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SCOTT GALVIN USA TODAY NETWORK

Foster child caseworker had troubling past, records show

BY BETH HUNDSORFER
Capitol News Illinois

The caseworker assigned to monitor Illinois foster child Mackenzi Felmlee — who died in May 2024 — had a troubling past, including an arrest for a violent crime and orders of

protection filed against her by eight women for alleged threats, harassment and abuse, court documents show.

Kurtavia White, a former Lutheran Child and Family Services caseworker, was arrested a decade before Mackenzi's death for her involvement in a metro-east strip club brawl that

left the victim, a dancer at the club, with eight staples in her head, court records show. She also was accused of retaliating against the woman by posting nude photos of her on social media.

Mackenzi, 18, died May 11, 2024, after being found unconscious and struggling to

breathe at the bottom of the stairs in her Fairview Heights, Illinois, foster home. A search warrant application signed by a Fairview Heights police detective in the investigation of Mackenzi's death also alleges that White failed to properly document home visits with the teen.

"It was discovered through the records that case worker Kurtavia White was copying and pasting notes for home visits, which does not appear to have correctly documented the visits," an affidavit read that was signed June 23, 2024, prior to the arrest of Mackenzi's foster mother, Shemeka Williams, and Williams' mother, Cornelia Reid.

Williams and Reid were indicted on charges of first-degree murder, involuntary manslaughter, aggravated domestic battery, intimidation, unlawful

SEE CASEWORKER, 4A



Provided photos

Belleville properties sold by Gregg Crawford's companies to Tempo Bank borrowers at unusually high prices include, top row, left to right, 420 State St., 218 S. Charles St., 234 Lebanon Ave., 14 Granvue Drive and 112 Gilbert St. (later demolished); middle row, 520 E. C St., 401 S. Jackson St. (demolished), 303 N. Jackson St., 505 Abend St. (demolished) and 211 Abend St.; and bottom row, 308 N. Virginia Ave., 603 Mascoutah Ave., 800 E. D St., 609 S. Jackson St. and 1015 Caseyville Ave. (demolished).

Man who bought derelict homes may go to prison for fraud

BY TERI MADDOX
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The guilty plea of a prominent metro-east businessman on federal fraud charges in June came as a relief to some people concerned about Belleville's derelict-housing crisis.

That's because Columbia contractor Gregg Crawford, 65, who formerly lived in Belleville, and his companies allegedly have been buying older proper-

ties in the city as part of a fraudulent-loan scheme, allowing some to sit vacant for years and fall into ruin.

Historic homes on at least four of Crawford's former or current properties in Belleville and on its Swansea border have been demolished. Others were — or still are — considered derelict by neighbors and city officials.

"This has done so much harm to neighborhoods, to redevelopment, to property values, to

people who've had to try to live and raise their kids across the street from one of these properties," said Lori Creason Powell, 60, a local rehabber and real-estate investor.

"There's homeless people and crime and needles, and one (of Crawford's homes) was being used as a feeding stop for a feral-cat colony."

Crawford and his brother-in-law, Francis "Frank" Eversman, 74, of Collinsville, a senior loan officer at the former Tempco

Bank in Trenton, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit bank fraud on June 23 in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Illinois in East St. Louis.

According to court documents, they worked together from 2011 to 2020 to falsify loan applications so that individual "straw buyers" recruited by Crawford could get mortgage loans and pretend to purchase highly overvalued proper-

SEE PRISON, 8A

Gunshot victim, 11, remains in critical condition

BY CAROLYN P. SMITH
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A long recovery remains ahead for an 11-year-old boy who was shot in the head while riding his bicycle through a Cahokia Heights neighborhood on July 21.

Tray "Tray-Tray" Millender remains in a St. Louis Hospital in critical condition, say members of his family. He is breathing on his own and, when he opens his eyes, he recognizes Nona Owens, his great-grandmother.

"He still has a neck brace on and doctors are keeping him very still. They don't know what kind of damage the bullet caused to his brain," Owens said. "They are going to do an MRI in a few days to determine what damage there is."

"He is alert, but in and out. He looks good. His face is still swollen a little bit. But, he's a fighter."

In the meantime, Jeremiah A. Johnson, 33, of Goodman Drive in Cahokia Heights, has been charged with aggravated battery, mob action and obstructing justice in connection with the shooting. A St. Clair County judge on Wednesday ordered he be held in jail until trial.

According to charges and

SEE GUNSHOT, 5A



Tray 'Tray-Tray' Millender

16-mile pipeline would carry fuel from river to air base

BY WILL BAUER
St. Louis Public Radio

A 16-mile pipeline that would carry jet fuel from the Kaskaskia River in rural St. Clair County to Scott Air Force Base is a feasible project, according to a new study.

The Kaskaskia Regional Port District and its engineering partners concluded in the recent \$350,000 study that building the pipeline would

provide multiple benefits compared to trucking in jet fuel to the airbase, said Ed Weilbacher, the district's general manager.

"The question then becomes: Now, how do we take it to the next step?" he said.

The study's affirmation of the pipeline, which backers believe is essential to ensuring the federal government keeps the military base open long term, means the port district and engineering

firms working on the pipeline will now turn their attention to funding its first phase.

"It's an exciting project that's going to help sustain the St. Clair County and the entire southwest Illinois area," said Tony Schenk, a project manager at Gonzalez Cos., a national civil engineering firm with an office in Belleville.

The impetus for the pipeline,

SEE FUEL, 5A



BRIAN MUNOZ Brian Munoz

A water tower with the Air Force's logo is pictured at Scott Air Force Base near O'Fallon.