



Coal Country Times

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Gillespie school district holds staff appreciation breakfast

By: RUTH GILL

Coal Country Times Reporter

The Gillespie School District number 7 held its annual Staff Appreciation Breakfast on May 27 in the Gillespie High School Cafeteria.

Shane Owsley, school superintendent, welcomed all of the staff. He took the opportunity to reflect on the “remarkable achievements” of the 2024-25 school year. Owsley mentioned everyone contributed making this, “an exceptional year for our students and for our district.”

This year, there was history in the making when Chaz Oberkfell became the Districts’ first ever Cross Country State Champion.

Another achievement was the Lady Miner’s Softball Team claiming the South Central Conference championship and regional title.

Both the middle school and high school Scholar Bowl teams had great achievements as well. The Middle School Team won the Macoupin County title and the High School team won 30-plus matches en route to a regional title.

Owsley also mentioned the Olympiad teams performed very well this year and won some awards.

The GHS girls’ basketball team had another 20-win season and won the South Central Conference.

In track and field, there were multiple school records broken this year and state medals were won.

Owsley recognized the FFA program for its continued tradition of excellence with numerous contest victories throughout the year. He said “these successes showcased not only the agricultural knowledge and skills of our students, but also their leadership abilities and work ethic, all qualities that will serve them well throughout their lives.”

Another exciting achievement this year came when Ben Gil Elementary School earned the prestigious Exemplary Rating from the state. This recognition reflects the elementary school staff, the young students and the supportive partnership of their families to make the school excellent.

A BenGil elementary teacher, Marcia Johns, was recog-



Kathy Edwards and Shelia Katich

nized for her achievement of perfect attendance this year. “This level of dedication and consistency sets a powerful example for our students and makes a tangible difference in their educational experience,” said Owsley.

Four staff members were then recognized for retiring and will start new chapters in their lives. Lorraine Strutter, who is a dedicated teacher, has committed an “incredible” 32 years of service at the BenGil elementary school. Owsley said, “For more than three decades, she has touched countless lives in the classroom and helped shape the future of our community.”

The next retiree was Jerry Balzaine, who had served as a custodian for 31 years at Ben-Gil. Owsley said, “Jerry was part of a great group of custodians that made it a mission to maintain the schools to create an excellent learning environments for our students.”

Kathy Edwards, who served

as the district secretary for 12 years, has also retired. Owsley said, “Kathy was a great coworker and friend. She has a welcoming voice that is required to deal with people at six o’clock in the morning.”

The final staff member who retired was Shelia Katich. Katich has provided 11 years of service as a paraprofessional to the district. Owsley said, “Shelia’s time has been spent directly supporting our students by providing guidance and assistance that has helped countless students to succeed.”

“Together, these four dedicated staff members represent a combined 86 years of service to our school district,” said Owsley. “That is 86 years of commitment, care, and unwavering dedication to our students and community.”

As the school year came to a close, Owsley wanted to thank everyone for their dedication, professionalism, and commitment to the students. He said, “Everyone in the room that included teachers, administrators, custodial staff, food service workers, secretaries, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, nurses, counselors, and all support staff, play a vital role in creating the exceptional educational environment for our students.

“The achievements that were celebrated today were not accomplishments by individuals working alone, but instead a collaborative efforts of our entire staff working together toward a common goal.”



Best of Show older than 1985-1968 was a Chevy C20 Camper Special. Photos by Ruth Gill, Coal Country Times Reporter. More photos on page 4B

Third annual car show at Benld Italian American Days

By: RUTH GILL

Coal Country Times Reporter

In addition to celebrating its 71st Benld Italian-American Days, the Benld Italian-American Club hosted a third annual car show as part of the festivities.

The park was shining with vintage chrome and serious horsepower Memorial Day weekend. There were over 65 vehicles from different years from classic cruisers to bold

muscle cars.

Some of the vehicles on display were different models and makes of cars and trucks ranging from Mustangs, Chevrolet, and Ford. There was even a Benld Fire Truck and a motorcycle. A lot of work went into the restoration, detailing, and craftsmanship of these beauties.

Several awards were given. The Italian Club Award went to the 1964 Cadillac Ed Dorado. The Mayor’s Choice went to

the 1968 Camaro RS/SS. The 1968 Chevy C20 Camper Special received the Best of Show for vehicles older than 1985. The 2015 Mustang 50 yr limited Edition received the Best of Show for vehicles 1986 to Present.

The Benld Italian-American Days would like to recognize and thank Kravanya Funeral Homes for sponsoring the commemorative tees and dash plaques.



Best of Show years 1986 to Present was a 2015 Mustang 50 yr limited Edition.

Staunton school board receives contribution for grant

By: JACKSON WILSON

Coal Country Times Reporter

During the CUSD No. 6 May meeting, superintendent Brett Allen reported that the Staunton school district had received a \$3,624 contribution for a work-based learning grant that the Education for Employment CTE Regional Delivery System had recently applied for.

The goal of this grant is to provide students with access to WBL resources and improve on experiences for future opportunities and related activities.

As an additional part of the superintendent newsletter, Allen mentioned that the district had been issued a bid package for the construction of a new bus lane, which will be laid in front of the elementary/junior high school building over the summer. The board agreed to hold a special meeting June 9 to officially approve a contractor for the project.

Next, educational service administrator Steve Moore provided an update on multiple items he had been pursuing, including other grant developments, a ‘bike to school’ quiz meant to improve elementary revenue and the annual verification process for the Operating Expense Per Pupil and Per Capita Tuition Charge organizations. He additionally reported that he planned to apply for a previously discussed COPS grant once the school renovation projects were completed.

Other business

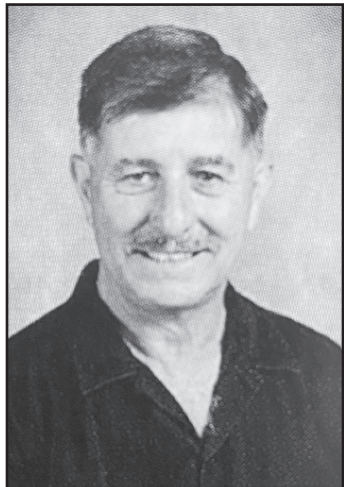
In other business, two representatives from FGM Architects provided the monthly building update and declared that the district was under budget following the first bidding phase. Thus, they encouraged approval of contractors for site work from steel to concrete.

School architect Kevin Meyer reported that the construction

management firm was set to take lead on the high school renovation and additions with site work beginning this month. The board approved the early package contractor award recommendations for phase one of the project.

The board also approved two Dodge Caravan minivans as surplus, the Consolidated District Plan for the 2026 fiscal year, a Title Grant waiver for the high school, the 2025-26 handbooks, renewal of the district’s property/casualty/liability insurance with the Prairie State Insurance Cooperative.

Lastly, the board accepted resignations of Josh Clark as an elementary teacher and Sarah Schulte as a junior high student council sponsor, then hired Sara Munro as an elementary/junior high social worker, Ashley Heyen as a full-time custodian and Brody Zumwalt as a summer custodian.



Jerry Balzaine



Lorraine Strutter

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GILLESPIE POLICE REPORT

Sunday, May 18, 2025

An Officer was dispatched to the 300 block of Park Ave reference dog at large. Nathan S. Thornhill, 38, of Gillespie was issued a citation for dog at large.

An Officer was dispatched to the 800 block of Harding Ave in East Gillespie reference a domestic dispute.

An Officer was dispatched to the 500 block of Henry Street reference criminal damage to property.

An Officer was dispatched to the 600 block of Charles Street reference criminal damage to property and criminal trespass to property.

An Officer was dispatched to the 900 block of North Adams Street reference a 911 call.

An Officer was dispatched to the 100 block of South 2nd Street in Benld reference a suspicious noise.

An Officer spoke with a male at Gillespie Police Department reference a child custody issue.

An Officer was dispatched to the 400 block of South Macoupin Street reference a suspicious person.

An Officer was dispatched to the 300 block of Park Ave reference neighborhood trouble.

An Officer was dispatched to the 700 block of North 6th Street in Benld reference a medical assist.

An Officer initiated a traffic stop at Central Ave and Main Street in Benld. Ricky M. Starr, 45, of Gillespie was arrested for driving on suspended driver's license and speeding.

An Officer was dispatched to North Hard Road and East Walnut Street in Benld reference a domestic dispute.

An Officer was dispatched to the 600 block of Henrietta Street reference a medical assist.

An Officer was dispatched to Madison Street and Wilson Street reference a noise complaint.

An Officer was dispatched to the 200 block of North Illinois Street in Benld reference noise complaint.

Monday, May 19, 2025

An Officer was dispatched to the 500 block of Henry Street reference a security check.

An Officer was dispatched to the 100 block of East Dorsey in Benld reference a theft.

An Officer was dispatched to Gillespie Police Department to speak with a female reference criminal trespass in the 700 block of Rose Street in Benld.

An Officer was dispatched to the 500 block of West Baker reference an animal complaint.

An Officer was dispatched to 5th Street and Eiler Street in Benld reference reckless driving.

An Officer was dispatched to Mt. Clare Drive in Mt. Clare reference a medical assist.

An Officer was dispatched to the 200 block of West Central Ave in Benld reference a noise complaint.

An Officer was dispatched to the 800 block of Madison Street reference a wellbeing check.

An Officer was dispatched to the 300 block of Berry Street in Mt. Clare reference a wellbeing

check.

An Officer was dispatched to the 700 block of Plum Street reference a domestic dispute.

Tuesday, May 20, 2025

An Officer was dispatched to St. Francis Hospital in Litchfield reference a criminal sexual abuse report.

An Officer was dispatched to the 700 block of East Chestnut Street reference a suspicious person.

An Officer was dispatched to Big Brick Park reference an animal complaint.

An Officer initiated a traffic stop at Broadway Street and LJ Ave. Thomas P. McAfee, 23, of St. Louis Missouri was issued a citation for speeding.

An Officer initiated a traffic stop at Broadway Street and LJ Ave. Christian L. Graves, 22, of Benld was issued a citation for speeding.

An Officer was dispatched to the 300 block of East Oak Street reference a wellbeing check.

An Officer was dispatched to the 300 block of Dorsey Road in Mt. Clare reference a wellbeing check.

An Officer was dispatched to the 200 block of North Illinois Street in Benld reference theft.

An Officer was dispatched to the 200 block of East Easton Street reference a suspicious person.

An Officer was dispatched to the 300 block of South 2nd Street in Benld reference a suspicious person.

Wednesday, May 21, 2025

An Officer was dispatched to the 200 block of South 6th Street in Benld reference the recovery of a stolen vehicle.

An Officer was dispatched to the 200 block of Montgomery Street reference criminal trespass to property and criminal trespass to vehicle.

Mary Kay Hughes, 73, Gillespie was arrested on a warrant out of Macoupin County for failure to appear for criminal trespass to land.

An Officer was dispatched to the 600 block of Charles Street reference battery and juvenile issues.

An Officer was dispatched to the 400 block of West Easton Street reference a suspicious person.

An Officer was dispatched to the 300 block of North 8th Street in Benld reference illegal burning.

An Officer was dispatched to the 400 block of Springfield Road in East Gillespie reference a domestic dispute.

An Officer was dispatched to South Hard Road in Benld reference a motorist assist.

An Officer was dispatched to the 500 block of Green Street reference a civil standby.

An Officer was dispatched to West Chestnut Street and Shelby Street reference unwanted solicitors.

An Officer was dispatched to the 300 block of Park Ave reference a civil standby.

An Officer was dispatched to the 100 block of Maple Street reference a civil issue.

An Officer was dispatched to Elm Street and Fulton Street reference an animal complaint.

An Officer was dispatched to the 900 block of Alton Street in Mt. Clare reference a 911 call.

An Officer was dispatched to the 700 block of Gillespie Street reference a civil standby.

An Officer was dispatched to the 300 block of North 8th Street in Benld reference an animal complaint.

An Officer was dispatched to

the 300 block of East Central Ave reference a juvenile issue.

Thursday, May 22, 2025

An Officer was dispatched to the 200 block of North 7th Street in Benld reference harassment through electronic communications.

An Officer initiated a traffic stop at Illinois Street and Walnut Street in Benld. Ashleigh K. Bethel, 41, of Benld was arrested for driving while license was suspended.

An Officer was dispatched to the 500 block of East Spruce Street reference child abuse.

An Officer was dispatched to the 200 block of North Lincoln Ave in Eagarville reference a domestic dispute. Richard M. Kroll, 55, of Eagarville was arrested on a Macoupin County warrant for failure to appear on a domestic battery.

An Officer was dispatched to Carney Drive at Gillespie Lake reference criminal damage to property.

An Officer spoke with a male at Gillespie Police Department reference a civil issue in the 200 block of West Central Ave in Benld.

An Officer was dispatched to Gillespie Lake reference juvenile issues.

An Officer was dispatched to the 100 block of South Lincoln Ave in Eagarville reference a civil issue.

Friday, May 23, 2025

An Officer was dispatched to a business in the 500 block of East Central Ave in Benld reference an alarm sounding.

The School Resource Officer was contacted by a parent at the Gillespie Middle School reference a battery that took place at the school.

An Officer initiated a traffic stop at Burton Street and Green Street. Andrea L. Kissell, 36, of Mt. Clare was arrested on a Macoupin County warrant for failure to appear for reckless driving.

An Officer was dispatched to the 800 block of Broadway Street reference a suspicious vehicle.

An Officer spoke with a female at Gillespie Police Department reference a criminal trespass warning in the 300 block of South Illinois Street in Benld.

An Officer was dispatched to Southern Street and Staunton Road reference a reckless driver.

An Officer was dispatched to the 600 block of Burton Street reference an animal complaint.

Saturday, May 24, 2025

An Officer was dispatched to the 900 block of Abba Street reference a 911 call.

An Officer was dispatched to the 400 block of North 4th Street in Benld reference a civil issue.

An Officer was dispatched to Gillespie Police Department to speak with a female reference a stolen vehicle in the 500 block of Henry Street.

An Officer was dispatched to

the 400 block of Berry Street in Mt. Clare reference suspicious circumstance.

An Officer was dispatched to the 900 block of West Broadway Street reference a suspicious vehicle.

An Officer was requesting dispatch to make contact with a parent at Benld Italian American Days reference juvenile issues.

An Officer was dispatched to Locust Street in Benld reference criminal damage to property.

An Officer was dispatched to the 500 block of South Hard Road in Benld reference a 911 call.

Sunday, May 25, 2025

An Officer was dispatched to Locust Street and 4th Street in Benld reference an aggravated assault. Justin M. Mason, 21, of Benld was arrested for aggravated assault.

David L. Clark, 32, of Gillespie was arrested on a Macoupin County warrant for failure to appear on driving while under the influence of alcohol.

An Officer was dispatched to the 300 block of West Walnut Street reference criminal trespass to property.

An Officer was dispatched to the 200 block of West Oak Street in Benld reference juvenile issues.

An Officer spoke with a male at Gillespie Police Department reference a civil issue in the 200 block of North Illinois Street in Benld.

An Officer was dispatched to Plum Street and Kelly Street reference a suspicious vehicle.

An Officer was dispatched to the 200 block of West Oak Street reference a suspicious vehicle.

An Officer was dispatched to the 300 block of Park Ave reference a civil standby.

An Officer was dispatched to the 200 block of East Walnut Street in Benld reference a 911 call.

An Officer was dispatched to the 200 block of Charles Street reference a suspicious vehicle.

Monday, May 26, 2025

An Officer was dispatched to the 700 block of Rose Street in Benld reference theft and criminal trespass to property.

An Officer was dispatched to the 200 block of South 2nd Street in Benld reference criminal trespass to property.

An Officer was dispatched to Benld Bike Trail at Park Street and Trolley reference juvenile issues.

An Officer was dispatched to Big Brick Park at Gillespie Street and Green Street reference juvenile issues.

An Officer was dispatched to the 700 block of Abba Street reference a wellbeing check.

An Officer was dispatched to North Locust Street in Benld reference unwanted solicitors.

All subjects are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

MISC

THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS SOUTHWESTERN ILLINOIS has support meetings for mental illness via Zoom every Thursday 7-8:30 PM. Contact Pat Rudloff, silverlining6@charter.net, to receive the Zoom link or the address for an in-person meeting.

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