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Four Forrest City High School ninth and 10th grade students were recently recognized for their writing skills after winning an English Language Arts contest...

Communities urged to share needs for Accelerator project

The St. Francis County Extension Service will be hosting a meeting in Madison on Monday to gather information from the community as part of the SFC Community Accelerator project.

The Extension Service is participating in the project through Feeding America.

UA Extension Family and Consumer Science Agent Marla Lane said the agency has been working on the project to address barriers to food access and health/wellness, with a goal of

making all residents of the county more healthy.

The meeting will begin at 2 p.m., at the Madison Community Center.

Lane said the meeting is really more for people who live in communities outside of Forrest City, pointing to areas such as Hughes, Round Pond, Madison, Widener, Goodwin and Wheatley.

"We're trying to get more partners to join us so we can get to more areas that have food insecurities," said Lane.

"We're trying to reach other towns outside of Forrest City who may want a food pantry, a walking trail or may want to make improvements to their parks," Lane continued. "We're trying to get other partners to voice their concerns about what they want and need in their communities to promote healthy living."

Lane said grant opportunities will be available for projects in the area and those will be discussed during the meeting on Monday.



Brodie Johnson • Times-Herald

First responders from throughout the area participated in the annual Prom Promise held this week for students at Forrest City High School. Each year, first responders talk to students about the dangers of driving impaired.

Hughes woman arrested as part of drug trafficking investigation

A Hughes woman was among 15 people arrested Tuesday as part of a law enforcement operation that targeted associates of a drug organization responsible for the distribution of methamphetamine in Northeast Arkansas.

Shauna Rutledge, 37, of Hughes was arrested along with 14 other people following an investigation that began in August 2022 to combat a significant drug distribution organization operating in the Northeast Arkansas area, according to a press release from the office of Jonathan D. Ross, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas.

Numerous indictments, which were returned by a Grand Jury on April 2, and unsealed this week, named several defendants who are charged with various drug, money laundering and firearm offenses. Law enforcement officers arrested 15 individuals and served an arrest warrant Tuesday on two defendants already in federal custody and one in state custody.

Prior to this week's arrests, the investigation had resulted in the seizure of 45 pounds of methamphetamine, 10 pounds of marijuana, one pound of

cocaine, six firearms, various ammunition and \$125,000 in drug proceeds. During arrest operations on Tuesday, agents recovered additional methamphetamine, three firearms (one of which was defaced), ammunition and an additional \$28,000 in suspected drug proceeds.

"So many lives and communities have been destroyed by drugs and with today's arrests, 15 drug dealers have been taken off the streets," said Ross. "Where drugs are present, so are firearms and violence. Working with our federal, state and local partners to keep our citizens safe from the violence that too often accompanies drug trafficking, will help to create safer communities for citizens in the Eastern District of Arkansas."

"These arrests demonstrate how the FBI has zero tolerance for criminals who pollute our communities with dangerous narcotics," Alicia D. Corder, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigations, Little Rock Field Office. "This was a collaborative effort between the FBI, Jonesboro Police Department, Craighead County Sheriff's Office, Arkansas State

Police and several others. We will continue to work together to keep Arkansans safe and bring dangerous criminals to justice."

The investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation with assistance from the Drug Enforcement Administration, 2nd Judicial District Drug Task Force, Jonesboro Police Department, Craighead County Sheriff's Office, Crittenden County Sheriff's Office, Arkansas State Police, Greene County Sheriff's Office, Poinsett County Sheriff's Office and the Clay County Sheriff's Office.

The charges in the unsealed indictments include conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute methamphetamine, distribution and possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine, conspiracy to money launder, money laundering, possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime, and felon in possession of a firearm and ammunition.

The minimum penalty for the drug charges is not less than 10 years imprisonment and a \$10 million fine. The minimum penalty for possessing a firearm See DRUGS on Page 10



Librarian's Log by Arlisa Harris, Librarian Forrest City Public Library



I am asked frequently about volunteering at our library. National Volunteer Week is next week, April 21-27 and this is a perfect opportunity to talk about how essential community support is to our library fulfilling its mission of service to those in need.

As another tax filing season ended this week, volunteers are and have been vital in helping us provide free tax filing services at the library. Folks like the late Earl Anthes, John Harris, Delores Morelon and Sandra Wright have given their free time to help us continue providing this service.

Mr. Anthes gave us the benefit of his years of professional tax preparation experience and his assistance was crucial during our early years of getting up to speed with the VITA free tax program. He was very diligent and thorough with each return and prepared it as carefully as if he were getting paid. He also provided help with the tax-related issues when setting up our nonprofit status for the friends of the library group. He had to step away due to health issues, but I want his family (and the community) to know how much he was appreciated and his contributions will always be remembered.

All our volunteers are superstars and today I want to highlight our newest volunteer, Jeanette Skipper. Jeanette drives from Hughes two to three times a week, and last week every day, to volunteer for tax preparation and filing. Jeanette was born and raised in Hughes. She is married to Rodger and has two sons and three grandchildren. She retired after 36 years of teaching high school math. Most of her career was teaching at Hughes and Marion High Schools and she was teacher of the year in 2019-20 at Marion High School. Jeanette is a staunch believer in the importance of volunteering.

After retiring, Jeanette decided that volunteering was going to be her hobby. She has volunteered at Elite Hospice and is currently a poll worker for St. Francis County. It should be of no surprise that she gives her time freely to tutor her former students' children. And when asked why volunteer at the Forrest City Public Library, Jeanette stated that she thought the library would be a good fit since she loves to read and enjoys talking about all things books.

Did I mention that she drives all the way from Hughes to volunteer here in Forrest City? Now that is devotion. (Forrest City people I'm giving you the side eye right now). I just want you all to know that there is plenty of room on this bus so jump on and get in where you fit in.

Why we need volunteers. Volunteers bring new perspectives, fresh ideas and the unique opportunity for collaboration and connection to

our library. We are always looking for ways to expand services and experiences at our library and volunteers can help us achieve this goal.

A current recent example of this is our Eclipse Watch Party we held at the library. We had a volunteer (Jeanette) helping with serving the hotdogs, popcorn, and drinks to our guests.

So, what's in it for you? The opportunity to remain active or use your professional skills again after retirement. Many of you are very skilled and knowledgeable and others would benefit from what you have to offer. Don't forget, I know many of you and what you bring to the table so don't make me have to call on you publicly in a future article.

Sometimes a job like enhancing and uplifting our community can seem like too much for one person (don't I know it!) and we might wonder what our individual efforts can achieve but let me remind you of the story of the Stone Soup. I won't detail it here, but you can Google it and you will find that it is a great folk tale about how individuals coming together and contributing a small part can achieve a great outcome for the whole community.

So, help yourself by helping others. Get to experience the satisfaction of doing something for someone and expecting nothing in return except the satisfaction of helping a neighbor. This is part of the joy of living, and we need more of that vibe in Forrest City.

Remember the, We Need You!, Uncle Sam army recruiting posters? Well, the library is sending out an SOS. We need you too! Volunteering at our library is a way to get involved in the community and help with library events, which helps our sometimes "spread thin" staff. So, like they say on the Price is Right, Come on Down!

Moreover, there are other volunteers who have graciously answered the call. At the top of our volunteer list is the library board of trustees. They faithfully serve the library and community for no pay and little recognition. There are folks like attorney Brad Beavers who served on the library board for 16 years and continues to help the library in many endeavors. I know I have thanked Brad before, but the library board does not have a retained attorney and we want him to know how much we appreciate his volunteer spirit by giving of his expertise from time to time.

We have also been fortunate to have people like Logan Jackson. What can I say, the man loves the library and has been a constant over the years. Until his recent health issues, he was always checking on us and dropping off things we needed. If he saw a need, he stepped in. He hasn't been in in a while, but our thoughts are you with sir.

I could not ever leave this couple off our list of superstar volunteers. Mr. and Mrs. Gazzola Vaccaro help the library every month by giving monetary donations. They will come to our book sale and get a \$6 bag of books and give us \$100 and say, keep the change. That means a lot to us, and it helps fill in some gaps in the budget during the year when things come up that we need. Thank you and don't ever think we don't see you and appreciate you.

And let's not forget the Master Gardeners, like the late Betty Jones and the late Betty Beazley who tirelessly worked to keep the gardens at the library looking great.

A quick mention of our appreciation of those who volunteered and were part of our defunct Friends group and a special shout out to Steve Gracey who helps a lot behind the scenes (thanks to Sheila Gracey for lending him to us).

If I missed mentioning someone, it is not intentional because we will be bringing more of you in future columns. We say THANKS to all of you who have volunteered in any capacity, big and small.

So how can you volunteer at the Forrest City Public Library? Are you a photographer or someone who loves posting content on Facebook?

We know that there are a lot of you who like talking and being in front of a camera and we would love for someone to come and do a Facebook live during library programs or post photos on our Facebook page. We can always use outgoing people to help us promote library services and resources at community events.

Do you have a talent that you are willing to share with others? One great way to donate your time is to volunteer to run a program. You can share your knowledge on a topic or skill set and you would be surprised how many people would be appreciative of learning something new. We would never turn away someone who is handy with a tool who would volunteer to fix a minor repair or help to spruce up an area in the library.

Were you always the first and last one on the dance floor? Well, we plan to use our soon-to-be-built outdoor amphitheater for classes and we are going to need you when we need someone to lead dance classes whether it be line dancing, square dancing, hip-hop, or other styles. So, if you still got the old soft shoe, hit us up and let's get Forrest City on the good foot!

These are just a few ways that you can volunteer at the Forrest City Public Library. I know that there are many of you who have something to share with others, whether it's a specific hobby or skill or you just want to commune with others in the community. Well, we have a spot waiting for you at the library!



Brodie Johnson • Times-Herald

The annual St. Francis County Master Gardeners Plant Sale began this morning at Vandiver's NewCastle Farms on Highway 284. Master Gardeners Joe Patterson, left, and Laurie Hiegel build shelves when they gathered at the host site earlier this week. All types of flowers, plants and trees will be available for purchase. Proceeds from the annual event help fund a scholarship that Master Gardeners give each year to a local student.

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