



THE PEOPLE'S TRIBUNE

NEWS FOR PIKE, EASTERN AUDRAIN & NORTHERN LINCOLN COUNTIES

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Pure Gold

Man Chronicles Life As A Fortune Seeker



A drawing by Joseph Early depicts George Stokes being attacked on the streets of Deadwood.

Editor's note: This is the sixth part in a story series by contributing writer Brent Engel.

Pike County native George Stokes, who in 1876 joined hundreds of others seeking the precious metal in the Black Hills of South Dakota, witnessed what can happen when there's a fight over it.

Homestake and De Smet were the two largest mining companies in Deadwood, where Stokes worked a claim.

"There were overtures toward a peaceful settlement, but they failed," Stokes wrote in his autobiography. "A great water war was on."

The battle began in 1877 and was an egotistical standoff between two California millionaires. Missouri-born George Hearst owned the Homestake. Irish immigrant Archie Borland helmed the De Smet. Each tried to corner the market on supplying water to the mines and residents.

It had been an issue from the start. Two creeks had quickly become fetid cesspools after gold was discovered in 1874. Two years later, a reservoir was built, but with dead dogs and rotting debris sometimes found floating along the shore, it proved just as putrid.

Hearst offered to buy out De Smet's water rights, but could not abide the \$20 million price tag. So, he ob-

tained a water claim that De Smet had previously rejected. Borland then bought a similar claim and asked a court to keep Homestake from polluting it.

"The air was full of legal papers, and the water fight was the principal topic of conversation everywhere," said Stokes, who worked for De Smet and edited a newspaper that backed the mining company.

The clash generally was verbal, but Stokes was badly beaten by a man who was angry over a story in the editor's newspaper.

"I had never been in the habit of carrying a gun, but just then I would have given anything for a Colt's 45," Stokes wrote.

Hearst declared victory after a judge's ruling gave Homestake principal water rights and Borland abandoned plans to build a 25-mile aqueduct.

"All the small-fry lawyers who had fattened on the water fight had to look elsewhere for employment," Stokes observed.

Going forward, Deadwood residents who didn't rely upon wells or other means would be serviced by City Creek, another noxious stream that one local observer found "reeking with virulent odors."

Soon, however, tragedy would showcase the importance of an adequate supply. Early in the morning of

Sept. 26, 1879, fire broke out in a bakery. Stokes and a friend were returning from a party when they saw the flames. Both helped the owner remove flour from the building.

"No attempt was made to quench the flames," Stokes said. "I didn't think of their spreading, and probably nobody else did. Someone did kick off a few burning boards at the rear, and maybe someone threw a few buckets of water near the oven where the fire seemed to have started. Then, inferno broke loose."

Stokes went to grab clothing and furniture from his rented room nearby. The nice coat he had been wearing was ruined by soot and flour. On the stairs, a neighbor woman pleaded with him to save a pet bird from her smoky apartment.

"Like a fool, I went after that bird, which was lying on its back, suffocated," he said. "As I started for the other end of the hall, the roof fell in and my trunk and clothing went the way of my coat."

Stokes managed to escape uninjured, only to be whacked outside with a board by a "half-crazed landlord" who claimed he was trying to put out the flames.

"The ramshackle, hurly-burly mining town of Deadwood was a smoking ruin — ashes, cinders and dust everywhere," Stokes remembered. "The fire ran its course, and died out only when nothing was left on Main Street to burn."

The blaze consumed 300 buildings. Stokes was among the 2,000 people left homeless. De Smet provided him food and lodging during recovery. Much of the town was rebuilt within six months, this time using bricks instead of wood. Stokes was bolstered, but unsurprised, by the effort.

"Nobody whined or filled the air with lamentations," he said. "The spirit that rebuilt Deadwood so quickly is the spirit of our frontiersmen and pioneers, who opened the West where millions now live and prosper."

Next time: Unexpected conclusion.

Three Area School Districts Place Propositions On April Ballot

By BRICE CHANDLER
EDITOR

Three area school districts place propositions on April ballot

Voters in several area school districts will decide on ballot issues during the April 7 municipal election, with proposals from the Van-Far, Louisiana and Silex districts addressing facility improvements, safety upgrades and district funding needs.

Van-Far R-I School District

Van-Far voters will consider a no tax rate increase bond issue titled Proposition "Safe Schools, Strong Community." If approved, the measure would authorize the district to borrow \$4 million for security measures and improvements to school buildings.

According to Superintendent Dr. Natalie Gibson, voter approval is required because the district would be borrowing money through bonds to fund the projects.

District officials say the goal of the proposal is to make improvements that restore district facilities, improve safety and enhance learning environments.

Two of the major safety improvements would include a new entrance to the high school and a new intercom system for the elementary school, which would improve entry procedures for guests and communication during routine and emergency situations.

The proposal would also replace flooring in the district's 7th through 12th grade building, some of which dates back to when the building opened in 1959.

Additional improvements would include installing HVAC systems in both gyms and addressing drainage around the building.

Van-Far hosted an open

house on Monday, March 16 for community members to tour the high school and ask questions about the proposed projects.

Louisiana R-II School District

Louisiana voters will also consider a no tax increase bond issue, known as Proposition A, which would allow the district to borrow \$1.5 million for safety and security updates to district buildings.

Superintendent Dr. Tom Ward said bond issues are a traditional way for schools to borrow money to pay for capital projects that are too costly for a typical budget.

Major improvements included in the proposal would include upgrading electrical panels at the middle school, elementary school and vocational agriculture building, as well as safety upgrades to the elementary school office and a new front door entrance to the elementary school.

The proposal also includes installing new exterior doors across district buildings, rekeying classroom doors, and upgrading camera and security systems.

Other planned improvements include repaving and repairing parking lots, addressing drainage issues on practice fields and parking areas, and purchasing new desks and chairs for older elementary students.

District officials say more information about the proposal will be shared with the community during a future open house.

Silex R-I School District

The Silex R-I School District will also have a measure on the April ballot titled Proposition Owls (Prop OWLS).

According to Superintendent Nick Heggemann, the measure was approved by the Board of Education to address financial needs facing the dis-

trict.

District officials say the proposal is designed to help the district remain compliant with Senate Bill 727, which establishes increasing minimum salary requirements for teachers across Missouri.

Beginning in the 2026-27 school year, the law requires a \$40,000 minimum base salary for teachers, along with \$47,000 for teachers with a master's degree and 10 years of experience, increasing to \$48,000 the following school year.

The district said it currently relies on a state baseline salary grant to meet minimum requirements, but that funding is not guaranteed and ensures only minimum compliance.

The district also noted that insurance costs have increased more than 17 percent over the past two years, with an additional 10 to 15 percent increase projected.

Beginning in January 2026, the district must also comply with Missouri's \$15 per hour minimum wage requirement for classified staff.

According to information shared by the district, Proposition OWLS proposes an adjustment to the district's operating levy, with revenue generated deposited into the district's Operating Fund, which is used to cover salaries and benefits for teachers and staff.

The district has scheduled informational meetings about the proposal in the school cafeteria at 7 p.m. on March 18.

All three measures will appear on the April 7 municipal election ballot, where voters will decide whether to approve or reject each proposal.

School officials in each district encourage residents to review the proposals and participate in the upcoming election.

Burglary Suspect Recaptured After Escape

By BRICE CHANDLER
EDITOR

A young man facing multiple felony charges in connection with a burglary and stolen vehicle investigation briefly es-

caped from custody Thursday before being located and returned to jail later that same day.

According to law enforcement reports, Caden Keith Burt was originally

arrested following a March 15 investigation into an attempted burglary at DG Firearms and the theft of a nearby vehicle.

See ESCAPE on page 6

State Funding Fails Schools

By LARRY TWELLMAN

A bleak future" is how Bowling Green R-I School Superintendent Nick Larson described anticipated funding from the Missouri State Legislators for the 2026-27 school year at the March meeting of the R-I District School Board.

Larson said that the legislator has already reduced the amount of funding for this school year that was promised in the state budget passed last May.

The district receives around one-third of its revenues from state funds. Larson warned the board that when state aid decreases it will put more pressure on the board to turn to local taxes to make up for the reduction in state funds.

Legislative pressure this year to cut revenues from

the state income tax could mean a loss to the district of over \$1,600,000. The board voted to renew health insurance for district employees with the Missouri Educators Trust. Premiums for the next school year will rise 4.6 percent over the amount paid during the current school year. The additional cost will be about \$81,000.

Four students from the elementary schools reported on the recent Cultural Fair that was held to highlight life in 15 foreign countries.

McKinli Scherder, Jaxson Oberman, Liam Robinson and Kensley Smith brought display board that students made to provide information about the foreign countries selected for study. As part of the experience, students also experienced some of the food and drink

that are popular in the countries. Students told the board about the foods they liked and those that were not as popular.

The board approved KPM CPAs and Advisors to complete the district's financial audit for the current school year. The firm, whose main office is in Springfield will be paid \$21,000 for the annual audit of district finances.

An annual evaluation report on the district's libraries was presented to the board by Julie Colbert, high school and middle school librarian and Victoria LeBeau, librarian for the elementary schools.

The next meeting of the Bowling Green R-I School Board will be on Tuesday, April 21, starting at 5:30 pm in the district board room.

Henderson Part Of 14th Amendment Debate

By BRENT ENGEL,
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

John Brooks Henderson took part in one of the biggest constitutional battles in American history, and the legal shock waves are still being felt.

In spring 1866, the Missouri U.S. Senator from Pike County became embroiled with colleagues over what to include and what to leave out of the proposed 14th Amendment.

By then, the mastermind of the 13th Amendment outlawing slavery had some of the strongest constitutional

credentials in Congress. When it was all over, Henderson could rightly be counted among the few who rose above petty politics and kept the country's abiding interests in perspective.

As Henderson saw it, the federal government had a right and duty to use the pen as it had the sword in quelling racial intimidation in the South after the Civil War.

Once a supporter of states' rights, he now believed a reunited nation was impossible without enshrining additional safeguards in the Constitution. Laws fluctuated with

political whims, but constitutional edicts were tougher to toss out. The position put the Republican at odds with Democrat President Andrew Johnson and 11 defeated Southern states that wanted to rejoin the Union on their terms.

On March 8, 1866, Henderson reminded America that Congress, not Johnson, was empowered to decide "whether armed resistance to the national authority yet exists" and "whether the causes of the rebellion have been removed."

See DEBATE on page 6



Donna Grote, left, and Debbie Ingram are co-directors of Encore, Raintree Arts Council's annual fund-raising concert. They are pictured at last year's show, which was a tribute to Elvis Presley. This year's concert in April 11 at The Apple Shed in Clarksville, and is entitled "A Night on Broadway."

By BRENT ENGEL,
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Encore is returning to its musical roots.

The Raintree Arts Council's annual fund-raising concert is Saturday, April 11, at The Apple Shed in Clarksville. Tickets are \$30 if bought before March 27 and \$35 from March 28 to the April 3 deadline.

Encore started as a tribute to Broadway musicals, and audiences were treated to popular showtunes. More recently, organizers expanded to include themes such as the Roaring 20s, a 1950s Sock Hop, the 1960s, Motown, Country Classics and the music of Elvis Presley.

"After several years away from Broadway, Donna Grote, my co-director, and I decided it was time to go back and visit the Broadway stage," said Debbie Ingram.

"I've loved Broadway since I was a kid in high school and have been playing some of these songs that long."

There are 13 performers in the Encore Ensemble and 11 songs in the show. The selections include "Memory" from "Cats," "Someone Like You" from "Jekyll & Hyde," "What I Did For Love" from "A Chorus Line" and "Goodnight, My Someone" from "The Music Man." Ingram promises that two additional group medleys are "packed with snippets" of beloved songs.

Reports indicate that Broadway largely has bounced back from the hit taken during the COVID pandemic. For many, it never lost the luster.

"Musicals are fun because just when your mind might have started to drift off while watching a production, all of a sudden

these characters — for no apparent reason — break out into song and maybe start dancing," Ingram said. "Sometimes, that's dramatic. Sometimes, that is comedic. But always it seems to work with the plot. We don't do that in real life — at least it seems that most people I know don't!"

Ingram said she loves plays, but "musicals can sometimes take our imaginations even further out of the everyday."

Working with dedicated musicians is particularly gratifying.

"I love getting to teach some of the old and new Broadway showtunes to our Encore Ensemble," Ingram said. "We have been having a blast."

Ingram praised the "great talent" that is participating and said it's "wonderful that we have The Apple Shed in Clarksville that is able to host these types of events. People can stay close to home and still attend a very elegant and entertaining production."

Ingram is proud that Raintree puts a premium on providing diverse arts activities.

"Events such as this one bring us together for a night of entertainment, but also for a night of being together with friends and new acquaintances in our community," she said.

Doors open at 6 with dinner by Keely Catering & Events and the show at 7 p.m. Reservations are required and must be made by logging on to www.raintreeartsCouncil.org and clicking on the "Encore 2026" icon. Questions may be directed to 314-518-5637.

Community News

From The Mayor's Desk...

The city completed their yearly audit and we are in very good shape financially. We are encouraged as "Cybersecurity threats are increasing and government entities of all sizes are at risk."

KPM CPAS and Advisors who does our yearly auditing recommends "The City to evaluate its cybersecurity risks and take further steps necessary to reduce the risk of cybersecurity threats to their information systems."

Additionally, As Bowling Green evolves and new "Government Accounting Standards Board change, these new accounting procedures may affect the city in future years." However, the city is solid and safe and our treasurer, Kim M, should be congratulated along with the entire city hall employees in their reporting procedures.

When residents feel heard, they become more engaged and local government works better! However, town hall meetings, surveys, and open board meetings do not reach the full community. So, how do we get more citizen representation? How do we bring more voices to the table? How do we hear from you in matters that are most important to you? How do we obtain more civic participation? More community volunteers and re-energize community engagement and involvement? And... eventually improve community pride and public trust.

There is a program at the state level called the Missouri Works Program. This is an incentive tool that helps businesses access capital through withholdings or tax credits to embark on facility expansion and create jobs. It also helps businesses purchase equipment to maintain and expand. Bowling

Green has several start-up businesses that could take advantage of this program.

Should public schools be teaching more on the Revolutionary War, our constitution, American history, business principles, emphasizing higher education and trade and skills preparation as opposed to philosophies and social doctrines? What are your thoughts?

There is a certain type of energy that comes when there are civic activities, growth, new businesses and services, and beautification projects that bring freshness and community pride. It is that time of year when residents need to recycle, donate, clear out the old, and simply trash. It is time to clean, plant, and dump unneeded items.

Yard sales spring up at this time of year and the first Saturday in May is yard sales in Bowling Green. (other days are also encouraged). Let's continue to Beautify Bowling Green as visitors, tourists, and potential new families continue to desire to be a part of our wonderful town. Love Thy Neighbor

April 7 is Election Day in Bowling Green, Pike County, and across Missouri. Mid-Term elections are in November. We need to exercise our voting rights, privileges, and responsibilities. Every vote counts. Americans have sacrificed and died for you to have this right. Know what he/she stands for and will follow through.

Pike County Lincoln/Reagan Days are at the Allen Family Resource Center, 21208 Hwy. WW, Bowling Green, Thursday, June 25. Doors open at 5 p.m., and dinner at 6 p.m. Meet the candidates for the fall elections. Advance tickets available or at the door.



JIM ARICO, MAYOR
CITY OF BOWLING GREEN

Pike To Pike...



By Wyvetta Davis-Niffen
1-217-320-8438

If you enjoy music, continue to read on to know where the music will be around here:

Buggs Family Opry -- Friday, March 27 in Pearl with the show starting at 7 p.m.

The Big River Band, Saturday, March 28 - Pike County Senior Center. Show starts at 6:30 p.m. No admission charge. Concession Stand with goodies to purchase. Good dance floor. Check out Big River Band on Facebook for where the Band will be playing, and updates and cancellations.

Do Not Forget, if the weather gets bad and/or iffy, either listen to 97.5 or 102 on the radio, or check on Facebook and look on either Big River Band or Polly Bugg or Jamie Niffen or myself Wyvetta Davis, or give someone a call, including me, at the number above to make sure the Shows will be happening.

Uptown Strings Band plays every Tuesday from noon-3 p.m.,

at the Admiral Koontz Recreation Center, 301 Warren Barrett Drive, in Hannibal. This is sponsored by the Hannibal Parks and Recreation. And everyone is welcome.

Birthdays and anniversaries for the week of March 25-31:

March 27 - Anita and Dan Mefford

March 28 - Bill Cawthon, Demetrius Welch, Dick Peebles, Ellen Likes, Jacob Lynch

March 29 - My first born granddaughter Jacqueline Mefford, Carolyn Johnson, Jan Kirk, Karen Coultas

March 30 - Judy Douglas, Sierra Ballinger

March 31 - Katy Winner

Single Seniors + One has another "Meet, Greet, and Eat" in the works. It's never too late to be a part of this group so if you are interested in joining, just call or text 1-217-320-8438.

Men and/or women, single by choice or circumstance, you are welcome to join. Any questions, just call 1-217-320-8438. This is NOT a matchmaking group, and this group is not strictly for people in Pike County or Illinois.

In the past, the group has went to several restaurants: Cardinal Inn; Courtyard Cafe; Gianni's; Maya; Watt's Up; Milkey's; Rudi's Grill; Sprout's Inn; and Saint's Avenue, to name a few. If you can drive or share transportation with another member and pay for your own meal, and are willing to share conversations with others, you will be welcomed.

Upcoming days of interest: Easter Sunday is April 5. Mothers' Day is May 10.

Memorial Day is celebrated May 25.

The second anniversary of the Single Seniors + One was celebrated at the home of Wyvetta Davis and Jamie Niffen on Wednesday, March 18 with 22 people present. Everyone brought delicious food to share and enjoy. And lots of conversations were shared. I believe those who were able to be there enjoyed our time together.

Recently, we called around to see if we could get pizza delivered to us outside of Pittsfield. No can do! We did find that Milkey's in Barry would deliver which is around 13 miles one way. Very good service, Mike, and Milkey's.

Friday afternoon, March 20, Jamie and I went to Bowling Green and visited at the home of Jamie's daughter-in-law, grandson, and granddaughter Tracy, Mike, and Allie Niffen. Had a good visit then we all went to Dairy Queen for supper.

Saturday afternoon, March 22, Jamie and Wyvetta's guests were Phil and Sally Lipcaman of Pittsfield and visiting was enjoyed.

Trivia answers from last week:

1. Which U.S. President has been commonly credited with inventing the swivel chair? (Thomas Jefferson)
2. Who named the first woman of the creation? (Adam named Eve)
3. Who are the only two men who have run effectively unopposed for President? (George Washington and James Monroe)



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SATURDAY, MARCH 28TH. @ 9:30 AM
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TOOLS, FISHING, & OUTDOOR:

Squirrel cage fans, Fence wire, Electric cords, Galvanized buckets, bench vice, old oil cans, trailer Jack, Electric wire, bench grinder, Metal cutting bandsaw, the fans, Miscellaneous hand tools, Miscellaneous nails, screws, Gas cans, Barbecue grill, metal wash times, Quarry Decorating Rock,

home lite chainsaw, push plow, Toro leaf, vacuum, extension ladder, wooden school desk, old tricycle, large - big red mule wagon, 2-220 Bayou 4 Wheelers. In good running condition,

and much more not listed

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Single Seniors

March 13, 2024, was the very first Single Seniors' "Meet, Greet, & Eat" in Pike County, Ill. Wyvetta Davis was the founder of this group which ranges anywhere between 13 - 27 in attendance once a month at various restaurants. The group has had 22 meetings and averages around 20 people, men and women, per meeting. Some come and go, and some have been faithful attendees. Three of their precious members, Sharon Straus, Joyce Stone, and Tracy Butler, have passed away and are sorely missed. This group celebrated their second anniversary this past Wednesday, March 18 at the home of Wyvetta and her second husband Jamie with 22 in attendance, a potluck get-together, and plenty of visiting. The group started as a way for single women and men (and no this is not a matchmaking group), ages 55+, that are single for one reason or another (widowed, divorced, never been married) that would enjoy a noon meal and share conversations. Even though it is still for single senior adults, there are now three married couples in the group. One was Wyvetta and Jamie who recently celebrated their first wedding anniversary in January. Wyvetta offered to give up the not-for-profit organization and let someone take over the planning the monthly get-togethers and reminding everyone where the meals would be at, but Wyvetta, and now Jamie, are still doing this and enjoy doing all the preparations. Then in October, three other members tied the knot and thought that they would have to quit attending. Not so, and they were "grandfathered" into the group along with their significant others, and the name of the group is now Single Seniors + One. If anyone would be interested in joining, just call the number at the top of the Pike to Pike News' column in this paper. As was said before, this is for single senior adults, men and women. There are no membership fees at all. You do not have to be from Pike County, or even from Illinois, to be a part of this. You must be able to pay for your own meal and provide your own transportation. Sincere and genuinely interested people are welcome to attend.

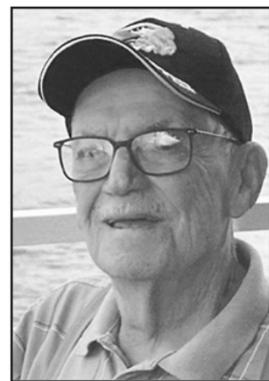
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Obituaries



James H. Lierheimer

Memorial service for James H. Lierheimer, 91, of Vandalia we're at 3 p.m., Saturday at Bienhoff Funeral Home in Vandalia with pastor Mark Burkey officiating. Burial followed in Bethel Presbyterian Cemetery in rural Audrain County. Masonic services provided by Vandalia Masonic Lodge 491 will begin at 3 p.m.

Visitation was Saturday from 1 p.m., until the time of the service at the funeral home.

Mr. Lierheimer died Sunday, March 15, 2026 at his home surrounded by family.

He was born Nov. 1, 1934 near Bean Creek in rural Mexico, the son of Paul and Edith Callaway Lierheimer. James married Doris Marie Young on Feb. 13, 1982 in Vandalia. She survives.

Other survivors include two daughters, Lorie Uhey and husband, Donnie, and Ellen Roy and husband, Alan, both of Vandalia; two step-children, Lori Fitts and husband, Jimmy of Camden, Miss., and Dr. Michael Stotler and wife, Jen of St. Louis; two grandsons, James Cory McFadden and Clayton Thompson and wife, Rachel; two step-grandchildren, Adam Tharp and wife, Brianna and Sarah Warren and husband, Zach; five great grandchildren, James Neal McFadden, Vivian McFadden, Ian McFadden, Walter Thompson, and Betty Thompson; three step-great-grandchildren, Colton Warren, Brody Tharp, Shepard Warren, and Avery Warren along with other relatives and a host of friends.

He was preceded in death by his parents and one brother, Ralph Eugene "Gene" Lierheimer.

James was a 1952 graduate of Mexico High School and served his country honorably in the Missouri National Guard. He farmed for several years and work at local refractories. He owned and operate school busses for Highway R-III School District and then would take a position with soil conservation services. Jim and Doris moved to the Lake Village, Ark., area where he would take a job with Valley Irrigation and lastly retired from an agricultural chemical company. Throughout his life he remained active in his faith and community, being a member of Bethel Presbyterian Church and later attending First Presbyterian Church in Vandalia. He was also a proud 32nd Degree Master Mason and member of Vandalia Masonic Lodge 491 and a member of the Scottish Rite.

James enjoyed the simple pleasures of life, especially spending time fishing, hunting for and collecting Native American artifacts, interests that reflected his appreciation for native American history and the outdoors. Above all, he cherished time spent with his family, creating many lasting memories with those he loved.

Honorary pallbearers were his grandchildren.

Memorial contributions may be made to Shriners Hospital for Children or First Presbyterian Church of Vandalia and mailed c/o Bienhoff Funeral Home P.O. Box 54 Vandalia, MO 63382.

Online condolences may be made at www.bienhofffuneralhome.com.

Correction

In the obituary for Betty Haines the year of her husband's death should have been listed as 2023.



James 'Jim' Albert VonVain

James "Jim" Albert VonVain, 97, of Middletown died Saturday, March 14, 2026, at his home.

Funeral services were at 10 a.m., Thursday at Myers Funeral Home in Middletown with the Rev. John Foster officiating. Burial followed in Fairmount Cemetery.

Visitation was Wednesday from 5-7 p.m., at the funeral home.

Jim was born Jan. 22, 1929 in Gamma, the son of John and Mayme Surls VonVain. When Jim was 15 months old, his mother died and he was raised by his step-mother, Alta Surls VonVain and his father. On March 25, 1960, he married Della McCurdy in Vandalia.

Jim worked for Harbison-Walker Brick Refractories in Vandalia for 30 years until he retired. He was a member of Middletown Baptist Church and found great joy in the simple pleasures of life. He loved fishing, hunting, and camping, often spending time outdoors doing the things he enjoyed most. Above all, he cherished the moments he shared with his family, and his happiest times were those spent together.

Survivors include his wife, Della; three sons, James VonVain of Bowling Green, Mike McCurdy of Vandalia, and John VonVain and wife, Amanda of Middletown; two daughters, Doris Atkinson and husband, Rick of Perry and Judy Mudd and Jim Bishop of Middletown; 16 grandchildren, Micheal McCurdy and wife, Amanda of Middletown, Jimmy McCurdy and wife, Becky of Vandalia, Charles McCurdy and wife, Jill of Wellsville, Julia Ruiz of Romana, Calif., Karen Phelless of Auxvasse, Keith VonVain of Louisiana, Mellissa Branham of Bowling Green, Shana Inman and husband, Mike of Imperial, Cassey Smart and husband, Dale of Middletown, Tiffany Olglesby of Perry, Ethan Atkinson of Perry, Jared VonVain of Middletown, Jayden VonVain of Middletown, Jordin VonVain of Middletown, Jaxson VonVain of Middletown, and Jacob VonVain of Middletown; and numerous great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren.

Jim is preceded in death by his father, John VonVain; mother Mami VonVain; step-mother, Alta VonVain; one sister, Opal VonVain; two brothers, Melvin VonVain and Donald VonVain; two grandsons, Jason VonVain, and James VonVain; two daughters-in-law, Bonnie McCurdy and Lora VonVain.

The family requests memorial donations be made to the Middletown Baptist Church or the Middletown Cemetery Association. Memorials may be sent, c/o a Myers Funeral Home, 203 E. Bates, Wellsville, MO 63384.



Tommy Lee Riley Betty Riley Jones

A celebration of life and

memorial will be held for Tommy Lee Riley of Cooper Texas, and Betty Louise Riley-Jones of Sumner, Wash., on Saturday at the VFW Hall in Bowling Green.

Celebration will begin at 11 a.m., with prayer and meal at noon. Family and friends are encouraged to gather and share stories until 4 p.m. Tommy and Betty were born to George Albert and Mary Mildred Moran-Riley. They attended Cyrene Elementary School and graduated from Bowling Green High School.

After graduation Bettly enlisted in the Women's Army Corps and relocated to Sumner Washington where she married and raised her family.

Betty died Jan. 26, 2026 in Washington.

She is survived by Dennis Allen Jones and wife, Tracy of Lakewood, Wash., Andy Lee Jones and wife, Rhonda of Cheney, Wash., Andrea Jones-Price of Wasilla, Alaska; one brother, George Albert Riley of Vandalia; and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Tommy continued on with his family's farm and spent many years as a pipe-fitter and welder at the chemical plant in Louisiana before eventually retiring from the Missouri Department of Corrections and relocating to Texas with Ola Jean. Tommy passed away in Cooper Texas on Dec. 27, 2025.

Tommy is survived by his wife, Ola Jean Scott-Riley of Cooper, Texas; children, James Scott Riley of Bonnetterre, Albert Riley of Wylie, Texas, Rebecca Riley of Fate, Texas; a brother, George Albert Riley of Vandalia; as well as his grandsons and many great-grandchildren.

They were preceded in death by their parents, a sister, Alma Jean Riley-Shaw, and one brother, Billy Wayne Riley.

Tommy didn't care for formal dinners and events. He enjoyed time spent with family around a fish fryer or grill, laughing, visiting, and enjoying a meal.

In that spirit a casual meal is being provided by nephew, Donnie and wife, Melissa, nephew, Ronnie Riley and wife, Crystal, and grandson, Austin Riley and wife, Carrie.



Patricia 'Patti' Lynn Backs

Patricia "Patti" Lynn Backs, 65, of Bowling Green, formerly of St. Louis died Wednesday, March 18, 2026, at SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital in St. Louis.

A memorial service will be held at 10 a.m., Saturday at Bibb-Veach Funeral Home and Crematory in Bowling Green with Pastor Mark West officiating. Burial will follow at Greenlawn Cemetery in Bowling Green.

Visitation will be held from 9 a.m., until the time of service at the funeral home.

Patti was born and raised in St. Louis, the daughter of Roy Lee and Dorothy Jean Harmon Backs. Growing up, she attended Riverview Gardens School District, in north St. Louis County and later obtained her GED. Following school, Patti began her working years at a local pet store in Olivette. She would take a job at the suburban journal for a short time, before returning to her passion for taking care of animals as a pet groomer off Page Blvd.

Patti enjoyed many things, including fishing and deer hunting and belonged to the Bass & Gals fishing club. Above all, Patti loved her dogs, Pockets, Tera, and Bandit.

Left to remember her memory are a sister, Diane Backs of Bowling Green; one nephew, Nicholas Backs and wife, Amy of St. Louis; a niece, Julia Backs-Lohus and husband, Rhett of San Leandro, Calif.; and great-niece and great-

nephew, Reese and Wade Lohus.

She was preceded in death by her parents; a brother, Gary Backs; and one sister, Janice Backs.

Memorials may be made to the Northeast Humane Society in Hannibal.

Online condolences may be left at www.bibbveach.com.



Rhonda Tapley

Rhonda Tapley, 55, of Vandalia went to be with the Lord on Sunday, March 15, 2026, at St. Louis University Hospital in St. Louis with the love of her family at her side.

Rhonda was born Jan. 15, 1971, in Washington, the daughter of the late Coleman Carlisle and the late Shirley Long.

She was united in marriage to Michael Tapley on Jan. 13, 1989, in Jonesburg. He survives.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by five daughters, Crystal Waters and husband, Terry Waters, Shirlena Johnson and husband, Justin, Alissa Ambrocio and husband, Miguel, Harlie Watters and husband, Milton, and Micaela Smith; her beloved grandchildren, Malcolm Smith, Cassius Smith, Octavias Smith, Andres Ambrocio, Alex Ambrocio, Alyss Ambrocio, Brink Waters, Rowe Waters, Micaiah Waters, Lylliana Waters, and Laylyn Watters; one brother, Alan Carlisle; and a sister, Victoria Murray.

She was preceded in death by her parents and one sister, Rebecca Spitznagel.

Rhonda was a devoted wife, mother, and grandmother who dedicated her life to caring for her family as a stay-at-home wife. She earned her GED and was a faithful member of Jordan Pentecostal Church. She had a passion for cooking and baking and was known for her generous spirit and strong work ethic. Rhonda cherished time spent with her family and especially enjoyed playing cards such as UNO and Skip-Bo with her loved ones.

Visitation will be Saturday from 12-2 p.m., at the YMCA in Vandalia.

Funeral services will be held at 2 p.m., Saturday at the YMCA in Vandalia with Pastor Kris Grimes officiating. Burial will follow at Fairmount Cemetery in Middletown.

The family is being served by the Waters Funeral Home of Vandalia.

Serving as pallbearers will be Terry Waters, Milton Waters, Migul Ambrocio, Justin Johnson, Tom Carlisle, and Nathan Carlisle. Honorary pallbearers will be Brink Waters, Grant Grimes, and Joshua Murray.

Memorial contributions may be made to Alissa Ambrocio to assist with funeral expenses.

Online condolences may be made to the family on Rhonda's memorial page at www.watersfuneral.com.



Linda Alice Birkhead

Linda Alice Birkhead, 80, of Vandalia, formally of New London died Saturday, March 7, 2026, at the Baptist Home of Vandalia Tri-County.

Cremation rites according to her wishes are under the direction of Bibb-Veach Funeral Homes & Crematory in Bowling Green.

A family-led memorial service will be held at 11 a.m., Saturday at the Frist Baptist Church of Vandalia.

Visitation will be held from 10 a.m., until time of services at the church.

Linda was born May 2, 1945, in Eldon, the daughter of Okle and Ozell Crum Moseley. Linda grew up in Eldon, attending Eldon Schools, and spent some of her childhood on the Lake at

Bagnell Dam, while her father was working on the dam's construction. Following graduation, Linda attended cosmetology school in Albuquerque, N.M., and graduated in 1966. It was while living in New Mexico that she met Michael Reece. Following graduation, the two moved to Springfield, married, and had three sons. The family moved to Puerto Rico while Michael served as a missionary from 1979-80. Michael died in 1984, leaving Linda to raise her three boys. It was three years later, while living in St. Louis, Linda met and married John Milton Birkhead on Oct. 24, 1987, and to this union, Linda gained two sons from John's previous marriage. Upon marrying John, Linda became a full-time farmer's wife and caretaker of the family home.

In her free time, Linda enjoyed spending time with her family and caring for her children and grandchildren.

Those left to carry on Linda's legacy include her husband, the Rev. John Birkhead of Vandalia; sons Sean Reece and wife, Joyce of Pilot, Va., Shannon Reece and wife, Stephanie of Hannibal, David Reece and wife, Heidi of Uganda, Africa, Benny Birkhead and wife, Annette of New London, and Carl Birkhead and wife, Becky of New London; 10 grandchildren; 14 great-grandchildren; sister-in-law, Sue Moseley of Chillicothe; many nieces, nephews, and extended family members.

Linda was preceded by her parents; husband, Michael Reece; and three brothers, Harley, Ron, and Otis Moseley.

Memorials may be made to Baptist Homes Tri-County.



Delores Ann Cottrell Burgmeyer

Have you heard of someone speak about the Dash? The Dash is the most important part of one's life.

Delores Ann Cottrell Burgmeyer started her Dash on Nov. 12, 1942. She would be the only girl born to Robert "Bob" and Anna Mae Stringer Cottrell. Delores was blessed with two older brothers, Donnie and Glen and four younger brothers, John, Rusty, Rich-

ard and Nathan. She was used to the family farm life as they grew up on the family farm in Clarksville. Delores wanted to go help daily with all the things the boys helped with, but she would say Daddy always told me no. Imagine seven children on the farm and all the mischief they could get into. Delores was a member of Dover Baptist Church and was baptized Oct. 7, 1953. The family spent a lot of time at Dover Church. She said that it was the family's second home.

Delores attended Clopton School. She would tell us about the long lunch breaks they had, and that she loved to roller skate and some of the kids brought their skates to school. She would borrow the skates and learn how to skate. She loved to go to Clarksville and St. Clement to the roller rinks. She talked about playing Jacks, listening to records and dancing during lunch breaks in high school.

Delores met her future husband at the St. Clement roller skate rink - Bill Burgmeyer. Three daughters came from this marriage. Sherry married Danny Grote, Linda married Howard Korte, and Elizabeth married Craig Rosenberg. Delores was always saying she could not believe how large her family had grown. She had nine grandchildren, Darci Korte, Toni Robinson, Cole "Brandon" Korte and wife, Sammie Jo, Ashton Dugan, Victoria DeClue, Brant Dugan, Dylan Grote, Patricia Adkison and husband, Jeremy, and Roy Paul Rosenberg and wife, Brynn. Delores was blessed with 17 great-grandchildren, Natalie, Haden, Scarlette, Wyatt, Savannah, Dani Ann, Karrah, Korbyn, Keatyn, Taggart, Baylor, Wrenley, Emery, Bentley, Royce, Rosie, and Ronan.

Family was very important to her whether it was going back home to the family farm for fish fries, homemade ice cream, or hauling hay. She always supported her grandkids by going to watch all their sporting events, building cardboard box houses to play in, teaching them how to sew and being referee to them all.

Delores met Dick Dowell July 12, 1987. They have been a part of each other's lives for 38 years. They spent many Saturday nights at the Community Center Square Dancing in their matching outfits. They enjoyed going to Oshkosh, WI every year to the air shows. When Delores was unable to travel, they still attended shows locally at Chesterfield and Springfield. Delores had a favorite pilot, Shawn D. Tucker, whom she was able to meet and get his autograph. Dick said she was so excited about that. They enjoyed many evenings going out to dinner and the movies. They enjoyed

See OBITUARIES on page 6

CARD OF THANKS

The family of Dorothy Steinhage Bibb wishes to express their deepest gratitude for the overwhelming support, prayers, beautiful flowers, food and generous donations during our time of loss. We have been deeply touched by the outpouring of love and sympathy shown by all of you.

May God bless each and every one of you.

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Janet Bibb & Family
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Community News

Alpha-gal Syndrome Changes How We Socialize

For some people, an invitation to dine out brings anxiety instead of anticipation. According to the non-profit organization Food Allergy Research & Education, one in four Americans are affected by at least one of the top nine food allergies.

Karen Funkenbusch, health and safety state specialist with University of Missouri Extension, says the rising number of Missourians diagnosed with alpha-gal syndrome (AGS) is changing how individuals and families eat and socialize. Alpha-gal syndrome causes allergic reactions to red meat and other mammal-derived products.

A 2025 MU Extension survey of more than 1,000 respondents found that dining and social situations have a big effect on the mental health of people with AGS. Nearly two-thirds reported anxiety or depressive disorders, nearly half said the condition affected daily life, and 63 percent said they avoid eating out or attending social events because of fear of food contamination.

"Social isolation, loneliness, depression and anxiety are often hidden side effects of food allergies like AGS," Funkenbusch said.

The challenges are often greater in rural areas, where social gatherings frequently center around food and restaurant options are limited. "Some rural communities may have only one fast-food

restaurant and little variety," Funkenbusch said. "Also, many social activities in rural communities center around sporting events where concession stand foods are the only choice."

Dining out requires advance planning. Funkenbusch recommends calling restaurants ahead of time to discuss allergies and kitchen practices.

"It's not just what's on the menu," she said. "Cross-contamination can occur when food is prepared on shared surfaces or with utensils that have contacted meat, dairy or other mammal-derived products."

When eating away from home, she advises choosing simple foods with few ingredients or bringing prepared meals.

"Think 'fins and feathers' and whole foods," said Eden Stewart, who leads MU Extension's interdisciplinary AGS team.

Grilled chicken or fish, steamed vegetables and salads are usually safer choices. Stewart cautions that dressings, desserts and processed foods may contain hidden mammal-derived ingredients such as gelatin or dairy.

MU Extension recently released a series of guides on understanding and managing alpha-gal syndrome. The publications are available for free download at <https://muext.us/AGS-guides>.

Open communication, self-advocacy and mental health support can help manage the social and emotional impacts of AGS. Funkenbusch urges people to disclose their condition, explain how to respond to an allergic reaction and always carry an epinephrine auto-injector.

Awareness of AGS remains limited, including among health care professionals. A Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services survey found that 78 percent of primary care physicians nationwide have little to no knowledge of the condition. Funkenbusch said the gap may be wider in rural areas, where outdoor exposure to ticks is more common.

Funkenbusch encourages anyone experiencing stress, anxiety or depression related to chronic illness to seek support. "Reach out," she said. "Call or chat with someone who will listen."

In partnership with MU Extension's Show-Me Strong Farm Families program, MU Psychological Services Clinic offers free, confidential telehealth counseling by licensed mental health counselors who understand agriculture and rural communities.

To learn more or request services, visit <https://muext.us/SMSFF>, email adpsc@missouri.edu or call 573-882-4677. For immediate help, call or text 988.

April Library Book Review



Brenda Gower

APRIL 2026 LIBRARY STAFF BOOK REVIEW
THE MYSTERIOUS VIRGINIA HALL BY CLAUDIA FRIDDELL REVIEWED BY BRENDA GOWER, FARBER BRANCH LIBRARY MANAGER

This Mysterious Virginia Hall by Claudia Friddell is a quick and educational title where the reader learns about the mysterious chameleon who outsmarted the Nazis in France. This book is about Virginia Hall, who is a woman of many names. She was born in 1906 in Maryland to a father who encouraged her independent nature and a mother who accepted her daughter's free spirit. Virginia grew up with the desire to be an ambassador for the United States, but on each attempt, obstacles got in the way, including losing her leg. None of these obstacles stopped her from her directive of defending democracy. A chance meeting on a train at the start of World War Two changed her life - she became World War Two's most dangerous elusive spy. This book is

cataloged as a young adult non-fiction. It is written in script form, which is informative without the extra dialogue and also includes photos. I would give this book a 5/5 rating. It can be found at the Mexico-Audrain Library.

Carol Schambach
For
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Tips To Avoid Black Bears

With hiking and camping season right around the corner, a University of Missouri Extension has tips on how to prevent and avoid problems when in bear habitat.

Missouri's black bear population is growing, with current numbers estimated at about 1,000, says Robert Pierce, MU Extension state wildlife and fisheries specialist and co-author of a new MU Extension publication, Ecology and Management of Black Bears in Missouri.

Most bears in Missouri are found in the oak-hickory forests of the Ozark region, but bears can move over large distances and may sometimes be seen in marginal habitats, even in urban areas.

Most encounters with bears can be avoided, says Pierce. Here are some general guidelines:

Never approach a black bear, and don't let one get close to you. Watch from a distance. If in a vehicle or home, stay inside. If possible, stay at least 100 yards away from a black bear.

Keep garbage, pet foods, bird feed and other foods away from bears. "Bears that feed on human foods can quickly lose their natural fear of humans," says Pierce. "Don't feed them."

When hiking in bear habitat, make noise to avoid surprising bears. Talk, whistle or sing to alert them to your presence. Leave your dogs at home or keep them leashed. Dogs can antagonize bears and cause an encounter.

Keep campsites clean. Don't put food in your tent. Store food in airtight or bear-resistant containers, and lock food in the trunk of your vehicle or hang it in a tree 15 feet off the ground and 8 feet away from the tree trunk.

Wash dishes when you have finished eating. Cook food away from where you sleep. Do not sleep in the same clothes you cooked in. Burn trash only if you are unable to properly secure it; never bury it.

"Ecology and Management to Black Bears in Missouri," by Pierce and Nathaniel Bowersock, a bio-

logist with the Missouri Department of Conservation, is available for free download at <https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g9458>.

Learn more about bears at BearWise.org. Developed and run by biologists, Bear Wise shares information about living responsibly with bears.

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