

City approves to seek and match funds

City approves a resolution requesting permission to seek \$200,000 in grant funding

BY DANIELLE TYLER
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — Mt. Vernon residents may have additional recreational opportunities to enjoy in the future.

Last night, the Mt. Vernon City Council approved a resolution requesting permission to seek \$200,000 in grant funding from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for a bicycle and walking trail.

Mt. Vernon Convention & Visitors Bureau Director Bonnie Jerdon told the council during the public hearing prior to the regular meeting that the trail, known as "Cedarhurst Trail" is phase one of a comprehensive trail plan.

The proposed 8-foot wide asphalt trail will be 2.14 miles long, and run from the Jefferson County Histori-

cal Village to Cedarhurst Art Center to the United Methodist Children's Home and then to the front of Casey Middle School.

The city would be required to match the grant, Jerdon explained. The application is due March 1.

City Park Director George Bryant said there has been a demand for these kind of trails nationwide and jogging, walking and bicycling was the number one recreational activity.

"When they looked at this statewide, they found the same thing was true here," he said. "I see the highest uses at [Veterans Park]

is walking around using the trail systems here and the demand is high."

"This would be a trail for all ages and I would appreciate that," Mayor Mary Jane Chesley said.

"This would be a great asset and I'm looking forward to getting it started," Bryant said.

While the Cedarhurst Trail would take approximately three months to complete, Jerdon added the comprehensive trail systems plan, which will span many miles, will take many years to complete.

The Mt. Vernon City Council also, with what Chesley called "extreme

reluctance", approved a resolution approving a water rate increase to municipal customers.

In December, the Rend Lake Conservancy District board voted to increase water rates beginning May 1. The increase was decided following a vote to accept a \$13.4 million Illinois Environmental Protection Agency loan for upcoming projects.

In May, rate increases for municipal customers will increase 2.5 percent for the first year, 2 percent in both the second and third years and 2.5 percent for the fourth and fifth

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RLC to begin search for new president

RLC begins search for new president due to the impending retirement of Mark Kern

BY JASON SILVEY
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

INA — Officials at Rend Lake College will begin focusing on the search for a new college president due to the impending retirement of current president Mark Kern.

The upcoming vacancy in the president's office was addressed at the end of Tuesday's regular meeting of the Board of Trustees.

Board Chairman William Simpson said "Back in Dec. 2004, Mark turned in his retirement, and I believe we've put together some ads to go out."

RLC Public Information staff confirmed that advertisements for the president's position will be sent to area newspapers today and that the college's website, www.rlc.edu, would be dedicated to the nationwide employment search.

The deadline for applicants to submit the required materials will be March 24. Kern's retirement will go into effect on June 30 after 40 years at RLC, making him the school's longest serving president with one of the longest tenures in all Illinois community colleges.

Both Kern and longtime Vice President of Finance and Administration, Robert Carlock, who retired last month, announced their departures at the same time in 2004.

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY HELEN — Helen Dumas will turn 100 years old on Sunday and family, friends and community members attended the Sunshine Center Tuesday to celebrate the significant milestone.

A grand party of 100 years

BY DANIELLE TYLER
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — A beloved figure in the community was given the birthday surprise of a century Tuesday afternoon.

Helen Dumas will turn 100 years old on Feb. 24 and family, friends and community members attended the Sunshine Center, one of her favorite hangouts, to celebrate the significant milestone, flooding her with gifts, cards and many congratulations.

It was a surprise party fit for a queen, and Dumas was proud to wear the tiara and take her place at the head of the table.

"I'm so surprised," she said. "This is wonderful. I don't have words."

Mt. Vernon Assistant Fire Chief Kevin Sargent kicked off the party, when he picked up Dumas

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Howell defeats Pigg in county board race

Pigg managed to close the gap by five votes but still lost to Howell by one

BY JASON SILVEY
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — The closest local race in the primary election earlier this month got even closer Tuesday as the votes on late arriving ballots were tallied.

In the Feb. 5 election, the Democratic race for county board candidate in District 10 was the closest of all the board races as current member Mt. Vernon resident Gale E. Howell bested opponent Nathan Pigg of Mt. Vernon by just five votes.

Howell received 216 votes to Pigg's 211.

With the late ballots, Pigg managed to close the gap with 215 votes but still lost to Howell by just a single vote.

The sealed ballot envelopes were opened at 10 a.m. Tuesday at the Jefferson County Courthouse by County Clerk and Recorder Connie Simmons.

Howell was at the courthouse to await the results, and Simmons tabulated the votes from the precincts in his district, McClellan 1 through Mt. Vernon 7, first since the late ballots could have the biggest impact on that race.

Simmons explained that the late arriving ballots were submitted by absentee voters and those serving in the military.

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LATE BALLOTS — Late arriving ballots from the Feb. 5 primary are fed into the counting machines to reach the final election results.

MV Citizens Police Academy wraps up this year's program

BY APRIL TOLER
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — Since 1995, members of the Mt. Vernon/Jefferson County Narcotics Unit have been working to take drug dealers off the streets.

"We won't stop until we get them," said Chief Chris Mendenall of the Mt. Vernon Police Department during Tuesday's Citizens Police Academy.

Tuesday's session was the last of the seven-week program that aimed at educating members of the community about the different departments and job duties of the MVPD.

During the session, Mendenall discussed the department's nar-



FINAL CLASS — Cpt. Ronnie Almaroad, of the Mt. Vernon Police Department, shows members of the Mt. Vernon Police Department Citizens Police Academy various ingredients and equipment used to make methamphetamine during Tuesday's session. The session ended the seven-week program that educates the public about the various departments and duties of the police department.

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MVTHS looking to move students from Kenneth Martin Center

The board will look at possibly running its own program for bd students

BY APRIL TOLER
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — Mt. Vernon Township High School Students who are currently attending the Kenneth Martin Center may soon be attending school at a different location.

During Monday's regular school board meeting, MVTHS Superinten-

dent Terry Milt discussed with the school board the possibility of changing the current program for behavioral disorder students who are attending the Kenneth Martin Center.

"We are looking to save money and to create a better situation for our students," Milt said. "This will take our Kenneth Martin Center students and move them to a different site under our program."

Currently, there are 13 MVTHS students who attend the Kenneth Martin Center, at a cost of \$223,000 a year.

"That is a lot of money for 13 students" Milt said.

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High 24 / Low 14
Details, 2A



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RLC:

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At that time, Kern wrote in his letter of resignation, "I started my tenure at Rend Lake College July 1, 1968. I could not have had a more enjoyable and rewarding career. To be involved in a community college in the district where you grew up is extremely rewarding. Every time the college does something positive, it benefits people I have known all my life."

IN OTHER business:
The tuition rate for in-district students was increased from \$60 to \$74 per credit

hour beginning this fall. The out-of-district rate will be set at a later date.

Acceptance of a bid for transportation services was tabled.

Board members voted to rescind action taken on Dec. 11, 2007, setting contracts lengths not to exceed one year for administration, administrative support, and academic support personnel for Fiscal Year 2008 and to approve multi-year contracts with the same ending dates as contracts previously approved. The salaries for those staff members approved on Dec. 11 were not rescinded. Administration was also given permission to set appropriate contacts as they see fit not to exceed June 30, 2008, or 12 months

from the ending date of the previous contract.

The board agreed to submit the statement of final construction compliance report for Phase II of the locks and security devices project to the Illinois Community College Board.

Clifton Gunderson LLP was retained for the completion of audit for the fiscal year ending June 30.

A \$58,400 bid from Sturdisteel of Waco, Texas, was accepted to furnish bleachers for the RLC running track.

No action was taken on the appointment of the VESTA program coordinator.

The resignation of Mike Joplin as commercial custodial instructor at Pinckneyville Correctional Center

was approved.

Tenure was granted to Agriculture Mechanics Instructor Brian Greer, Biological Sciences Instructor Carrie Ragan, Chemistry Instructor Paul Sandrock, Communications Instructor Elizabeth Bailey-Smith, Counselor Jena Jensik, and Cosmetology faculty Daphne Mitchell and Erin Butler.

Upward Bound Director Nicki Bowlin was transferred to the position of academic counselor.

jsilvey@morningsentinel.com

At least 13 Iraqi police officers die in explosions

BY TINA SUSMAN
LOS ANGELES TIMES

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Iraqi police officers attempting to dismantle rockets primed for launching from the back of a truck were caught up in a series of blasts Tuesday that killed at least 13 of them.

There were different reports on what caused the explosions in eastern Bagh-

dad. An official in the Ministry of Interior, which oversees police, said the area around the truck had been booby-trapped with roadside bombs that detonated as police arrived to dismantle the rockets.

But other police reports said at least some of the explosions occurred as police worked to dismantle the rockets.

Funds:

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years.

With RLCD's raise, Ron Neibert, Mt. Vernon City Manager, has said the city is forced to pass the increase on to its municipal customers, which include the villages of Belle Rive, Bluford, Watonville, Dix/Kell, Woodlawn and the Northeast water district. In addition, by contract, the rate increase will be passed along to high users, those who use at least 300,000 gallons of water per month.

"There are 6 or 7 of these users in the city," Neibert said.

When asked by Councilman David Wood if these rate increases would be passed along to customers in those villages, Neibert said it was possible but if a rate increase was going to be passed along to Mt. Vernon residents that would be an separate issue in the future.

"Our customers is a separate issue and does not affect what we charge," Neibert said.

Chesley, however, did praise RLCD board members Jere Shaw and Jim Rippy, who voted against the rate increase and were present at last night's meeting.

"I appreciate your endeavors to [vote down] this increase," Chesley said. "Unfortunately, with this raise, it is one the city cannot

afford to absorb and we have this item before us."

Wood, Chesley and Holt all voted yes. Councilman Mike Walker and Councilwoman Mary Burgan were absent from the meeting.

THE COUNCIL also:
Approved a bid of \$20,000 from S & N Fireworks for the annual fireworks display.

Approved a first reading of ordinance annexing property located at 648 Fairfield Road.

Approved the reappointment of Robert Brown to Fire and Police Commission.

Approved the reappointment Linda Short to Historic Preservation Commission.

Approved the appointment of Larry Griffin and Robert Herr to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

dtyler@morningsentinel.com

Celebration:

Continued From Page 1A

from her home, where she lives independently, and escorted her to the party in a fire truck.

"She wanted to know what all the hubbub was about," Sargent said. "I told her it was not everyday that someone turns 100 and I asked her if she wanted a short ride or a long ride. She told me she wanted the long one."

The Sunshine Center's Marty Bodine said when she learned that Dumas would soon be reaching her 100th birthday, she immediately went to work on making sure it was celebrated with style.

"She comes everyday and when she doesn't go and check on her," Bodine said. "Everyone loves her here and we had to do this for her. It wouldn't be the same without her. She deserves a very special party."

Her friend Jeffrey Watkins said Dumas' wisdom is what keeps her young and added she is an inspiration to others.

"She is like a grandmother to me," he said. "She is a beautiful Christian. She is a righteous, outstanding woman. She is a strong woman. When you ask her a question, she will give you



Sentinel Photo/DANIELLE TYLER

A SPECIAL SURPRISE — A special birthday party celebrating Helen Dumas' 100th birthday started with a big surprise. Mt. Vernon Assistant Fire Chief Kevin Sargent escorted Dumas to the event in a fire truck. "I was very surprised," she said of the event. "It was my first time in a fire truck."

the right answer and it just blows your mind."

During the birthday celebration, Dumas was treated to her favorite food, fried chicken and chocolate cake.

"If there is anything sweet it's going to be a good day," she said.

When asked the secret to a long life, Dumas smiled and said it was a gift of happiness and her creator."

"It has nothing to do with me," she said. "I didn't do it. It was god's will and happi-

ness."

In addition to many gifts, which included a rocking chair and handmade blanket from her friends at the Sunshine Center, Dumas was given a certificate of appreciation from the city of Mt. Vernon, presented by Mayor Mary Jane Chesley, proclaiming her a "golden citizen."

She also received a Senate Recognition Certificate for her significant milestone, signed by Sen. John O. Jones.

dtyler@morningsentinel.com

Race:

Continued From Page 1A

"We had a lot more absences this year, and I think the early vote has affected that," she said.

As each envelope was opened, employees representing the Democrat and Republican parties witnessed the process and compared signatures on the official documents to make sure they matched before the ballots were put in the ballot box.

One ballot was rejected because of a signature discrepancy, and Simmons said that voter would receive a letter explaining why it was rejected.

The ballots were then fed into the vote counting machine. Simmons, with the witnesses close by, filled out a matching ballot to replace one that could not be read by the machine.

The two employees serving as election judges were required to sign off at every step of the process to verify that it was done properly.

Simmons said that five of the outstanding 10 absentee ballots had been returned although the outcome was still in Howell's favor. She also outlined the steps Pigg would have to take if he decided to contest the results.

"He could file a discrepancy. It doesn't change the results, but he could ask for them to be tabulated again to see if there is a discrepancy. If there is, he could take it before a judge," Simmons said.

She added that a recount performed for a state race yielded the same results as the first time the votes were counted.

Pigg could not be reached for comment as of press time.

Howell called the final election results "a big relief" for him. He also said that this would be his last term on the county board.

"Four more years, and then that's it," Howell said. "I'll be

88 years old then, and I don't want to worry about anymore elections."

At the candidate's forum in January, Howell said he has continued to work with members of the board to solve financial problems.

"Our county is better than it was four years ago," he said. "We are trying to use money in a wise way that's what I will continue to do."

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Academy:

Continued From Page 1A

cotics unit which began in 1995 following involvement with the Southern Illinois Drug Task Force that was formed in 1987.

"We had some pretty serious problems [at the time]," Mendenall said of the need for a narcotics unit here.

During his presentation Mendenall covered the various investigations the unit covers including controlled substance cases, cannabis cases, and vice cases including gambling, prostitution and the illegal sale of alcohol and tobacco.

Along with a video of some past drug deals by the unit, Mendenall also discussed the various tools used to catch drug dealers/users including audio and recording devices.

Mendenall also discussed how officers have to stay ahead of the game when it comes to getting drug dealers

off the street.

"Investigations have changed over the years," Mendenall said. "We have to change our methods because we educate our drug dealers every time we buy drugs from them."

Although some community members may not be involved with drugs, they may become the victim of a crime associated with a drug dealer or addict, Mendenall said.

Most narcotic investigation, he said, impact other crimes.

"There's no limit to what type of crimes they will do to support their drug habit," he said.

Along with hearing information about the department's narcotic division, members of the Citizens Police Academy also heard the from a member of the department's High Risk Team.

Cpt. Tom Vowell, a 14-year veteran of the department, discussed some of the various situations the High Risk Team face and the training officers go through to be a part of the team.

While most of the situations

MVTHS:

Continued From Page 1A

The Center, operated by the Franklin-Jefferson Counties Special Education Districts, houses students who have extreme cases of behavioral disorder.

The goal of the program, Milt said, is to work on the student's behavior disorder in an effort to return them back to the MVTHS campus.

Milt said he would like to save money by possibly renting out a room at the Alternative School and using the district's own teachers to educate the students currently attending the Kenneth Martin Center.

"I believe it could save us approximately \$80,000," Milt said.

Not only could changing the program save the district money, Milt said it would also give them more control over the behavioral disorder program.

"It allows us to monitor kids better because the teachers are our teachers," Milt said. "It gives us an element of control and it gives us an opportunity to continue our educational services."

Along with the 13 students who attend the Kenneth Martin Center regularly, Milt said the district was also using the facility to house special education students who had been suspended.

After realizing that cost was \$100 per day, per student, Milt said the district no longer sends those kids there, instead having them serve their suspension at home.

The board agreed to give Milt permission to continue researching the possible change.

"I think [changing] is financially responsible and it can provide better educational opportunities for our kids," Milt said.

Milt said he would have more information for the school board at the March board meeting.

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