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INSIDE:

The Southeast District FFA Livestock Judging Contest was held at the Bourbon County Fairgrounds. See page 4.



INSIDE:

A special fishing hole is designated for city councilmen only. See Items from the Past on page 4.

SPORTS:

The Fort Scott High School Tiger baseball team advances to the Laroche Tournament championship game today. See page 9.

School officials talk bond projects, retirement, end of year events

BY JASON E. SILVERS

The Fort Scott Tribune

Topics ranging from spring school activities and projects to street projects, zoning and other issues were highlighted during a Community Connection Panel Luncheon Wednesday at the Empress Event Center.

Updates were provided by USD 235 Superintendent Vance Eden, USD 234 Superintendent Destry Brown, Fort Scott Community College Board of Trustees Chairman Bryan Holt, Fort Scott City Manager Brad Matkin and Bourbon County Commissioner David Beerbower.

The event, hosted by the Fort Scott Area Chamber of Commerce and moderated by Colleen Quick, chamber board chair, included introductions, updates from officials and questions from the public.

Chamber President and CEO Lindsay Madison said the chamber has hosted the panels for about a year “as a way to keep the community informed.” Representatives from the offices of U.S. Congressmen Derek Schmidt and Roger Marshall were also in attendance.

USD 235

Eden discussed a \$1.2 million bond issue which voters passed in March to fund improvements to district facilities, adding work to receive funding is underway.

“It takes time and board actions on the backside of the bond work before construction begins,” he said. “We don’t receive funding until mid-June.”

Eden said the hope is to accomplish fire alarm system improvements at the Uniontown Junior/Senior High School, and renovation of the main entrance at West Bourbon Elementary School to be ADA-accessible and more secure, prior to the start of the 2025-26 school year. Bond projects also include replacement of the district’s Pre-K facility.

“We’re currently working with architectural and engineering on plans for the preschool,” he said. “The biggest part of that, it takes a lot more hoops. We hope to start construction late in the fall or early winter.”

Eden said projects must receive approval from engineers and the fire marshal before construction can begin.

“We’re appreciative of the community support to make that a reality,” he said.

Eden said an approximately \$1 million project to remodel the district’s agriculture shop, which began in December, should be completed before next school year. Work is currently being done on the HVAC and electrical systems.

“We needed to do something to continue to have that program,” he said.

Eden also gave updates on spring athletics within the district, as well as state assessment tests, which began last week at different



Jason E. Silvers/Tribune photo

USD 234 Superintendent Destry Brown, second from left, updates attendees on happenings within the district during a Community Connection Panel Luncheon Wednesday at the Empress Event Center. Other officials who provided updates were, from left, USD 235 Superintendent Vance Eden, Fort Scott Community College Board of Trustees Chairman Bryan Holt, Fort Scott City Manager Brad Matkin, and Bourbon County Commissioner David Beerbower.

grade levels. He said there is also a focus on enrollment, and the district conducts an open enrollment “like all Kansas schools.”

“I’m happy to meet with people who are considering Uniontown,” he said.

USD 234

Brown updated attendees on a project to construct a new preschool center in a building located at 902 S. Horton St. The project is designed to expand the district’s preschool services.

Brown said the contractor recently completed demo inside the building, which included removal of asbestos.

“Now we’re starting to take bids for the sprinkler system to go in, as well as building back construction of classrooms,” he said,

adding the project should be completed by Jan. 1. “Hopefully, we’ll get moved in there.”

Students in the district have also been participating in state assessments, which Brown said is “kind of our state tournament for all of our learning.”

“It’s an important time for us, and important to have our kids ready to go and kids getting to school,” he said.

Brown said the district will have to make up one snow day due to cancellation last winter. He said a day of school will be added to the calendar April 21, which was initially a day off for students and staff.

“We won’t extend anything as far as having to go longer in May,” he said.

Brown also highlighted

several spring activities taking place. He said Thursday was a busy day for activities, with every sports team on the road and the band and choir programs at a state festival at Pittsburg State University. The Fort Scott High School baseball team is competing in the LaRoche Varsity Baseball Tournament, which concludes today.

Officials have also begun planning for next year’s budget, as well as summer school. Brown said summer school will “look a lot different than in past years” as the district has spent its allotment of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds provided by the federal government during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We will be scaling

back some of our summer school, which will be held at Eugene Ware,” he said.

Brown said work on the HVAC system at Winfield Scott School will be done this summer.

Prom at FSHS took place April 5 and graduation is set for May 10. Brown said those events were “spread out” so as not to occur on consecutive weeks.

Brown also announced he plans to retire following the 2025-26 school year. He was hired in 2022.

“I’ve told the board next year will be my last year and I’m going to retire,” he said. “Hopefully, I’ll really retire this time.”

SEE COMMUNITY CONNECTION ON PAGE 10

Fort Scott Public Library receives \$20,000 grant to create sensory area

BY MARTI WELLS-SMITH

Special to the Tribune

Big changes are coming to the Fort Scott Public Library, which recently received a \$20,000 grant from the American Library Association, in collaboration with the Association for Rural and Small Libraries, through its Round Three of Libraries Transforming Communities Program.

The announcement was made at the weekly Chamber Coffee, which was hosted at the library on Thursday.

Library Director Jennifer Gum-Fowler said Fort Scott’s library is one of 50 libraries chosen nationwide for the grant, with 300 libraries participating in the initiative that provides community engagement and accessibility resources to small and rural libraries, helping them to better serve

people with disabilities.

Gum-Fowler also announced the competitive award will be used to create a “Shushbooth, where special needs children and their families can have a quiet place to explore different approaches to engage with each other. This will include sensory items and toys that may be used or borrowed to help with the process.

“This grant is an incredible opportunity for the Fort Scott Public Library to better engage with the community and we’re excited to be one of the few libraries in the nation to receive the enhanced grant amount,” Gum-Fowler said. “With the grant, we can provide a safe space for our younger patrons to engage with the library, even those with sensory issues. It will help us improve our services to ensure that all families feel welcome and safe in our space.”

A press release states

as part of the grant, local library staff will take an online course on leading conversations, which is a “vital” skill for library work today. They will host in-person discussions with families, children and other professionals about the needs of neurodivergent children in the community. Neurodivergent conditions include ADHD, autism and dyslexia, among others, which are viewed as variations, not deficits, concerning how the brain processes information, learns and responds.

The library is becoming a destination place for a large variety of activities and events, Gum-Fowler said. There is something for everyone, with a wide array of books, digital resources, Wi-Fi and computer access, educational workshops, children’s story times, adult book clubs and senior programs.

Changes will include moving the children’s area

downstairs for easier access, moving the computer room upstairs, which will feature six desktops and two laptops for public use. A new Teen Zone is being created in the old children’s area, with a new Makerspace in a portion of the area that will bring tech to the library, where patrons and entrepreneurs can experiment and learn. The announcements also stated that new, engaging themes will be added to each area.

A summer reading program has also been scheduled with the theme of “Color Our World” that will be based on all things nature. According to Library Youth Services Supervisor Mackenzie Kaemmer, it will run from June 2 through Aug. 1.

For more information concerning all programs now available, contact Gum-Fowler at 620-223-2882.



Marti Wells-Smith/Special to the Tribune

Fort Scott Public Library Director Jennifer Gum-Fowler, left, and Library Youth Services Supervisor Mackenzie Kaemmer are pictured during the Thursday Fort Scott Area Chamber of Commerce Coffee hosted by the library.

WEATHER

Sunny, with a high near 75. Wind chill values as low as 36 early. South wind 6 to 11 mph increasing to 12 to 17 mph. Winds could gust as high as 24 mph.



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