

# The Courier

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ARKANSAS RIVER VALLEY

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The Johnson County Peach Festival will return to downtown Clarksville July 15-19.

## Peach Festival to return for 85th year

By OLIVIA FROST  
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The 85th annual Johnson County Peach Festival is set to return to downtown Clarksville this July, bringing five days of events, competitions and entertainment.

Festival activities are scheduled for July 15-19 and will include a mix of long-standing events and newer additions, ranging from contests and tournaments to live music and family friendly activities.

Melissa Woodard, president of the Johnson County Peach Festival, said the event has deep roots in the community, dating back nearly a century. "It began in 1938," Woodard said. "It is the oldest out-

door running festival in the state of Arkansas."

The festival has continued for decades, with Woodard stating it has only paused during major events such as World War II and the COVID-19 pandemic.

"They travel from all over, including different states, to come to the peach festival and experience it," Woodard said.

The event centers around local peaches, a symbol of the area's agricultural history, while also featuring a wide variety of vendors and activities.

Festivalgoers can expect craft and food vendors, live entertainment and a full schedule of contests and competitions throughout the

week. Events such as the greased pig chase, frog jump and terrapin derby will return, alongside a variety of youth focused competitions that have become popular at the event.

Additional activities include a diaper derby for younger participants, a bicycle obstacle course, water balloon toss and a pocket car race, as well as a frozen t-shirt contest. Food-centered events will also be a part of the event, including a peach cobbler bake-off, peach pie eating contest, a peach eating contest and peach pit spitting contest.

"There's really activities for all ages," Woodard said.

This year's schedule will also include a car show as the

newest addition, alongside traditions like the cardboard boat regatta race, evening concerts and parade on Saturday.

Woodard said part of what keeps the festival going is its generational appeal.

"Families really do return year after year," she said. "When kids grow old and have their own kids, they want to bring them back to do those same activities."

Events will begin Wednesday, July 15, with Cinema on the Square and continue through Sunday, July 19, concluding with a horseshoe pitching tournament. A full schedule of events is available on the Johnson County Peach Festival's Facebook page.

## What are options to proposed prison site?

By THE ARKANSAS  
ADVOCATE

LITTLE ROCK — A controversial plan to build a 3,000-bed prison in Arkansas is on hold after a year and a half of steadfast opposition from the local community and a group of lawmakers.

The plan to build a facility on 815 acres of Franklin County farmland, first unveiled by Republican Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders in 2024, had the support of several Republican lawmakers as a solution to Arkansas' growing prison population.

But bipartisan opposition in the Senate doomed efforts to pass an appropriations bill to start construction, and legislative leaders said before the 2026 fiscal session that prison supporters and opponents remained at an impasse.

A lack of prison capacity is not a new issue in Arkansas. But with the prison population set to continue growing over the next 10 years, and the governor's choice to address the growth on ice — at least for now — what are the alternatives?

### Why not Franklin County?

Sanders hasn't explicitly given up on the Franklin County site, but the location faces challenges in the Legislature. It's also drawn resistance from locals, who say the location isn't suitable for such a large facility.

When the Franklin County plans were first announced, local residents and elected officials said they were blindsided by the governor's plans and decried a lack of transparency about its selection.

Residents opposed to the project have said they want to maintain the peacefulness of their rural community, questioned where the workforce to support the prison will come from and suggested that the state focus on providing more resources to keep people already in prison from returning instead of building

a new prison.

The project was likely the cause of higher-than-typical turnout in Franklin County for a special legislative primary in January. The prison also drove a number of voters to the polls during the March primary.

In addition to local opposition, officials face challenges in delivering the needed infrastructure to the rural prison site. Testing last year indicated that water wells on the property were likely not enough to support what would be necessary for the proposed prison.

Having nearby communities provide the needed water supply was also problematic. Fort Smith officials said last summer the city lacks the water supply capacity to meet the prison's needs without upgrades, while the Ozark City Council voted against initiating water supply talks with the state in November.

All the needed upgrades come with a cost, and state lawmakers have struggled to find enough votes to spend more on the project. A \$750 million appropriation bill failed five times in the Senate last year, and legislative leaders have said they don't believe there are enough votes to address funding during this year's fiscal session.

Sanders has requested special language in a corrections department reappropriation bill that would prohibit certain funds from being used for the project. The Legislature set aside \$330 million for the project in 2023 that hasn't been appropriated. State lawmakers can release that funding, but need enough votes to grant that spending authority.

### Can Arkansas expand existing facilities?

The state had expansion plans before the Franklin County prison project was

See **OPTIONS**, page A2

## Master Gardeners to host annual plant sale this Saturday

FOR THE COURIER

Each year, the Pope County Master Gardeners host their annual plant sale on the first Saturday in May. This year's sale will take place on Saturday, May 2 from 8 a.m. to noon in the Commercial Building of the Pope County Fairgrounds located at 500 South Knoxville, Russellville.

The 2026 sale will celebrate the 28th year and promises to feature the most extensive collection of plants to date.

"This year's sale includes a great selection of annuals, perennials, vines, flowers, natives, a wide array of vegetables and even houseplants," Joan Wright, plant sale chairman, said. "A number of shrubs and trees will be for sale too. Come early if you can



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Master Gardeners host their annual plant sale Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon at the Pope County Fairgrounds.

as many of the most popular plants, especially heirloom varieties and natives, sell quickly and we often completely sell out before noon."

"Each year we look forward to sharing our love of

plants with our community," Pope County Master Gardener president Augusta Greco said. "The annual plant sale is an opportunity to purchase plants Master Gardeners have grown from seeds as well as

plants from their own private gardens. Many will be unique and unusual varieties.

"We hope you will stop by on May 2, 8 a.m. till noon, explore the wide selection of plants and perhaps purchase

a few to nurture and grow in your own garden."

Master Gardeners and community members have generously donated items to be given away the day of the sale: A sturdy metal bench, perfect

for enjoying the outdoors from your lawn, garden or porch; plus a set of hand-crafted, cedar bird house and bird feeder along with a bag of bird seeds.

Giveaway tickets will be available for purchase for \$2 each or six for \$10. Proceeds from the sale and raffle will be used for Master Gardener programming and for beautification projects encompassing nine sanctioned garden projects throughout the area.

Tracy Douthit and Kim Bradford are providing a special opportunity for children. Along with their team, they have created a Pollinator Station offering a variety of kid friendly interactive activities, educational information and a live Monarch exhibit. Each

See **GARDENERS**, page A2

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### Index

News.....	A2
Comcs.....	A3
Sports.....	A4

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### Weather

Chance of showers and thunderstorms



### Obituaries

None submitted

## Man charged in White House correspondents' dinner shooting

By ERIC TUCKER, MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The man who authorities say tried to storm the White House Correspondents' Association dinner with guns and knives was charged Monday with the attempted assassination of President Donald Trump as federal authorities suggested

an attack that disrupted one of Washington's glitziest events had been planned for at least several weeks.

Cole Tomas Allen appeared in court Monday to face federal charges after the chaotic encounter Saturday that resulted in shots being fired, Trump being hurried off the stage unharmed and guests ducking for cover underneath their tables. He was ordered to remain jailed pending additional court

hearings, and faces up to life in prison if convicted of the assassination count alone.

An FBI affidavit filed in the case reveals additional details about the planning behind the assault, with authorities alleging that Allen on April 6 reserved a room for himself at the Washington hotel where the event would be held weeks later under its typical tight

See **SHOOTING**, page A2