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WestArk to hold fourth annual special needs prom

By **TY THOMPSON**
Special to the Press Argus

WestArk Church of Christ will hold its fourth Night to Shine Event on Feb. 7. This event provides people with special needs to have their own prom experience.

WestArk in Fort Smith began the Night to Shine event in 2017. "Imagine a prom like event," said Pastor Chris Benjamin. "Where people with special needs, ages 14 and up, get to be the kings and queens of the prom. They are the royal guests, and we make it all about them."

The guests to the prom get to enjoy a dance, food, photo ops, karaoke, and much more. They are also treated by volunteers that will do their hair and makeup, shine their shoes, and even a limousine that will pull them up to a red car-

pet that leads into the prom. When they make their way down the red carpet they are met with cheers and claps all the way inside.

The event may be in Fort Smith, but Benjamin is proud to share it with the rest of the River Valley, and receives help from outside of the city. "We've always had help from people in Crawford County, and we turn to people in Law Enforcement to ask if they help out. It's nice to have them show up in their uniform." They typically have Law Enforcement and Military crown the men attendees as the kings of the prom, but one year Alma Mayor Jerry Martin was given the opportunity to crown them.

"I do plan on attending again this year and hope to have some other Mayors with me," Martin

said. "This is an event that is hard to describe. You just have to see it to fully understand the impact that it has, Not only for the Queens and Kings but for the caregivers as well. Truly amazing how something this simple can have such a big impact."

Former NFL quarterback Tim Tebow started Night to Shine six years ago to give people with special needs the prom night experience. Since then, the event has grown to be held in over 650 churches around the world.

"We always expect that it's going to grow every year," Benjamin said. One of the new things that they are updating is their photo station. There will be one station for formal photos and another for fun photos. Benjamin decided that they needed to bring characters

into the photos. Similar to photos at amusement parks, he hopes that he can incorporate well known princesses, superheroes, and any other character they can get.

The event is always looking for volunteers. There are 17 teams that someone can serve in. Whether it be doing make-up, hair, preparing food, or most importantly being a buddy. A buddy is someone that will be paired up with one of the kings or queens and will get to do whatever they get to do. All that is required of a buddy is a sign up and a short training video. There will be people present to take care of those with special needs, so being a buddy requires you to have fun with the guests.

More information about the event and how to volunteer can be found at fsnighntoshine.org.



photo submitted

Pictured is Patrick Poole, right, and Kevin Yates.



photo by BENNETT HORNE

Van Buren Planning Director Wally Bailey discusses the reasons for amendments to two ordinances pertaining to traffic flow in the city during the December city council meeting.

VB council trying to improve traffic flow

By **BENNETT HORNE**
Special to the Press Argus

Van Buren city officials are constantly looking at ways to alleviate traffic issues that tend to clog the city's roadways.

During the city council's December meeting two steps were taken that officials hope will pave the way for easier and safer mobility as new construction projects crop up around the city.

The council approved the amending of one current ordinance to reflect the addition of regulations concerning residential access to arterial and collector streets. The other step was to amend the current ordinance that deals with control of access to streets and highways, adding access regulations for residential subdivision sites.

The moves were the natural steps following a public hearing and a majority vote of the entire planning commission.

Van Buren Planning

Director Wally Bailey said the issue involving both ordinances is one of safety and traffic flow. The idea where future residential construction is concerned is for developers to develop lots in such a way that residents aren't forced to back out from their property into the main flow of traffic.

"The intent is when you have a driveway on a residential, duplex or multi-family lot the normal traffic patterns for those people living in those structures is to back out into the street," Bailey said following the meeting. "These ordinances have to do with designing those lots and subdivisions properly so that cars don't back into the higher volume streets such as the collector and arterial streets. When they do that it slows down the traffic and it also presents a traffic safety hazard for them as well as the ones traveling on those streets."

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Foliart to Lead Chamber Board in 2020



Special to the Press Argus

The Van Buren Chamber of Commerce is proud to announce it's 2020 Chair of the Board of Directors is Debbie Foliart. 2020 begins Foliart's sixth year serving the Chamber on the Board of Directors, through various chamber committees, and on the Executive Committee.

Debbie and her husband of 43 years, Alan, are owners of TDG Merchant Solutions LLC, a local merchant consulting company providing payment processing and point-of-sale solutions for retailers and the hospitality industry. The Foliarts, along with their grandson, Christian Westbrook, are also the owners of Chapters on

Main in Van Buren.

Throughout her career, Debbie has held marketing and advertising positions with Gannett Co., the Press Argus-Courier and established fundraising programs for schools and organizations. Her extensive experience working with the supplier and vendor community have paved the way for her understanding the needs of any size business or corporation.

Of the new task, Foliart says, "I have been involved with the Van Buren Chamber of Commerce in many ways over the past years, from member to board member to executive committee. In leading the Chamber this year I'm excited about the direction our Chamber is going in parallel with growth of our city of Van Buren. Our "For Van Buren" theme over the next year and implementation of new ideas, strategic planning & economic development that will come from our own people and businesses spending time behind the scenes will make a huge difference in how our community is seen in other areas of the region and the state."

She continues, "Working with our Mayor Joe Hurst and the other city officials and stakeholders is very important to the Chamber and we plan to be part of Van Buren moving forward in a strong way."

Julie Murray, President/

CEO of the Chamber notes, "Debbie is such an asset to the Chamber. I have learned a great deal working with her the past few months and I look forward to working with her as Chairperson this year. As a Chamber, we have big goals for 2020 and I think Debbie is the perfect person to help us achieve each one."

In addition to the Van Buren Chamber of Commerce, Debbie also serves the community through Kiwanis Club, Womens League of Van Buren, is a founding member of Van Buren Original, and is Chair of the Van Buren Advertising & Promotions Commission.

Two additional directors were elected to the board beginning in 2020 to fill vacant seats left by directors who had fulfilled their terms. Brian Burke, VP of Further Processing for Simmons and Dr. Terisa Riley, Chancellor of UAFS will begin their terms of service with the first board meeting in January.

The Van Buren Chamber of Commerce has proudly served the community for 65 years with a membership base of over 400 businesses, organizations, educational institutions and individuals throughout the River Valley. The Chamber's mission is to prepare, develop, and promote the city of Van Buren for economic growth.

One Blood Donation Can Save Up to Three Lives

January is National Blood Donor Month, Teresa Henson, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) Extension specialist - nutrition outreach coordinator, said. Arkansans can kick-off the new year by helping to save lives through donating blood.

"Former President Richard Nixon initiated National Blood Donor Month on December 31, 1969," she said. "Each January, the American Red Cross celebrates the occasion by recognizing the life-saving dedication of

blood donors."

Henson said the month of January was originally chosen for the awareness campaign to highlight the need for blood and platelet donations during the winter months. During this time, less blood is donated because of donor cancellations due to cold and inclement weather and sicknesses such as flu and

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Briefly

Bingo for Books. An engaging event designed for families. So if you are a big reader or a little one, you are welcome to participate. Free event. 2 p.m. Alma Public Library.

Rhythm and Rhymes for infants and toddlers. An interactive, fun and educational program to enjoy with your infant, toddler or preschool age child. Rhythm and Rhymes is a 20-30 minute block of story time full of books, songs, rhymes, and finger plays. Free event. 10:30 a.m. Mountainburg Public Library.

Story Time for toddlers and preschoolers. Join Ms. Lara and read stories, sing songs and do activities together. Today theme: Way Up High Story Time! Free event. 10 a.m. Cedarville Public Library.

Teen Time. Play games, craft, learn about others and more during the month of January. Free event. 3:30 p.m. Van Buren Public Library.

Weather



Mainly cloudy with a shower. Raining with highs in the 60s to 50s and lows in the 30s to 40s. Highs/Lows: Today 69/37; Thursday 52/37; Friday 52/44.