

# Rome News-Tribune

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Weather: Sunny. High near 50. Low around 36. **C6**

## Inmate labor saves jail plan

◆ Sheriff's office staff and county crews will handle the training center phase after bids came in too high for the project.

By Diane Wagner  
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Floyd County is taking over construction of the training center building at the jail after a call for bids put the price at nearly twice the budgeted amount.

County Manager Jamie McCord said the sheriff's office and maintenance department would manage the project and use inmate labor at a cost of about \$550,000. Leaving the building in the jail medical expansion contract with Carroll Daniel Construction would cost about \$1.2 million.

"We're hoping it won't happen with everything ... but there's more work than there are people out there building buildings," McCord said.

The training center is the first phase of a \$7.4 million project that will add a medical and mental health wing with 60 beds

to the jail at 2526 New Calhoun Highway.

The facility currently has just five medical cells. One is padded, for inmates in a mental health or substance abuse crisis, and one has a separate ventilation system to house inmates with contagious diseases.

The two-phase project is funded through allocations in the 2013 and 2019 special purpose, local option sales tax packages. Funding for the new sheriff's office train-



Bob Sapp

ing center — which must be moved from the jail to make room for the medical wing expansion — was budgeted at \$700,000. McCord said there were at least three bids for each work category but, ultimately, it was too much money to divert from the second, main phase.

"We'll be OK on this phase," said Jail Administrator Bob Sapp, who helped craft the solution and will be heavily involved in managing it. "It's a simple project with few site challenges."

SEE JAIL PLANS, A2

### Investigators believe it started in middle of historic home

## Still no cause found for fire

By Doug Walker  
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Fire investigators still have not been able to pinpoint a cause for the blaze which gutted the historic Towers Place at 313 E. Fourth Ave. early Saturday morning. Investigator Mary Catherine Chewing did say she is still a little concerned that what remains of the front wall, badly bowed out toward the street, may collapse if high winds continue to prevail.

She said the insurance companies she is working with want the building left as it is until the investigation into the cause is completed.

"They've got to do what they've got to do and I understand that," said home owner Ira Levy. He said that Brown & Brown was the lead insurance agency.

Chewing said she and Deputy Chief Dean Oswald tend to believe that the fire started somewhere in the middle of the home, but could not say if that was in the basement or first floor of the home.

"It's going to be a lengthy investigation due to the



amount of damage to the structure," Chewing said. At this point, Chewing said she does not believe that arson was involved.

"I have over 600 pictures plus evidence from the house that I have to analyze," Chewing said. The investigator also said she still has a lot of surveillance video from several of the neighbors homes that she has to review in a bid to find any kind of

clue that might help determine exactly what happened. The home, thought to have been built in the 1870s, is owned by Ira and Libby Levy who have been renovating it for the past two years. Chewing said her information is that Levy had a potential buyer and there had been discussions about the equipment that was going to be put in the kitchen.

SEE FIRE, A3

Above: Caution tape surrounds a home at 313 E. Fourth Ave., that was destroyed by fire Saturday morning. A cause for the blaze still has not been established. Left: A view from the east side of the historic home in the Between the Rivers Historic District. Below: A view into the charred remains the burned home also reveals a tarp over a neighbor's home that also sustained significant damage in the blaze on the morning of Jan. 5.

Photos by Doug Walker



## Following the trail of campaign spending

◆ Elected officials and candidates file their financial disclosure reports.

By Diane Wagner  
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Sen. Chuck Hufstetler, R-Rome, is headed into a new two-year term in the Georgia General Assembly with more than \$160,000 in his campaign fund.

That's after a contested election in a four-county district he won with 75.78 percent of the vote. The District 52 senate seat covers all of Floyd and parts of Chattooga, Gordon and Bartow counties.

Elected officials and candidates had until this week to file their year-end financial disclosures without a penalty. The period covers spending and donations between Oct. 26 and Dec. 31 of 2018.

Hufstetler's Democratic opponent Evan Ross, a political newcomer, raised and spent just over \$4,800 during the course of the campaign and closed out his account.

State lawmakers can't accept contributions while the legislature is in session. The 40-day convocation starts Monday.

Major donors to Hufstetler in the waning months of the year included Independent Doctors of Georgia, \$2,000; Capital Health Management for Quality Housing and Home Depot Inc., \$1,500 each; and, at \$1,000 each, Civil Justice PAC, Dish Network, Georgia Association of Convenience Stores, Georgia Amusement & Music Operators, International Paper and McGuire Woods Federal PAC in Richmond, Virginia.

He took in a total of \$14,300 during the reporting period and spent \$12,084. His expenses included a \$3,900 donation to Republican Brad Raffensperger, who won the secretary of state seat in a December runoff. Republican Lt. Gov.-elect Geoff Duncan got \$3,000.

Floyd County's House delegates maintained five-figure accounts.

SEE SPENDING, A5



Sen. Chuck Hufstetler, R-Rome



Evan Ross

## Downtown parking changes still months away

◆ The DDA wants to keep a closer eye on the condition of buildings.

By Doug Walker  
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The Downtown Rome Development Authority hopes to start easing in the first phase of changes to its downtown parking plan sometime early in the Spring. Parking Services Manager Becky Smyth told members of the authority board of directors Thursday that new license plate reader technology and kiosks for the parking decks are on order and should arrive within a couple of months.

Once the LPR technology is in place, parking enforcement downtown will include a change in the



Downtown Development Authority board member Megan Watters looks through documents to find some information about a new logo that is being designed for the downtown community. / Doug Walker

hours of enforcement from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Currently, the two-hour parking limit is enforced through 6 p.m.

Smyth said the LPR technology will help generate a lot of data that will be critical to how the city moves

forward with future changes to the parking plan, which could include paid parking for premium spaces along Broad Street, but open up the decks to free parking.

When the kiosks are installed in the decks, the first hour will be free

with a \$1 per hour charge thereafter, up to a maximum of \$8 per day.

"I think what we have right now is a good plan in place," said Commissioner Evie McNiece, who serves as vice-chair of the authority.

The DDA board also expressed some concern over rehabilitation projects downtown that seem to be going on forever, specifically mentioning the work at 407-409 Broad St., a building owned by Rome businessman Nathan Roberts. DDA Director Amanda Carter said she periodically does walk-arounds with building inspection office staff to check on certain buildings. City Manager Sammy Rich said perhaps something should be written into the Historic Preservation ordinance with respect to timing of work that is authorized by the HPC.



Amanda Carter

SEE DDA, A2



### TODAY'S YOUNG ARTIST

Today's artwork is by Kaylee Powell, a fourth-grader at Alto Park Elementary School.

Visit RN-T.com to see Today's Young Artist monthly galleries.

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