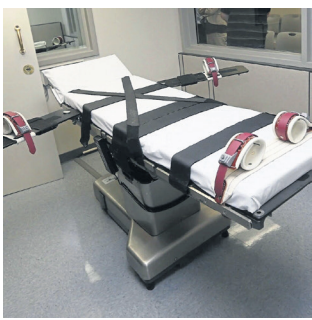




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WE BUILD COMMUNITY • YEAR 136, NO. 250

Schools superintendent staying for consolidation

By CLAYTON SIDENBENDER  
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ELKHART — Superintendent Larry Huff, speaking at a news conference to announce his departure, said he is committed to staying at Elkhart Community Schools through the consolidation process. The school board in Rockford, Illinois, voted unanimously Tuesday to select Huff as its next superintendent. Huff will start his new position on July 1. It was a move that caught the community by surprise. “I will continue to be transparent with the district,” Huff said Wednesday. “It is not easy work, but it is necessary work to make sure Elkhart is one, on sound footing for years to come, but most importantly, the new superintendent doesn’t have to enter into that

space doing that critical work. I’m going to do as much as I can with the consolidation work that’s based off the timeline that’s already submitted.” Huff said he is proud of the work the district has accomplished in his tenure as superintendent and pointed to the high graduation rate and growth in IREAD scores in the district. Huff said the process of selecting his successor will be worked out with the school board, but he does not know the timeline of that process. Huff’s three-year contract at Rockford has a starting salary of \$285,000 a year, which is up from \$218,000 at Elkhart. He said the decision to accept the position at Rockford was not driven by money, but to be closer to family and to try a new opportunity.

“Also, professionally, I think it’s very similar to Elkhart Community Schools,” Huff said. “They have a very industrial economy in Winnebago County, same here in Elkhart. I think the reason why that it was appealing to me is because it was very similar to Elkhart, and so it was not rooted in compensation only. It was rooted in just, overall I felt that was best for me and one of those decisions I could make for my family.” Huff has been superintendent in Elkhart since March 2024. He said the district has hit every metric and timeline in the consolidation process so far and will not be disrupted by his departure. The next phase of the consolidation process is to talk with staff about their concerns and will take place



Elkhart Superintendent Larry Huff speaks with local media during a press conference in the board room on Wednesday.

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Photos provided / Heidi Prescott

ABOVE: Elkhart General Hospital and South Bend International Airport teams pose for a photo upon delivery of more than 525 teddy bears at the hospital. BELOW: Kira Carter-Robertson, president of Elkhart General Hospital, and Mike Daigle, CEO and executive director at South Bend International Airport, pose for a photo with teddy bears at the hospital.

More than 525 teddy bears land at hospital

Bears in the Air, sponsored by South Bend International Airport, provides stuffed animals for children at Elkhart General

TRUTH STAFF

ELKHART — South Bend International Airport’s 14th annual Bears in the Air program has delivered more than 525 teddy bears to children at Elkhart General Hospital, part of an effort to provide more than 2,600 stuff animals to five area hospitals. The bears were delivered in Elkhart on Wednesday by airport CEO and Executive Director Mike Daigle and SBN team members. Other deliveries were planned at



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Evaluations ordered for man accused of trying to burn mother alive

By JORDAN FOUTS  
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GOSHEN — Mental evaluations have been ordered for a man accused of trying to burn down his own house with his mother inside.

Christopher Hochstetler, 21, is charged with attempted murder as a Level 1 felony and attempted arson with the aim of injuring someone, a Level 2 felony, following the Nov. 12 incident. He allegedly came to the Nappanee Police Department to tell them that he set the fire and wanted to kill his mother.

He is set for trial on March 2. He faces prison time of up to 70 years on the two charges together.

Hochstetler’s lawyer filed a notice of insanity defense during a hearing Thursday in Elkhart County Circuit Court. Attorney John Maciejczyk said he has no trouble communicating with Hochstetler and that Hochstetler seems to understand the charges against him, but he filed the motion based on Hochstetler’s medical history.

Judge Michael Christofeno said he would appoint two psychiatrists to evaluate Hochstetler for both insanity and competency. The judge said he wants to ensure that Hochstetler understands the proceedings before he heads to trial.

“Mr. Hochstetler, I want to make sure you’re competent. ... I’d rather cross both of those

bridges now,” Christofeno said. “Mr. Maciejczyk thinks you are. Guess what, I think you are. We’ll get these reports and we’ll see what the doctors say.”

The judge also ordered Hochstetler to cooperate with the doctors, which he promised to do. Christofeno said he would not reset the March 5 trial at this time, but may move it when Hochstetler is in court again on Feb. 5.

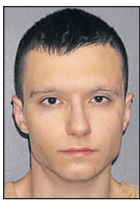
Hochstetler went to the Nappanee Police Department on Nov. 12 shortly after 1 a.m. and informed them that he had just tried to set fire to his house with his mother inside, according to police. He allegedly said he did it because he “really didn’t like his mom.”

He claimed that he used a candle lighter and some rolled-up toilet paper to start the fire, according to police. Officers went to the home at 805 E. Market St. where they found some toilet paper with a log next to it that had been ignited outside of a bedroom door.

Police say they found several other logs scattered around the house in an apparent attempt to keep the fire going. Hochstetler’s mother told officers the fire alarm woke her and she came out of her bedroom to find the toilet paper and log.

Hochstetler allegedly told police that his intention in setting the fire was to kill his mother. He told them “it has been a thought he has had for a while,” according to police.

He allegedly said he made sure to let the cat out of the house first to keep it from getting hurt.



HOCHSTETLER

U.S. says price increases eased last month, but data may be distorted



Shoppers walk around the Somerset Collection mall on Dec. 10 in Troy, Mich.

By PAUL WISEMAN and ANNE D’INNOCENZIO  
AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON — At a time when Americans are frustrated and angry over the high cost of living, the government released a report Thursday showing that inflation had cooled unexpectedly in November.

But economists quickly warned that that last month’s numbers were suspect because they’d been delayed and likely distorted by the 43-day federal shutdown. And most Americans have not felt any let up in the high prices they are paying for food, insurance, utilities and other basic necessities.

The Labor Department reported

Thursday that its consumer price index rose 2.7 percent in November from a year earlier. Yet, year-over-year inflation remains well above the Federal Reserve’s 2 percent target. Americans, dismayed by high prices, handed big victories to Democrats in local and state elections last month.

The inflation report was delayed eight days by the shutdown, which also prevented the Labor Department from compiling overall numbers for consumer prices and core inflation in October and disrupted the usual data-collecting process. Thursday’s report gave investors, businesses and policymakers their first look at CPI since the September numbers were released on Oct. 24. Consumer prices had risen 3 per-

cent in September from a year earlier, and forecasters had expected the November CPI to match that year-over-year increase.

“It’s likely a bit distorted,” said Diane Swonk, chief economist at the tax and consulting firm KPMG. “The good news is that it’s cooling. We’ll take a win when we can get it.”

Still, Swonk added: “The data is truncated, and we just don’t know how much of it to trust.” By disrupting the economy — especially government contracting — the shutdown may have contributed to a cooling in prices, she said.

Kay Haigh, global co-head of fixed income and liquidity

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