



The Crittenden Press

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BUCKLE UP

It's now the law and fine is \$25

Motorists driving on Kentucky highways now can be pulled over by police for not wearing their safety belt and will be facing a \$25 fine for each citation. Kentucky's 2006 fatality rate was 78 below the 2005 total of 985. Much of that drop can be attributed to media coverage that focused public attention on the benefits of wearing safety belts during the debate over the Primary Seat Belt Bill in 2006. Kentucky officials believe the highway death toll for 2007 will be reduced by about 100. Hundreds of other motorists and passengers are expected to avoid serious injuries in 2007 by simply taking time to buckle up. It's now the law.

Legislature now in session at Frankfort

Lawmakers returned to Frankfort Tuesday for the start of a 30-day session of the General Assembly, gaveling in shortly after noon. It's during such shortened sessions that lawmakers choose leaders and make committee assignments. See page 8B for more coverage.

Babies of '06

The Crittenden Press will publish Babies of 2006 in its Jan. 11 edition. Parents and grandparents of children born in 2006 are invited to submit photos. Deadline is Thursday (today). Babies included are not limited to Crittenden County residents. Cost is \$10.

2006 Rainfall

Local WPSD-TV Weather Watchers Brenda and Glenn Underdown have observed the following rainfall totals in Marion during 2006. They report their weather findings daily to the Paducah television station:

Month	Inches
January	6.6
February	2.6
March	7.2
April	3.8
May	4.4
June	1.2
July	7.6
August	3.4
September	8.4
October	6.7
November	6.6
December	3.9
Year's Total:	62.4

LOCAL MEETINGS

MONDAY NIGHT
Marion City Council will meet at 6 p.m., Monday night at city hall.

70% CHANCE
CLOUDY
55/50
THURSDAY

20% RAIN
P. CLOUDY
56/48
FRIDAY

Rain gauge
Last 7 days0.00"
Last 30 days4.43"
Year-to-date0.00" (-0.21")
UK Ag Weather Service, Observations at Paducah as of Tuesday

965-4300: ANOTHER WAY

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Driver still at large following car chase

Marion officer pursues into Livingston

STAFF REPORT

There were scant details other than reports of a wrecked truck and gunshots fired Sunday morning that sent Marion Police Officer Chuck Hoover on a high-speed chase in unfamiliar territory.

Twenty-one miles after Hoover initially began pursuit of a vehicle on U.S. 60 toward Salem the chase ended with the driver of the vehicle fleeing on foot and a passenger lodged in the Crittenden County Jail.

As of Wednesday morning, several law enforcement agencies in western Kentucky had received copies of a warrant for the arrest of Ronald G. Ledbetter, Sr., 44, who remains at large after eluding the Marion police officer during the chase through Crittenden and Livingston counties. Ledbetter is facing charges of first-degree fleeing/evading, second-degree wanton endangerment and reckless driving. Kentucky State Police have also charged Ledbetter with wanton endangerment.

The initial call received at 1:14 a.m., by

Marion dispatcher Bob Woodward was that a truck was in a ditch on U.S. 641 near Mott City. As officers began to investigate, the driver of that truck, Randy Cowsert, reported that occupants of a Honda Del Sol shot several rounds at his house in Mott City. When he went after them, he lost control of his truck and wrecked.

After receiving a description of the Honda, Hoover, who was patrolling in Marion, realized he'd just seen the car traveling west on U.S. 60 past Crittenden Hospital.

"I went out U.S. 60 and (the driver) decided he didn't want to stop," Hoover said. "We went through Burna, down Highway 135 through Hampton, then to Joy and on Frankfort



HOOVER

See **CHASE**/page 8A



Sworn to Office

Crittenden County Judge-Executive Fred Brown and the county's six magistrates were sworn to office recently by Circuit Judge Rene Williams. Pictured from left are Judge Fred Brown and magistrates Percy Cook, Curt Buntin, Helen McConnell, Dan Wood, Greg West and Glenn Underdown. See more coverage of swearing in ceremonies on pages 8A and 8B.

Area cattlemen helping repair Louisiana ranges

STAFF REPORT

Crittenden County farmers are joining others from across the region in helping Gulf Coast colleagues to get back to work.

Hurricane Rita slammed into the Gulf area in September 2005 only three weeks following Hurricane Katrina. While Katrina has gotten most of the publicity, Rita was just as devastating. Rita made landfall farther west where it inundated farms in Louisiana and Texas.

The fourth most powerful Atlantic-born hurricane on record, Rita caused \$10 billion in damage on the U.S. Gulf Coast.

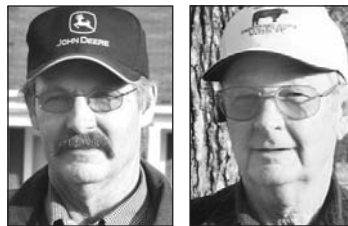
Much of the land in Rita's path was large cattle farms. Acre after acre was ravaged by high winds and flood waters and mile after mile of fencing was destroyed.

"It's more than a year later and now that they are kind of back on their feet they're trying to put their farms back together," said Nicky Baker of Fredonia.

Baker read about the destruction left in the wake of Rita, but couldn't imagine the real toll until he talked personally with one of the farmers in Louisiana who lived through it. After that conversation, Baker said he was motivated to help in some manner.

A few weeks ago, Baker challenged other members of the Caldwell/Lyon County Cattlemen's Association to do something to help their contemporaries in Louisiana. There wasn't a one of us in the room who couldn't afford to help a little, Baker said. They first thought about buying barbed wire and sending it to Louisiana, but upon further investigation, the group learned that fence posts are the greatest need right now.

Baker's original challenge has crossed county lines and has picked up steam throughout all of western Kentucky. The entire First District cattlemen's association has joined hands to assist in the project.



BAKER

HENDRIX

The Crittenden County Cattlemen's Association joined the band wagon a few weeks ago. Together area cattlemen are trying to buy at least one tractor-trailer load of wooden fence posts to send to Louisiana.

Carol Hendrix, president of the Crittenden County association, said farmers in the Gulf region were completely wiped out. Their fences are gone and it's an open range situation in many parts of the state.

There are 37 members of the Crittenden County Cattlemen's Association, but Hendrix said everyone is encouraged to help.

The plan is to raise \$5,500

See **POSTS**/page 8A

Homestead Exemption rises to \$31,400

STAFF REPORT

Kentucky's Homestead Exemption allowance has gone up to \$31,400, giving elderly citizens a larger break on property taxes.

Anyone 65 or over or drawing disability from a retirement system may qualify for the Homestead Exemption. The exemption provides that the home owned by a qualified citizen is exempt from taxation up to \$31,400.

If your home is assessed at a greater value, you are given credit on the first \$31,400.

The old exemption allowance was \$29,400. State law requires the exemption level to be raised every two years to adjust for inflation. The new rate will be good through 2008.

If you have any questions about the Homestead Exemption, contact Crittenden County PVA Ronnie Heady.

TOP STORIES OF 2006

Here are the top news stories which made headlines in The Crittenden Press during 2006.

1. Former Crittenden County Economic Development Corporation (CCEDC) president and CEO Steve Davidson, 63, was arrested in March and in August pleaded guilty to embezzling a large sum of money from the local agency he had worked for from 1998 to 2005. Davidson was originally charged with 15 counts of theft and one count of identity theft. Investigators say he used a former CCEDC employee's name to illegally qualify for credit and used CCEDC credit cards to embezzle \$236,313 over about a six-year period. Davidson pleaded guilty in August and was sentenced to 60 days in jail. He was also required to repay \$210,000 to the CCEDC.

2. The Nov. 7 general election garnered a great deal of attention although most on the ballot were unopposed. Rebecca Johnson's victory in the county attorney's race with 61 percent of the vote and incumbent Mayor Mickey Alexander's narrow victory over Councilman Mike Byford headlined the local election.

3. Peoples of Bank of Marion announced in July that controlling interest of the bank was selling to a group of investors led by Terry Bunnell of Glasgow, ending 60 years of leadership by the Guess family. Current bank president Gordon B. Guess is the son of the late Neil Guess who helped organize the bank in 1946.

4. Crittenden County School System made a series of changes directed at reducing drug use and other criminal activity in local schools. The school board imposed a drug test on students involved in extra-curricular activities or those who drive to school. The school board also hired Greg Rushing, a longtime city policeman, as a full-time deputy to patrol the halls at school.

5. The Crittenden County Fiscal Court decided in June to build a new \$7.7 million jail. Construction started in the fall on a 129-bed detention center. The new 26,077-square-foot jail is being built behind the old 20-bed jail.

6. Circuit Judge Rene Williams through several rulings in 2006 released most of the defendants in a defamation law suit filed by former school superintendent Fredericka Hargis. At the end of 2006, only five of the original 13 defendants remained involved in the case. Hargis filed the law suit Dec. 28, 2004 seeking \$900,000 in damages. She alleged that the 13 defendants had circulated a letter critical of her and others.

7. Crittenden Health Systems, Inc., terminated the jobs of 12 individuals in July, a move the healthcare organization said would save \$270,000 annually. Crittenden Health Systems operates the hospital, home health and ambulance service. Although controversial, the move has enabled the hospital to improve its financial standing, according to administrators.

8. Dr. Richard Brandon, 84, died in June. He was a pioneer in modern medicine in Marion and had delivered between 400-500 babies during his long career here. Brandon closed his practice in the late 1980s when office visits were \$6 and house calls \$10.

9. Marion-Crittenden County Airport's new 4,400-foot, paved runway opened in 2006. The project, which cost about \$5 million, was the first phase in a comprehensive plan to modernize the former grass strip into a 21st century facility. The FFA funded most of the project, but the city and county governments pitched in with resources of their own to build the airstrip.

10. A series of criminal activity near Fredonia prompted the Caldwell County Sheriff's Department to add a deputy who would focus on patrols in the area. One murder, two shootings and a robbery at knifepoint were among the criminal activity reported in the small community at the Crittenden-Caldwell line.

Other top stories worth mentioning but not in any particular order, included the following:

•Local tourist spending was up in Crittenden County over the past year.

•Ray O'Neal was promoted from patrolman to assistant chief of police by the City of Marion.

•A Crittenden County Circuit Court jury convicted Ronnie Damron of sexual assault of a woman in the Deer Creek community. Damron was sentenced to 70 years in prison. An earlier trial for the same crime had ended in a hung jury.

•Crittenden County honored the late Forrest C. Pogue by erecting a monument at the public library recognizing the area native's contributions to the literary and research fields.

•Crittenden County Judge-Executive Fred Brown was selected Man of the Year by the Chamber of Commerce.

•A drug roundup in May and one last winter netted nearly 30 individuals charged with various drug offenses.

•Sheriff Wayne Agent won the primary election for sheriff and he was unopposed in the general election. Political newcomer Joe Myers won the primary election for county coroner.

•The City of Marion agreed to sell its interest in a permit for a hydro-electric plant on the Ohio River at Smithland for \$1 million.

•Marion native Doug Travis was recognized for his long service to the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources Agency. The state named a wildlife management area in far western Kentucky on the Mississippi River for Travis.

•Crittenden County Senior Citizens Center received state and federal aid to build an addition onto its facility. The 3,200-square-foot addition will cost nearly \$350,000 and will include a recreation area and computer room.

•A Crittenden County Grand Jury dismissed homicide charges against Mark Riddle of Dycusburg in connection with the death of Carter Peek. Peek died after an incident in the parking lot outside the cafe in Dycusburg.

•Morgan Lynn, a Crittenden County High School senior, became the first county resident to study overseas for an entire school year. She left for Belgium in August.

•Mining rights for a new coal mine in the northern portion of Crittenden County were sold to Phoenix Coal Company who plans to continue operating the facility – the only coal mine in Crittenden County.

•The state highway department began negotiations with local property owners to purchase their land in order to make way for a new four-lane highway between Marion and Fredonia. The highway, dubbed U.S. 641 because it runs parallel with the current federal highway, will eventually go all the way to the Western Kentucky Parkway between Eddyville and Princeton.

•In June, three young people died in a fiery head-on wreck south of Dycusburg. Andrea K. LeFan, 17, was in one car and Joey Taylor Jr., 23, and LeeAnn McFarland, 17, were in the other. All perished in the tragic accident.