

The Courier

YOUR MESSENGER FOR THE ARKANSAS RIVER VALLEY

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Packed bleachers of fans watch the action on a Friday night at Keenan Field.

Kurt Jones | The Courier

Sand Lizards' success boosts community morale

By OLIVIA FROST  
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DARDANELLE — As the Dardanelle Sand Lizards prepare for their first-ever appearance in the Class 4A State Championship, school officials say the team's play-off run has brought a noticeable increase in student morale, community engagement and district visibility. Superintendent Dr. Jamie Burris said recent home tournament games drew significantly larger crowds than regular-season ones. "The stands have been noticeably more full, and I would say easily we're talking probably close to 2,000 people," Burris said.

The additional turnout also led to higher concession activity to benefit the band boosters. Burris said the district sought and received additional help to meet the needs created by increased traffic. "We were really happy to get volunteers, whether it be parents, the community or students, that would help us in order to try to provide the concessions without feeling the lines," he said. "We were very, very blessed to be able to find the help." Burris said hosting playoff games on campus helped maintain regular school routines. "It makes things more simple instead of compli-

cated," he said. "Our students are not having to be dismissed from classes early and they're not having to leave in the middle of the school day to travel for multiple hours. We would much rather deal with the administrative responsibilities of hosting than the opposite." He also said student presence at games increased as a result of hosting the play-offs. "We've seen a whole lot more representatives from our student body at these games each week," Burris said. "You could just feel it and know that there were more people there." Burris said the playoffs and state championship

have coincided with a demanding time of year, but football has become a central point of conversation. "We have Christmas concerts, band concerts, Christmas parade, football is not the only thing we're doing," he said. "But it's certainly one of the most exciting things and it's one of the most common things that you hear folks talking about." He said staff and student morale has reflected that increased interest. "It's through the roof," Burris said. "We're very much having school just as normal, but we're getting to

See IMPACT, page A2

Man arrested after reckless driving on I-40

By COURIER STAFF REPORTS

A Pope County man was arrested Dec. 5 after allegedly driving recklessly on Interstate 40 and failing a field sobriety test, according to a probable cause affidavit. James Shockley was identified as the driver of a vehicle that allegedly performed a full 360-degree turn on the interstate and nearly hit the cable barrier before continuing westbound on Friday. The affidavit states dispatchers received two separate 911 calls related to the incident. When deputies made contact with Shockley near Parker Road and East L Street, the affidavit states he allegedly had slurred speech and exaggerated movements. According to the affidavit, Shockley denied consuming alcohol before field sobriety tests were conducted. The filing states Shockley failed the tests and was placed under arrest on suspicion of driving while intoxicated. While searching his vehicle, officers allegedly located a rifle behind the



SHOCKLEY

seat. The gun was loaded and contained four rounds of ammunition. The affidavit states that because Shockley is a felon, the firearm and ammunition were seized. Shockley was transported to the Pope County Detention Center where he allegedly became incoherent, staggered and needed assistance to remain standing. The affidavit states officers also found a glass cylinder with a pink lid inside his medicine bag that had black marks on its bottom consistent with burn marks. The report states residue inside the container tested positive for methamphetamine. Shockley was charged with driving while intoxicated, possession of firearms by certain persons, possession of drug paraphernalia and reckless driving. During bond hearings Monday morning, he received a \$1,200 cash bond.

State SNAP payment error rate still above maximum to save money

By ARKANSAS ADVOCATE

The Arkansas Department of Human Services needs to reduce its rate of erroneous nutrition benefit payments in order to minimize the cost of the program in the coming years, DHS officials and state lawmakers agreed Monday. The federal One Big, Beautiful Bill Act extended a series of tax cuts by reducing several benefit programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). States will have to share some of the cost of the program for the first time in the program's 86-year history, and each state's share will depend on how often it overpays or underpays SNAP benefits. The law incentivizes states to keep their error rates below 6 percent in order for the federal government to continue to pay 100 percent of the cost of SNAP benefits. States with error rates above 6 percent will pay at least 5 percent of SNAP benefit costs starting in fiscal year 2028, which begins Oct. 1, 2027. Arkansas' current error rate is 7.01 percent, DHS Division of County Operations Director Mary Franklin told the Joint Public

Health, Welfare and Labor Committee Monday. The rate has decreased by 0.28 percent since July, when the Advocate calculated that the most expensive potential outcome of the cost-shifting would be just over \$100 million based on the rate at the time. Franklin said the state's error rate in October 2024 was 9.56 percent, so the state has been "making improvements" and will work to bring the rate down further. "We have reached out to other states that have lower error rates to inquire what they are doing [and] how they are doing things differently to see if there's a process or a procedure that we are not doing or paying attention to," DHS Secretary Janet Mann told the committee. The two most common areas of error in calculating SNAP benefits are in recording recipients' income and calculating shelter deductions for homeless households, Franklin said. Rep. Howard Beaty, R-Crossett, asked if errors are more frequently the responsibility of SNAP recipients providing their

See ADVOCATE, page A2

ATU recognizes fall 2025 Tradition Keepers

By ATU MEDIA RELATIONS

Ten fall 2025 Arkansas Tech University graduates have earned the ATU Tradition Keeper designation. They are: ■ Abass Adesokan of Houston, Texas ■ Litzi Baltazar of Russellville ■ Ashlyn Brickley of Ozark ■ Abigail Coffman of Pottsville ■ Travis Gentry of Greers Ferry ■ Brock Gottsponer of Morrilton ■ Jameson Hall of Ozark ■ Meagan Lewison of Van Buren ■ Monique Morris of Memphis, Tenn. ■ Ashley Muller of Cabot



Submitted | The Courier

Photographed: (back row, left-to-right) Abass Adesokan, Brock Gottsponer, Travis Gentry, Jameson Hall; (front row, left-to-right) Litzi Baltazar, Abigail Coffman, Ashley Muller, Meagan Lewison and Ashlyn Brickley. Not photographed: Monique Morris.

See TRADITION, page A2

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Index

Community ..... A3  
Opinion ..... A4  
Sports ..... B1  
Comics/Puzzles ..... B3  
Kids Page ..... B4  
Classifieds ..... B5

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Weather

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58°

Obituaries

No obituaries

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