a photo in the Tranquility Shop during the WCVB’s weekly outing in Warrensburg.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WARRENSBURG CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU



The exterior of the future Warrensburg Visitors Center, 205 N. Holden St., is seen in mid-April. Construction is underway on the downtown Warrensburg building.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WARRENSBURG CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

Arts Commission works to promote, install public art

Community partnerships, strategic plan help move ideas forward

By Nicole Cooke
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WARRENSBURG — Af-

ter a few years of rebuilding, plus an interruption by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Warrensburg Arts Commission is continuing

its mission of promoting and installing public art. The commission began in 2009 and the first groups of members had

terms ending around 2019, causing a lot of turnover. Throw in the pandemic, and it became difficult to organize projects.

Chairman Allison Robbins, who has served on the commission since 2020, said the commission has had a full slate of members since 2021.

“There’s been a lot of reorganization. We’re focusing on doing one or two projects a year and getting our finances in order,” Robbins said. “I know that’s boring, but I’m proud of the commission getting organized and rebooting the last two years. It’s easy to stop and say, ‘Let’s not do it anymore.’”

Robbins said the commission had a strategic planning session in January, its first in a few years. They now have a five-year plan and a set of goals, including an increase in the commission’s presence in the community.

One of those goals is to reinstate the Art in Public Places Committee to help install art not just downtown but around the city.

Robbins said the City Code of Ordinances states



Becky Axton from Tranquility Shop poses for a photo next to one of Katie Childers’ interactive murals. This mural can be found between Brown’s Shoe Fit and Old Drum Coffeehouse.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WARRENSBURG MAIN STREET

that 1% of the budget for large city-funded infrastructure projects constructed above ground goes to fund public art. The committee helps determine how that 1% should be used when needed.

“We want to have a plan of where we would like to install art, what we’d like to install, what the community would want. So they can do the planning necessary, so when we have funds, we’re ready to go,” Robbins said. “(Relaunch-

ing the committee) is not super exciting, but it’s really important to make sure that things happen. We’re looking for volunteers for that committee.”

Also in the works for 2023 is a fundraiser with Warrensburg Community Theatre. Robbins said the two groups plan to stage “well-loved skits” from “The Carol Burnett Show” that will feature local actors in a number of performances.

See **ART**, Page A10

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SHELTER

Continued from Page A7

“We are just fine-tuning those kinds of things,” Yeo said. “We’re increasing our training opportunities and creating more job enrichment.” Old Drum has found a partnership with Esther Stevens, “The Dog Nerd.” Esther has created an animal pantry that provides food, toys and miscellaneous items for animals. The items are free to those in need.

Stevens is also working with the shelter to train dogs in hopes of making them more adoptable. She has been working on getting her Professional Dog Trainer certification. To achieve the hours required, she has taken on the job of training dogs at the shelter.

The shelter receives dogs from various backgrounds and various levels of training. Stevens said she believes that if they increase the training and help the dogs become more home-friendly, it will be easier for them to be adopted.

Stevens bases each training session on each dog. She uses information provided by the shelter to address the needs of each dog. “We have a length of

stay meeting every month,” Stevens told the Star-Journal in March. “They bring me cases... I then make a training plan to see what we can address to make this dog more home-ready.”

Since beginning the training, Stevens has seen a lot of progress in the dogs she has trained. Throughout the next few months, Stevens plans to evaluate each dog to give them training for their specific needs.

“I have worked with a few dogs here for four weeks now and they are making a lot of progress,” Stevens said in March. “For other dogs, I have started doing behavior evaluations, so we have a better idea of how that dog will act in a home... I make a training plan for each individual dog. When I come in, I prioritize which dogs need more help to be adopted and then I will do those respectively.

“It is different for each dog. I have a dog who is working on being calm in the kennel, two working on leash manners... and dogs that just need confidence building. I think my next project is behaviorally evaluating each dog in the shelter right now so that



Bobbi Yeo greets Pongo outside Old Drum Animal Shelter on Thursday Nov. 17. Pongo has been in the shelter since Oct. 27. FILE PHOTO BY MELIAH VENERABLE | STAR-JOURNAL

we have a good baseline of what their personality is.” Yeo said the animals at the shelter have made improvements in the short time they have been working with Stevens. “Working with Esther Stevens has been amazing,” Yeo said in March. “It has been transformational. I have always been able to

have someone on my team with that certification... At some point, we want to hire her on a contract to come in like once a week. She will also do staff training and maybe even dog training sessions here for people who have adopted dogs with us and even new adopters who are having issues in the home.”

For the future of the shelter, Yeo hopes to continue finding more employees, training staff and building the volunteer program. “We are wanting to really build out a volunteer program,” Yeo said. “We want to make sure that we are ready when they come here to give them mean-

ingful work to do, that’s what they want to do. We want to make sure that it makes a difference in our shelter and not just find busy work for people. We want to have a more solid and meaningful volunteer program for people.” Meliyah Venerable can be reached at 660-747-8123.

ART

Continued from Page A8

All proceeds from ticket sales will be used for future arts grants from the commission and support for public art.

“We’re hoping this both gives people interested in acting and performing an opportunity in the community theatre context and serves as a fundraiser for the arts commission,” Robbins added.

Over the past year, the commission approved restraining the concrete art installation, “Downtown Vibrations,” on the Pine Street sidewalk near the alley. Robbins said it was installed in 2013 and the commission “freshens it up” every five years or so.

Many public art projects are a collaboration of entities, such as the tile art installed by Warrensburg Main Street. Over the course of summer 2022, Main Street also installed three interactive murals in the downtown area; two were created by Katie Childers and Taylor Trudell created one.

Main Street also was responsible for the Old Drum art hung on the chainlink fence around the parking lot at the corner of Holden and Market streets.

Outside of public art installations and updates, Robbins said the commission worked to promote existing art. The group worked with the Warrensburg Convention and Visitors Bureau to create a map of public art in Warrensburg and on the University of Central

Missouri campus that was turned into a pamphlet to share with visitors looking for places to stop.

In 2022, the commission also hosted a Paint With Your Dog event at Old Drum Day, participated in the Third Wednesday Art Walks in downtown Warrensburg, and hosted an auction during Dickens’ Christmas to generate revenue for arts grant projects.

Robbins said that in 2022-23, the commission awarded two arts grants. In January 2022, a grant was awarded for international artists to do a virtual performance; earlier this year, a grant was awarded for Old Drum Woodcarvers to host a master woodcarver later in 2023.

Community partnerships are essential for the commission, Robbins said.

She noted that Main Street has been a great partner in the downtown area and the two entities work together on the art walks every summer. Any art installed on public property must go through the arts commission for approval, so the members give Main Street the green light for its various projects.

With the WCVB art pamphlets complete, Robbins said they are now working with the bureau on Warrensburg coloring pages that showcase the city’s history and current environment.

“We’re super psyched about those kinds of proj-

ects,” Robbins said. In addition to collaborating on public art projects, Robbins said the commission’s purpose is to promote visual and performing arts and make them accessible and affordable for citizens. She said it’s important for a community to incorporate and feature public art in a variety of ways. “Public art does a lot for a community,” Robbins said. “One thing people point to is economic vitality, and I think that’s true. If you have spaces that are welcoming and have beautiful art that helps define the community’s identity and who we are, it brings in businesses, brings people in town. “Art does more than bring in money and business,” she continued. “The arts are about connecting people in our community with each other, making sure the things we sing and dance and paint and write stories about, it’s really telling each other who we are and who we want to be. I think the arts give that avenue and venue. When we listen to each other, we’re a stronger community.”

Warrensburg Arts Commission meetings are open to the public and Robbins encouraged public input. For more information, visit www.warrensburg-mo.com/163/Arts-Commission or www.facebook.com/BurgArts. Nicole Cooke can be reached at 660-530-0138 or on Twitter @NicoleRCooke.



Lauren Vesecky shields herself from the rainbow spray paint raining down from another one of Katie Childers’ murals. This mural can be found on the side of SC Fuel near UMB Bank. PHOTO COURTESY OF WARRENSBURG MAIN STREET



The circle art on West Pine Street is dedicated in October 2013. Jeff Imboden and Christian Cutler, who serve on the Warrensburg Arts Commission, place the bricks with the artist’s name, John Sunami, for his design “Downtown Vibrations.” STAR-JOURNAL FILE PHOTO



Joey Hanes performs music on South Holden Street during the Wednesday Art Walk in May 2022 downtown Warrensburg. Joey goes by Johho on streaming services. FILE PHOTO BY DILLON SECKINGTON | STAR-JOURNAL

WRESTLING

Continued from Page A7

“I told the girls coming in that in order to be here, we needed six medalists in order to compete [for a district title],” Holden girls wrestling head coach Ron Franklin said. “The COVID year, we got Tasia [Lee] in. Last year, we got Charlie [Gregg] through. That was it. This year, they decided they were those girls.”

The local success corresponds with the growth and respect girls wrestling has seen at the state level since MSHSAA voted to add the sport in May 2018.

According to a survey released in October 2022 by the National Federation of State High School Associations, Missouri had 1,897 girls wrestling participants during the 2021-22 school year.

The number was a 98.43% increase from 941 student athletes the sport began with in the 2018-19 season.

Correlating with the growth, MSHSAA opted to break girls wrestling into two classifications ahead of the 2022-23 school year.

The addition doubled the number of athletes that receive an opportunity to compete for all-state

status.

Four different Johnson County girls wrestlers finished within the top six in 2023. The total included Sader, Greene, Holden junior Charlie Gregg and Holden freshman Haley Brooks.

Prior to this season, only Knob Noster’s Haley Robles and Kelsey Burden received All-State status. Robles earned the mark in 2019, while Burden earned the mark in 2021. Burden, Sader, Gregg and Holden’s Tasia Lee are the only local girls wrestlers to reach state numerous times.

“It was a pretty good overall experience for me,” Gregg said of her junior season. “I’m definitely looking forward to moving next year and just getting higher on the podium.”

While both Knob Noster and Holden have established their roots in girls wrestling, Warrensburg is still working to further develop its program.

The Tigers had their first-ever senior girls wrestlers in the 2022-23 season, made up of GiGi Jones and J’Lee Jones.

The twin daughters of former Holden boys wrestling head coach John



Holden junior Charlie Gregg controls her opponent in the MSHSAA Class 1 Championships 140-pound fifth-place match Feb. 23 at Mizzou Arena. FILE PHOTO | STAR-JOURNAL

Jones relocated to Warrensburg midway through the fall semester.

GiGi Jones, who became Warrensburg’s first-ever girls state qualifier this season, took on a mentor

role to a younger Tigers team.

The Tigers fielded their largest girls wrestling program over the winter. On top of Jones, their district tournament lineup featured four freshmen and two sophomores.

Five of the seven finished the season with a record of .500 or better. Alexis Ilnicky, Cerissa Holsey and Avee Bevans reached the feat as freshmen.

“Every single one of our girls from the start of our season to now has made drastic improvements,” Warrensburg head coach Austin Kemp said. “The beautiful part about this sport is it’s a lifetime sport. The more you wrestle, the more you learn. After that, you kind

Every single one of our girls from the start of our season to now has made drastic improvements!”

— Austin Kemp, Warrensburg Head Coach

of see it happen.”

Now in the midst of the 2023 offseason, preparations are in place for continued growth for MSHSAA girls wrestling.

Through the 2022-23 school year, only Holden had split its wrestling programs into separate entities. Both the Warrensburg R-VI and Knob Noster boards of education recently opted to create the position at the high school level.

The MSHSAA Wrestling Advisory Committee

also recently approved the recommendation of keeping boys and girls state wrestling championships at one site until it is deemed a third classification is necessary, or other variables cause a need for change.

The item, which would keep girls state wrestling at Mizzou Arena in correlation with the boys, will be presented to the MSHSAA Board of Directors at a later date.

Joe Andrews can be reached at 660-747-8123.



Holden girls wrestling celebrates its first-place finish in the MSHSAA Class 1 District 3 tournament Feb. 11 at Clinton High School. FILE PHOTO | STAR-JOURNAL

POOL

Continued from Page A7

Deal said the pool should not experience any major equipment malfunction because there will be a maintenance schedule in place to check on the equipment and make sure it is in working order.

The Warrensburg Community Center celebrated “25 Years of Fun” on Thursday, Jan. 5. To mark the milestone anniversary, WCC hosted a celebration and opened the indoor aquatic center.

The lobby was filled with music, cookies, free bags and familiar faces from the community.

“It’s wonderful to see so much support for such a great cause in our community,” Jamie Brisbin, a member of the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce board, said during remarks at the celebration. “We are very fortunate to have this... a lot of communities cannot say they have one.”

Members of Parks and Recreation spoke about the anniversary of the building as well as the process that the community center underwent to reopen the pool.

“This beautiful building was dedicated in 1997,” Parks and Rec Business and Information Specialist Jeff Imboden said in January. “We believe that it has held up very well. What a great asset to this community... We wanted to put this together with reopening our aquatic center that has been closed. We are really happy about that.”

Along with the anniversary and reopening of the pool to kick off 2023,

the Parks and Recreation Department hired a new director in 2022. Deal was hired as the interim director and has continued to work and upgrade the community center.

For the past 40 years, Deal has worked in various parks and rec departments around Missouri and, most recently, Florida.

Deal said sports and outdoor activities can bring a community together. That is one of the things he enjoys about his profession.

“I grew up being able to play sports,” Deal told the Star-Journal in November. “I went to college on a scholarship for volleyball and played for a couple of teams that won a national championship.

“That real desire for sports and outdoor activities can bring people together. That is really just something that has always drawn me. This is an opportunity to continue that public service to the community. Parks and recreation is something that I love to do and I saw the perfect opportunity to do that.”

Deal has been working on increasing community engagement.

“Our membership has grown a couple hundred since January,” Deal told the Star-Journal this month. “I think the pool reopening helped... one of the things that is somewhat new, we added more supervisors for when kids get out of school. We used to not have that, and it made it harder to keep things under control... I

think that when members see that, they are excited to come in.”

The community center will be receiving about \$60,000 worth of fitness equipment in the coming months. There will be five treadmills, weight machines and free weights.

The funds for the equipment will be from a \$60,000 donation from the Marian H. Glazebrook Estate account in the Parks and Recreation Fund Balance.

A big project that Parks and Recreation has decided to begin this year is renovating the park signs for all the parks in Warrensburg.

The replacement of the signs will not exceed \$20,000. Deal said the new signs will help each park be more identifiable because the current signs are small and hard to read.

Deal is nearing the six-month mark of his interim term. He said he would like to stay in Warrensburg and continue developing the community center and Parks and Recreation.

“I don’t plan on going anywhere,” Deal said. “I am absolutely energized. I’m enjoying this job 100%.”

“We have a good staff team. We have a very strong office manager and current programmers who oversee our sports and events. I am feeling really good about the staff team that we have developed.”

Meliyah Venerable can be reached at 660-747-8123.

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Raging Bull Serves Up Food & Family



larger every year.

Our restaurant is a family-owned and run establishment that specializes in high-quality, prepared in-house foods. A dream built from the ground up by Todd Dale and his son Adrian, and watched over by his business partner Clif Castleman, who also owns Taxman Accounting and resides in the lower level of the same building. This idea came to pass after Adrian's passion for food and quest to attend culinary school pushed his father to jump back into the market. That passion has them striving to provide healthy culinary dishes that most individuals would need to go to the big city to find but in a relaxed atmosphere. The restaurant is located on the north side of Warrensburg, Missouri, right in the middle of a hotel and shopping district, which has a small-town feel but is steadily growing

The Raging Bull has collected a very large variety of ingredients, which gives them the ability to provide a great selection of unique dishes that are found on specials or make special regional dishes from the area you may come from. They are also very proud of the huge selection of whiskeys, bourbon, tequila, and wine their bar sports every day. Todd and his son are particularly focused on this area of the restaurant, traveling to take specialized classes in many types of liquor production and how to properly introduce them into their dishes and which ones go best for your choices. Dry-aging most of their steaks in-house, using meats that are born, raised, and finished off in Missouri, is important and allows the restaurant to keep quality in check and gives them an edge on most corporate places; this



is because everything is shipped to them with the mindset of cheap costs.

This steakhouse is not your traditional old-fashioned stockyard establishment and has no problem changing their cooking style. This shows with the variety of awards that they have won in the three years that they have been open; ranging from Best Burgers, Tacos, and of course, Steaks from local and state competitions, while also winning Best value \$\$\$.

Visiting them on a Friday or Saturday evening, especially for their dry-aged slow-smoked prime rib, has grown into a big part of their appeal, but make sure you do not plan this for a late evening because they only smoke so much per night, and when they run out, they are

out. You will see the owners walking and talking amongst the customers on a regular basis, collecting suggestions, and providing assistance wherever needed.

With an old-fashioned feel of repurposed barn wood and warm smiling staff, everything else is set up with up-to-date charging stations at all the tables, free Wi-Fi, and great consistently updated social media – which should be a setup for all generations. Please go check them out on all their social media, then visit their amazing staff one day. We are sure that you will fall in love.

