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SENIOR AWARDS

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Photos by Beth Holmes

Students Aliziah Abbott, Sammy Adams, Gracelynn Akin and Eddowyn Baker stood with their classmates ready for graduation on Friday night. See more graduation photos page 2.

Court votes to establish countywide payroll tax

A vote to establish an occupational tax in Adair County narrowly passed during Tuesday night's fiscal court meeting.

The vote was a first reading for an ordinance to set a .75 – three-fourths of one percent – tax on payroll of people who work within Adair County. A second vote will be required before any tax could take effect.

County Judge Executive Larry Russell Bryant proposed the .75 percent rate along with an agreement to set property tax rates at a 4 percent increase, pay 100 percent of health insurance premiums for employees, add one deputy position at the sheriff's office, and provide employee raises based on tenure, job performance, and wage comparison as recommended by department heads.

Magistrate Terry Hadley made a motion to approve the occupational tax and Sammy Baker seconded. Hadley, Baker, Chris Reeder and Judge Bryant voted yes, with Billy Coffey, Daryl Flatt and Tony Denton voting no, for a four to three affirmation. Mark Humphress was not present.

When asked for clarification during public comments, Bryant said Hadley's motion included his full proposal and not just the occupational tax. He added that the salary increases would be capped at $2 an hour for all employees. There was no discussion about when a tax would take effect if final approval is given.

The city of Columbia currently has a 1 per-

See **COURT**, page 2

Bid for park bathroom comes up empty

The fiscal court did not receive any bids after a request to construct bathrooms at the Jim Blair Center.

The court discussed options during a meeting Tuesday with an interest in getting bathrooms built soon, with the a playground drawing a lot of attention and other activity taking place at the facility.

The building has indoor bathrooms but access is limited. Portable bathrooms have been set up temporarily until a more permanent structure can be built.

County Judge Executive Larry Russell Bryant said he has found someone who developed a proposal to rough in the

See **BID**, page 7

School board helps fund new instruments for band

The Adair County High School marching band will get some help from the school board to purchase new instruments for the 2023-24 marching season.

Band Director Jordan Humphress and members of the band boosters updated the board on the band's needs and efforts to improve the financial standing of the booster organization.

Students brought several instruments to the meeting to give board members a view of their condition, with some of the instruments that are still in use purchased in 2000.

"Some are older than the students that are currently using them," Humphress said.

Humphress said instruments were constantly being repaired, and at some points during the season they borrowed instruments from other programs for performances.

Humphress asked the board to help with the cost of a lease program that would cost more than $152,000. They can make payments of $30,000 a year for five years and then they would own the 44 instruments that were included.

Board member Troy Grider said he served as a band parent, helped transport equipment, and he could attest to the condition of the instruments.

Humphress was asked about the financial condition of the band boosters and several members of the boosters provided details. The booster organization faced financial problems a year ago and current board members have been working to pay off debts and stabilize the finances.

Todd Davenport, president of the boosters, said the organization had a rough couple of years but have come a long way. They consolidated $42,000 in debt into a loan and all accounts are now current, he said. Money they borrowed from the board will be paid back by May 2024.

He and other board members said Bingo is expected to bring in around $80,000 and their budget for 2023-24 is $115,000. They reduced their annual budgets from around $128,000.

Davenport said the band is in a rebuilding phase, with many of its members being young.

"We were probably one of the youngest bands competing last year," he said.

Davenport said purchasing the instruments is an immediate need, and they were not asking the board to cover the whole cost but to help at whatever level was possible.

Grider made a motion to fund

See **SCHOOL**, page 2

Cross set to enter plea in federal case

A change of plea hearing has been set for former Columbia police chief Jason Cross in a federal criminal case stemming from 2021.

Cross was indicted in March 2022 on a single charge of theft from a local government receiving federal funds. He is accused of stealing more than $25,000 from the police department's evidence locker and the city's drug purchase fund while serving as

See **CROSS**, page 2

VFW post to honor fallen heroes

The VFW post is hosting a Memorial Day program to honor fallen heroes from all wars.

The program will be held at the post, 500 Greenhills Rd., on Sunday at 2 p.m. The program will begin indoors with guest speaker US Army CWO-4 (retired) Russell Lunsford. Chief Lunsford is the Post 6097 Jr Vice Commander. He is married to Janice Loy Lunsford and they reside in Fairplay.

Following the presentation, the event will move outdoors to the memorial for the laying of the wreaths. Class A or B uniforms are appropriate for veterans if they choose to wear a uniform for the event.