

The Paducah Sun

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JOHN PAUL HENRY | The Sun

Much ado at Murray State

(From left) Mariah Morton, Chris Lossie, Michael Castleberry and Joy Beth DeWitt, all theater majors at Murray State University, take turns heckling with other students in Shakespearean English on Monday during a language dueling event at the Crisp Center on the MSU Campus in Murray. The theater students were promoting the Murray Shakespeare Festival, which boasts performances and workshops this week by the American Shakespeare Center of Staunton, Va. The AMC will perform "Much Ado About Nothing" today and Thursday, and "Hamlet" on Thursday and Friday, all at Lovett Auditorium. Prices are \$7 for MSU students, faculty and staff (with ID), and \$12 for the general public. Price for children under 12 and students from other institutions is also \$7.

School districts resist raising taxes

BY GENEVIEVE POSTLETHWAIT

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Though state law allows school boards to increase local tax rates annually to provide up to 4 percent more revenue over the previous year, McCracken County, Paducah and many other school districts have opted in recent years to keep tax rates as low as possible.

A review of state data going back to the 2007-2008 school year (when the economic recession hit) shows that 107 of the state's 173 school districts voted for the 4 percent increase.

But during the 2012-2013 school year, that number fell to 76 and has continued to decline.

Many school districts, McCracken and Paducah included, have steadily

opted for what's called the compensating rate, which adjusts local taxes to bring in the same amount of money as the previous year.

With Kentucky public schools facing continued declines in state funding, as well as increases in personnel costs for state-mandated raises, dis-

Please see **TAXES** | 10A

State lawmakers vote to ease out landlines

BY ADAM BEAM

Associated Press

FRANKFORT — Kentucky appears ready to join at least two dozen other states in deregulating its landline telephone services, the beginning of the end for the more than 100-year-old technology that is being pushed out by cellphones and high-speed Internet access.

The state Senate voted 30-3 on Monday to strip the Public Service Commission of its authority to make telecommunications companies install and

maintain landline telephone service. Democratic Gov. Steve Beshear said after the vote he will sign it into law.

The bill only affects areas that have at least 15,000 households, meaning the rural mountainous parts of the state famous for their spotty cellphone coverage would still have access to landlines. And companies could not take away someone's landline in an urban area unless the Federal Communications Com-

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Associated Press

Poisoner convicted

Defendant Lacey Spears brushes her hair back during the opening statements portion of her murder trial at the Westchester County Courthouse in White Plains, N.Y., on Feb. 3. Spears was convicted Monday of poisoning her son, 5-year-old Garnett-Paul Spears, to death by force-feeding heavy concentrations of sodium through his stomach tube. See story on Page 3A.

Please see **ADOPTION** | 10A

College hosts panel featuring faces of adoption

BY KAT RUSSELL

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American families adopt some 135,000 children each year.

For many of these families, having adopted children has no bearing on the way the children are treated or how much they are loved. But to

others, they can often be perceived as different.

On Monday, West Kentucky Community & Technical College hosted a panel discussion that featured five women, all either adoptive parents or adopted as children.

The panel was part of the col-

lege's Diversity and Inclusion series, which began this school year as a way to recognize the different experiences of people who live, work and study in the area.

"What I really asked these women

NATION POLICE: DEAD MAN HAD GUN

Police fatally shot a homeless man on Skid Row during a "brutal" videotaped struggle in which a rookie officer cried out that the man had grabbed his gun.

5A



LOCAL GRIFFITH LAWYERS FILE TO WITHDRAW

Defense attorneys have filed a motion to withdraw as counsel in the murder case against Keith Griffith — a Reidland man accused of killing his wife and burning their home with her and their dogs inside.

2A

Forecast

Today

56°

Occasional rain

4B

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Markets climb, hit new highs

BY MATTHEW CRAFT

AP Business Writer

NEW YORK — For the first time since its dot-com era peak nearly 15 years ago, the Nasdaq composite has closed above 5,000.

Major U.S. indexes rose from the start, with the Nasdaq passing the milestone number shortly before noon. The tech-heavy index then dropped, but rose again toward the close of trading to end at 5,008.10 on Monday, just 40 points from its March 2000 record. Merger news and an encouraging economic report drove the gains.

The S&P 500 closed up 12.89 points, or 0.6 percent, to 2,117.39. The Dow Jones industrial average rose 155.93 points, or 0.9 percent, to 18,288.63. The Nasdaq rose 44.57 points, or 0.9 percent.

The broad gains for all three indexes on Monday, the first day of trading for March, came after the best monthly advance for stocks in more than three years. The S&P 500 climbed 5.5 percent in February, its biggest gain since October 2011.

The long climb back for the Nasdaq, once a symbol of investor recklessness and self-delusion, has been marked by

Please see **NASDAQ** | 6A

Snow and temps to fall this week

Staff report

After warm temperatures today, the weather will make a quick return to winter with sleet and a half-foot of snow expected Wednesday, followed by bitter cold on Thursday.

The National Weather Service in Paducah predicts today's high will reach the mid-50s with temperatures dropping to around 35 degrees at night. Showers are expected today with the possibility of afternoon and evening thunderstorms.

On Wednesday, temperatures will be around 35 in the morning and falling throughout the day as a cold front moves in. As temperatures drop, the rain will give way to sleet and snow. The most significant accumulation is expected from noon to midnight. In all, as much as 6 to 8 inches of snow is expected.

Thursday will see very cold temperatures, with a high of 25 and low near 0 but no additional precipitation.

Temperature swings like the ones Paducah will see in the coming days are not that unusual for the time of the year, said Jim Packett, meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

"We're closing in on spring. In the transition period between winter and spring, you can have pretty much anything and everything," said Packett. "What is rare is to have two snowstorms of this magnitude so close together."

Luckily, after Thursday's frigid blast, temperatures will head back up.

"By Friday we'll have temps back above freezing, and beyond that we're looking for a slow moderation upward," said Packett. "It will be on the ground for a couple days, but we're not looking at it lasting on the ground for two weeks like the last snow."

ADOPTION

CONTINUED FROM 1A

to do was to be the faces of adoption," said event coordinator Kim Russell. "A lot of people have this preconceived idea of what adoption looks like, and I wanted to show them the real people."

The program is about acknowledging that the word diversity describes many kinds of differences, be they cultural, social, geographic, economic or gender based, said Russell, who is director of the school's English department.

In Monday's discussion, titled "In my shoes: Families brought together by adoption," panelists talked about their lives and how the outside world perceives them.

Russell said she purposely chose people who had different adop-

tion experiences.

Among the panelists were three mothers who had adopted. Sheila Highfil adopted her husband's adult stepdaughter, Kelly Walden adopted a 12-year-old girl from Ethiopia, and Claudia Stoffel, a professor at the college, adopted an 8-month-old girl with a bone disease from Korea.

The other two panelists were adopted as children: Hillary Price, who was adopted with her twin sister at 10 days old, and Tabitha Manea, who is Stoffel's daughter.

Along with sharing their experiences, the women talked about misconceptions and ignorance they've encountered.

One of the hardest things for people to comprehend, Highfil

said, "is that you love this person every bit as much as you love your biological child. I don't think people can truly understand that. I love my daughter just as much as I do my two sons, and I love her children as though they had my own DNA."

Another topic was the hurtful comments people sometimes made.

"When I was in elementary school, you know you sometimes have little fights with your friends, well one of my friends — she knew I was adopted — and she would say 'Well, at least I know my real mom,'" Hillary Price said.

"People just assume, 'Oh your parents didn't want you,' or 'They just gave you up,' but it's not like that. Sometimes that is the case, but a lot of the times that's not

the case at all."

Many said they often had to deal with questions other mothers would never be asked, such as "Is she yours?" or "You don't know anything about her medical history?"

Above all, the women shared the joy adoption has brought to their lives and families.

"From the minute we saw her picture, we knew she was ours, and it was love at first sight," Stoffel said of her daughter. "It's just been a neat experience to be her mom. I can't think of anything bad that has ever happened in our lives that came from being her mom. It's always been good and positive."

Contact Kat Russell, a Paducah Sun staff writer, at 270-575-8653.

Officials release description of cigarette bandit

Staff report

The McCracken County Sheriff's Department has released the description of a man who allegedly burglarized a convenience store early Tuesday morning.

Deputies responded at 3:43 a.m. to the Superway Convenience Store, 3245 Benton Road, after a burglar alarm was activated, according to a news release.

When deputies arrived, they found the glass of an east side door shattered and entry had been made, the release states. Deputies reported multiple cartons of cigarettes were taken.

After reviewing surveillance video, deputies reported the suspect to be a white male with medium build wearing tan overalls, a gray short-sleeved T-shirt, orange sock cap and a red bandanna covering his face.

The suspect was driving a truck, color unknown, and pulling a flatbed trailer, according to the release.

Anyone with information regarding the crime should contact the sheriff's department at 270-444-4719, or Crime Stoppers at 270-443-8355 (TELL). Anyone providing information that leads to an arrest and/or conviction may be eligible for a \$1,000 reward.

TAXES

CONTINUED FROM 1A

districts are being pushed to their creative budgeting limits.

"We're not going to raise taxes in McCracken County until we have to," said Jeff Parker, board chairman for McCracken County Schools. "For the foreseeable future, with a compensating rate we should be fine. Bottom line is, we've been really frugal with our money, and we've been really lucky."

Thanks to a slight increase in assessed value of real estate and tangible property in the county, McCracken was able to decrease its

tax rate this year while maintaining roughly the same amount of revenue for its schools.

Paducah Schools also took the compensating tax rate option, but for Paducah that meant a slight increase of 0.4 percent in tax collections over the year before. Due to a drop in over \$2 million in Paducah's net assessed growth of property, the district had to raise its tax collection rate to 77.1 cents per \$100 of assessed property to break even, up from 76.7 cents the previous year.

Paducah Superintendent Donald Shively explained that local prop-

erty assessments drive the board's tax decisions each year, and assessments can vary widely from district to district. For example, the compensating rate might still lead to a tax increase in an economically depressed district, while the 4 percent increase in revenue might lead to tax rates remaining steady or even decreasing in a thriving area of the state.

It's nearly impossible today to predict if Paducah's tax rate will increase, decrease or stay steady next year, Shively said. It heavily depends on local property assessments.

"We just won't know until we get that information," Shively said. Most districts receive their assessments from the Kentucky Department of Education in August or July, and have 45 days from that point to set their tax rate for the following year.

"In the meantime, we're trying to do everything we possibly can to become as efficient as possible. We feel like we owe that to the taxpayers that support Paducah schools."

Shively said Paducah is thoroughly evaluating its operations for cost savings and greater efficiency of resources

with the help of a KDE grant. McCracken has been able to cut costs through its consolidated high school and the closing of Farley Elementary and Reidland Middle schools. Both districts seem to be trying in earnest to avoid tax hikes.

Both Shively and Parker expressed frustration over state legislators' unfunded mandates, most notably this year's mandated 1 percent pay raise, and next year's 2 percent pay raise. Though they believe wholeheartedly the raises are well-deserved, they said, without adequate state funding districts may have

no choice but to rely on their local tax bases to fund them.

"If the state legislature doesn't step up and do what needs to be done for public education, we'll be put in a tough position," Parker said. "In order to keep from raising taxes in McCracken County and elsewhere, people have to put pressure on their state legislators."

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

Contact Genevieve Postlethwait, a Paducah Sun staff writer, at 270-575-8651 or at gpostlethwait@paducahsun.com.

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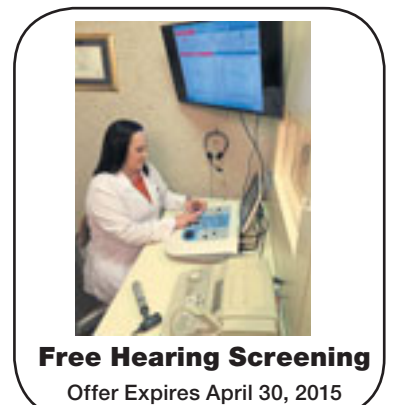
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