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Forrest City, Arkansas

TUESDAY

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NEWS NOTES

Man arrested in bus theft

A Forrest City man was arrested early today after allegedly stealing a school bus from KIPP School, located on South Washington.

Brian Jones, 33, 50 Hwy. 350, is charged with felony theft of property and three misdemeanors including second-degree criminal mischief, driving on a suspended driver's license and reckless driving.

About 2:40 this morning, a St. Francis County deputy reported to the Forrest City Police Department that he saw Jones climbing out the back of the bus that was stuck on the side of Fletcher Road.

When the officer arrived, Jones reportedly handed him a key that appeared broken.

According to the report, Jones told the officer he drove the bus off the road and tried to flag down two men who were traveling west on Fletcher Road. The men told officers the bus nearly struck their vehicle before they saw a white male jump out of the bus, flag them down and ask for help to get the bus out of the mud.

A side door on the bus was broken and a radio stolen, according to police.

MPD suspends body camera rollout

MEMPHIS (AP) — Memphis officials have come under scrutiny after the suspension of the rollout of about 2,000 body cameras that police say were expected to be in use by October.

News outlets report Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland announced the indefinite suspension of the devices Jan. 15, saying the rollout had been hurried and the implementation wasn't well organized.

Shelby County District Attorney Amy Weirich tells *The Commercial Appeal* that her office wasn't included in the talks about the timing of the rollout and only learned about it in September, forcing attorneys to write new policies. At that time Jan. 1 was the new target date for the rollout.

Police Director Toney Armstrong, who championed getting the cameras, dismissed concerns Thursday about the delays, which he said are normal on large projects.

State's jobless rate below 5 percent

LITTLE ROCK (AP) — Arkansas' unemployment rate is now below 5 percent for the first time in nearly 15 years.

The Arkansas Department of Workforce Services says the state's jobless rate was 4.8 percent in December. That's down two-tenths of a percentage point from November's rate of 5 percent.

In December, Arkansas saw the most gains in the trade, transportation and utilities sector, which added 2,500 jobs. Nearly half of those jobs came in retail trade because of the holiday shopping season.

WEATHER

To-night: Mostly cloudy in the evening, then becoming partly cloudy. Lows in the upper 20s. North winds 5 to 10 mph.

Wednesday: Sunny. Highs in the lower 40s. North winds 5 to 10 mph.

Wednesday night: Mostly clear. Lows in the upper 20s. North winds around 5 mph becoming southwest after midnight.

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Christ Church school building destroyed by fire

Historic facility served as gathering place for members of black community

Kendall Owens
T-H Staff Writer

A portion of another of Forrest City's historic landmarks went up in flames Tuesday night after an early evening fire at Christ Episcopal Church School on Ophelia Street.

According to a report from the Forrest City Fire Department, firefighters were called to 1120 Ophelia Street, just before 6 p.m., Monday. When firefighters arrived, they found the south building on the campus of Christ Church School engulfed in flames. Firefighters spent more than three hours extinguishing the fire that destroyed the building which has served as a black school, community center, polling site and gathering place for decades.

"We lost another of our historic Forrest City facilities last night," said Forrest City Mayor Larry Bryant. "Christ Church School has had an impact on the lives of many black residents in our community. Many people in our community either attended school or pre-school there and the building hosted many, many NAACP meetings over the years. There are a lot of proud memories of that facility as a gathering place in the community and even as a voting site, and it is a shame to see it destroyed by fire."

"But, as with any fire, my hope is that we will see a phoenix arise from that site and maybe something bigger and better can be built to replace it," added Bryant.

The building most recently

has been used as the polling location for Ward 1 voters. Late last year, election commission officials agreed to relocate the Ward 1 poll to Lane Chapel C.M.E. Church.

Officials with the St. Francis County Historical Society were working on an application seeking to place the school campus, which includes a second school building that was not damaged, on the National Register of Historic Places.

"I was really sorry to hear about the fire last night at Christ Church School," said Dr. Stuart Towns, president of the SFCHS. "Those buildings have so much historical significance in the history of St. Francis County. As a matter of fact, we were working with officials from the church on an application seeking to put the buildings the National Register of Historic Places. We will continue those efforts with the remaining building and hopefully this won't have too significant of an impact on those efforts."

Monday's fire is the most recent to destroy historic properties in Forrest City.

In August, several Grant Street buildings were destroyed after an overnight fire, and in July, a building on North Washington was destroyed. Last January, fire destroyed a building that housed four downtown businesses on North Washington Street.

According to fire department officials, the cause of Monday's fire had not been determined as of press time.

Hwy. 1 project to Walnut Corner on AHTD's schedule

Work would complete expansion of roadway to four lanes from Phillips to Cross County

Kendall Owens
T-H Staff Writer

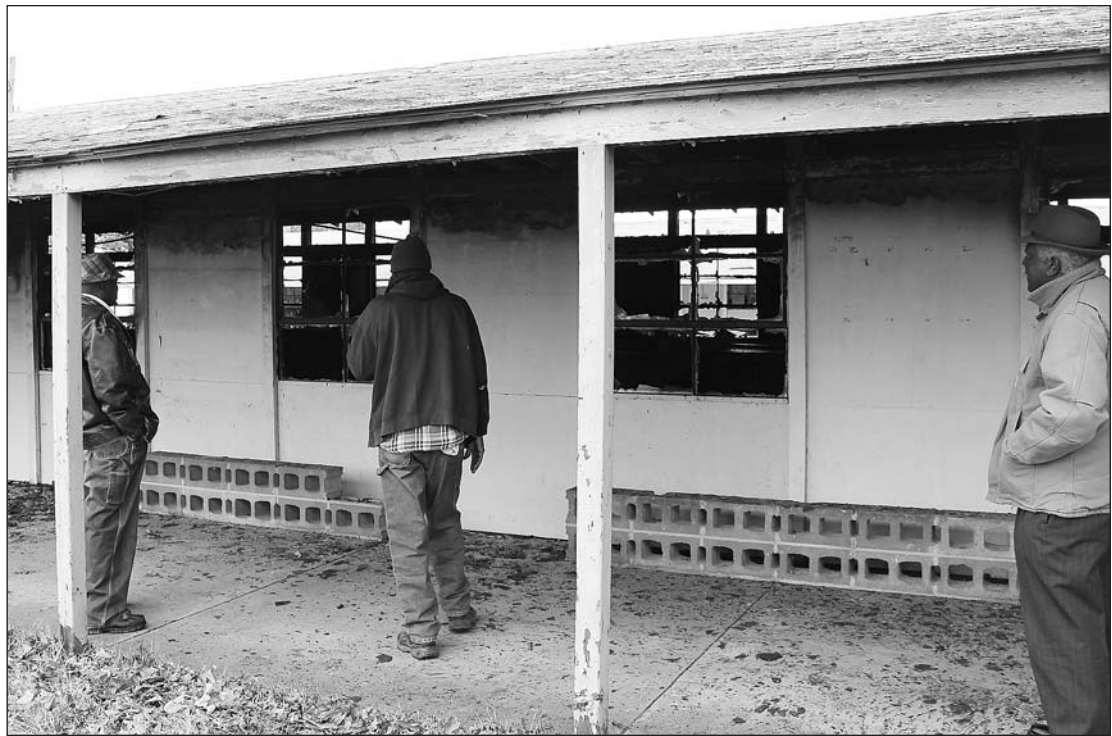
The expansion of Highway 1 to four lanes in Phillips County and a pair of overlay projects on East Arkansas highways could be part of a busy 2016 for Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department District 1.

AHTD officials in Little Rock recently opened bids totaling \$238.3 million on more than two dozen construction projects, including one to replace the White River Bridge on Interstate 40 in Prairie County.

Also included in the bid

opening is a project to widen Hwy. 1 in Lee and Phillips County. Construction is currently under way widening the roadway from just south of Marianna to Cypress Corner, and the project bid recently will conclude the expansion of Hwy. 1, making the roadway four lanes from Walnut Corner in Phillips County north to Wynne.

"That's the last section of expansion we have to do on Hwy. 1 in that area," said District Engineer Rex Vines. "Once that is finished, we'll have at least four lanes of traffic from Walnut Corner in



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Surveying the damage: An overnight fire destroyed a building at Christ Episcopal Church School on Ophelia Street. In the top photo, firefighter Andrew Latham and Lt. Thurlo Ward work to extinguish the blaze on the west end of the building. In the bottom photo, church member Alex Cole, custodian L.C. Velma and church member Dr. Robert Cole inspect the damage this morning.

Sound of gunshots reported at Navy medical center

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Military authorities responded Tuesday to a report of gunshots at a building on the campus Naval Medical Center San Diego.

The hospital posted on its Facebook page: "An active shooter has just been reported in building #26 at Naval Medical Center San Diego. All occupants are advised to run, hide or fight."

Spokesman Mike Alvarez said, however, that "I cannot confirm an active shooter."

The sounds were heard around 8 a.m. in Building 26, which houses offices and barracks for wounded sailors and Marines as well as a gym, said spokesman Mike Alvarez.

All non-emergency personnel were asked to stay away from the area.

He said at least three gunshots were reported heard.

"We're not taking any chances and are executing procedures we've been trained for in this kind of situation," Alvarez said.

San Diego police Officer Travis Easter said police received a notification call from military police at 8:03 a.m. of shots fired but assistance was not requested.



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More than books: Books are not the only research tools available at the Forrest City Public Library. Forrest City residents Rob Lemke and Doris Jones were busy using the computers for research this morning.

Phillips County to the intersection with Hwy. 64 in Wynne. The only section that will not be four lanes is the bypass there in Forrest City, but the main section of Hwy. 1 through the city is four lanes already."

Vines said plans also call for bids to be opened in February and March for overlay projects on both Hwy. 70 through Forrest City and Hwy. 64 near Augusta.

"We are very aware that both of those sections of highway took a beating during the construction on I-40. The Hwy. 70 overlay was on our list of projects for last year and ended up having to be delayed due

to the issues with the federal highway bill, but now it's back on and should be bid in February," said Vines.

"That section through Forrest City from South Powell Street east to Crow Creek really took a lot of damage from the interstate traffic and from weather. It really is in need of repair and we realize that. Hwy. 64 over near Augusta also had considerable damage from the traffic diversion, and that project is scheduled to be bid in March," said Vines.

According to a story in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, the

low bid for the White River bridge project was \$77,569,482.80 from Johnson Bros. Corp., a Southland Co., based in Roanoke, Texas. The second lowest bid was \$116.7 million from Massman Construction Co., of Overland Park, Kan., the company replacing the Broadway Bridge in Little Rock. Bids of \$122.5 million by Flatiron Construction Inc., of Broomfield, Colo., and \$198.7 million from Conti Enterprises Inc., of Edison, N.J., were also submitted. The bid letting also included the replacement of two bridges over the Cache River.

Supreme Court ruling could affect 50 Arkansas inmates

LITTLE ROCK (AP) — A U.S. Supreme Court ruling issued Monday will allow more than 50 Arkansas inmates serving life sentences without parole for murders they committed as juveniles a chance to one day be free, but how that will happen is still in question.

The court issued its ruling on a case involving Henry Montgomery, imprisoned for more than half a century for the fatal shooting of a Louisiana sheriff's deputy in 1963 when he was 17. The Supreme Court ruling Monday said the ban should be applied retroactively, but it left the door open for how that would be done.

Jeff Rosenzweig, an attorney representing some of the inmates who have appealed their sentences, said the next step will be for the courts to resume hearing the petitions of those inmates.

The Arkansas Supreme Court ruled in June in a challenge by inmate Ulonzo Gordon that the sentencing ban should be applied retroactively.

Gordon's resentencing request was put on hold while Arkansas Attorney

General Leslie Rutledge filed a petition with the U.S. Supreme Court to review the state court's decision.

Judd Deere, a spokesman for Rutledge, said that petition is still pending at the U.S. Supreme Court.

Deere said it was too early to speculate what the ruling would mean for the Arkansas inmates.

Rosenzweig, who represented Gordon, said he believed the ruling Monday made the Attorney General's petition moot.

"This is obviously good news for us, but we were going to win anyway," he said. "We already won this as a matter of state law in the Gordon case."

The opinion from the U.S. Supreme Court left room for how states would apply the ruling, saying in some states it may be fiscally and procedurally prohibitive to hold new sentencing hearings for every inmate in the same situation, some of whom have been in prison for more than four decades.

"Previously the Arkansas Supreme Court held there would be resentencing proceedings for all these people," Rosenzweig said.