

Boy dies, 3 injured after car, train hit

Dad, 1 child cut from wreckage

SPENCER WILLEMS
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

A young boy died and three other people were injured after the boy's father drove into the path of a train early Thursday near Sweet Home, according to reports.

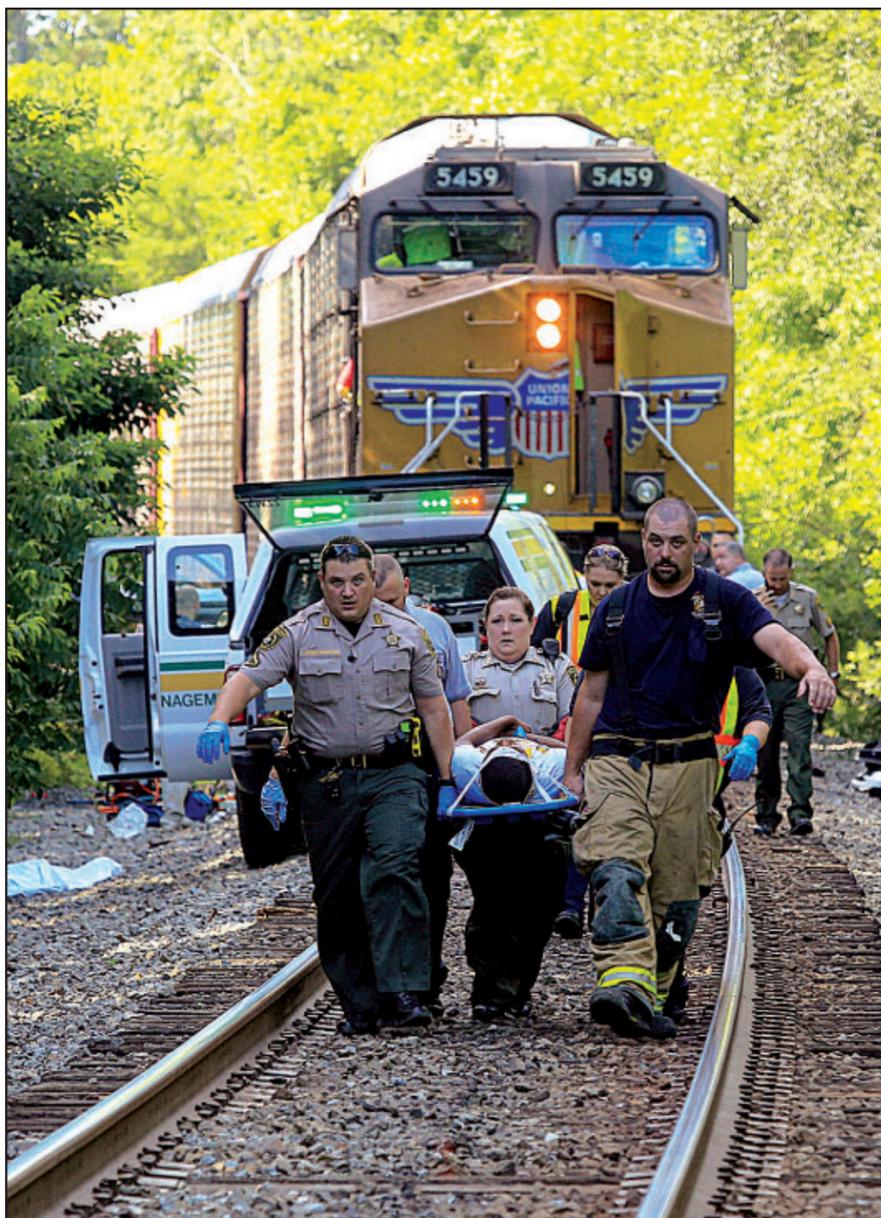
Emergency responders drove to the Harper Road railroad crossing at Arkansas 365 in Sweet Home shortly after 8:10 a.m. after receiving a report of the crash.

When they arrived, they found a stopped train and, several hundred yards down from the crossing, a Chrysler 300 crumpled against the lead engine, according to sheriff's officials.

The car, driven by Corey May, 38, of Sweet Home, was driving west through the crossing when it was struck by the locomotive on the driver side and pushed down the tracks.

May's 9-year-old son, Floyd, who was riding in the right side of the back-seat, was pronounced dead at the scene.

May's 14-year-old son, who was riding in the front passenger seat, was waiting inside the train when de-



Emergency personnel carry one of three people injured in a car-train accident to a waiting ambulance Thursday morning near Sweet Home. One person died in the accident, Pulaski County sheriff's office spokesman Lt. Carl Minden said.

Bills adopted in session get Beebe's name

He signs into law measures on insurance, jails, lottery

SEAN BEHEREC
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Gov. Mike Beebe on Thursday signed into law the handful of bills approved during this week's special legislative session, aimed at boosting funding for state school employee health insurance and reducing jail crowding.

The Legislature also passed, and Beebe signed, a measure that puts a moratorium on the Arkansas Lottery Commission offering electronic monitor games until mid-March.

Beebe spokesman Stacey Hall said the signing ceremony was closed to news media, and news reporters and photographers were not allowed to watch it.

Afterward, Beebe said the media shouldn't have been excluded because the ceremony "was not a closed deal."

Beebe said Sen. Jimmy Hickey, R-Texarkana, and Rep. Harold Copenhaver, D-Jonesboro, and a few of their relatives attended.

Hickey had sponsored

the lottery legislation. Copenhaver guided the health insurance bills through the House.

Future legislation on insurance funding and jail crowding may be necessary.

The governor told reporters earlier in the week that it was "anybody's guess" whether the changes to the school employees' insurance plan would be enough to stabilize the program.

"It's probably going to be an ongoing issue that they are going to have to look at going forward as you would with any system that potentially is dynamic," Beebe said.

The governor made similar comments about the prison-crowding measure.

"It is not the total fix because they need more than 600 beds, or the prison population needs to stabilize at least the influx based upon changes in the parole laws," he said.

Two of the bills signed by the governor will save the school employees' insurance plans about \$9 million a year, according to supporters of the measures.

Acts 2 and 3 of the Second Extraordinary Session of 2014 make about 4,000 part-time public school em-

See **BILLS**, Page 5B



Beebe

Lottery's chief gets 2% bonus

Merit pay comes to \$2,832

MICHAEL R. WICKLINE
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

The director of the Arkansas Scholarship Lottery, Bishop Woosley, has received a 2 percent merit bonus.

Woosley was paid a merit bonus of \$2,832.06 last Friday based on 2 percent of his base salary of \$141,603 a year, according to information released by the lottery this week in response to a public-records request from the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

While Woosley's annual compensation is \$165,000, \$141,603 is the maximum salary for a lottery director under state law and that's

considered to be his salary for the purpose of computing his merit bonuses, cost-of-living raises and retirement, according to Woosley.

The law allows the Legislature's Lottery Oversight Committee to give directors a special allowance on top of their base salary. Under state law, any pay above \$141,603 up to \$354,007 a year requires the committee's approval. The committee approved \$165,000 a year for Woosley's salary and allowance after his Feb. 12, 2012, promotion from chief legal counsel.

The Lottery Commission See **LOTTERY**, Page 6B

Thanks for the good work



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/MELISSA SUE GERRITS

Joanie Smith, assistant director of Maumelle's Public Works Department, serves lunch to parks and recreation staff members Dorwood Johnston (left) and Chris Clement during a Fourth of July picnic held a day early Thursday as a way to thank city workers for the behind-the-scenes work they do.

State says voter-ID judge skipped step

Initial view of law as OK said left out

JOHN LYNCH
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Pulaski County Circuit Judge Tim Fox did not follow court-mandated guidelines when he ruled that the state's new voter identification law was unconstitutional, state lawyers argue in an appeal of his decision to the Arkansas Supreme Court.

The legal brief on behalf of Secretary of State Mark Martin and the state Board of Election Commissioners was filed Thursday.

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit in question will have an opportunity to respond, with the state getting the final word in a rebuttal to that response before the high court makes its decision on the legality of the law, which requires voters to show election officials a government-approved photographic ID before their ballot can be counted.

In May, Fox ruled that the identification law was illegal on two grounds. For one thing, it added a new

requirement to vote beyond what the state constitution specifically describes, the judge said.

And lawmakers, who had to twice approve the measure to overcome a gubernatorial veto, also did not pass it with the two-thirds majority required to amend the constitution, Fox said.

The election officials in their appeal argue that Fox did not apply the correct standard to evaluate the identification law, Act 595 of 2013, when he deemed it unconstitutional. The officials say Fox is required by court precedent, which dates back at least to 1938, to begin his analysis of the law with the presumption that it is in accord with the constitution.

The doctrine requires that he must make every reasonable effort he can toward interpreting the law as constitutional before he can rule that the law is not legal, according to the election officials' brief, written by their counsel, Assistant Attorneys

See **VOTER ID**, Page 5B

Police look for ties to Loan Ranger Bandit

AZIZA MUSA
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Local and federal authorities are looking for ties between a man arrested Tuesday in connection with three holdups in Benton and bank robberies in at least three other states.

Arkansas State Police ar-

rested Richard Swicegood, 37, late Tuesday in connection with a bank robbery earlier that day in Benton. Authorities have linked the Waxahachie, Texas, man to two other robberies of the same Summit Bank branch at 1114 Arkansas 35 North in 2009 and 2011.

FBI agents haven't confirmed whether they suspect Swicegood is the "Loan Ranger Bandit" — a serial bank robber who is wanted for a string of bank robberies in Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi and Kentucky. But investigators from the Police Department in Tyler, Texas,

where the bandit purportedly struck twice, said Thursday that they think Swicegood is the bandit.

"I about jumped for joy," Tyler Police Department Major Crimes Detective Andy Erbaugh said about Swicegood's arrest. "I had looked See **ARREST**, Page 10B

100-year-old WWII veteran honored for his contribution to Arkansas

NIKKI WENTLING
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

ENGLAND — Surrounded by family and friends in the sunroom of Cavalier Health Care on Thursday, 100-year-old World War II veteran W.R. Roberts accepted a Capitol Citation, an award given to Arkansans who make a significant contribution to the state.

After receiving the framed citation, signed by Secretary of State Mark Martin, as well as a certificate of recognition from the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs, Roberts offered a summation of his experience in the Pacific theater.

"I helped a little bit, and I got home safe and sound," he said. "We did go swimming sometimes, but the water was cold."

Roberts has three chil-

dren, seven grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren, many of whom were present at the Thursday morning ceremony in England. They swapped stories, snacked on sandwiches and punch, and took turns visiting with Roberts, who sat in a wheelchair near the front of the room, slowly flipping through a yearbook full of pictures from his time overseas.

"I usually don't want to think about things we did," Roberts said. "But every once in a while, I'll get that book out and look through it."

Two years after the United States declared war on Japan, Roberts signed up for the Navy to avoid being drafted by the Army. At the time, he was a married 30-year-old farmhand from England.

"The Army was about to

get me," he said Thursday, prompting laughs from his family.

Roberts served from 1943 to 1945 and was a fireman in the 82nd U.S. Naval Construction Battalion. Members of the battalion were nicknamed "Seabees," derived from the unit's initials, C.B. The Seabees cut through the jungle and constructed airstrips, bridges, roads, warehouses and other structures on Pacific islands, often operating under fire, according to the Naval History and Heritage Command.

Dan Roberts, W.R. Roberts' 67-year-old son, is also a military veteran. He was drafted by the Army in 1966 and spent two years at Fort Hood in Texas before being honorably discharged as a sergeant.

See **VETERAN**, Page 5B



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/RICK MCFARLAND

W.R. Roberts, 100, shows photos of his battalion taken during World War II to his grandson H.L. Moody of Little Rock during a ceremony Thursday at Cavalier Health Care in England.

Fayetteville hospital to cut 27 jobs, cites revenue drop

TERESA MOSS
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Washington Regional Medical Center in Fayetteville is among the latest of several Arkansas hospitals to announce layoffs. Officials say a drop in revenue stemming from health care changes and reimbursement reductions is to blame.

The Fayetteville hospital plans to cut 27 positions, according to officials. Some employees will be reassigned, but 15-20 will lose their jobs.

Positions at all levels were affected by the reduction, said Terry Fox, hospital spokesman. She said clinical staff members, such as nurses, have the opportunity for reassignment to other positions at the medical center.

An \$8.75 million drop in revenue over the past two years has forced the hospital to make changes to ensure its future, Fox said. She said Washington Regional's annual operating budget is \$260 million.

Reimbursement reductions from Medicare, Medicaid and commercial insurance have caused the revenue drop, Fox said.

Reductions in Medicare reimbursements in the past few years account for 30 percent of the revenue decrease, Fox said. She said a drop in commercial insurance coverage accounts for another 30 percent. Cuts from the Budget Control Act of 2011 make up another 25 percent and Medicaid 15 percent.

On June 26, CHI St. Vincent announced that it was cutting 157 positions. The health care system operates hospitals in Little Rock, Hot Springs, Sherwood and Morrilton.

Mercy announced last month that it was cutting 200 to 300 positions in its health care system that includes hospitals and clinics in Arkansas and six other states.

Reimbursement reductions from the government along with commercial payers were also mentioned among the reasons for the layoffs by Mercy, according to a news release from the system.

Paul Cunningham, Arkansas Hospital Association executive vice president, said hospitals across the state and nation are facing tough times financially.

"It all goes back to a big reduction in Medicare payments," Cunningham said. "It is easy to say that is all associated with the Affordable Care Act, but that is not the case."

About half of reimbursement reductions come from the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that was passed in 2010, Cunningham said. He said the other reductions stem from other acts passed in Congress since 2010, including the Middle Class Tax Relief Act, the Taxpayer Relief Act and the Budget Control Act.

Cunningham said hospitals planned for Medicaid reductions from the Affordable Care Act. He said hospitals hoped to make up for the drop in revenue with more patients insured.

"What hospitals did not plan for were the other cuts such as

the Budget Control Act," Cunningham said.

The association projected that Arkansas hospitals will see \$2.5 billion in reductions between 2013 and 2022, Cunningham said.

He said there is still a hope that an increase in the number of insured patients under the Affordable Care Act will help hospitals make up for reductions.

Fox said Washington Regional's decision to reduce staff took into account some of the "positive aspects" of the Affordable Care Act.

"Obviously the implementation [of the Affordable Care Act] has not gone as planned and has been slower than expected," Fox said.

Benefits from the Affordable Care Act, such as an increase in revenue because more people are insured, have not offset reimbursement cuts that Washington Regional has seen in recent years, Fox said.

University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Medical Center officials said earlier this year that the hospital could face layoffs because of a projected \$29 million deficit in its \$1.3 billion budget for fiscal 2014. Fiscal 2014 ended Monday.

Roxane Townsend, medical center chief executive officer, previously stated that the hospital absorbed \$63.7 million in uncompensated costs last year. Nearly \$17 million was bad debt, and the other \$46.7 million was charity care.

The hospital receives some

reimbursement for charity care through Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital payments, Townsend said.

Townsend said Disproportionate Share Hospital payments cover nearly half of the cost of the hospital's charity care. That leaves the hospital paying about \$23 million on top of the \$17 million from bad debt.

The federal government plans to roll back Disproportionate Share Hospital payments as hospitals start to receive more money under the Affordable Care Act, Townsend said.

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Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/MELISSA SUE GERRITS

Library assistant Theresa Ebinger finishes preparations Thursday on a new exhibit in North Little Rock's Argenta Library. The exhibit, "The Sum of Many Parts: Quiltmakers in Contemporary America," highlights quilting styles and techniques. It opens Saturday and runs until Aug. 16.

NLR library sets quilt exhibit

Patchwork display to run until Aug. 16 at Argenta Branch

JAKE SANDLIN
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

A collection of quilts crafted by contemporary artists from throughout the United States will open Saturday at the Argenta Branch of the William F. Laman Public Library in North Little Rock's downtown, the first museum-quality exhibition at the new library.

The exhibition, "The Sum of Many Parts: Quiltmakers in Contemporary America," will be displayed at the Argenta Branch, 420 Main St., until Aug. 16. The exhibition is free and open to the public during library hours, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Saturday.

A craft dating to pre-colonial times, quilting uses techniques of "piecing, patching and appliqueing" fabrics to create patterned quilts, which originally were stitched together from whatever materials were handy for the practical use as a bed cover to keep warm. In later times, quilting evolved into American folk art.

"It really is a lost art now," said Dan Noble, public relations manager for the William F. Laman Library System. "It's like seeing a beautiful painting," he added. "This is what these really are, with the fabric being the canvas."

The exhibition, a traveling display by ExhibitsUSA, a national program of Mid-America Arts Alliance, is part of a larger exhibition that toured China in 2012-2013, according to an exhibition media packet.

The exhibition, at a cost of \$2,000 to the Laman Library System, highlights a range of quilting styles, including different sizes and shapes.

"The attention to detail in these is amazing," Noble said. "I think artists, or painters, will be coming in here looking at these. This is art, no doubt about it. Art that can keep you warm, too."

Among the 14 quilts in the North Little Rock display is one from Louisiana Randolph, a member of a famed community quilting group in Gee's Bend, Ala. Quilting in Gee's Bend, a small, black community on the Alabama River southeast of Selma, Ala., began receiving national attention during the latter part of the last century.

Gee's Bend quilts have since been part of national modern art tours nationally. Images of Gee's Bend quilts have even been depicted on postage stamps issued by the U.S. Postal Service.

The Argenta Branch

opened March 31 in the former downtown post office building that the Postal Service closed in June 2012. The 83-year-old building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Laman Library, with a loan from the city that's been repaid, bought the building and renovated it to create the \$3.5 million Argenta Branch, including a glassed-in, L-shaped gallery area to bring small exhibits to downtown. The former Argenta branch of the library, 506 Main St., closed in January.

The Argenta Branch has already displayed photographic exhibits featuring the old post office's history and part of an exhibition marking the 50th anniversary of The Beatles first coming to the United States, but the quilting exhibit is the first national traveling exhibit to be featured. Noble said the library branch will focus on smaller exhibits than those featured at the main library, located at 2801 Orange St. in North Little Rock.

The Argenta Branch gallery has about 1,000 square feet of exhibit room, Noble said, while the main library's exhibition gallery is more than 1,300 square feet.

Football player killed in crash

State police investigate if racing caused 2-car wreck in LR

SCOTT CARROLL
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

A former football player at the University of Central Arkansas and Ouachita Baptist University was killed in a two-vehicle crash early Thursday morning in Little Rock.

Jaalen Watkins, 21, was a passenger in a 2011 Dodge Charger traveling eastbound on Interstate 630 near State Street about 2:08 a.m. when it struck a 2013 Dodge Charger traveling in the same direction. Both cars were being driven at a high rate of speed, Arkansas State Police reported.

The cars exited the road and overturned, according to

the report. Watkins, a running back at UCA in 2012 and OBU in 2013, was ejected and killed.

The driver of the 2011 Dodge Charger, 20-year-old Natalia Matthews, was also ejected. She and a second passenger in the car, 21-year-old David Simmons, were taken to UAMS Medical Center for treatment. Their condition was unknown late Thursday.

Three occupants of the 2013 Dodge Charger were not injured.

Conditions were clear and dry when the crash occurred, according to state police.

State police spokesman Bill Sadler said the agency is investigating whether the

vehicles were racing.

"Whatever was going on between these two vehicles for whatever reason is being investigated, whether one was fleeing from the other or whether it was competitive racing," he said.

Investigators were interviewing witnesses and those involved in the crash. Toxicology tests for those involved in the crash were also being conducted, according to Sadler.

No charges had been filed in the crash late Thursday.

Watkins was named to the Democrat-Gazette All-Metro Team in 2011 at Central Arkansas Christian after leading Pulaski County in rushing yards as a high school senior.

Firms win \$2.4 million in federal work

ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced \$2.4 million in contracts with Arkansas companies Thursday.

VEDC Inc., a construction company based in North Little Rock, was awarded two contracts from the Central Arkansas Veterans Health Care System for projects at the Eugene J. Towbin Healthcare Center, 2200 Fort Roots Drive. The company received a contract for \$1.64 million to renovate the laundry facility and a contract for \$551,665 to improve

operating rooms.

Pafford Medical Services Inc. in Hope received a \$138,870 contract from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers of Mississippi for advanced life support services, equipment and the services of two licensed paramedics.

Lastly, Price Resource Management LLC, based in

Heber Springs, won a \$95,625 contract from the Corps of Engineers in Little Rock to provide buoy maintenance at the Greers Ferry Project Office.

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