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Censorship concerns raised before 3-1 vote

Tammy Cheek
tcheek@farragutpress.com

Deliberations on a resolution for a social media policy led to a lengthy discussion of the State Open Meetings Law, also known as Sunshine Law, during Farragut Board of Mayor and Aldermen’s meeting Thursday, Feb. 12.

“I’ve been using social media to communicate with the Town for nine years, since I’ve been here,” Town Communications manager Wendy Smith said. “A good portion of that time, it’s been recommended by my professional organizations that we have a social media policy in place to address possible problems that can come up with social media.”

Smith said the social media policy would allow “Town of Farragut staff to remove content that is deemed harmful and is not protected by the First Amendment.

“We don’t have problems with social media happening in such a way that I would feel like posts need to be removed with the exception of some fraudulent posts that get posted

ed on Visit site, trying to get people to buy tickets for free events, and that kind of thing,” she said. “But, I would like to have this policy in place just in case we change our minds.”

The policy reads: “Town’s social media pages do not reflect the opinions of the Town, and the Town does not promote or endorse comments posted on our pages.”

Also, it states, “While we encourage individuals to share thoughts and opinions on the Town of Farragut’s social media platforms, we expect this to be done respectfully, truthfully

and in a constructive manner. Comments may be removed by the Town if they contain:

- Defamation (false and injurious language)
- Threats (serious expressions of intent to commit an unlawful act of violence)
- Spam (content that is not related to the subject matter of the post) or content that is so unrelated, in the sole opinion of staff, that it causes confusion concerning the actual subject matter of the original post
- Encouragement of illegal activity

- Malware links
- Promotion of illegal discrimination, such as offensive and disparaging comments that target ethical, racial, cultural, religious or other groups protected by law
- Content that purports to claim ownership of intellectual property rights contrary to the true ownership interest established by another party
- Personally identifiable information about an individual, such as financial or health care data.

See CENSORSHIP on Page 4A



Above left: Taylor Lunn smiles alongside parents John and Shannon Lunn during a visit to Thompson Boling Arena at Food City Center. The Lunn family took in the Vols’ game against LSU as part of a dream weekend organized by “Dream on 3.” Above: Taylor Lunn receives an autograph from Tennessee guard Nate Ament after the Vols’ win over LSU on Saturday, Feb. 14.



Submitted

KnoxDems launch campaign season

Tammy Cheek
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Knox County Democrats rallied for their candidates running for county and state seats at their KnoxDems Local Primary Campaign Kickoff in Bridgewater Place Event Center in Knoxville, Monday, Feb. 16.

Among the 20 Democratic candidates seeking election, Beau Hawk is running for county mayor, with current Mayor Glenn Jacobs being term limited.

“I see too many opportunities disappearing for too many people,” he said about his running for office. “I also see the Republicans have been in power in this county for too long and not do anything about it.”

As Democrats, “we’re going to take on the status quo; we’re going to shock the system; and were going to turn Knox County blue,” he said.

Hawk, president of the Knoxville-Oak Ridge Central Labor Council, is the only Democrat seeking the county mayoral office.

Candidates running for County Commissioner are Brandon Huckaby, District 3; William Cooper, District 7, Katina Sharp, Seat 10 at-large; Vivian Shipe, Seat 11 at large; John Butler, OT Harris and Breauna Holloway, District 1; Kat Bike, District 4; Cadence Collins, District 6; Amy Fenner, District 7; Brandy Jenkins, District 9.

Meanwhile, Stephen Hood is running for county trustee; Joey Tate for county clerk; and Ben H. Houston II for Division IV general sessions judge.

“I am running because I have four children ... I want my college-age



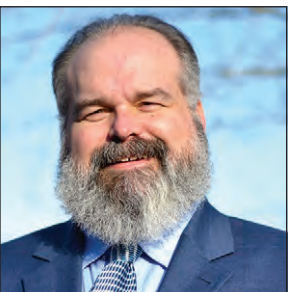
Burnette



Hawk



Honaker



Hood



Tate

children to be able to afford a house when they get out of college,” Sharp said. “I want my

See DEMS on Page 4A

On Rocky Top

FMS cancer survivor gets UT dream weekend

Jake Nichols
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On Friday, Feb. 13, Taylor Lunn walked through the main hallway at Farragut Middle School.

Little did the 13-year-old know what awaited her.

Dressed in gray Tennessee-themed sweats, Lunn rounded a corner with her parents and broke into a wide smile.

Some classmates waved orange pom-poms, and others held up signs while “Rocky Top” blared from a nearby speaker.

It was a fitting scene on a fully-packed weekend, which began with the Lunn family walking out of the school and into the bright sunshine. There, a black SUV whisked them off to a whirlwind 72-hour experience, all organized by the nonprofit organization,

“Dream on 3.”

Based out of Charlotte, the organization exists to “enrich the lives of kids with life-altering conditions by making their sports dreams come true,” according to the website.

Undergraduate students from the organization’s Tennessee chapter compiled the Lunn fam-

See ROCKY TOP on Page 2A

New K-5 school on track for fall 2027

Tammy Cheek
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Construction for the new Farragut Area Elementary School is on schedule, according to Lauren Morgan, District 5 Knox County School Board representative who spoke to Rotary Club of Farragut members during the club’s meeting in Fox Den Country

Club Wednesday, Feb. 11.

“I got to tour the school on Monday (Feb. 9), with Merit Construction, whose doing the work, and it’s fantastic,” said Morgan, whose district covers Farragut. “It’s unbelievable to me that last May we were standing there, breaking ground, and now it is up and looking great.

“They’ve even got dry-

wall ... systems in place there,” she said.”It’s going to be the largest elementary school Knox County has ever built, and its slated to hold up to 1,400 students, so we will take a lot of pressure off of our primary and intermediate schools by having three K-5 schools.

“It will be a huge transformation point for our community when we do

that switch in fall 2027,” Morgan said.

She recalled the land was purchased before she came on the school board.

“I got to come on board before the ground-breaking,” Morgan said. “The Town of Farragut, I know, worked very hard with Susan Horn

See SCHOOL on Page 4A



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3.1 Million visitors help drive Farragut revenue

Tammy Cheek
tcheek@farragutpress.com

As the Farragut Board of Mayor and Aldermen prepares to begin work on its 2026-27 budget, starting with a workshop Thursday, Feb. 12, the board gathered Friday, Jan. 23, for its annual retreat.

“My goal is for us to have this budget adopted by the end of May,” Town Administrator David Smoak said. “The departments have already turned in their base budgets.”

Smoak presented information for the Board to consider related to growth trends and potential revenue.

“I want to give you a good sense of where we’re at and what’s going on in our community,” he said. “Obviously, our population is continuing to increase because people continue to move into the Town of Farragut.”

Smoak said the Town’s population is currently about 25,579, with an estimated 1,000 additional residents expected.

“The University of Tennessee is going to be giving us census counts going forward,” he said. “The state legislature changed the law last year, allowing us not to have to do a special census.”

He also reported the Town’s median household income has increased over the past several years.

“The median household incomes also are a factor for our community housing occupancy,” Smoak said. He noted the Town’s median age has increased by eight years.

“That could have an impact on apartment residency

rates,” he said. “We have almost 9,000 residential units in the Town, and only 1 percent is vacant. That’s great.”

Smoak said maintaining a community where residents of all ages can live has been a long-standing goal.

“That’s been a goal of this board for at least 10 or 15 years — having all generations be able to live in the community,” he said.

Turning to economic drivers, Smoak said the presence of Costco continues to play a major role in the Town’s economy, although he noted the Brentwood location saw slightly higher activity last year.

Smoak also reviewed visitation data related to Topgolf and the Turkey Creek shopping area.

“You can see visitation is up over the last year,” he said. “It looks like we have a pretty healthy environment.”

Turkey Creek drew about 3.1 million visitors last year, according to Smoak.

“That’s tons of traffic coming into our community,” he said. “Hopefully they’ll come and do the town.”

Grocery stores also remain an important economic component, Smoak said, noting a new store is expected to open in the coming months at the Dixie Lee Junction.

“It’s interesting that of the business last year, about 60,000 shoppers were people who lived 30-plus miles outside of Farragut,” he said. “There are people who travel here to do some shopping, maybe while visiting family or for other reasons.”

this shows that so there’s nothing better.”

That was certainly the case for Taylor, especially given everything she has endured and everyone she has inspired.

In 2016, at just 3 years old, Lunn was diagnosed with Philadelphia chromosome-positive Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. She went into remission after 30 days but endured 28 grueling months of treatment for more than two years afterward.

“When she was old enough to go to kindergarten, she’d go when she could,” her father, John Lunn, said. “When her immune system was compromised, she would just stay home.”

After the 28-month period passed and her scans came back clean, Taylor — who was 6 years old at that point — began a more typical childhood.

from the Town by Wendy Smith Farragut supports our schools in many ways

Questions about property taxes and local services come up regularly at Town Hall, as well as in the farragutpress, so this column offers a brief refresher on these topics.

First, all property taxes paid by Farragut residents go directly to Knox County — the Town of Farragut does not receive any portion of property tax revenue. Instead, we rely heavily on sales tax revenue. About 60 percent of the Town’s revenue comes from the Local Option Sales Tax generated by businesses right here in Farragut. That’s one reason we work hard to attract visitors and encourage residents to shop locally.

Even without a property tax, Farragut boasts some of the finest amenities in the county. Our parks, greenways and the Farragut Community Center all scored higher than the national benchmark in the National Community Survey (see all survey results at townof-farragut.org/survey). While Campbell Station Inn renovations were not completed until after the survey, visitors have been overwhelmingly positive about the restoration of the historic home and the amenities available there.

Because we rely heavily on sales tax revenue, the Town takes a fiscally conservative approach to budgeting. Sales tax collections have grown steadily, but they are expected to level off once available commercial space is fully developed. At the same time, infrastructure costs continue to rise, and staffing needs increase as our community grows. The Town currently carries no debt, and maintaining healthy savings is essential if we want to continue avoiding a property tax in the future.



Town of Farragut

Farragut Mayor Ron Williams and Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator Ashley Kite-Rowland from the Tennessee Department of Agriculture participate in an Arbor Day assembly for third graders at Farragut Intermediate School in 2025. Town of Farragut staff work with school administrators to bring the program to the school each year.

We are incredibly proud of our Farragut schools, but all public schools in the county are operated by Knox County Schools. They represent a significant investment. About 66 percent of the Knox County budget goes toward operating public schools, meaning roughly two-thirds of your property tax bill supports public education. Additionally, 50 percent of the Local Option Sales Tax collected in Farragut goes to Knox County Schools. (In FY2025, this was more than \$10.8 million.) It’s important to understand that Farragut absolutely contributes financially to our public schools.

Beyond taxes, the Town provides direct annual support: \$27,000 to each Farragut school and \$12,000 to the Farragut High School Foundation. We’re also happy to lend a hand with special projects.

At the request of school administrators, Town staff have mulched flower beds, helped maintain athletic fields, hung banners and even cleared a gravel spill from a school driveway using Town equipment. We also partner with schools on special events like the annual Arbor Day program at Farragut Intermediate School.

We are so proud of our high-performing Farragut schools, and we know they’re the reason many choose Farragut as a place to live. We’re honored to provide financial support for them, and we value the relationships we have with school administrators. Our schools are part of what makes Farragut such a special place — a beautiful, close-knit, connected and engaged community where individuals, families and businesses thrive.

Rocky Top

From page 1A

ily’s festivities, which ranged from a camp with UT cheerleaders to multiple Tennessee basketball games to an Alumni Hall shopping spree. They even had breakfast at the Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame on Sunday morning before taking in the Lady Vols’ game against Texas that afternoon.

“It’s pretty cool,” Barb Urch, a senior programmer for “Dream on 3,” said during the visit to FMS on Friday. “There are many different levels to it, and I love the collegiate aspect with students working so hard at building this dream.”

“Then seeing it through the family’s eyes and Taylor’s eyes and having everyone come together is amazing. Our biggest thing is wanting people to be seen, valued and loved, and

joy that so many grew used to seeing.

“It’s been an honor,” Farragut Middle School head principal Greg Adams said. “She’s been an inspiration to myself and our teachers and students. To see the joy on her face every day, being open and transparent with her story and fighting all the adversity and struggles, it’s been a phenomenal journey these last several years.”

As Adams uttered those words, Lunn stood a few feet away, relishing the beginning of a weekend full of joy.

At that point, she had no idea what stood ahead on the schedule. But given what she had already endured, there was only one thought on her mind as she came upon her classmates that Friday.

“I was happy,” she said. “Just so happy.”

treatments that same month, eventually winding up in the hospital for five straight weeks at one point. Also, young Taylor had to wear a backpack 24 hours a day so that medication could be infused in preparation for a bone marrow transplant. Every two days, the family would return to East Tennessee Children’s Hospital for her medicine to be changed.

By March 2024, the family relocated temporarily to Nashville in preparation for a bone marrow transplant.

Finally, on St. Patrick’s Day in 2024, Taylor was admitted for her transplant. To this day, the family has no idea who the donor was.

“It was someone really awesome though,” John said.

By the fall of 2025, Taylor was ready to return to FMS for her eighth-grade year.

And she brought the same

She eventually gave cheerleading a try in elementary school, and all appeared well.

Then came Oct. 23, 2023. Just after her 11th birthday, Taylor began showing some unusual symptoms — prompting her parents to schedule a doctor’s visit.

“When we started feeling like something wasn’t feeling well, her mom and I figured that we needed to take her back to get tested,” John Lunn added. “She got tested on a Monday, and I called the oncologist to see.”

On the other end, the nurse told Taylor’s father that they had an appointment set for her the next day.

“At that point, we knew,” he said. “And we knew it would be very different. It was going to interrupt school and life like it didn’t before.”

She started chemotherapy

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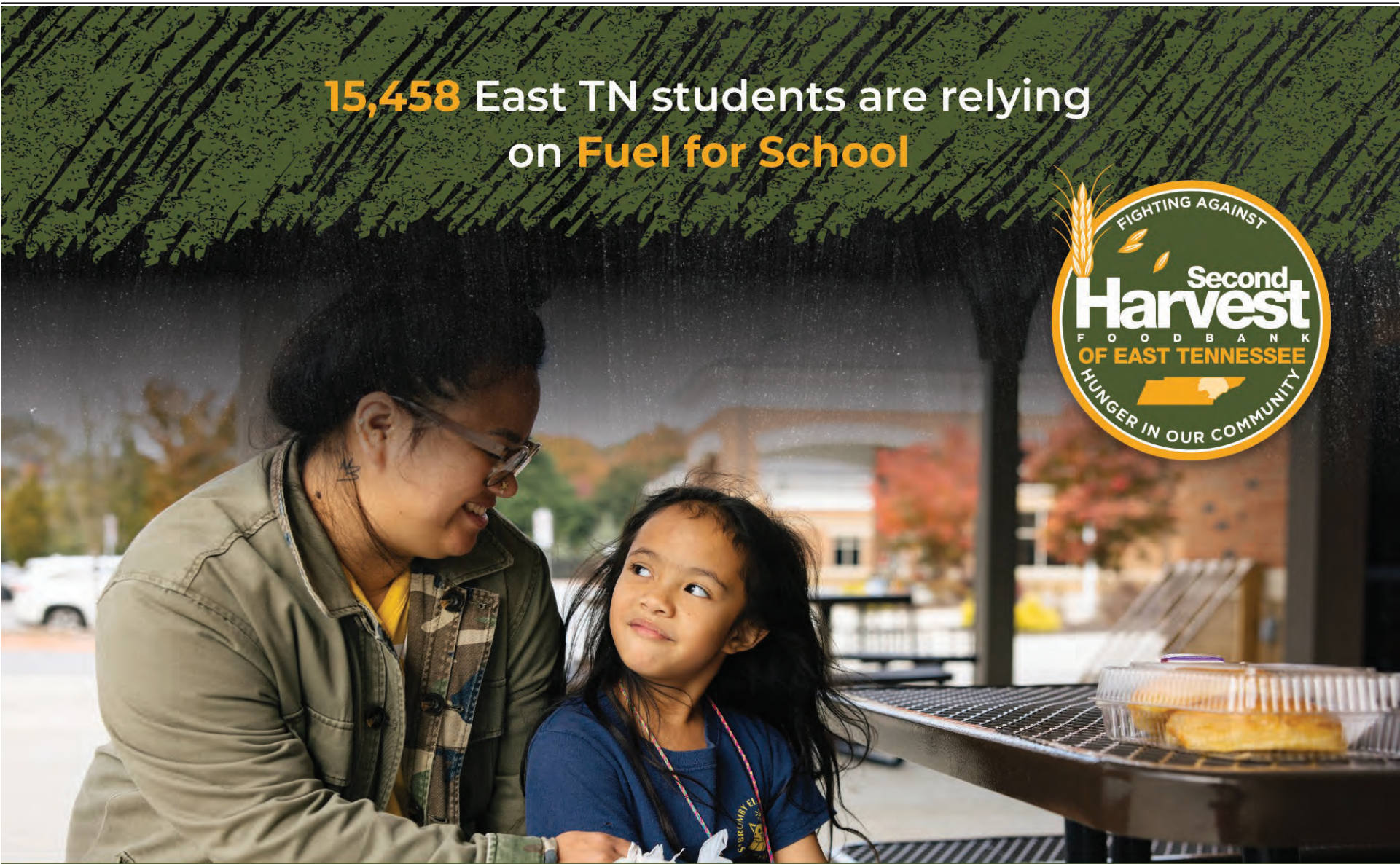
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School

From page 1A

(Morgan’s predecessor on the school board] and Knox County Schools, making sure we did a good set-up for our elementary school.

About her district, “I think that our Farragut schools are amazing,” she said. “I don’t think they’re perfect. If I did, I probably wouldn’t be doing this role.”

Still, Morgan said Farragut schools are overcrowded. While Farragut High School is not at the overcrowded stage yet, she anticipates the high school will experience overcrowding before too long as well.

In Farragut, “we are one of the only primary and intermediate schools set up in Knox County,” she observed, noting Chilhowee also has primary and intermediate. “Our primary school has over 1,000 kids in it, and that just kindergartners, first-graders and second-

graders. “And a staggering number of kindergartners came in not potty-trained,” Morgan added. “They had a rough year.” Likewise at the intermediate and middle schools, she said there are about 3,000 in those two schools combined. “So, I’m sure it is not new to anybody that we are building a new school,” she added. So, “at Knox County Schools, we are working hard to make sure that kids know not only their foundational skills — how to read, how to do math — but they are also leaving with what they need to either go on to a post secondary institution, to enlist in the military or to earn a high-paying wage,” Morgan said. “We are graduating kids now who could go out into the world and start earning a good income as electricians or plumbers or some other CTE career.” Recently, she said, Knox County Schools was named

and Advancing District. “Before (school superintendent] Dr. [Jon] Ryswick came on, I believe it was four years ago, we were a Needs Improvement District,” Morgan recalled. “We were struggling. If you had a child in school here, you probably saw that was the case. “We still have a long ways to go, but this designation from the state shows that we’re on the right track,” she added. “Our numbers have increased dramatically [in regard to reading and math proficiency].” Morgan noted, though, that Knox County’s enrollment has dropped. Part of that was a result of rezoning in the Powell community. Also, “We had a bump with the COVID times and we haven’t quite come back up from that yet,” she said. “We’re at 58-59,000 students. Previously, Morgan said it was 67,000 students for many



Photo submitted

Knox County School Board member Lauren Morgan, who represents District 5, which includes Farragut, toured the new Farragut Area Elementary School with Merit Construction staff.

years. However, Knox County’s is the third largest system in the state with more than 9,000 employees. Despite the enrollment drop, “enrollment is up in Farragut,” she said. “We are actu-

ally down in previous years, especially at the lower level, but you know how things are with people moving in and things continue to be built. We anticipate our numbers to keep going up.”

Censorship

From page 1A

“Links posted within comments may be deleted if they are deemed inappropriate based on the above criteria. Please be aware that all comments are subject to disclosure as public records. Comments may be disabled on public service announcements made through social media, including information about public safety and emergency situations.

However, resident Kimberlie Parks opposed the policy, citing the First Amendment. “Let’s be clear what this policy is. This is not about manners; it’s not about people calming down before they type; it’s not about protecting feelings,” she said. “It’s about power and whether you actually have it.

“... I’m asking this Board on the record, ‘where in the Tennessee code has the General Assembly granted you the authority to regulate or suppress lawful citizens’ speech in an online public forum?’” asked Parks, adding she has searched the state codes.

“That authority does not exist,” she added. “... you would still be bound by the First Amendment.”

Parks said the policy already has been enforced. “Comments have already been hidden; citizens have already been censored; and the Board had not yet voted on anything,” she added. “That is not just premature. That is government without authority ...

“Nobody’s arguing that true threats ... should remain online,” Parks said. “Those are already unlawful and have processes in place. The problem is the vague, discretionary language [of the policy].”

“I don’t think there’s any-

where in TCA that says we have the authority to have a social media platform, but we have one, and I think we also have the authority to regulate the use of our platform within the law,” Town attorney Tom Hale said. “TCA 6-2-201 ... every municipality incorporated into this charter may ... [Section 22] define, prohibit, abate, suppress, prevent and regulate all acts, practices, conduct, businesses, occupations, callings, trades, uses of property and all other things whatsoever detrimental or liable to be detrimental to the health, morals, comfort, safety, convenience, welfare of the inhabitants of the municipality ...”

“What this policy does is it is a policy for regulating other parties’ rights to comment and post on social media platforms that the Town sponsors,” Hale said. “As a government, the Town is required to observe and to not violate the First Amendment Freedom of Speech of those who communicate on its sponsored social media platforms where comments are permitted.

“There is some speech, however, that the First Amendment does not protect,” he said, adding those items are listed in the policy for which posts would be removed.

He stressed posts have not been taken down because they were disagreed with.

“This policy is designed for people who want to use our social media what they can and can’t do without the Town feeling obligated to take it down.

“This is more complicated than everything put on there, we have to leave it up,” Hale said. “We have to use certain judgement so that our citizens don’t get hammered by people who misuse the Internet.”

Town administrator David Smoak said there are several

staff members who handle various pages of social media. The first step was to relay the staff member’s concern to the Communications manager, then to Smoak.

“If I have any questions of whether it violated the policy, I would get a legal opinion from Mr. Hale,” the administrator said.

Just before deliberations, though, the discussions took another turn when Alderman Joe LaCroix announced he and another alderman [Drew Burnette, who was copied on the email], had received an email from a South Ward citizen, for which LaCroix responded several times regarding the policy. Burnette, who left earlier during the meeting to attend a funeral, was not present during discussions of the social media policy, Sunshine Law nor the vote on the social media policy. He returned to the meeting during discussion of the last item on the agenda.

“There was no deliberation at all, just fact finding, but since I did have a conversation on a Board-related item that I’m about to vote on, I need to bring that up,” LaCroix said.

“I’ve been asked to look into this,” Hale said. “This is the second time this has come up within the last little bit. They were sent email together and when Mr. LaCroix responded, he responded to the citizen, and he copied Mr. Burnette on that.

“That’s pretty clearly not deliberation,” the attorney said. “That’s passing information. It’s not a violation of the Sunshine Law, for the two of them to have had that communication. A little later, Mr. LaCroix sent another email, in which he copied Drew Burnette.

“My advice has always been just don’t communicate ... in email with other Board members,” Hale said. “If you do,

you’re susceptible to being accused of deliberating even though you may not be deliberating, and we have to go through the process of proving you weren’t deliberating. The same thing with a casual meeting.

“My recommendation is just don’t have those conversations,” he added.

“Mr. Hale, you stated chance meetings are permissible as long as there’s not a deliberation,” Cain said. “I was censored for having a seven-word conversation with [the late] Alderman [David] White, not an email chain ... I think we need to have a full investigation and discussion on this.

“You also said because we had a full conversation on this today that the whole issue is cured,” Cain said. “We had this same type of conversation on mine that the item has still not come up for a vote, and you stated mine was not cured.”

“In your situation, you wrote to the [farragutpress] and told them that you and Mr. White had had a conversation and you agreed how you were going to vote on a particular issue that was coming before this Board,” Hale said. “That’s totally different from what we have here.”

“I still have to disagree with you because the conversation was ‘I don’t like it’ and ‘Neither do I,’” Cain related. “That was the whole conversation between Alderman White and myself. That was it.”

“Then you misreported what you wrote to the newspaper because the newspaper had your letter in there that you wrote and said you had this conversation and reached this agreement,” Hale retorted.

“There was nothing about a conversation,” Cain said. “It was a chance meeting ... I believe you have decided this needs to go away so it’s not

made an example, but I was made an example.”

“If anything was violated it was that they didn’t follow my recommendation,” Hale said of the emails between LaCroix and Burnette.

Ultimately, the Board voted 3-1 to approve the social media policy. Alderman Alex Cain voted against the policy while Mayor Ron Williams, Vice Mayor Scott Meyer and Alderman LaCroix voted for the social media policy. Burnette was absent.

In other action, the Board unanimously voted “yes” on the following:

- Approval of a zoning ordinance amendment on second and final reading to allow masonry to be averaged in a new building. The amendment came about after a request from West End Center’s architect, as they are planning a new retail building on the West End Center parking lot. While the Town ordinance in the Mixed Use Town Center requires new buildings have to be 75 percent brick on each of the elevations, the amendment allows the applicant to average the face brick requirements over the four elevations, according to Town Community Development director Mark Shipley. “That’s also what’s required in our Architecture Design Standards,” he added.
- Approval on second reading to amend the Town’s codes to allow interactive sports analysis businesses to operate in Office zoned properties. It came about after a request from Christian Miller, who plans to open such a business in Town.
- Approval of a professional services contract with LDA Engineering Inc. to engineer and design a parking lot and trailhead for the Red Mill Dam project.

Dems

From page 1A

driver teenage son to have safe roads and intersections that work for him.”

In the Knox County School Board races, District 6 candidate Cadence Collins is running against Betsy Henderson.

“I am running on three pillars of transparency, service and connection,” Collins said, adding she is against vouchers but she will support teachers and “make sure every child feels safe, physically, mentally and emotionally, in our schools.”

In the state House of Representatives race, Lindsay Honaker, who is running for District 14 seat, said, “I’m here to take Jason Zachary’s seat away from him.”

Another candidate running for District 14 House seat is Shivam Zaveri, who did not attend the kick-off. Also in the state, Bryan Langan is running for the District 7 senate seat against Dr. Richard Briggs.

“I just decided to run on Saturday,” Langan said, adding he thinks the Republicans in General Assembly has been “derelict in taking care of us in East Tennessee.

“It’s time for a change,” he said.

In the U.S. Representatives District 2 race, Michaela Burnette is running against current Rep. Tim Burchett.

“I am so tired of leaders who are blaming culture war issues and an attaboy from the president than about serving the people of East Tennessee,” she said. “I’m running because I know you deserve better.”

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Golfers Tee Off at Topgolf to Support YMCA Annual Campaign

Professional and novice golfers alike gathered at Topgolf Knoxville for an afternoon filled with competitive fun in support of YMCA of East Tennessee’s Annual Campaign. Held on Thursday, February 12, the top bay was filled to the brim with teams enjoying time on the tee line, networking between swings, sampling exceptional food, and competing in a spirited long-drive contest. From seasoned players with a polished short game to first-timers just finding their swing, the event was a hole-in-one for camaraderie and community impact.

This tournament marks the first of four in the 2026 series. Upcoming locations include Gettysvue Country Club, Avalon Golf and Country Club, and Egwani Farms Golf Course in the coming months.

Proceeds from the YMCA’s Annual Campaign help subsidize childcare and swim lessons and provide financial assistance to ensure programs remain accessible and affordable for individuals and families, regardless of income.

If you are interested in sponsoring or playing this season, please contact JaredDaugherty at jdaugherty@ymcaetn.org or (865) 522-9622.





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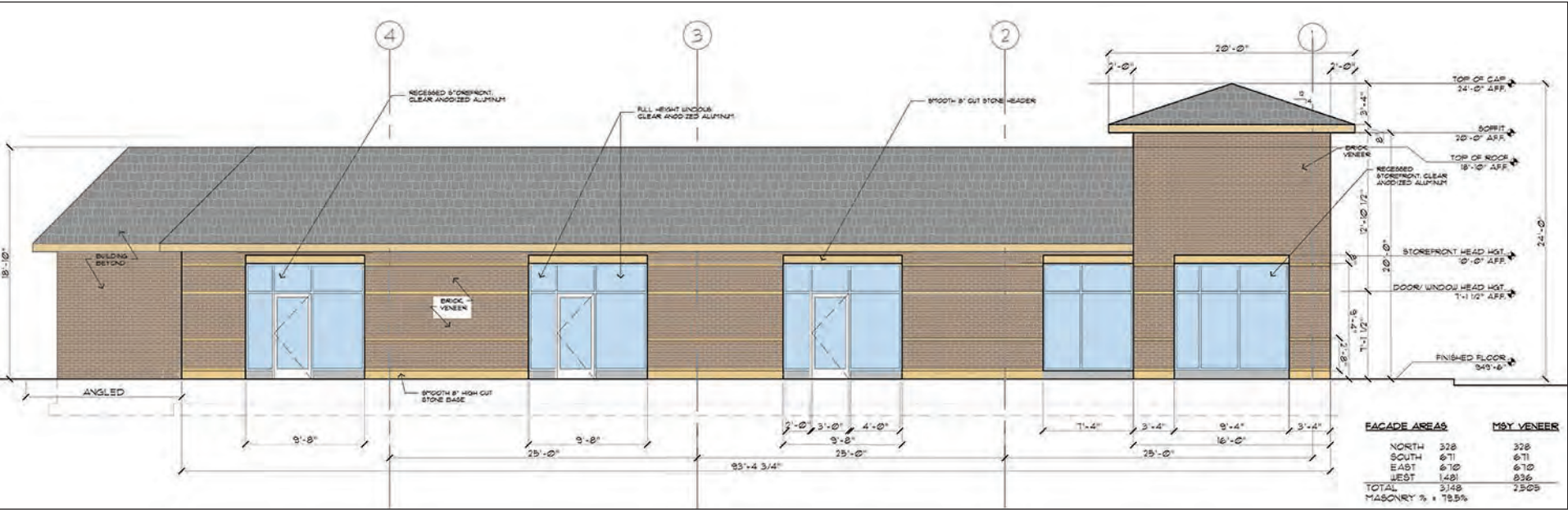
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TOP KNOX

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mike@mikelewisagency.com



Owner plans new retail space

Tammy Cheek
tcheek@farragutpress.com

The commercial development at 707 N. Campbell Station Road, housing Campbell Station Wine & Spirits, is expanding.

The owner, David Stevens, is planning to have another building constructed behind Campbell Station Wine & Spirits to provide more space for retail.

“With the ownership of 707 Campbell Station Road, we

have received a number of unsolicited offers to acquire our property or request additional lease space,” Stevens said. “Part of that interest is driven by the current 62 parking spaces on the property,” he said. “We decided to convert some of the unused property into a rental asset.”

Stevens is looking at health-related businesses as tenants, “something to blend in with one of our current tenants, Jazzercise, along with the entrance to the

Town of Farragut’s Founder’s Park at Campbell Station walking trails.”

He anticipates starting the leasing process later this summer. Currently, “the site plan and clearing have been approved, and we are working with the Town of Farragut on approval of the final architectural plans,” Stevens said.

“We hope to further enhance the entrance to Town of Farragut’s walking trails with a mix of additional healthcare related tenants,” he added.



Top: Hutchins Associates, P.C., presented a rendering of a proposed building to be located behind the Campbell Station Wine & Spirits as additional retail space during a Town Staff/Planning meeting last month. **Above:** People passing by Campbell Station Wine & Spirits can expect to see another building on the property later this year, as the owner currently is in the design phase for another retail structure.

FWKC Networking & Ribbon Cuttings



Tammy Cheek

Kelley Perry, First Citizens Bank, networks with Choya Harden, Incredible Towns, LLC, during a Farragut West Knox Chamber of Commerce networking hosted by Bryan Insurance Group, 102 Chaho Road, Thursday, Jan. 8.



Tammy Cheek

Joe Ronoco (with scissors), owner of Accurate Pest Solutions, gets ready to cut the ribbon on his home-based business, Accurate Pest Solutions, during a Farragut West Knox Chamber of Commerce-sponsored event in Farragut Community Center Tuesday, Jan. 20.



Renee Koss (with scissors), owner, gets ready to cut the ribbon on her home-based business, HR Hive, during a Farragut West Knox Chamber of Commerce-sponsored event in Farragut Community Center Tuesday, Jan. 20. She was joined by her sister, Shannon Koss (in red, front) and Justin Baxter (to Renee’s right), HR representative.

Kitchen Tune-Up opens doors wider in Farragut

TAMMY CHEEK
tcheek@farragutpress.com

With a ribbon-cutting event scheduled 11 a.m., Wednesday, Feb. 25, for Kitchen Tune-Up’s joining Farragut West Knox Chamber of Commerce, West Knoxville owners, Wesley “Wes” and Katlin Steese are enjoying looking back at their first year in their newest showroom.

“We opened the showroom [at 11113 Kingston Pike in Premier shopping center with Premier Eyecare] in November [2025],” Wes recalled. However, “the business has been open since 2019. This is our third showroom. The business really started out of our home.

“We’ve been able to grow it a little by little ever since,” he added. “We love it.”

“Our showroom before was in Oak Ridge, and it was tucked into an industrial park,” Katlin said. “There wasn’t much walk-in traffic or visibility, so we’re really excited to be in Farragut on Kingston Pike, to have more visibility and having people see our sign, walk in and check it out.”

The business idea was sparked when Wes was 19.

“I started a handyman company,” Wes said. “I ran that business for four and a half years. So, I naturally, kind of, was an entrepreneur and wanted to have my own business.

“I spent some time in industrial distribution and sales,” Wes said. “I found myself wanting to get back into owning a business.”

Then, he learned about the franchise Kitchen Tune-Up, which was available.

“The franchise was started



Tammy Cheek

Kitchen Tune-Up owners Katlin and Wes Steese will be celebrating their joining Farragut West Knox Chamber of Commerce with a ribbon cutting.

in 1988 by a gentleman, Dave Haglund,” Wes said. “He had a cabinet company, and wrote an article, I believe, in Life magazine about taking care of your cabinets and what you can do to get them looking back to closer to what they were when they were new.

“That article blew up, and he got so many phone calls he said he needed to find a way to franchise or spread it out.”

For Wes, “it’s a really good fit for my background of what I’ve done before, but I really liked the focus of being in kitchens, perfecting and in-

stalling cabinetry and the little details you can do inside of a kitchen.

“The company was founded as “a tune-up, where we don’t change anything about your cabinets, but we just bring them back to 90 percent of what they looked like when they were new,” he said. “That’s still one of our core services; but over the years, we’ve added cabinet painting, refacing and new custom cabinets.”

For more information, call 865-253-7805 or visit kitchentuneup.com/Knoxville-tn/

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Building Strong Hearts and Stronger Connections at NHC Farragut

Residents and patients have been staying active and full of heart this month! Since February is **National Heart Health Month** we focused on fitness and wellness, with group exercise classes designed to promote strength, balance, and flexibility for those of all ability levels. From morning stretch sessions to active games, our residents and patients are prioritizing their health while having fun together.

We also saddled up for a spirited **Western Week** celebration! The soda fountain was filled with cowboy hats, boots, country music, and western-themed games and activities. Residents enjoyed themed crafts, tasty treats, and plenty of laughter as they embraced their inner cowboys and cowgirls.

To wrap it all up, love was in the air as we celebrated **Valentine's Day** with festive décor, sweet treats, and special gatherings that highlighted friendship and community. From creating valentines to spreading kindness, our residents were reminded that connection and companionship are at the heart of everything we do.

At NHC Farragut, every week brings new opportunities to stay active, celebrate together, and create meaningful moments.



Residents shared smiles and friendly competition during a spirited game of Balloon Volleyball, keeping the fun floating all afternoon.

Photos submitted



Residents proudly cheered as this year's Valentine's Day Happy Hour King and Queen nominees were announced, celebrating friendship, fun, and a little friendly competition.



Residents put their muscles to work during a lively Nerf showdown, building strength, boosting coordination, and sharing plenty of laughter along the way.

A little winter whimsy and a lot of team spirit made Snowman Bowling a striking success!



Residents spent the afternoon crafting heartfelt Valentines for one another, spreading kindness, creativity, and sweet smiles throughout the community.

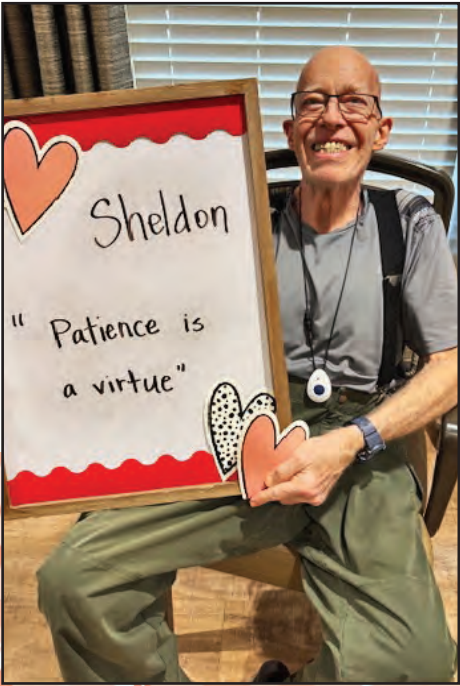


Residents kicked up their boots and enjoyed a Western-themed Happy Hour filled with country tunes, festive treats, and plenty of frontier fun.



Valentine's Day King and Queen: Charles and Christine

Valentine's Day words of wisdom from NHC residents and staff



Some of NHC's amazing staff from nursing dietary and housekeeping



Alan Letsinger, Chef, has been with NHC for 26 years

KCSOpolicereports

● A Farragut woman told deputies Feb. 5 that a check mailed from the Farragut Post Office, 11409 Municipal Center Drive, was intercepted and altered between Dec. 19 and Dec. 23.

According to the report, the complainant received a letter notifying her that the property taxes had not been paid. When she reviewed her bank account, she then saw where the check, originally written for \$5,658.32 to pay Knox County property taxes, was forged and the payee changed. The funds were deposited into a bank account not belonging to the victim. The case is being investigated as felony theft, forgery and fraud.

● A Farragut man reported Feb. 5 that a check left in a post box at the Farragut Post Office, 11409 Municipal Center Drive, was altered from \$1,359.65 to \$6,700 and made payable to a male suspect. The

complainant told deputies the suspect attempted to cash the check, but the bank flagged the transaction as fraudulent. The incident is being investigated as attempted forgery and fraud.

● A Pecos Road man reported Feb. 6 that someone used his personal information to open a Verizon Wireless account in July 2024. The victim told deputies he discovered the delinquent account on his credit report Jan. 23 while applying for a mortgage. He said he never opened the account, nor has he ever received a bill or any correspondence in the mail from Verizon Wireless. He has disputed it with the credit bureaus. The case is being investigated as felony identity theft.

● A complainant reported Feb. 6 that a check mailed from the Farragut Post Office, 11409 Municipal Center Drive, was

intercepted and fraudulently deposited. According to the report, the check was altered and deposited into a bank account on Jan. 7. The forged check totaled \$15,390.10. The incident is being investigated as felony theft, fraud and forgery.

● A Rockwell Farm Lane woman reported Feb. 7 that her debit card information was used without permission to place a food order through her GrubHub account. The complainant told deputies a \$24 charge was made using her linked Cash App card. She said the suspect changed the order name to “Auntie Casey” but did not alter her account information. The complainant stated she filed a claim with Grubhub and Cash App. The case is being investigated as misdemeanor credit or debit card fraud.

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I had the same thing happen to me as what was reported in the February 4th issue of stolen checks and fraudulently cashed, and it's a real problem. I'm told that this is a widespread thing going as far as Atlanta. This happened to me in November. I'm still trying to change all my accounts, and the bank actually says don't use checks at all anymore. This is terrible. Thank you.

Thank you to the farragutpress, Tammy Cheek and the Farragut resident that came forward for the recent article

“Reports of mail theft rise in Farragut.” We've had several checks mailed in the last year that did not get to the intended companies for which the checks were written. Thankfully, we have not yet discovered that any of those checks have been cashed. We thought we were the only ones experiencing this terrifying ordeal. Our local bank has been wonderful in working with us, and we appreciate the reporting on this and trust that the perpetrators soon will be brought to justice.

Town Calendar

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[illegible]



Jake Nichols

Bearden senior Theo Mills (4) goes up for a shot against McMinn County’s Abe Reinbold (14).

Bearden squads roll on Senior Night

Jake Nichols
jnichols@farragutpress.com

Last Monday night, Feb. 9, Bearden celebrated its seniors in fitting fashion with two lopsided victories over McMinn County.

The Lady Bulldogs picked up an 83-37 win, highlighted by 30 points from Natalya Hodge, 12 from Katie Foster, 11 from Riley Hunt and 10 from Emma Rainey.

In the boys game, Bearden won 81-57 behind 17 points from Carson Asbaty, 13 from Justin Nordin and 12 apiece from Sean Capshaw and Theo Mills.

That put both Bulldog teams at a perfect 12-0 in District 4-4A, as they enter this week’s district tournament as the top seeds.

In the girls’ game, Justin Underwood’s squad shot out to a fast start to take a 49-28 lead into halftime.

It was an impressive output given the pregame emotion, as the Lady Bulldog seniors went through handshakes with their moms — the same trend

that took hold in Farragut a few days prior.

The moment allowed a deeper glimpse into each BHS player, especially Hodge, who wore a bubbly smile instead of the swaggering scowl she flashes after 3-pointers.

“It was bittersweet,” said Lakisha Dobbins, Hodge’s mother. “This is really the end, you know? The girl has two different personalities on and off the court, so I love the emotion she puts with it.”

The Bearden boys did not go through the same ceremony, opting only for the mid-court recognition that took place between games. Jeremy Parrott’s squad did honor its seniors during the action, though, as multiple Dawgs had big nights in the scorebook.

“They’ve been steady all year, but what’s made us hard to cover is that we have so many guys that can do things for us,” Parrott said. “I thought Theo (Mills) played really well. And a coach couldn’t ask for anything better than to have a group like this.”

Admirals

From page 1A

“Those coaches (at Fulton) are doing a good job over there, and they’ve been down the last few years and they’ve played well and they’re not really used to that,” Mayfield said. “This group of girls, they were being tougher than us for a good stretch of the game.”

“This is a win that we might not have gotten earlier in the season, around Christmas or even in late December, like the game we lost to Austin-East, so I think we’ve gotten better.”

The Lady Admirals were

without junior center Trinity Curry, who suffered a minor injury in a game 24 hours earlier.

“Toughness is (overcoming) not having Trinity in there,” Mayfield said. “She stepped on somebody’s foot. Had this been a district game, she probably could’ve played.”

“Toughness is also overcoming foul trouble.”

The Lady Admirals persevered to secure the win. They opened a 20-13 lead in the first quarter and extended that advantage to 33-19 by halftime, as their defense surrendered just six points in the second stanza.

Hardin Valley holds off West, 61-55

KEN LAY
Correspondent

The 2025-26 season ended on a winning note for the Hardin Valley Academy boys basketball team Friday night, Feb. 13.

The Hawks outlasted Knoxville West, 61-55, in the Marble City Community.

The game might’ve landed in the win column for Hardin Valley but Hawks’ coach Andy Arendt was anything but pleased with his squad’s defensive effort against the Rebels (10-19).

“It’s always get to get a win on the road and get a win over here,” Arendt said after Har-

din Valley (16-13) led throughout the contest against the Rebels, who are in a bit of a rebuilding mode this season under the direction of second-year head coach Tommy Eggleston, a longtime assistant in the program. “West has good athletes and a great program.

“Offensively, I think we played pretty well, but our defense was terrible and we didn’t do a good job rebounding.”

The Rebels and Hawks were similar heading into the recently completed regular season as both had to replace some key pieces from the pre-

vious year but on this night it was a pair of veterans, Jax Sparks and Colin Dyreness who were the key playmakers in the victory.

“I think our two seniors, Jax Sparks on offense and Colin Dyreness on defense, did a good job leading us against a good team, coached by a great guy like Tommy Eggleston,” Arendt said. “He’s one of the best guys around.”

The contest was a close one throughout, with West High holding a narrow 19-16 advantage at the end of the first

See **HARDIN VALLEY** on Page 3B

Rhien, Edwards lead HVA in finale

Ken Lay
Correspondent

Hardin Valley Academy girls basketball coach Jennifer Galloway used her team’s regular-season finale against Knoxville West to throw in a few new wrinkles to prepare her young team for the postseason.

The Lady Hawks easily defeated the Lady Rebels, notching a 54-38 victory Friday night, Feb. 13, on the road.

“We wanted to do some different things to get ready for the district tournament,” Galloway said after her squad dismantled the Lady Rebels late last week in the regular-season

finale for both schools. “It was nice to get a win going into the tournament.”

From the outset, the Lady Rebels appeared to be outmatched as Hardin Valley darted out to a fast start, opening a 14-4 lead by the end of the opening quarter.

The Lady Hawks would maintain control throughout the contest. They never trailed game and extended their advantage to 27-15 by halftime and 41-25 by the end of the third quarter.

Hardin Valley had a pair of players post double figures in the scoring column as Audree Rhien finished with 17 points and Marley Edwards had 15.

Alaina Linrbaerry chipped in with nine points.

Galloway said she has been pleased with her young squad’s progress during a season where they’ve experienced their share of growing pains.

The Lady Hawks notched a victory over Oak Ridge at Wildcat Arena recently, salvaging a split with the Lady Wildcats.

“That was a big win for us,” Galloway said. “I think our kids have really grown up and I think we’ve gotten better.”

HVA had a short turnaround as it opened District 4-4A Tournament play Monday with a 53-38 victory over host McMinn County.

Wrestlers

From page 1B

years. I was surprised that I qualified for state in my new weight class, but now I want to be able to place.”

Hardin Valley, meanwhile, has three wrestlers who will take the trip to Franklin next weekend after seven advanced to the sectional round.

Roland finished in third place over Science Hill’s Nick Evans, winning 17-4 by major decision. He also beat Oak Ridge’s Nick Englehardt in the consolation semifinals to clinch a trip to state. Wimer beat Science Hill’s Braeden Parrish in the consolation semifinals a by 5-4 decision for a state berth, but he finished fourth overall after a

loss to David Crockett’s Ethan Greear. Remarkably, he did so while dealing with walking pneumonia, per HVA coach Matt Bates.

Finally, HVA’s Mikael Arce beat Maryville’s Payton Cromwell in the consolation semis but lost to Tennessee High’s Spencer Miller to finish fourth overall.



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The Good Neighbor Character Award

Briseis Charles

Congratulations to Briseis Charles, a First Grader from Farragut Primary School, for winning the Good Neighbor Character Award presented by Mansour Hasan, State Farm Agent. Briseis was chosen for this award because she demonstrates thoughtfulness. “She’s a fantastic student,” said her first grade teacher, Mrs. Sanchez. “She works hard, participates, and gives her best. She’s always happy and willing to help me and her classmates. She is a great role model for her peers.”



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Perfect
From page 1A

game against Mt. Juliet, Emery Cooper, a three-year starter for the Lady Wolves, scored 11 points. Janiya Turner added 10 points. Reese Davis and Reese Underwood had seven points each.

The win over Mt. Juliet wasn't the toughest game for West Valley in the Midstate.

The Lady Wolves opened the tournament with a 47-32 victory over Upperman on Friday at Stewarts Creek High School in Smyrna.

"This was a re-classification year and Upperman moved up from (Class) AA to be with us

in (Class) AAA," Ballard said. "And they were the best team in AA for a long time.

"So the biggest thing for us was how we had to come back and play after we had played the second best team in the tournament in the semifinals."

The Lady Wolves ran past Upperman, 47-32, in the semifinals.

Cooper led the way with 12 points. Turner added 11. Underwood had eight and Jaide Patel finished with six.

This year's eighth-grade class made a remarkable three-year run. Those players never lost to a Knox County team and went 87-6 during their time at the school.



Photo submitted

West Valley Middle School's girls basketball team won a second consecutive Class AAA state title Saturday with a victory over Mt. Juliet. The victory at Rockvale High School culminated a perfect 33-0 season for the Lady Wolves.

Ads
From page 1A

withstood one more Farragut push with less than two minutes to go.

"We had our opportunities, just couldn't get over the hump," Farragut head boys basketball coach J.P. Burris said. "Had some really tough breaks go against us. I mean, we cut it to two possessions and even one but had some things go against us. We can only control what we can control."

The Admirals did see a bright spot in Matthew Dickens, who led the team with a career-high 23 points.

It would have been an impressive outing any day, but especially less than 24 hours after Dickens scored just two points against McMinn County.

"It was my birthday yesterday and I only had two points, so that lit a fire under me," Dickens said. "Just playing with a little emotion."

Hardin Valley
From page 2A

quarter. HVA had seized the upper hand by halftime as it used a 17-8 second-quarter run to open a 33-27 advantage by the break.

The Rebels then trimmed the Hawks' advantage to 44-43 by the end of the third stanza.

Sparks scored 20 points against the Rebels while Kymani Smith added 13. Mike Fritts and Kristian Oliver finished the contest with 12 points.

West High's Robert Shuler had a game-high 23 points for the Rebels, keeping them within striking distance.

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 - Candidates need to provide contact information with their submission in case clarification or follow-up is necessary.

Candidates may email their political profiles to editor@farragutpress.com

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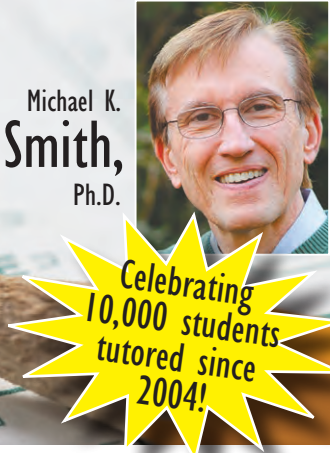


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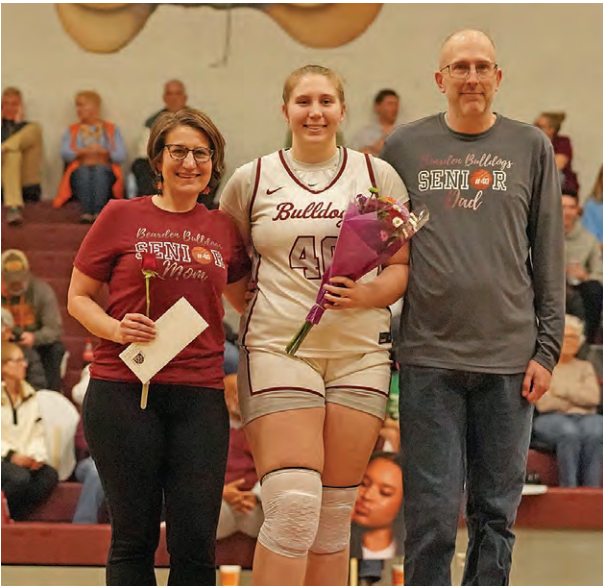
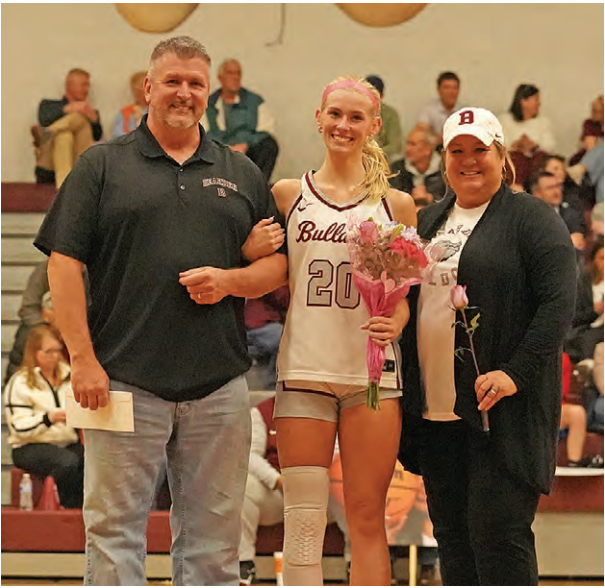


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In recent weeks, our local high schools recognized their seniors at their respective Senior Nights.
Find students from Farragut High School and Bearden High School
featured with their families in these pages.

BEARDEN HIGH SCHOOL



Farragut photos courtesy of Carlos Reveiz/crfoto.com • Bearden photos by Jake Nichols



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Dancing
with Daddy

Fathers and daughters enjoy quality time
at St. John Neumann Catholic School event



Photos by Tammy Cheek

More than 250 fathers and their daughters gathered in St. John Neumann Catholic School's gymnasium Saturday, Feb. 7, for the school's annual Daddy Daughter Dance. "That's the biggest one we've had," said Patrick Wade, SJN director of development. He added everything went well. "People volunteered for the event, so it's a well-oiled machine," he added. Fathers and daughters enjoyed dancing to the latest hits and some old classics, such as the Bird Dance; having their photos taken and enjoying refreshments.

Clockwise from top left: Alvin Manabat with daughter Felicity, 4; Clara Below, 6, with dad Michael Below; Curt Ratliff and daughter Emilee, 10

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Photo submitted

Bill Jackson works on one of his intricate three-dimensional puzzles at his work station in his Morning Pointe residence.

Jackson puzzles

TAMMY CHEEK
tcheek@farragutpress.com

After Bill Jackson, a 96-year-old resident of Morning Pointe Senior Living in Hardin Valley, retired from broadcasting about five years ago, he searched for something to keep him busy.

While dealing with the COVID pandemic, he also had double bypass surgery and was the caregiver for his late wife, Dorothy. "I can't just sit around here and watch TV," he said.

"I wasn't able to do the things I had been doing," Bill recalled. "I was faced with 'what do you do?' So, I got into puzzles."

Initially starting with jigsaw puzzles with his wife, Dorothy, "we'd put a puzzle out on the dining room table and work on it," he said.

But, the pastime soon bored him. Then, Bill discovered three-dimensional puzzles.

On Amazon, "they had a laser-cut three-dimensional wooden puzzle," he said. "I hadn't even thought of anything like that."

Now Bill builds intricate

wooden three-dimensional puzzles — from little kiwi birds and ponies to globes, locomotives, architectural models and lights and other mechanical designs.

"The laser cuts them out so precise, you don't even need glue," he said.

As a child, Bill made balsa wood model airplanes, which he observed were made similar to the 3-D puzzles. He also was able to use prior woodworking skills.

The hobby quickly became part of his weekly routine, providing a sense of purpose as he found a way to not only communicate with children using his projects but also fellow residents, as it helped their memories.

He would watch a resident's face light up when she saw a pony and remember, "I had a pony like that!"

He said one of his favorite designs is "Brainaic," a head covered in gears of various shapes. He displays them on a stand beside his door in the hallway, along with two globes

~ Clarissa Alberto,
Communications assistant
with Morning Pointe, in
reference to Bill Jackson

"... he's still learning, creating and staying curious at 96."

See PUZZLE on Page 7B

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WINNING SOULS AND CHANGING LIVES FOR JESUS CHRIST IS A TOTAL FAMILY MINISTRY

obituary

Alexander Dumas of Knoxville, TN, was born on March 8, 1928 and died on February 12, 2026 at 97 years old. Born in Detroit, MI, Dumas enlisted in the United States Navy in 1945 at the age of 17 and served as a corpsman with U.S. Navy hospital where he treated patients injured at Iwo Jima. After his discharge, he was a nurse at University of Virginia Hospital while he attended the university as a pre-med student. But his true calling would come about a decade after receiving a painting kit for his 27th birthday. He discovered a passion for painting and eventually had paintings commissioned by banks, businesses and organizations. His artwork helped Dumas earn accolades from some big names, including Paul “Bear” Bryant, Howard Cosell, Stan Brock and Johnny Majors

Dumas served as a major in the 3rd Infantry Brigade of the Tennessee Defense Force/Tennessee State Guard. In the early 1970s, Dumas met a paraplegic veteran who served as the catalyst for his creation of a series of works, including the aftermath of the Battle of Okinawa in 1945 titled “The Last Goodbye”. Dumas’ series of over 90 paintings depicts combat scenes from World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War These paintings now reside at the Morris Museum in Augusta, Georgia. Other paintings reside in



Dumas

the USS Tennessee Battleship Museum, National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force, East Tennessee Historical Society, Robert P. Coggins Collection, Medal of Honor Museum and others “Lest We Forget was one of Alex’s favorite sentiments.

Beyond his art, Dumas was recognized for his involvement with various charities and organizations including the CADES program at Concord United Methodist Church, Remote Area Medical Expedition, Thompson Cancer Survivor Center and Knoxville Zoo. He is preceded in death by his wife, Jeanette Dumas. He is survived by his daughter, Pamela Piggott (Les) of Tyler-town, MS and stepson, David Galey (Ginny) of Maryville, TN. He is also survived by grandson Charles L. Zakaib III (Gwyneth), great grandchildren Madelon & Rhoslyn.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the CADES program c/o Concord United Methodist Church, 11020 Roane Drive, 37934.

Services held on February 24th, 2026, at East TN State Veterans Cemetery at 1PM with military honors.

5901 Lyons View Pike, Knoxville, TN 37919

Puzzle
From page 6B

he made, a music box, pinball machine and other items.

“I discovered a locomotive [puzzle],” Bill said. “I was fascinated with the fact that the instructions were like building a house. You have to put one piece with the next and build up.”

It is unlike a jigsaw puzzle, “where you just match them up,” he said. And, “I found they had a miniature pinball machine [puzzle]. It’s got the little microchip sensor for the sound and lights. The instruction is 75 pages. That was a real challenge when I got on it, and I made three of them.”

“The first one I gave as a Christmas present to my son-in-law and my grandchildren,” Bill said.

Another one he kept for himself and the third he gave to a veterans’ group.

“Recently, videos of Bill and his finished puzzles have started gaining attention on TikTok, where viewers are drawn to both the complexity of the builds and the fact that he’s still learning, creating and staying curious at 96,” said Clarissa Alberto, communications assistant with Morning Pointe. “Bill says puzzle-building acts as



Tammy Cheek

Bill Jackson, 96, keeps his mind challenged by building three-dimensional wooden puzzles, which he displays in the hallway at Morning Pointe Hardin Valley.

meditation and therapy for him, and he especially enjoys seeing other residents — and visiting grandchildren — light up when they see the finished pieces.

“At a time when aging is often framed around limitation, Bill’s story offers a refreshing perspective on curiosity, focus and connection across generations,” Alberto said.

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press planner

• United Way of Greater Knoxville (UWGK) released its Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the 2026-2028 Community Investment Grants process, inviting nonprofit organizations serving to apply. First-stage applications will be accepted from Feb. 19 to March 13. To support interested applicants, UWGK will host Nonprofit Information Sessions, providing an overview of funding priorities, the application process and key dates, as well as time for questions. Sessions are organized based on where organizations are headquartered. Advanced registration is required, and registration details are available at uwgk.org. Nonprofit organizations are encouraged to review the full Notice of Funding Opportunity and

application materials at uwgk.org prior to the sessions.

- Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee is seeking volunteer drivers to provide one-on-one transportation to Knox County residents who require aid and assistance to travel safely. Volunteers drive CAC vehicles and transport older adults and individuals with disabilities, stay with them at destinations and get them safely back home. VAT not only provides transportation to medical appointments and the grocery store but also pharmacy pick-up, transportation to social events, senior centers, activities and much more. Volunteers are needed weekdays, weekends and some evenings. To volunteer, call 865-673-5001, email vat@cac-

trans.org or visit www.knoxseniors.org/vat.

- Each month St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church has a Gift of the Month collection for local social service programs. In February, the Gift of the Month is dedicated to Family Promise of Knoxville. Family Promise's goal is to prevent homelessness and to assist families to be able to stay together if they are homeless. To help Family Promise, St. Elizabeth's is collecting the following items: feminine hygiene products, general cleaning supplies and new pillows. Items may be dropped off at St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church, 110 Sugarwood Drive, on Sunday, Feb. 22, between 1 and 2 p.m. or at the church during regular business hours.



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FARRAGUT BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS AGENDA February 25, 2026 • 7:00 p.m. • Farragut Town Hall • Board Room

1. Approval of minutes for the December 13, 2023, meeting.
2. Consideration of moving the meeting time from 7:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
3. Public hearing on a request for a variance from the minimum lot size in the General Single-Family Residential (R-2) Zoning District related to a request to subdivide an existing parcel that was sold at an estate sale as two different lots to two different property owners, referenced as Parcel 05501, Tax Map 152 and Parcel 055, Tax Map 152 (12232 Turkey Creek Road), Zoned R-2 (Midtown Legal, LLC., Applicant)

It is the policy of the Town of Farragut not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, natural origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability or veteran status pursuant to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Public Law 93-112 and 101-336 in its hiring, employment practices and programs. To request accommodations due to disabilities, please call 865-966-7057 in advance of the meeting.



Farragut Town Hall | 11408 Municipal Center Drive

VISUAL RESOURCES REVIEW BOARD MEETING TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2026 AT 6:00 PM

- AGENDA
- I) Call to Order
 - II) Approval of Minutes
 - A) Approval of the January 27, 2026, meeting minutes.
 - III) Staff Report
 - A) Wall signs approved since the last meeting.
 - IV) Business Items
 - A) Review of a tenant panel sign for Nord-

- strom Rack, located at 11417 Parkside Drive.
- B) Review of a tenant panel sign for Curry & Queso, located at 117 Lovell Road.
- C) Review of a primary ground sign for RBM Services, located at 11221 Outlet Drive.
- D) Review of a pylon sign (reface) for LaQuinta by Wyndham, located at 805 North Campbell Station Road.
- V) Citizens Forum

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HeartHealth

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Photos submitted

Top: Judy Lane (center) shares a quality family moment in 2025 with son, Rylen Lane, 16, and daughter Reighlen Lane, 15, following her heart crisis the year before.

Above: Judy Lane could still smile while she was in intensive care with heart failure. Once diagnosed in a LaFollette hospital, she was transported to Turkey Creek Medical Center, where she spent a week before being transported again to a hospital in Nashville.

Life is good

Cardiac survivor shares heart failure ordeal

Feb. 20, 2024, Judy Lane walked into LaFollette Medical Center for her shift knowing something felt off.

"I'd been sick for a few days — shortness of breath, just not feeling right — but I didn't connect it to my heart," she said.

A nurse at the hospital, she headed to the emergency room and asked them to "check me out."

What happened next unfolded faster than she could process.

"It all went downhill from there," Lane said with a small laugh. "It was chaotic."

She was admitted to the intensive care unit, where an echocardiogram revealed the truth she never expected: she was in heart failure.

Six days later, Feb. 26, "I just crashed.

"Technically, I died on Feb. 26," she said. "I coded on the cath lab table and never recovered that weekend. From what I read in my medical records, I gave them a run for their money."

Because of the severity of her condition, within 24 hours Lane was transferred out of LaFollette to Turkey Creek Medical Center.

There, Lane "underwent an electrical cardioversion procedure to convert her heart rhythm back to normal," said Shannon Smith, marketing communications director for American Heart Association in Knoxville. "While there she also suffered cardiac arrest and required multiple shocks to come back to life."

"After a few days she was

transferred to Nashville because they thought she might require a heart transplant, but ended up not needing one," Smith said of Lane.

Lane spent a week at TCMC before she was flown to Ascension St. Thomas Hospital Midtown in Nashville, where she was placed on a transplant list, the next step if her heart didn't "do a turnaround."

That's where she regained consciousness.

Through it all, "it was very scary, but I felt at peace. Everything was out of my control," Lane shared. "My nurse brain was working, but I couldn't get anything to make sense."

Her medical team used every tool available to keep her alive.

"I was on multiple implanted devices," Lane said. "I had an Impella close to my heart, I was on ECMO, and I had a

pacemaker."

The Impella acted as a tiny internal heart pump while the ECMO served as life support

for both her heart and lungs.

Lane believed the combina-

See HEART FAILURE on Page 5C

New options available for statin-intolerant patients

With the U.S. Centers for Disease Control reporting nearly 25 million adults in the country have total cholesterol levels higher than 240 mg/dl, demonstrating a need for cholesterol management medication, a new survey is bringing light that 61 percent of respondents are not aware of alternatives outside of statins to lower cholesterol.

With heart disease remaining the leading cause of death in the U.S., cardiologist Dr. Laxmi Mehta is focused on educating Americans about al-

ternative options for managing cholesterol.

In addition to statins, there are newer, non-statin medications available in both oral and injectable forms for individuals who are statin-intolerant or who need an additional line of defense.

Currently, statins are one of the top medications prescribed.

"Statins are prescriptions medications that are used to lower LDL or the 'bad' cholesterol," explained Mehta, director of preventative cardiology

and women's cardiovascular health at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center.

The statins, "also impact the development or progression of atherosclerosis — buildup of fats and cho-



Dr. Laxmi Mehta

lesterol in the arteries," Mehta said. "Since statins have a secondary benefit, we consider them the gold standard."

"Statins are typically prescribed for patients who are at high risk for cardiovascular disease, have diabetes or have an LDL level greater than 190," she said. "Statins often get a bad reputation because they may have side effects in some patients, but the evidence consistently shows they are highly effective and remain the cornerstone of cholesterol treatment and lowering heart dis-

ease risk.

For people having difficulties with statins, the cardiologist said non-statin medications are an option for those who are statin-intolerant and require LDL lowering or need additional help in lowering their LDL to meet goal levels.

"These medications can be used in combination with statins for optimal cholesterol management," she said. "There are several types of non-statin medications:

See STATIN on Page 4C



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Close to the heart

How Callie Hodge gives back at ETCH

When Callie Hodge steps out of the development office at East Tennessee Children’s Hospital, she does not need to walk far to find a sense of motivation.

Rather, the 27-year-old Hodge merely needs to leave the building and step across Clinch Avenue to the South Tower.

There, on the second floor, is the cardiology unit, and a reminder that Hodge’s life was altered, forever fueling the work she does today.

From ‘earth-shattering’ to life-saving

Shortly before Hodge’s 3rd birthday, her mom took her to the doctor in Nashville, where they lived at the time.

“I had respiratory infections and was sick a lot,” Hodge explained. “I was 2 years old, in and out of the doctor. My mom took me to a pediatrician, and they listened to my heart and heard a murmur.”

Doctors asked Hodge’s mother if she was aware of the murmur, and she said no.

Immediately, Hodge was scheduled for a cardiology appointment that same day.

“My mom knew that something wasn’t right,” Hodge said, “so she called my dad and he met her there.”

Upon further investigation, the cardiologist diagnosed Hodge with an Atrial Septal Defect (ASD), a congenital heart defect in which there is a hole between the upper heart chambers, according to the Mayo Clinic. The hole increases the amount of blood going through the lungs, and

it can cause serious damage if left untreated.

Doctors also discovered she had Partial Anomalous Pulmonary Venous Return (PAPVR), a condition causing abnormal blood flow from her lungs to her heart, per the Cleveland Clinic. One or more pulmonary veins were returning oxygen-rich blood to the wrong side of Hodge’s heart.

Together, these two issues explained her respiratory infections. But they also spoke to a much deeper issue — that, without open-heart surgery, her life expectancy would be just 19 years old.

“It was earth-shattering for my parents because I’m the oldest child, so that was probably the first time they had really experienced something being wrong with their child,” Hodge said. “I can’t imagine what that was like.”

The surgery was scheduled, and less than a year later, the family moved back to the Knoxville area.

Soon after, Hodge began seeing Dr. Michael Liske, a cardiologist in the same unit that sits across from Hodge’s office today.

He, along with other cardiologists, has cleared Hodge to lead a perfectly normal life.

But as Hodge grew older and became aware of her condition, that spurred something deeper, too.

“My parents were always very open, and I grew up knowing my heart was different and that I had surgery,” she said.

See HODGE on Page 4C



Above photo by Jake Nichols/
Left photo submitted

Above: Callie Hodge, a former cardiology patient at East Tennessee Children’s Hospital, now works at the hospital as a major gifts officer.

Left: Callie Hodge, a major gifts officer at East Tennessee Children’s Hospital, spends time with a patient. Hodge noted that she is quite fond of these experiences, as she gets a chance to experience the joy and resilience that these children exude.



HEALTHY HEART CHALLENGE

Come for your heart. Stay for your health.

Join the February Healthy Heart Challenge!

February is American Heart Month, and there’s no better time to take steps toward a healthier heart! At the YMCA of East Tennessee, we’re inviting you to join our Healthy Heart Challenge and make heart health a priority.

Sign Up – Register for the challenge and receive a long-sleeve t-shirt to wear with pride.

Complete Heart-Healthy Activities – We’ll provide you with a list of 12 heart-healthy activities. Choose 5 of the 12 activities and work toward completing them throughout February.



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Stayin’ Alive: the importance of CPR certification

If you are a fan of the American version of “The Office,” then the hit song “Stayin’ Alive” will always strike a chord.

Season 5 of this show presented the song as an example of the correct beat to follow — 100 to 120 beats per minute — when doing chest compressions for cardiopulmonary resuscitation, otherwise known as CPR.

The “Stayin’ Alive” scene and its aftermath brought quite a few laughs, but the stark reality of this situation is hardly funny.

According to a 2025 piece from the American Heart Association, more than 350,000 cardiac arrests occur outside of hospitals in the United States annually.

Moreover, three out of four of those cardiac arrests happen in homes with these incidents proving fatal 90 percent of the time.

Cheryl Smith, CEO of CPR Choice in Knoxville, is quick to point out the benefits of proper CPR certification.

“It just takes a few hours to learn, and it’s really impactful because it works,” Smith said. “We just had a business tell us they saved a man’s life by having these skills. So that’s our goal, is for people to feel confident in these skills to be able to jump in as quickly as possible. Seconds truly matter, so we want to empower people for what to do in the case of emergency.”

The impact is not just limited to adults either, as children ages 9 and older can take a CPR certification class.

“We hear those stories all the time about a kid that steps into action with a teacher or sibling or parent,” Smith said. “I have three kids, and I’m glad all

three know how to do CPR.”

She added that the age range exists because children have to possess the physical strength for compressions.

“So the older they get, the better they are,” Smith said. “Really, what we focus on with kids is recognizing warning signs of heart attack and stroke. So if you see these warning signs — a parent with shortness of breath, chest pain, nausea — that might be an emergency.

“And it’s the same with a stroke — someone who’s having trouble speaking, paralysis to one side. Those kids can recognize that and call 9-1-1 as quickly as possible. Then if they can step in with those chest compressions, that’s great.”

Aside from individual classes, Smith noted that they do on-site business training and teach groups, such as Girl Scouts, homeschoolers and church groups.

The certification is only good for two years, so she recommended anyone who is not CPR-certified within that time frame should brush up to be safe.

Speaking of which, Smith noted a couple of changes in how to approach those who are suffering from a heart attack, stroke or may even be choking.

“One of the biggest changes that just happened recently in the last 60 days is that, for the longest time, we did CPR on infants using two fingers,” she said. “They just switched it to using the palm of one hand. I’ve been teaching CPR for 25 years, and that’s a really big change. Parents expecting new babies were always taught to do the two-finger compressions, and now they’ve switched it.”



Adults practice chest compressions on CPR dummies at CPR Choice in west Knoxville on Saturday, Feb. 6, 2026.

As far as choking assistance, people previously went right to the Heimlich maneuver for adults and children. That involves performing abdominal thrusts from behind while squeezing the person who’s choking above the belly button. Now, Smith noted that the first step is to deliver five hard back blows with the heel of one’s hand in-between the person’s shoulder blades, then go to the five abdominal thrusts before repeating the cycle.

“You repeat that until the object comes out or until the victim passes out, and that is when you do CPR,”

Smith said.

For an infant, the cycle involves five back blows then five chest thrusts with the heel of one’s hand.

And if CPR is needed, then Smith confirmed that the song “The Office” scene remains prevalent today.

“The tempo of Stayin’ Alive is 100 beats per minute, and that’s the recommended number of compressions,” she said. “Also, ‘Rocky Top’ is 120 beats per minute, so you wouldn’t want to go any faster than the tempo of that.”

~ Jake Nichols

Statin

From page 1C

- Ezetimibe: An oral medication, which blocks cholesterol absorption at the intestinal level, reducing LDL cholesterol by 18 to 25 percent.
- PCSK9 Inhibitors: A highly potent injectable medication, administered every two to four weeks, that can lower LDL cholesterol by 45 to 64 percent.

- Inclisiran: An injectable medication, administered twice a year after the initial doses, that can reduce LDL cholesterol by about 50 percent.
 - Bempedoic Acid: An oral medication, particularly for people who are intolerant to statins, used to help lower LDL cholesterol by 21 to 24 percent.
- The recent survey “found 61 percent of Americans haven’t heard of non-statin medications,” Mehta said. “A

reason for this could be that many of the medications are newer and we’re just now starting to have more data on their cardiovascular benefits. There’s also a lack of desire to be on additional medications, a gap in knowledge in the healthcare system and cost is also a real barrier,” she said. “The reality is that statins are still the first line of therapy because of their effectiveness, but we have other options in our tool box for

those who are intolerant to statins or unable to achieve adequate LDL levels with only a statin.”

When paired with a heart-healthy diet and regular exercise, these options (Ezetimibe, PCSK9 inhibitors, Bempedoic Acid) may help support cholesterol management and reduce the risk of related complications, including heart attack and stroke

~ Tammy Cheek

Hodge

From page 2C

Over time, that understanding inspired Hodge to support nonprofits as a high school student. She continued to give back in college, hosting fundraisers for East Tennessee Children’s Hospital.

Eventually, she realized she wanted to work in pediatric healthcare.

“And when I found out that fundraising could be my career, I knew I wanted to be at this hospital, understanding that the care I received as a child ultimately saved my life,” Hodge said.

She went on to earn a Master’s Degree in ethics as a Knoxville Fellow, starting her career in philanthropy.

She maintained a long-held goal of working at ETCH, ultimately joining the staff in April 2023 as an annual giving officer.

Hodge has since become a major gifts officer, where she partners with individuals and families. Among those, one stood out.

“I was given the opportunity to meet a little girl who also had open-heart surgery, and that was within the first six months of me working at Children’s Hospital,” she said. “That felt so full-circle to me.

“I was able to talk to her and her family and say, ‘Here I am now,’ telling them I get to work here and advocate and raise funds for patients just like she is and I was. That was just a God moment.”

It was not the only unique encoun-



Photo submitted

Callie Hodge, pictured here at the age of 3.

ter Hodge has experienced. She also oversees the programming for the hospital’s Women’s Philanthropy Society, and she gets a firsthand look at the endurance these children showcase.

“When you’re listening to these stories, it never gets old,” Hodge said. “It’s always emotional to see these kids — who are still just kids — yet they’re so resilient and strong and exude so much hope and joy.”

Hodge noted that she keeps pictures of some ETCH ambassadors at her desk in the development office. While their smiles and the building across the street drive Hodge, her own life provides the ultimate reminder.

“It’s a gift to do what I do,” Hodge said. “My life was spared because of God, ultimately, and the pediatric care I received.”

~ Jake Nichols

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3:30 p.m. Attorney Carolyn Levy Gilliam Estate and Will Planning

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National Wear Red Day brings awareness of women’s heart health

American Heart Association representatives and Turkey Creek Medical Center staff joined Tennova Healthcare, Knox County and Town of Farragut officials in bringing awareness to heart health in women during the 2026 National Wear Red Day kickoff event in TCMC Friday, Feb. 6.

“It’s exciting to have such a great group here today, a special day for us, for sure,” said Tennova Healthcare CEO Tony Benton, who also is immediate past chair for AHA.

Dr. Richard Briggs, a cardiologist and state senator; Farragut Mayor Ron Williams and Alderman Drew Burnette; and Rhonda Smithson, community engagement coordinator with Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs’s office were on hand for the kickoff.

“It’s my honor to welcome you to this special proclamation event, as we declare today as our National Wear Red Day,” Benton said. “Today, we come together to raise awareness about heart disease, the leading cause of death for both men and women, still, in the

United States.”

“We’re so thankful to have a place like Turkey Creek [Medical Center] that’s in the community that puts patients first and brings awareness to medical issues that affect women, men all throughout our community,” Burnette said before reading a proclamation from the Town of Farragut declaring Feb. 6 as National Wear Red Day.

“Whereas, cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death among women in the United States, claiming lives of one in every three women each year and surpassing all forms of cancer combined,” he read. “... and nearly half of the women over the age of 20 are living with some sort of cardiovascular disease yet most women remain unaware of their potential risk factors or unique ways heart disease can present in women.

“And ... women often experience heart attack symptoms that are different from men, such as shortness of breath, nausea, back or jaw pain, extreme fatigue or dizziness,

which can lead to delayed treatment and poor outcome ...” Burnette added before declaring National Wear Red Day.

“When I started medical school 52 years ago, there were so many misconceptions about heart disease in women,” Briggs said. “And even today, if you did a survey with the general population, they would probably say the No. 1 killer of women is breast cancer.

“There’s a lot about Pap smears, about all these other issues,” he said. “Still, heart disease is killing more women than of these, and we have a lot of days for cancer awareness; but to me, this is why this is the most important.

Briggs recalled when he was in medical school in the 1970s, he was taught heart disease was primarily a disease in men and “it really doesn’t involve women.”

“We found out that’s wrong” the cardiologist said. “We also know that the symptoms women have with heart disease are not the same as men.

“The problem is women are



Photo submitted

Tennova Healthcare dignitaries, Turkey Creek Medical Center staff and local officials gathered in a heart shape to commemorate wear Red for Women Day at Turkey Creek Medical Center on Friday, Feb. 6.

diagnosed later, after the damage is done,” he said. “That’s why Wear Red is so important.”

“By wearing red, we are not only sharing our support

See WEAR RED on Page 7C

Heart failure

From page 1C

tion of medical intervention, skilled doctors, her children and what she calls her “strong will” kept her going.

“I knew I had to come back and fight for my kids,” she said. Her oldest is 42; her younger two are teenagers. “I’m living proof God has a sense of humor,” she joked about the age gap.

Today, “I feel good,” Lane said. “My ejection fraction [heart function] is up to 55, 60 percent. I’ve had no bouts of [atrial fibrillation] and no signs of heart failure right now, so life is good.

“Of course, I’m on a lot of medicines and my pacemaker

is helping a lot, too,” she added.

Still, “I feel very blessed,” Lane mused. “I am humble, thankful for the teams that knew what they were doing, thankful for my family and to God for letting me stay here for a few years longer.

“My biggest thing is gratitude,” she added.

One physician stands out in her memory — the cardiologist on call the day she first arrived at the LaFollette ER.

“She’s kept up with me since,” Lane said. “Very compassionate and caring. When she told me I was going into heart failure, she sat down on the bed beside me and held me while I cried. She gave me so much comfort.”

Looking back, Lane realizes

she didn’t have the symptoms most people associate with a heart crisis. “That was the issue,” she said. “I didn’t have anything I thought was abnormal.

“The symptoms were things I had battled all my life, and I just thought I was having a flare of asthma, bronchitis,” Lane said. “I just thought I was having a flare of reflux — nausea, vomiting — I just chalked that up to normal.

She even blamed an allergic reaction to mums in October 2023 and the rabbits her teens got for Christmas. “I thought, ‘I’m allergic to rabbits. I’ll get rid of them and everything will be fine.’

“Well, January rolled around and I wasn’t any bet-

ter,” Lane said. “It was like I can’t go upstairs, the increased fatigue, shortness of breath. I couldn’t take a shower without having to stop and rest before I even complete my shower.

“That Monday morning, [on Feb. 19, 2024], I said, ‘this Is not right,’” she recalled. She went to work then called her allergist and said, “I’m just not getting any better.”

The doctors prescribed steroids, which Lane took that evening. The next day, she was too fatigued to go back upstairs to get her sweater. But, she went to work and listened to her own heart.

“Imagine if you will, just taking a gallon jug, filling it up with liquids, turning it upside down. That’s what my heart

sounded like,” she said.

Lane went to the emergency room and had the staff listen.

“My heart rate was 200,” she was told. She was taken to the ICU, where she was told her heart function was 30 to 35 percent.

“When I regained consciousness in Nashville, they told me the ejection fraction [heart function] was less than 10,” Lane said. “I had no heart function, went into kidney failure, cardiogenic shock and all the stuff that came with that.”

And because of allergic reaction, she required a tracheoscopy, she added.

A year later, Lane is home, healing and said she is grateful for a life she nearly lost.

~ Tammy Cheek



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Every Heart Matters

Pilot launches annual Heart Month campaign to fight heart disease and stroke

Pilot, the largest travel center network in North America, is continuing its long-standing support of the American Heart Association (Heart Association) and Heart & Stroke to support heart health education, research and prevention efforts across the United States and Canada. From Jan. 30 through Feb. 22, Pilot invites guests to turn their everyday stops into moments of impact, helping fund the fight against heart disease and stroke, the leading and fifth-leading causes of death in the United States.

In 2026, Pilot's goal is to raise \$1 million to directly fuel the mission of saving lives. Now in its ninth campaign year with the Heart Association, Pilot and its guests have raised a total of nearly \$10 million.

"Heart disease and stroke affect millions of lives every year, including my own," said Julius Cox, executive vice president, chief people and administrative officer at Pilot and stroke survivor. "After overcoming my experience, I became even more committed to taking care of my personal health and encouraging others to do the same. Every dollar raised during the campaign helps fund groundbreaking research and equips communities with life-saving tools and education they need to keep more hearts beating."

Guests can visit participat-

ing Pilot, Flying J and One9 travel centers and take part in simple, meaningful actions that collectively make a life-saving difference:

- **Paper Hearts and Round Up:** Guests at U.S. locations can add a \$1, \$3 or \$5 paper heart or round up their in-store purchases to the nearest dollar at checkout, with 100 percent of proceeds benefiting the American Heart Association's Life is Why campaign. Guests at Canadian locations can round up their in-store purchases, with 100% of proceeds benefiting the Heart & Stroke in Canada*
- **Donate in the App:** For the first time, guests can now donate \$1, \$3 or \$5 directly through the Pilot app when placing a mobile order, making it easier to support heart health with just a click

- **Free Coffee Offer:** To thank guests for their contributions, Pilot app users who join the "Heart Month Challenge" and purchase a paper heart in-store will receive an offer for a free coffee on their next visit.**

"At Pilot, our purpose is to show people they matter at every turn and supporting heart health is one of the most meaningful ways we can live out that purpose," said Adrienne Ingoldt, senior vice president, communications, risk and procurement at Pilot and member of the American Heart Association's National Life is Why Council of Retailers. "We are grateful for our team members and the millions of guests who choose to support Heart Month. We want everyone to live longer, healthier lives through education, healthy diet, physical activity

and regular medical screenings."

Alongside the company's fundraising efforts, Pilot is committed to helping its team members take meaningful steps toward better heart health. During Heart Month, the company's team members will have access to hands-only CPR training, blood pressure resources and heart health education developed by the Heart Association to support prevention, awareness and lifesaving action. These trainings and resources are also available to the public by contacting the local Heart Association office.

Pilot's support of the Heart Association is fueled by the company's Miles of Good giving program. Additional details about Pilot's Heart Month campaign are available at [PilotCompany.com/heart-](https://PilotCompany.com/heart-month)

month. Information about heart health programs and resources can be found at heart.org and heartandstroke.ca.

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~ Story submitted



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Wear Red

From page 5C

for those affected by heart disease, but also taking a stand to promote heart health and to encourage preventative measures,” Benton said. “Tennova is proud to sponsor this day ... our commitment to heart health is unwavering, and we’re dedicated to making a positive impact in our community.

“In collaboration with the American Heart Association, we’re excited to enter the second year of an initiative to aid new mothers with hypertension,” Benton said. “These new moms receive new mom kits, which include self-monitoring blood pressure devices and infant CPR kits, providing essential tools to help manage their health and ensure the safety of their families.

“Heart disease can often be silent, but its impact is profound,” he said. “It affects our families, friends and our communities. However, through education, research and community support, we all can make a difference.

“The American Heart Association has been at the forefront of this fight, and I’m proud to be part of an organization that’s dedicated to saving lives and improving heart health,” Benton said. “Your presence and support are vital in spreading the message of heart health and encouraging others to take action.

“Today, we can create a healthier future for all of us,” he added.

“Look around,” said Kayla Smith, executive director of Knoxville AHA. “This is a national movement on national media today. It’s really groundswell awareness, and I think it’s so fun and so important.

“It’s an honor to stand with you once again to lift up the hearts and voices of women across our community,” she said.

Not only is it a day to recognize wear read, but also Smith

said it was a day to recognize the “women whose stories, struggles and triumphs fill the work that we do.

“Heart disease continues to affect women in ways that are often overlooked and misunderstood,” she said. “It doesn’t always present with the symptoms we expect. It doesn’t wait for the right time. It certainly doesn’t discriminate.

“Yet, what gives me hope is what I see right here — a community willing to learn ...” Smith said. “Every time someone wears red, learns CPR, checks their numbers or talks openly about their heart health, it sends a powerful message that women’s lives matter.

“Awareness is not passive; it is powerful,” she said. “Our community continues to prove that progress happens when we show up for one another.”

With that, Smith introduced Ananya Nair, a Webb School of Knoxville junior, “whose passion truly embodies the spirit of action.”

Last year, Nair, the daughter of Lekshmi Seemanthini, an interventional cardiologist with Tennova Healthcare, “stepped forward as a Teen of Impact candidate, and what she accomplished was nothing short of extraordinary,” Smith said.

In seven weeks, Nair rallied friends, family and the greater Knoxville community to raise more than \$80,000.

“Ananya, your leadership, your empathy and drive remind of us the next generation is not waiting for their moment; you’re truly creating it,” Smith said as she presented the girl with the Teen of Impact Award.

“I feel pretty strongly about women’s health in general,” Nair said in a separate interview and added the money raised will fund research in women’s heart health.

The teen attributed her mother’s influence in her drive to raise the money and concern for women’s health.

“She comes home and talks



Tammy Cheek

Webb School of Knoxville junior Ananya Nair receives the Teen of Impact national award during the Wear Red for Women event.

about work,” Nair said about her mother.

In continuing the event, “it’s a privilege to stand with you today, as our local leaders unite to recognize National Wear Red Day here in Knox County,” said Suzanne Thames, chief financial officer with Tennova Healthcare and 2026 Go Red for Women campaign chair. “Heart disease is the leading cause of death in all Americans, yet women continue to face unique risks. “Pregnancy-related complications, transitioning through menopause and everyday demands women shoulder can all influence heart health in ways that are too often overlooked,” Thames said. “When women know their numbers — blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar — they gain the ability to protect their heart.”

According to the AHA, near-

ly 45 percent of women over age 20 are living with some form of heart disease.

Rhonda Smithson, community engagement coordinator with Knox County mayor’s office, said being at the event “is deeply personal for me.

“National Wear Red Day is such an important reminder that conversations like this matter,” she said. “Women’s heart health doesn’t always get the attention it deserves. Today is about changing that.

“Awareness, education and action — women deserve to be heard,” Smithson said. “We deserve to be listened to when we speak up about our health, our concerns and our experiences.

“We deserve strong advocates at every level who will stand up for us and ensure that we receive the care and attention that we deserve,” she said.

~ Tammy Cheek



Hearts and Heroes event set for Feb. 26

With February being American Heart Month, cardiac and stroke survivors are invited to a special event on Feb. 26. That night, the Hearts and Heroes event will take place at the American Heart Association’s “Heart House” at 4708 Papermill Drive in Knoxville.

“Survivors are the heart-beat fueling the mission of the American Heart Association,” the release stated. “This event is our way of honoring your journey and connecting you with others who share it.”

The event will run from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m., as the American Heart Association invites people to mingle with light refreshments and a chance to share their stories. Attendees are asked to RSVP and send a photo to Mindy.Savage@heart.org.

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