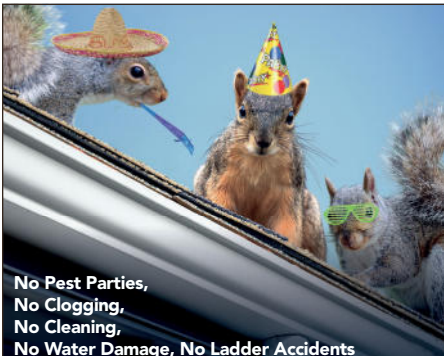




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Agape Boarding School sued

Former student alleges violation of act prohibiting servitude

Susan Szuch
Springfield News-Leader
USA TODAY NETWORK

A new federal lawsuit alleges that a now-closed Stockton boarding school violated a former student’s constitutional rights.

Rebecca Randles, of Randles, Mata LLC, is representing former student P.H. The case is filed against not only Agape Boarding School, but also former dean Brent Jackson, former medical director Scott Dumar and former staff members Julio Sandoval, John Wilke and Robert

Graves. The case also lists Cedar County Sheriff James McCrary for his failure to take action despite “reports of abuse occurring at (Agape).”

The complaint, filed May 16, alleges that while P.H. was at Agape, he did not receive education and was instead performing forced labor including excavating and clearing space for a new building. It also says that on one occasion, Sandoval and Jackson “beat P.H. senseless.”

The lawsuit asks for eight counts to be levied against the defendants, including violation of a U.S. code that pro-

hibits human trafficking, slavery, indentured servitude and peonage.

Agape and its staff not only transported students across state lines, but they engaged in threats of force and physical restraint as well as the use of force to obtain labor from students there, including P.H., according to court records. The lawsuit identifies this as peonage, where someone is worked by lawless methods against their will “for the purpose of compelling him to discharge real or alleged obligations.”

The lawsuit also alleges that in order to keep students on campus, “staff often

wrote kids up for things that were untrue in order to scare parents into keeping them at Agape.”

Randles is asking for a jury trial in this case as well as damages.

Request for comment for Agape Baptist Church’s legal representation has not yet been answered.

Despite closure, Agape continues to gather lawsuits

Investigators began looking into the Stockton-based Christian reform school in 2021 due to abuse allegations. On Jan. 20, 2023, it closed “solely due to the lack

See AGAPE, Page 2A

‘A COOL PART OF OUR COMMUNITY’



The 112-year-old Green Bridge, which crosses the Finley River near Ozark in Christian County, has been closed by the Missouri Department of Transportation after an inspection rated the bridge a 2 on a 10-point scale.

NATHAN PAPES/SPRINGFIELD NEWS-LEADER

City aims to preserve Green Bridge as part of new Ozark trails system

Tony Madden
Springfield News-Leader
USA TODAY NETWORK

After Green Bridge was closed to traffic earlier this year due to safety concerns identified by state inspectors, Christian County and the city of Ozark are working to save one of the area’s most historically significant bridges.

According to Jeremy Parsons, public works director for Ozark, a letter of interest has been submitted to Great River Engineering to explore the idea of reus-

“We’re remaining positive that we can incorporate this into our trail system and preserve the historical and cultural aspects that that bridge brings to our community.”

Jeremy Parsons
Ozark public works director

ing Green Bridge. The city has several work sessions planned with Christian County staff to explore the idea of pre-

serving Green Bridge in place as a crossing exclusively for bikes and pedestrians.

Green Bridge was built in 1912 by the Canton Bridge Company of Canton, Ohio. It was built over the Finley River on property belonging to Calvin Green, according to a plat map from 1912. The 8-foot-wide bridge was originally intended for horse and buggy traffic. It has since been the site of picnics, weddings, baptisms, float trips and other family outings.

Even driving over the bridge had become an activity of local interest — until it was closed in February. With a rating of 3 on MoDOT’s 10-point bridge

See BRIDGE, Page 5A

What to know about avian flu outbreak

Susan Szuch
Springfield News-Leader
USA TODAY NETWORK

Across the nation, the avian flu outbreak has impacted more than 92 million poultry in 48 states, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. On May 22, a second case of cattle-to-human avian flu was identified in Michigan.

While there have been some avian flu cases in Missouri poultry, there have been no cattle or human cases. The last reported poultry outbreaks in Missouri were in February, according to the Missouri Department of Agriculture.

Additionally, nine states have reported outbreaks of the avian flu in cattle, with 58 herds across the U.S. impacted. There also have been more than 9,000 cases detected in wild birds in 50 jurisdictions.

Is H5N1 dangerous to people?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there have been two cattle-to-human transmission cases: One in Texas and one in Michigan. The most recent one was announced May 22, with the first happening in the beginning of April.

So far, humans infected have only

See AVIAN FLU, Page 6A



Chickens are on display at a 4-H fair. The avian flu outbreak has impacted more than 92 million poultry in 48 states, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

MIKE LAWRENCE/COURIER & PRESS FILE

