

Opinions

Columnist Korbin Keller discusses benefits of test banks

page 3



Features

Slam poet Neil Hilborn visits Truman

page 5



Sports

Truman volleyball claims GLVC title

page 10



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INDEX

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Photo by Austin Dellamano/TMN

Kirkville firefighters arrived on the scene of the fire at the Kirkville Arts Center right after receiving a call at 8:15 p.m. No one was hurt in the fire, but many quilts on display were damaged.

Kirkville Arts Center erupts into flames

BY NICOLAS TELEP
Staff Writer

As soon as the Kirkville Arts Center started to burn Friday night, the Kirkville Fire Department was on the scene at McPherson and Franklin streets near The Square.

Kirkville first responders were soon joined by fire departments and emergency response teams from surrounding areas at what John Cook, Kirkville Fire Department Deputy Chief and battalion chief, characterized as an abnormally large fire. After an unsuccessful initial attack, firefighters contained the fire, the cause of which has yet to be determined. The building was housing an exhibit of quilts at the time, many of which were badly damaged.

Cook said a Kirkville police officer responded immediately to the scene after a call came in from a passerby at about 8:15 p.m. Upon seeing and confirming heavy smoke and flames, the Battalion Chief called for a "general arm," a call to all KFD personnel. Cook said KFD firefighters were the primary responders and were aided by Rural Adair County, Novinger and La Plata fire departments, as well as Kirkville Police and Public Works. The firefighters initially attempted an offensive attack on the fire from the

interior of the building, having seen mostly smoke and little flame on the outside. After running into heavy fire in a stairwell near the second floor, responders withdrew from the building and prepared for a defensive attack. Cook said the rest of the response went smoothly, and responders focused on protecting surrounding buildings. The building attached to the Art Center on the north side suffered only minor smoke and water damage as a result, and responders were able to remove a number of records from that building.

"The outcome was about as good as we could hope," Cook said. "We're fortunate that it really went pretty well and there wasn't more damage than there was. I would call this a once or twice a decade fire. We have fifteen to twenty what we call 'working fires' every year, and this is significantly bigger than the average fire that we respond to."

State investigators joined Kirkville Police and Fire Tuesday in an investigation to determine the cause and depth of damage of the fire. Cook also said flames reappeared a number of times during the next few days. He said this is normal, and these flames are caused by pockets of fire that still exist in void spaces created by dam-

age to the building.

The Kirkville Arts Association posted on Facebook Saturday after the fire and again on Tuesday with updates. In these posts, the Art Association apologized for the destruction of or damage done to the quilts that were on display during the fire. While there was damage to quilts, the Arts Association said the mosaic tile mural on the front of the building appeared to have survived, and the mural would be displayed again.

"In the near future the Kirkville Arts Association will begin planning for how we move forward. We are committed to serving the Kirkville area with a community arts program. The programs we are involved with in the community such as Invitation to the Arts at Ray Miller Elementary will continue," read the post from Saturday.

Tuesday's post added, "We continue to be positive and look forward to an exciting future."

Temporary offices for the Arts Association will be located at Suite 101 of 1902 South Baltimore St. A quarterly newsletter will be published soon. The Arts Association encourages people to keep up-to-date by checking its Facebook page, "Kirkville Arts."

Woman shot in leg during weekend altercation

BY KAYLA PERKINS
Staff Writer

Early in the morning Saturday, a call reporting unlawful use of a firearm was made and police officers were sent to investigate.

At around 12:30 a.m., a woman was shot in the leg on the 2100 block of South High St.

Officers were sent to respond when a call came in of a woman screaming and possible shots fired. Upon arriving at the scene, officers discovered a woman had been shot in the leg. Lieutenant Mark Wellman said the woman was identified as 18-year-old Cheyenne Durham.

Lieutenant Mark Wellman, who was the Scene Commander at the time the call was made, said medical responders transported Durham to the hospital while some officers cleared the scene and others searched for the perpetrator, who had fled the scene.

Wellman said this assault happened at a time when the police force was short on manpower. At the time of the call there was a major structure fire officers were responding to and there were personnel responding to a drunk driving incident which occurred when the driver struck a support vehicle.

Mutual aid from Highway Patrol, the Sheriff's Department and Truman State University Department of Public Safety were called to assist with all the situations handled by KPD Friday night going into the early mornings of Saturday, Wellman said.

Wellman said the community has expressed more concern over violence recently.

"I think our community is very concerned because we've had some incidents recently that have been pretty severe," Wellman said. "We've had a homicide, we've had an individual who's been stabbed, we've had, I believe, a couple of shootings. It's something that really has the community concerned."

Although KPD has a suspect, Wellman could not disclose the name.

Officers from DPS assisted the KPD on the call Saturday morning. DPS officers secured the perimeter while KPD officers went in and searched homes and handled the call, said DPS director Sarah Holzmeier.

Holzmeier said DPS is fortunate to work so closely with the KPD, especially because lately the call load for the KPD has gone up, so they have had to call DPS officers more frequently this year. She said despite the fact that calls for assistance from the KPD have gone up, incidents involving minors in possession and narcotics on campus have gone down.

Kirkville mourns Welte family deaths

BY KIRA HINTZ
Staff Writer

Editor's Note: This piece is part one of two in a series about families and mental health in Kirkville.

Two recent deaths in the community have helped Kirkville citizens start an open conversation about mental health and family dynamics.

The two deaths — including Danny Welte Jr.'s Nov. 13 suicide and the shooting death of his mother, Echo Welte, three days later by husband Danny Welte — have impacted the community as members try to process and heal alongside the Welte family.

Mark Wellman, Kirkville Police Department lieutenant, said the Kirkville community has been stunned by the Weltes' deaths. Many people's reactions, Wellman said, including his own, came down to the astonishment of, "Why did this happen?" Wellman said there has been a tremendous outpouring of concern toward the Welte family from the Kirkville community and several members of the general public have come to him and asked him what happened.

Wellman said the KPD, in the early hours of the investigation, made men-

tal health professionals available to the Welte family for counseling and grief.

Despite conducting several death investigations throughout his career and always maintaining a professional demeanor, Wellman said there are times when it can be tough to not be emotionally affected by an investigation. That emotional side effect, Wellman said, is one of the things police officers sign on to deal with when they get the job. Wellman said he's never known of anybody within the police department to ever react unprofessionally or to lose their composure.

Wellman said the best way the public can help to try and prevent crimes and deaths is to contact the KPD if they know of anything potentially harmful — especially if it involves a family dynamic. The KPD, Wellman said, takes their cases seriously, particularly if the situation is domestic in nature. Wellman said if the situation involves domestic violence, the KPD will put whatever resources it can into the situation and try to have a successful outcome. In addition, Wellman said there is a Victims Support Services agency in town that can be of service to families and individuals.

James Hughes, Kirkville Chief of Po-

lice, said significant crimes can be difficult, but the community and KPD can always rely on each other for support.

"[The Welte case] is just a good reminder that we're all in this together and let's learn from it, see what we can do different in the future, and to just reinforce that hey, we're all in this together," Hughes said. "[The police] are here to help everybody else keep their community safe because they can't do it full time. We can do it full time. They can't. You [could be a] student. You may be working. You can't go out and patrol the streets. That's what you hire us for. We're actually doing it on your behalf, so help us help you."

Hughes said there has always been mental health training within the KPD, and the current training program for police officers is called "Crisis Intervention Team Concept." The program, Hughes said, started in Memphis, Tennessee, and has become a nationwide effort. The KPD is the first entity in this part of Missouri, Hughes said, to be recognized as having a formal CIT program. Hughes said the KPD wants more of its officers to be trained in CIT because of the increase of mental health related incidents and calls that the police

have seen rise significantly in the last five years.

Kirkville is a relatively safe community, Hughes said, but, like anywhere, there's nothing at the city limits that keeps bad people from coming inside. Hughes said there's not actually a community out there that can afford enough police officers to have a statistically significant impact on crimes by themselves and, if they did, it would be oppressive. Hughes said he doesn't like having more than two police officers out at a time and nobody wants a cop on every street corner, so civilians' eyes and ears are invaluable in helping information advance to the police.

Hughes said people assume that once the person involved in the case is caught, then the case is done, but he said it's a lot more complicated than what most people think. The KPD is only two weeks into the Welte case, Hughes said, and only 24 or 25 reports have been written with the KPD probably not being finished with the case until after the court process finishes.