

OKLAHOMA: First Grand Lake Fest set for September. **3A** | **FOOTBALL:** Joplin Eagles open season with scrimmage. **1B**

'It's beautiful'



Makenna Petersen, a new kindergarten teacher at Jefferson Elementary School, works to prepare her new classroom for the return of students Aug. 24.

GLOBE | JOHN HACKER

Jefferson teachers appreciate improvements to school

BY JOHN HACKER
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When Joplin classes begin Aug. 24, students and parents will see a number of improvements and upgrades at three of the district's older elementary schools.

Jefferson, McKinley and Royal Heights elementary schools saw about \$10 million in renovations and additions that should be mostly complete by the time students walk in the doors next week to begin their 2026-27 school year.

Assistant Superintendent Matt Harding said Jefferson Elementary, which was built in 1954, saw \$4.2 million in renovations that refreshed the buildings, added space on the north and south sides of the building, enhanced security, created administrative offices and more.

"We've got a new principal's office, new teacher's workspaces," Harding said. "There's new office space for the secretary, which is much more secure than the original one. From here, you actually have to be



India Reynolds, a first-year music teacher at Jefferson Elementary School, prepares the room she will share with the art department for the start of class Aug. 24.

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Editor's note

THIS IS the first of three feature stories on improvements to some of Joplin's older elementary schools. Other school improvements will be profiled later this week.

buzzed in the building. No one will have direct access to building, and that's better for security."

Harding said this was part of Phase 1 in a series of improvements to many of the elementary schools

in Joplin being done with district reserves and revenue from the \$40 million Eagle bond issue passed by voters in 2025. The bond issue also includes an indoor athletic and activities center at Joplin High School.

Phase 1 was work on several older elementary schools to bring them to the standards of the new elementary schools that have been built since the EF5 tornado hit Joplin in 2011.

Makenna Petersen, a kindergarten teacher starting her first year in Joplin, was

putting her new kindergarten classroom together recently. Her room is located in the new addition on the south side of the school.

"This is great," Petersen said. "When I first came for my interview, this was all under construction. So I had no idea what it was going to look like. And it's beautiful. I walked in and I was like, 'Whoa, this is really good.' I'm excited. It's fun to come in as your first year and have a new classroom."

SEE **JEFFERSON**, 2A

Building permit filed for Joplin airport

New passenger bridges sought for gates 1 and 2

FROM STAFF REPORTS
news@joplinglobe.com

A building permit for nearly \$3.7 million for two passenger bridges at the Joplin Regional Airport was the largest in July, according to city records.

In order to meet federal deadlines for funding of the project, an agreement with Wright Construction Services to replace the existing bridges received Joplin City Council authorization last fall.

The city will replace the existing bridges at airport gates 1 and 2. The cost for the project will largely be paid from a combination of four federal grants approved for the airport. The federal grants will pay 95% of the cost, or \$3,492,200, and the city's 5% share will be \$183,800, according to airport manager Allison Zahner.

She previously reported to the Joplin City Council that the existing bridges were obtained by Joplin from the Springfield-Branson National Airport in 2009.

Zahner told the council those bridges, now over 30 years old, have exceeded their useful life. She said they are

SEE **AIRPORT**, 2A

Neosho plans inclusive playground

Residents invited to community preview; donations sought

FROM STAFF REPORTS
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NEOSHO, Mo. — The city of Neosho is planning to build an inclusive playground in Rocketdyne Park. The announcement was made Monday.

Residents are invited to get a first look at the plan during a community preview from 4:30-7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 10, at the Spring Valley Golf Course Conference Room.

The Rocketdyne Park playground is being designed to provide opportunities for children and caregivers "of all ages and abilities to play, explore and enjoy time together," the city said in its announcement.

It will be approximately 8,844 square feet of playground, which will feature accessible and inclusive play elements, such as fully ramped access, specialized seating and handholds, inclusive swings, sensory-friendly spaces, educational and imaginative play features, safety surfacing, as well as ample shade,

SEE **PLAYGROUND**, 2A

Event held in more than 600 communities nationwide

FROM STAFF REPORTS
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Joplin and Pittsburg, Kansas, will each hold a Walk to End Alzheimer's on Sept. 19.

The Alzheimer's Association Walk to End Alzheimer's is the world's largest

event to fight the disease, which affects more than 7 million Americans. According to the organization, 1 in 3 older Americans die with Alzheimer's or another dementia.

The walk is held in more than 600 communities nationwide and last year

raised \$112.4 million.

The Joplin walk will begin with registration at 8:30 a.m. at Mercy Park, 3002 St. John's Blvd. There will be a ceremony at 9:45 a.m., with the walk to begin at 10 a.m. It usually wraps up by noon.

"We have the loop around the fountain. They can walk as much or as little as they like," said Julie Milbauer, a

senior manager with the Alzheimer's Association overseeing walks in Joplin, Springfield and Lake of the Ozarks. Springfield will have its walk Sept. 26.

Milbauer said that 3,200 people in the Joplin metro area of Jasper and Newton counties have Alzheimer's, or more than 10% of the population over age 65, according to a 2020 survey.

The goal of the Joplin effort is \$45,000. As of Friday, 185 participants and 55 teams had registered. Last year, nearly 160 people walked and raised \$41,610.

All of the money that is raised goes to further the care, support and research efforts of the Alzheimer's Association, a nonprofit.

Milbauer called the walk a "family-friendly event"

that will include superhero characters, "Star Wars" characters and face painting. Pets also are welcome as long as they are on a leash.

Registration for the Pittsburg walk will begin at 8:45 a.m., with a ceremony at 9:45 and the walk to begin at 10 a.m. The event will be held at Pittsburg

SEE **WALK**, 2A

