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Transition to new system to affect utilities payments in July



A utility payment drop box is seen at 111 Opera St., near City Hall. Hot Springs is moving to a new system that will provide interconnectivity between all city departments in late July, but the transition will limit all financial transactions to be done via cash or check from July 17 to July 28. (The Sentinel-Record/Thomas Buckman)

Payments made in mid, late July restricted to cash, check

JAMES LEIGH
THE SENTINEL-RECORD
A new billing system for Hot Springs utilities will leave users unable to pay online for at least 10 days late next month.

From noon on July 17 through at least 5 p.m. on July 28, the city will be restricted to cash or check payments only.

“On Friday, July 17, about noon, our old system, New World, will be shut off for actual transactions,” Hot Springs Finance Director Karen Scott said. “It will be available to view information, but no new transactions can be entered.

“The week of the 20th, we’ll have seven people from BS&A on site doing what they’re calling pre-go-live training, so everyone in utility billing will learn the system — what a customer file looks like, how you take a payment, how you help a customer over the phone or in person. People across the city will learn how to do requisition, those folks who do that now. Each department has someone that is their key person that you know does purchase orders and stuff. We’ll be working on learning how to do payroll and all those things.”

The city will not be able to

take any credit card payments for that time period in any department. All transactions will have to be done with cash or check, and receipts will have to be hand-written.

“We will be open customer service to take cash and checks,” Mara Harper, the city’s Utilities Billing Services director, said.

“Across the city,” Scott added. “Customers will still transact with us. It’ll just be manual. We’ll write hand receipts, if they so desire, to pay by cash or check.”

Customers who have their utilities payment drafted each month, which accounts for

approximately 20,000 of the 37,000 utilities customers, will not be affected. Around 46% of customers pay their bill in person, using the drop boxes, mail or monthly online, Harper said.

“Those that are on bank draft will see no interruption,” she said.

The new system will be beneficial for customers who struggle to pay their bill each month as well, Scott said.

“All the people in the field will have iPads. The meter shop, they have disconnect lists every day,” she said. “They can go through there,

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Screens are stealing childhood, counselor says

BRANDON SMITH
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

For many families, the biggest summer battle may not be boredom. It may be the screen in a child’s hand.

Mary Catherine Liscinski, a local licensed professional counselor who is certified in digital addiction therapy, said excessive screen time is increasingly tied to problems with children’s mental health, academic performance, relationships and physical development.

“I think that when digital addiction really becomes a problem is when it does interfere with other areas of your life in a negative way, and there are a lot of different symptoms that can show up in children and in adults,” Liscinski said.

She said parents should watch for warning signs including withdrawal from others, anger when devices are taken away, declining grades, poor communication skills, reduced eye contact, fewer interests and low motivation.

She said one of the saddest signs is what she calls “zombie face,” or a flat expression that signals something deeper may be wrong.

“To see so many young people just totally flat is very sad,” she said. “As a professional, I would say that flat affect — or you could call it zombie face — people need to know that’s not normal. That’s not just a new generational norm.”

Liscinski, who has been a licensed counselor for 15 years and opened her own practice in Hot Springs in 2017, said her interest in digital addiction grew out of family therapy. As she worked with families, she noticed a common source of conflict.

“I realized how frequently family conflicts were over screen use and devices,” she said. “And so I thought, if I

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A new exchange of fire with Iran in the Gulf tests the fragile ceasefire

SAMY MAGDY AND MICHELLE L. PRICE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAIRO — Iran fired ballistic missiles and drones toward Bahrain and Kuwait that were intercepted early Saturday, Bahrain’s government said, and called on Tehran to halt attacks on Gulf neighbors that test a fragile ceasefire in the Middle East conflict.

Iran said that it targeted American military assets in both countries, after the U.S. attacked surveillance facilities on Qeshm Island and near Sirik that Iran said were used to protect borders and “ensure the security of navigation in international waters.” Tehran called the attack a ceasefire violation.

The latest exchange of fire came as the Trump admin-

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Spring Lake Camp & Retreat crosses the finish line in Saturday’s Running of the Tubs. (The Sentinel-Record/Thomas Buckman)

20th Running of the Tubs

Garvan races to first tub title; sheriff’s office claims badge battle

WILL LIVINGSTON
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

The 20th Stuart Pennington World Championship Running of the Tubs held Saturday on Bathhouse Row saw a first-time win for one newcomer, and a repeat of the Garland County Sheriff’s Battle of the Badge win.

Three racing titles were awarded at the end of the tournament, with trophies also awarded for team performances in the events leading up to

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The Garvan Woodland Gardens Gardeners accept the first place trophy in the traditional division following Saturday’s Running of the Tubs. The team also took home the award for Best Overall Tub, which took “a combination of spirit, design and athleticism.” (The Sentinel-Record/Will Livingston)

Attendees at the first Bridge Street LIVE of 2026 listen to the music of Funk Factory on Thursday. The free concert series continues this week with Bluffett, a Jimmy Buffett tribute band. (The Sentinel-Record/James Leigh)



Tribute band Bluffett to bring Margaritaville to Spa City

FROM STAFF REPORTS

The Bridge Street Entertainment District will be transformed into Margaritaville Thursday as Bluffett, an Arkansas-based Jimmy Buffett tribute band, takes the stage for the second concert in Bridge Street LIVE’s June concert series.

Larry Pearson fronts the band, giving “an amazingly accurate approximation” of the Tropical Troubadour, and they will take the stage at 7 p.m., according to a news release.

“Who needs a coastline to get that re-

laxed Buffett vibe when you have Bridge Street,” Alexis Hampe, the special events manager for Visit Hot Springs, said in the release. “We’re bringing the island vibes right into the heart of Hot Springs.”

The free concert series is held every Thursday in June, and dogs and lawn chairs are welcome, but no coolers.

“These Bridge Street LIVE free concerts are just one of the great activities that make Hot Springs Arkansas’ No. 1 tourism destination,” incoming VHS CEO

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