



The Paducah Sun

MONDAY, May 2, 2016

www.paducahsun.com

Vol. 120 No. 123

Helping people succeed guided Veazey's career

BY GENEVIEVE POSTLETHWAIT

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Dr. Barbara Veazey remembers well her first time in the Paducah Community College President's Office in Carson Hall.

She was interviewing to become a part of the college's nursing faculty, and she wore her blue and white pinstripe public health uniform for the occasion. She never would have imagined then that same office would one day be hers. She never set out to be a college president.

What propelled her forward

and upward — from nurse, to professor, to program coordinator, to dean and ultimately president for the past 14 years — was her passion for helping people improve their lives.

"As a public health nurse, you are trying to get people to take better care of themselves and their families, to help them pull themselves out of poverty," Veazey said, sitting in the president's office. She'll leave it when she retires June 30.

"I think that translated into coming here and realizing that the community college is absolutely the way to a better

life for all those people that I was trying to take care of, that this was the answer, education," she said. "That's when I became passionate about the community college."

Every promotion started with Veazey looking at the next job up and thinking, "I can do that job, and then I can help even more people."

It wasn't until President Dr. Donald Clemens announced his retirement in the mid-1990s that Veazey considered going for the college's top spot. She was dean of academic affairs then.

Dr. Michael McCall, then-

president of the Kentucky Community & Technical College System, called Veazey to Lexington for a meeting. He asked her to serve as interim president while they searched for Clemens' replacement, and her heart sank.

KCTCS was looking to bring in someone from the outside without even considering any local candidates, and it didn't sit well with Veazey. It stirred up an "internal rebellion" for her, she said.

"I told him no, I'm not interested in that," Veazey said.



Contributed photo
Dr. Barbara Veazey poses in her nursing uniform for one of her first faculty photos at WKCTC in the early 1970s.

Please see **PASSION** | 8A



MALLORY PANUSKA | The Sun

Fine day for a bike ride

Easton McDonald, 7, of Paducah, leads a group of cyclists Sunday along a section of Noble Park. He was riding with Dale Harmon (left). Kicking off May as National Bike Month, BikeWorld and Paducah Parks Service jointly sponsored a series of bicycle-related activities, including guided bike tours along the Greenway Trail that left every 30 minutes from 1 to 4 p.m.

Sunday earthquake felt across region

BY JOSHUA ROBERTS

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Things went bump in the night — well, technically the morning — Sunday when a magnitude 3.5 earthquake occurred near La Center in Ballard County.

The quake was felt by people in western Kentucky, southern

Illinois and southeast Missouri, according to the National Weather Service. No damage or injuries were reported.

It occurred about 1:12 a.m., and was centered 8.7 miles northwest of La Center, about 39 miles from Paducah. The epicenter was 8.5 miles deep, the weather service reported.

Meteorologist Kevin Smith said earthquakes aren't completely unheard of in western Kentucky. Sunday's was different because of the magnitude, he said.

"They happen with such frequency that it isn't that un-

Please see **RUMBLE** | 10A

Trump comes up with 'Plan B' for nomination

BY JULIE BYKOWICZ

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump has a Plan B if he's faced with a contested convention, and it involves the sort of outside groups that he's called "corrupt."

While the billionaire businessman might lock up the Republican presidential nomination in the next five weeks of voting, he and his allies are simultaneously undertaking a parallel effort in case he falls short.

Outside groups, including one led by longtime Trump political ally Roger Stone, and a loose collection of colorful supporters such as "Bikers for Trump" are organizing ahead of the July convention in Cleveland.

They're soliciting money to pay for their transportation and housing, and they're already trying to influence the mood of the convention with a social media campaign saying that anything short of a Trump nomination would be "stealing."

"Our principle focus right now is Cleveland," Stone said

Please see **CONVENTION** | 10A

Technology helping to build a safer gun

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Jonathan Mossberg is among a small number of pioneers looking to build a safer gun. But unlike many others, he was in the gun business when he started down that path.

His family is renowned for its premier line of shotguns treasured by law enforcement, hunters and the military. Mossberg already has spent more than a decade working to develop — and someday bring to the market — a firearm that the wrong person cannot fire. It is intended to work without fail in the hands of its owner in a life-or-death situation.

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Local officials praise long cleanup contract

BY DAVID ZOELLER

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News that the next contract for cleanup services at the U.S. Department of Energy's Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant could be for 10 years in length has drawn praise from lo-

cal officials.

The DOE issued a draft request for proposals Thursday for deactivation and remediation services at the plant for a prospective period of 10 years, in-

Please see **DOE** | 8A



The next cleanup contract at the U.S. Department of Energy's Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant could be for 10 years, a move praised by local officials who see continued funding of the site and steady employment as a key economic driver for the region.

RYAN HERMENS | The Sun

WORLD

PROTESTERS LEAVE IRAQ GREEN ZONE

Anti-government protesters disbanded at least temporarily Sunday from the heavily fortified Green Zone after the Islamic State group carried out its second major attack in Iraq in as many days.

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FEATURES

ELEPHANTS TAKE FINAL BOW

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus bid farewell to its performing elephants on Sunday, as they closed the chapter on a practice that has entertained audiences for two centuries.

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PASSION

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“At that time I looked around and so many of the top positions in Paducah were filled by someone from the outside. I thought, you know, I’m a Kentucky girl, and I think Kentuckians can do these jobs just fine. So I told him no, I’m not going to do that. I’m going to apply for the presidency.”

Once the Marshall County native starting thinking she’d not only like to be president, but that she’d be great at it, she couldn’t shake it. She considered leaving Paducah and becoming a president elsewhere if she couldn’t get the job here.

After her first out-of-town interview, however, she came back to West Kentucky Community & Technical College, then still PCC, went and sat in the middle of the quad and thought, “Oh, I’m home!” The next morning she called that out-of-town college and withdrew her name from consideration.

“I realized that it just wasn’t for me, that I wanted to be here,” Veazey said, looking out her office window at the quad. “I made the choice to stay here and forget about being president. When you commit to a place like that, you start having peace with your choices. It was a good choice. I love this place.”

National recognition

Veazey did become president, though. KCTCS moved forward with a national search, but they accepted Veazey’s hat in the ring and she ended up being the best candidate. She was named president of PCC and CEO of the WKCTC District in 2002. She became the founding president of WKCTC in 2003 when the college was officially consolidated.

In her 14 years as president, Veazey’s pushed WKCTC to become one of the nation’s top community colleges. Last year it tied for second in The As-



RYAN HERMENS | The Sun

Barbara Veazey, West Kentucky Community & Technical College president, speaks during the recent staff and faculty awards gathering. Veazey, a longtime WKCTC fixture, is preparing to step away from the school. She’s retiring effective June 30.

pen Institute’s College Excellence Program.

Veazey showed tenacity, from her time as a public health nurse in the ‘60s establishing the region’s first birth control clinic, to her push at WKCTC to improve student achievement through a schoolwide focus on reading. Sometimes her decisions raised eyebrows, but she never let that deter her.

Her proudest achievement as president isn’t totally tangible but is at the core of WKCTC’s guiding vision and mission: equity.

The college has a 48 percent graduation/transfer rate, compared with only 40 percent nationally, and there is no gap in graduation rates for students of color, a rare feat.

As she winds down her final months as WKCTC’s founding president, Veazey can’t help but bring up equity in some way almost any time she gets a turn at a microphone. She mentioned it at the college’s

awards ceremony and the staff and faculty meetings Friday. She couldn’t help it, she said.

“I just had to say it one more time,” Veazey said. “What I love about the community college is the fact that those people I tried to help as a public health nurse, they have a chance here. They have a place to go. You’re going to have students who come here, and they’re the best and the brightest, and they’re bound to succeed, but then you have others who have struggled. You want this place to be the right place for all of them.”

Strength in vision

At this point in Veazey’s life, she feels the right place for her is on the family farm in Marshall County. She said so many people have asked her what she’s planning for her retirement, and they don’t seem to believe her when she tells them her only plans are to be free. Free to figure out what’s next, or to do nothing at all.

She’s going to spend more time with her husband, kids and grandkids. She’s going to do some leisurely traveling and maybe take up sheep sheering and weaving. She gets almost giddy, thinking about how open her future is.

Times are tight at the college, but Veazey isn’t worried. Any time she starts to worry or stress over what might come next for the school she loves so dearly, that one little word — equity — eases her fears.

“It’s in our vision statement,” Veazey said. “Even though we’re having a lot of cuts and times are hard, we didn’t cut that. The vision was for innovative, equitable initiatives that foster the success of all students. We all believed in it. We put it in writing. Things can and will change, but the true essence of your college doesn’t. It’s going to be OK, because the heart and soul of the college is still here.”

SAFETY

CONTINUED FROM 1A

“We’re gun people, so we know when you pick up a gun you want to shoot it,” Mossberg stated.

“You don’t want to swipe your finger. You don’t want to talk to it. In an emergency situation, you want to pick it up and use it.”

Mossberg’s iGun Technology Corp., based in Daytona Beach, Florida, relies on a simple piece of jewelry — a ring — that “talks” to a cir-

cuit board imbedded in a firearm to let it know the user is authorized. The ring must be within centimeters of the gun for the gun to fire.

The road to a safer gun has been long. Initial efforts encountered a public wary of the technology, but that has eased as iPhones, tablets and other smart devices have become common.

Mossberg isn’t the only one attempting to bring a bit of James Bond to firearms.

Others are explor-

ing biometrics, like an iPhone lock that opens with your fingerprint. Some rely on radio-frequency identification, or RFID, technology, proximity sensors similar to the system Mossberg’s company uses. Some use watches to send a signal to the firearm.

They’ve had varying degrees of success, but none has been broadly marketed so far.

On Friday, Obama announced new steps to curb gun violence, including by identifying

the requirements “smart guns” would have to meet for law enforcement agencies to buy and use them.

“As long as we’ve got the technology to prevent a criminal from stealing and using your smartphone, then we should be able to prevent the wrong person from pulling a trigger on a gun,” Obama said on Friday.

The departments of

Justice and Homeland Security said in a report Friday that they expect to complete the work of identifying the smart-gun requirements by October.

Then there’s politics. The powerful gun lobby raises red flags about reliability.

What happens if the firearm isn’t syncing with the radio signal or the fingerprint isn’t recognized? In a crisis, sec-

onds are precious.

“If you need it to protect yourself and it doesn’t work, that’s a bad outcome,” said Larry Keane, senior vice president and general counsel for the National Shooting Sports Foundation, which represents manufacturers. “Reliability is everything ... If your iPhone doesn’t work, you’re inconvenienced. You’re not dead.”

DOE

CONTINUED FROM 1A

cluding option periods.

The current deactivation and remediation services contract at the site is held by Fluor Federal Services and expires July 21, 2017.

“I’m very happy to see it,” Paducah Mayor Gayle Kaler said. “I think it’s a win all the way around. We, as a community, PACRO (Paducah Area Community Reuse Organization), the chamber, city and county have all worked very hard to foster a good relationship with DOE. We go up there (Washington, D.C.) and talk with them. They see us face to face, we communicate a lot.”

McCracken County Judge-Executive Bob Leeper agreed.

“It’s obviously a positive development economically, to potentially continue the contract for a longer period of time,” Leeper said. The longer contract period will make it easier for the contractor to recruit employees, he said, “and for those folks to find roots in McCracken County.”

Sandra Wilson said she and Scott Darnell, Paducah Economic Development president/CEO, were in Washington recently discussing the contract with DOE and Kentucky’s congressional delegation and staff.

“We talked about the importance of moving forward with that contract,” Wilson said. “After our meeting we felt

like it (RFP) was going to be out very soon. It’s really good news for our community.”

Wilson said advocating on behalf of the community is worth the time and effort.

“We’ve really tried to get our message across,” she said. “We’ve met with them (DOE officials) when they’ve come to Paducah, and we’ve gone to D.C. to meet them. I believe it helps for us to be vocal and let them know what is important to our community.”

Ken Wheeler is a member of the Paducah Citizens Advisory Board, chartered by the DOE.

“There are several facets that make it (longer contract term) attractive from a community standpoint,” Wheeler said. “They (Fluor) had to bring in a number of their employees from other sites, relocating to Paducah. Those folks, understandably, may not be interested in investing a lot of money in a house or other facilities in town if they don’t know whether they’re going to have a role here.”

“Fluor, as a company, has done an outstanding job of trying to be a good community citizen and participate in a lot of activities. But it’s been very hard on their workforce to really get a sense of becoming a part of the citizenry of Paducah,” Wheeler said. “That’s one reason that we’ve lobbied so hard with DOE to try and get a longer-term contract.”

Having a longer-term agreement with the cleanup contractor can benefit all parties involved, according to Wheeler.

“Being able to maintain a sense of continuity (over a longer period) is a real asset not only to the contractor but also the DOE,” Wheeler said. “I fully believe they will reduce their costs over time. I also think this will result in very good bidding quality, too.”

According to DOE, the draft RFP is designed to provide for open competition on the continuing work at the site and assist the department in developing a final RFP.

DOE has recently initiated tours of the Paducah plant site for the public. Following a press tour of the site March 31 in advance of the tours for the public, Bob Nichols, Fluor Paducah Deactivation Project director of operations, was asked about the next step in the cleanup process.

“I think DOE’s probably going to follow the normal procurement cycle,” Nichols said, noting Fluor’s current contract will be completed in July 2017. “We anticipate that DOE would go back out for a re-compete, and we will just follow the same protocol of any other contractor that wants to come to the site and compete for the work here.”

Contact David Zoeller, a Paducah Sun staff writer, at 270-575-8676.

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