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City, county compete for AEDC grant funds

DAVID SHOWERS
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

The city and county are competing for state grant funds from the same source, with the city applying for assistance with capital improvements at the Hot Springs Community Resource Center and the county for help constructing the Garland County Senior Center.

The Hot Springs Board of Directors authorized the city to apply for \$288,000 in Arkansas Economic Development Commission Community Assistance Grant funding for bathroom and locker room upgrades and a commercial grade laundry room at the 109 Hobson Ave. campus.

In June, the Garland County Quorum Court authorized the county to apply for up to \$1.5 million in AEDC Community Assistance Grant funds to build a senior center behind the CHI St. Vincent Hot Springs Medical Building at 1662 Higdon Ferry Road.

See **FUNDS**, Page 2A



Dylan Campbell, new special education director at Fountain Lake School District, is seen in the district's administration building on July 23. (The Sentinel-Record/Donald Cross)

Campbell returns home to lead special education at Fountain Lake

BRANDON SMITH
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

FOUNTAIN LAKE — For Dylan Campbell, taking on the role of special education director at Fountain Lake School District is more than a professional milestone — it is a homecoming.

The 2012 Fountain Lake graduate, who most recently served as principal at Lakeside Junior High School, brings a student-first, team-centered approach to his new role.

“I think the most exciting piece for me is getting to come back to Fountain Lake,” Campbell, whose wife and other family members are also alumni, said. “It’s kind of a homecoming piece, so that’s super exciting to get to kind of give back to the community that gave

See **CAMPBELL**, Page 3A

J&S Hospitality adds Mueller’s, catering

JAMES LEIGH
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

J&S Hospitality Group celebrated the third anniversary of owning J&S Italian Villa with a VIP celebration at the restaurant, where owners Saddiq and Jeannie Mir made two announcements to the packed dining room.

The group is expanding to add a fifth restaurant with Mueller’s Bistro and Bakery, 111B Crawford St., and it will also start offering catering from any of its restaurants.

“People love J&S food, and we think we needed to have the ready resources to really do that before,” Saddiq Mir said. “So now I think we have resources. We have established ourselves. Local people have been very good, supportive, and we feel, since we have overwhelming requests for catering, we’ll have to offer catering.”

Saddiq Mir said the new addition to the J&S family of restaurants will be a partnership.

“We’re actually partnering with Destiny’s Bakery,” Saddiq Mir said of Mueller’s. “She’s currently running that, but we’re going to be the majority owner. ... We both have a knack for and an eye for detail, and we love quality. We love fresh product, fresh quality.”

There are no plans to close the restaurant as part of the purchase, he said.

“They’re going to learn the operation, see what is needed, and kind of freshen up a little bit,” he said of his team’s plan. “And then our goal is proba-



J and S Hospitality is now offering catering from all of its restaurants, as noted on its new catering van. (The Sentinel-Record/Donald Cross)

bly start off a Sunday brunch. Saturday, Sunday, we’re going to offer brunch there. That’s gonna be the goal, but, of course, freshly baked goods and all that stuff’s gonna be top of mind. ... It’s a small, quaint little place.”

Saddiq Mir said he loves the history of Hot Springs, which is what drew his interest in Mueller’s.

“We fell in love with all the historic places,” he said. “Like Ohio Club, you see what we’ve done with that. Mueller’s Bakery has same thing, same history. The older German lady that owned that — matter of fact, I’m going to

See **J&S**, Page 8A



J and S Hospitality owners Saddiq, left, and Jeannie Mir discuss bringing Mueller’s Bakery and Bistro into their family of restaurants as well as adding catering services. (The Sentinel-Record/Donald Cross)

CenoBots hit the halls: Lakeside deploys autonomous cleaning robots

BRANDON SMITH
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

The Lakeside School District has begun using autonomous cleaning robots in each of its school buildings to improve cleanliness, reduce costs and support custodial staff.

The district purchased two robots per campus — each customized to suit the building’s size and layout — over the summer and is currently piloting them before fully deploying them for daily use this school year.

The robots, called CenoBots, use artificial intelligence and sensor technology to clean hallways, cafeterias and other large common areas on their own.

The rollout is part of a broader effort, championed by Superintendent Bruce Orr and Assistant Superin-

tendent Mathew Thornton, to prioritize safe, well-maintained learning environments, according to Lakeside Director of Support Services Anthony Brunet. Part of that process, he said, was finding more efficient ways to manage cleaning.

“We have been in contact with several schools trying to figure out, you know, what’s the best balance in doing that?” Brunet said. “We spoke to a couple of vendors that started showcasing some automation, and it really piqued our interest. We started looking at that and kind of put it to pen and paper — what that looks like, purchasing those, and what do they do versus a human?”

While the robots can clean any space as needed, their main function, he said, is to clean hallways and other

large areas so that custodial staff can focus on deep cleaning restrooms, classrooms and smaller spaces.

“They do everything on their own. They undock and go to the area to be cleaned, and then once they’re done, they go back to their station to recharge, and they dump all their waste and refill with cleaning solution, and they’re ready for the next day. They are 100% accurate. They go straight lines, they don’t waver, and they show up every day,” he said.

“We are the first school in Arkansas that has purchased robots for every building on campus. And so we are very excited and thankful the school board and our leadership team are putting our facilities first and making sure

See **ROBOTS**, Page 3A



CenoBots use artificial intelligence and sensor technology to clean hallways, cafeterias and other large common areas in schools and commercial facilities. (The Sentinel-Record/Donald Cross)



Ouachita Wax & Naturals owners Lisa Garcia, left, and her daughter Megan Garcia are pictured inside the store on Friday. (The Sentinel-Record/Thomas Buckman)

Ouachita Wax & Naturals hosts weekly ‘Sip & Pour’ classes

JACOB MILLER
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

As fall approaches, Ouachita Wax & Naturals looks to bring soothing scents and relaxation to Hot Springs.

The candle store will be holding “Sip & Pour” classes on Fridays and Saturdays from 6-8 p.m., where visitors can enjoy a beverage while learning how to make candles.

“At the Sip & Pour classes, you can come sip some wine, beer or non-alcoholic drinks,” Lisa Garcia, owner of the store, said. “We have charcuterie pool boards, and then you get to make your own candle.”

Garcia and her daughter, Megan Garcia, run the family-owned business, which recently relocated

to Bathhouse Row from Ouachita Avenue.

Established in Hot Springs in 2023, Ouachita Wax & Naturals originated in Dallas before the Garcia family came to Hot Springs.

“Hot Springs has robust tourism, so the foot traffic is ample down here,” Lisa Garcia said. “Being on the crosswalk by all the breakfast spots, we’ve adjusted our hours a lot to accommodate for the morning time. ... So far, it’s been really great here in Hot Springs.”

The family is proud of its Choctaw heritage and incorporates its Native American roots into the store.

“We’re indigenous, so we would like to bring that cultur-

al aspect to the area that people are fascinated by,” Megan Garcia said. “Hot Springs has a big indigenous culture, given its history. ... As a takeaway from the classes, we want to bring more cultural awareness and connect with other indigenous people in the area.”

In addition to sharing Native American culture with Hot Springs through the Sip & Pour classes, the store also partners with the Choctaw Nation for the city’s monthly Gallery Walks.

“They get artists in here and fill our display cabinets with artifacts and things that can educate and allow people insight into the culture of Choctaw,” Megan Garcia said.

See **WAX**, Page 3A



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