

The Sentinel-Record

Published daily in Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas, since 1877

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Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Two sections, 16 pages
No. 56, Vol. 149 | \$2.00

City board to consider sewer impact fee increase

DAVID SHOWERS
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

The Hot Springs Board of Directors' agenda for its March 3 business meeting includes a 400% increase in the cost to connect a new residence to the regional wastewater system. The enabling ordinance proposes to increase the \$500 impact fee adopted in 2004 to \$2,000 for

a five-eighths-inch water meter. Wastewater usage isn't metered but is based on a percentage of customers' metered water usage.

Action the board took at its Feb. 17 business meeting scheduled a public hearing prior to the consideration of the fee increase. The March 3 hearing is a requirement under state law, which prohibits

wastewater rate adjustments without a hearing. The law requires the associated public notice to run in the newspaper at least 10 days before the hearing. The enabling ordinance was read for the first time at last week's business meeting.

The proposed fee represents a fraction of the \$10,674 maximum justified by capital expenditures

that ratepayers will have to make to keep capacity at pace with the number of new residential units projected to connect to the wastewater system over the next decade, according to the fee study the city's contract ratemaker completed last fall.

The study recommended a more than \$800,000 maximum

impact fee for an 8-inch meter. A \$160,000 fee would be assessed under the rate schedule the board will consider next week. The current schedule assesses a \$14,500 fee for large-diameter meters.

The maximum fee is partially a function of the \$78 million in cap-

See **FEE**, Page 2A

Trump seeks to calm economic concerns in State of the Union

WILL WEISSERT AND MICHELLE L. PRICE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump began his State of the Union address on Tuesday, a speech where he planned to declare his policies have the job market and domestic manufacturing booming — hoping to convince increasingly wary Americans that the economy is stronger than many believe and that they should vote for more of the same by backing Republicans during November's midterm elections.

Republicans chanted "USA! USA!" as Trump, wearing a long red tie and a blue suit, stepped to the lectern in the House. Most Democrats remained seated without applauding. Some of the party's lawmakers registered their opposition by refraining from attending the speech.

"It is indeed a turnaround for the ages," Trump said early on.

See **TRUMP**, Page 4A



Lakeside School District Superintendent Bruce Orr, third from left, comments during the Feb. 19 school board meeting at the Lakeside High School Tech Center. Orr told board members the district's Title I funding was being cut by about 15%. (The Sentinel-Record/Brandon Smith)

School districts face unexpected Title I cuts

BRANDON SMITH
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

Lakeside and other Garland County school districts are revising their budgets after learning this month that their final Title I allocations will be significantly lower than expected.

Lakeside School District Superintendent Bruce Orr told board members at the Feb. 19 meeting that the district's Title I funding was reduced by about 15%, or nearly \$90,000, in the final allocation released by the state.

"We just became aware of this a few days ago," Orr said, explaining that districts typically receive a preliminary allocation early in the year and build their budgets around it before final calculations are made.

He said numerous personnel and district salaries, including academic coaches, reading therapists and similar positions, are funded through the Title I budget.

Title I, Part A of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act is the largest federal aid program for public schools, providing more than \$16 billion annually to schools with high percentages of low-income students, according to the U.S. Department of Education. The program is designed to help disadvantaged students meet state academic standards.

Orr, who previously served as a federal programs coordinator, said such a cut is uncommon. He said the reductions appear to be tied to how federal funds are calculated and distributed, particularly as the number of open-enrollment charter schools in Arkansas has grown.

Federal Title I funds are distributed to states largely based on census poverty data and then allocated to districts. Orr said poverty levels in the Lakeside area have increased significantly in recent years, with the district's free and reduced-price meal percentage rising from around 32% in previous years to 52% today.

"Our focus will remain on minimizing the impact on classrooms and maintaining strong support for our students and staff."

— Lake Hamilton School District Superintendent Tony Thurman

Based on those numbers, he said Lakeside should have seen an increase. Instead, he said changes in federal legislation and funding formulas appear to prioritize allocations for charter schools, which use direct certification counts rather than geographic census boundaries.

"It appeared to me that when the charters do their calculation, which is a little bit different than public schools, because there's no geographical boundaries, so they do what they call direct certification, and they can grow kind of exponentially, but we can't grow because there's not enough money," Orr said. "So we're actually taking a cut."

Under federal law, states must reserve 7% of Title I funds for school improvement efforts. Districts like Lakeside and

See **TITLE I**, Page 3A

Pearcy man allegedly crashes stolen car into carport, causing \$20,000 in damages

STEVEN MROSS
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

A Percy man was arrested Sunday morning after allegedly crashing a stolen car into a carport, also striking another vehicle and a dumpster, causing an estimated \$20,000 in damages.

Jaxon William Wallace II, 21, who lists a Huntington Drive address, was taken into custody around 5:15 a.m. and charged with felony counts of theft by receiving, punishable by up to 10 years in prison, and four counts of second-degree criminal mischief, each punishable by up to six years, and misdemeanor counts of reckless driving, leaving the scene of a property damage accident and having no or an expired driver's license.

Wallace was later released on a \$13,500 bond and is set to appear March 17 in Garland County District Court.

See **ARREST**, Page 3A

Garvan Gardens continues Junior Gardeners workshops for children through May 20

JACOB L. MILLER
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

Garvan Woodland Gardens will resume its Junior Gardeners series today after a successful first session on Feb. 11.

Paige Scoggins, the nature education specialist at the Gardens, said making children feel comfortable while learning is important to the Gardens.

"We are working on offering as many programs as we can for the community," she said. "One of our main priorities here is for this to be a safe space for kids to come and be able to have hands-on experiences with and without their families."

The sessions take place at the sensory garden, which is a part of the botanical garden's campus at 550 Arkridge Road and also the site of thousands of tulips in bloom.

Scoggins said the program is designed to teach children how to



Karen Malone, horticulture manager at Garvan Woodland Gardens, shows off the seedlings that students planted on Feb. 11 as part of their first session. (The Sentinel-Record/Gwen Kudabeck)

grow their own food.

"The kids are starting plants in

the greenhouse, and they're planting them themselves," she said. "They're



Children planted their seedlings in the Sensory Garden at Garvan Woodland Gardens' Junior Gardeners sessions, with the next one being held today. (The Sentinel-Record/Gwen Kudabeck)

doing vegetables and growing things quickly."

Today's session will involve the children checking the seeds they initially planted, which include lettuce, spinach, carrots and tomatoes. The sessions take place on either

Wednesdays or Saturdays, and they are two weeks apart to highlight the changes in the plants over time.

They were originally \$100 for members and \$200 for nonmem-

See **GARDENING**, Page 2A



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