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election results

Kearney use tax, sheriff tax renewal pass

BY AMANDA LUBINSKI
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CLAY COUNTY — While only roughly 6% of registered voters in Clay County voted in the Tuesday, Nov. 2 election, Kearney and the Clay County Sheriff's Office have reason to celebrate. Tax efforts for both jurisdictions passed.

Sheriff's office tax

According to uncertified election results from Clay County Election Board, with 81 precincts reporting as of 9 p.m. Tuesday, Prop A, the sheriff's office tax renewal effort, overwhelmingly passed with more than 77% of the 10,226 votes cast.

"It means we don't have to worry about losing a quarter of our budget," said Sheriff Will Akin after the results came in. "Thank you, Clay County voters for allowing the tax continue. It's because of them, this is possible."

Voter approval means continuance of the existing one-eighth cent law enforcement sales tax. The tax, in effect since 1998, funds about \$5 million of the agency's roughly \$20 million annual budget.

In addition to personnel,

RESULTS ELSEWHERE IN COUNTY

While the sheriff's office and Kearney tax measures passed, ballot questions put to voters in the Holt fire district and Oakwood Park failed.

The Holt fire district sought added funds for needed equipment. The measure failed with more than 54% of the 257 ballots cast saying "no."

The Oakwood Park question failed with nearly 81% of the 57 votes cast saying "no."

"The medical for our jail, the food contract for our inmates, those are two of the biggest (other required expenses). Those are actually the two that got us into the lawsuit with the previous county administration. Our medical contract is about \$1 million and our food services contract is around \$600,000," the sheriff said.

In addition to increased patrol and detention duties, the Clay County Sheriff's Office also has worked to provide school resource deputies in the growing North Kansas City School District. Seventeen deputies now serve the district, up from eight in 2009.

For this go-round of the tax renewal effort, the Clay County Commission voted to remove the 12-year sunset on the tax, meaning it no longer will be put to voters every 12 years.

"Removing the sunset would eliminate future election costs, and the County Commission could vote to repeal the tax at any time," states a sheriff's office release.

Kearney use tax

In Kearney, the 1,024 voters who cast ballots according to uncertified

BALLOT/Page A3



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METRO CREATIVE

Former Kearney teacher pleads not guilty to sexual misconduct with students

BY AMANDA LUBINSKI
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CLAY COUNTY—Former Kearney High School teacher and coach Bryant Hummel pleaded not guilty last week to misdemeanor sexual misconduct following accusations he exposed himself to two Kearney students last school year.



Bryant Hummel

As he entered the Clay County courthouse off the Liberty Square, Hummel refused to comment to reporters who inquired about the charge against him and his being allowed to remain in the classroom for a period of time this school year.

Hummel, a former math teacher and defensive line football and assistant girls wrestling coach, was charged earlier this fall after allegations circulated in the tight-knit Kearney community for months. District leaders were initially made aware of allegations involving a Kearney School District staff member and students in April.

Allegations also circulated on social media. The name of the staff member was not released by the district, but social media allegations included reports of a high school teacher, who was also a coach, being escorted off school property by law enforcement this spring.

The matter has been one point of contention in a tumultuous year for the school district. Controversy, criticism and protesting have come from a multitude of fronts including those against universal masking policies, Hummel's remaining a teacher after allegations surfaced, former Superintendent Matthew Miller's drunk driving charge while attending a state school administrator conference, a claim of racism that is now part of a federal civil rights investigation and punishment a student faced after running across the field during a football game.

Tensions reached a fever pitch this September, the same day of a school board meeting and the charge against Hummel was announced. The start of the meeting was delayed as protesters refused to wear masks in school buildings along with several in the audience hurling insults toward school board members, some specifically calling out school board President Mark Kelly.

One school district parent and father, Cole Mills, said he could not understand why the district would allow someone to remain a teacher and have involvement with students after an allegation like the one raised against Hummel.

"You enable pedophiles," Mills said. "You're OK with yourself, you live with that? He was in that school building."

After that meeting, Mills spoke with the Courier-Tribune, saying it was

the first board meeting he attended and was concerned after his child, a male student athlete, told him Hummel was allowed to keep teaching earlier this school year despite allegations against the teacher.

Hummel was replaced as a high school coach this summer, but remained under teaching contract and allowed to return to a classroom setting this school year. According to Kelly, it was not in the same teaching capacity as in prior school years.

In a previous interview, Kelly told the Courier-Tribune the internal investigation, standard for any allegations of possible wrongdoing, was unable to gather the same information as police obtained, hence Hummel's allowance to remain a district educator for a period of time. Hummel has since been removed from the teaching staff listing on the school district's website.

"Generally, a teacher is put on administrative leave and then an investigation takes place to see if you can substantiate the allegations," Kelly told the Courier-Tribune in September. "But, obviously, a school district doesn't have the same rights or abilities to investigate that a police force does or sheriff's department. So, we're limited to what we are provided as we investigate that. Certainly, I can tell you that the police found more than what we were able to obtain."

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT/
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'Songs Close to my Heart' takes flight Saturday

BY KELLIE HOUX
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LIBERTY — There's something about Steve Wolcott's tenor voice that seems to fit with the tone and timbre of fall. He has a warm voice, wrapping listeners like a soft blanket with some of his favorite tunes.

That's precisely what he plans on doing Saturday, Nov. 6, with his performance, "Songs Close to my Heart." The 7 p.m. show will take place at Corbin Theatre, located at the Garrison School Cultural Center, 502 N. Water St., Liberty.

He will be accompanied

by Danny Baker, director of liturgy and music at St. James Catholic Church, and a friend of Wolcott's. Laura Warren Barge, an area voice teacher and director of Stars of Tomorrow, will join Wolcott on a few songs, too.

"Steve's a great tenor," she said. "I would like for him to sing 'O Danny Boy.' We will see, but he will definitely be telling stories about the songs he has chosen."

When Wolcott came to the area to attend law school at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in

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