LIVING: Adventure awaits close to home at Lake Ouachita, **Page 1C**

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A fire-resistant coat hangs from an engine in the Hot Springs Central Station apparatus bay. The provider of the fire department's protective gear is a defendant in a class action lawsuit more than a dozen cities have joined. (The Sentinel-Record/Anna-Claire Butler)

HSFD seeks $700K to replace gear amid cancer concerns

DAVID SHOWERS
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

Hot Springs officials are considering spending $700,000 to replace all protective gear worn by the city's 89 firefighters amid concerns that chemicals used to manufacture the equipment could increase their risk of cancer.

The proposed purchase would replace both sets of turnout gear assigned to each firefighter. The gear's manufacturer, Globe Manufacturing Co. LLC, is a defendant in a federal class action lawsuit alleging it knowingly used chemicals linked to cancer in its products.

> *"(Firefighters) take calculated risks every day. We don't want the gear that protects them to be an additional risk."*
> **— Assistant Fire Chief Casey Burch**

The chemicals, known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, are commonly called "forever chemicals" because they break down slowly in the environment. Research cited by the National Institutes of Health has linked exposure to certain PFAS to an increased risk of some cancers.

"We felt it wise to replace the gear we have and retire the gear that's been linked to cancer-causing compounds and chemicals," Chief Ed Davis said. "The board's been very supportive."

The Hot Springs Fire Department said firefighters reported an increase in concerning skin spots where the suspenders holding up their protective pants come into contact with their bod-

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Co-founder Jan Laggan shows off a barbecue and potting table that was built in Samaritan Ministries' woodworking shop. (The Sentinel-Record/Felisha Butler)

Samaritan Ministries marks 20 years of service

FELISHA BUTLER
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

Samaritan Ministries has served more than 4,000 men since opening its doors two decades ago, providing shelter and stability to those facing homelessness and struggling to get back on their feet.

The organization offers an overnight shelter and a residential program to help men rebuild their lives.

Co-founders Jan and Chuck Laggan recognized a need for a men-only facility in Hot Springs.

"When we look at it, 4,000 men to some people doesn't seem to be a lot," Jan Laggan said. "... We're really meeting the overnight need on a repeated basis. That gets people off the streets so they don't have to do the bad weather. We share a chapel service with them and some of them have understood better what God's plan was for their life."

As a gospel-based rescue mission, Samaritan Ministries emphasizes the role of faith in helping men overcome challenges and rebuild their lives.

A painted wooden shelf in the foyer of the facility reads, "In our mission, we trust in God, say I'm sorry, allow second chances, think good thoughts, love one another."

"I work hard at them focusing on who they are," she said. "What God really wants them to do. ... They're able to focus on themselves and do what they would like to do. The men that come in here are broken men. Many of them need to hear that with God,

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Lake Hamilton weighs millage in midst of aging schools, enrollment drop

WILL LIVINGSTON
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

PEARCY — The Lake Hamilton School District is preparing for a possible March 2027 millage election as officials consider consolidating aging school buildings and moving students between campuses to cut costs amid declining enrollment.

The Lake Hamilton School Board voted unanimously this week to authorize Superintendent Tony Thurman to work with the district's financial and legal advisers to prepare for the election, less than a year after voters rejected a $45.5 million improvement plan.

The district has not proposed a millage rate or decided how additional revenue would be spent, Thurman told *The Sentinel-Record* on Wednesday. He said those details are expected within the next couple of months. Final election documents and ballot language will require board approval.

Although no formal plan has been proposed, Thurman said his priority is to reduce the amount of building space the district maintains, particularly at the elementary level. That could involve consolidating facilities and moving students between campuses to use existing space more efficiently.

"Here's the challenge: We have exactly the same footprint. We can't afford it," he said. "My rationale is that we

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Cartel leader captured in northern Mexico in bloody firefight; 11 dead

MEGAN JANETSKY,
FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ
AND MARTÍN URISTA
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GUASAVE, Mexico — Heavy gunfire, helicopters and burning trucks marked Mexico's Sinaloa state Saturday after authorities captured cartel boss Fausto Isidro Meza Flores, known as "El Chapo Isidro," in an operation that left at least 11 people dead.

Meza Flores, one of the FBI's 10 most wanted fugitives, was captured and flown to Mexico City on Saturday after the firefight between Mexican forces and cartel gunmen overnight left residents of the city of Guasave terrorized.

Mexico's Defense Ministry on Saturday afternoon said that seven alleged cartel gunmen and four Mexican soldiers were killed.

The capo climbed the cartel ranks to lead the Beltrán Leyva cartel and later became the leader of his own group,

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The heart behind Jessieville's lunch line

BRANDON SMITH
THE SENTINEL-RECORD

JESSIEVILLE — For 12 years, Theresa Stockrahm has helped feed Jessieville students, but she hopes they leave the cafeteria with more than a full stomach. She wants them to know someone cares.

That commitment was on display this week as Stockrahm and her staff prepared the district's annual Thanksgiving meal for students before they headed into a weeklong holiday break.

As the Jessieville School District's child nutrition director, Stockrahm and her nine coworkers serve an average of 540 meals a day in a district of about 720 students. But their work goes beyond preparing food. They also offer a listening ear, a kind word and a place where students feel welcome.

Though it is a job that often goes unnoticed, Stockrahm said she believes cafeteria workers play an important role in helping students succeed in the classroom.

"If your belly is not full, you're not thinking about learning," she said. "You can't learn. You're thinking about your belly. So I wish that they would see that we are a partner. We've come alongside teachers."

Stockrahm, 59, has spent much of her career working to make school meals better for students, both through the food they eat and the relationships they build with cafeteria workers.



Jessieville School District child nutrition director Theresa Stockrahm, right, interacts with elementary students dressed as turkeys Thursday during the district's annual Thanksgiving meal as Jessieville Elementary School Principal Tiffany Wainscott, left, looks on. (The Sentinel-Record/Thomas Buckman)

When she arrived at Jessieville 12 years ago, she said students had few alternatives if they did not like what was being served. She wanted to give them more choices.

Today, the cafeteria offers everything from fresh salads and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to personal pizza and meals designed for younger students. The staff also prepares several dishes from scratch, including macaroni and cheese and a tomato soup that has become a favorite.

Stockrahm has also worked to improve the quality of ingredients, bringing in beef from Wahrmund Farms

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