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INSIDE - THIS ISSUE!



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Grant County News

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Vol. 110, No. 45

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2016

40 Pages

Election brings 54 percent turnout

By Bryan Marshall
Editor

With only one contested local race, Grant County voters still turned out in larger-than-usual numbers to cast their ballot for president and other offices.

There were 9,690 ballots cast for a 54.68 percent turnout locally, about 4 percent lower than the state-wide turnout.

Grant County Clerk Tabatha Clemons said she was encouraged by the turnout.

“Several precincts commented on how many younger voters came to the polls,” Clemons said. “We’ve seen such low-voter turnout since I’ve been the county clerk that I’m really excited that we’ve crossed that bridge of 50-percent turnout.”

Corinth Commission

The only contested local race was for Corinth City Commission.

Despite less than 200 votes cast, it provided a couple interesting things of note.

The race featured five candidates for four seats on the commission.

In Grant County-only votes, Lila McDaniel led vote getters with 50, followed by Barbara New with 44 and Jeanette Houk with 34.

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Grant County names interim superintendent

By Bryan Marshall
Editor

Grant County Schools has decided who will take over for Superintendent Ron Livingood after his mid-year retirement.

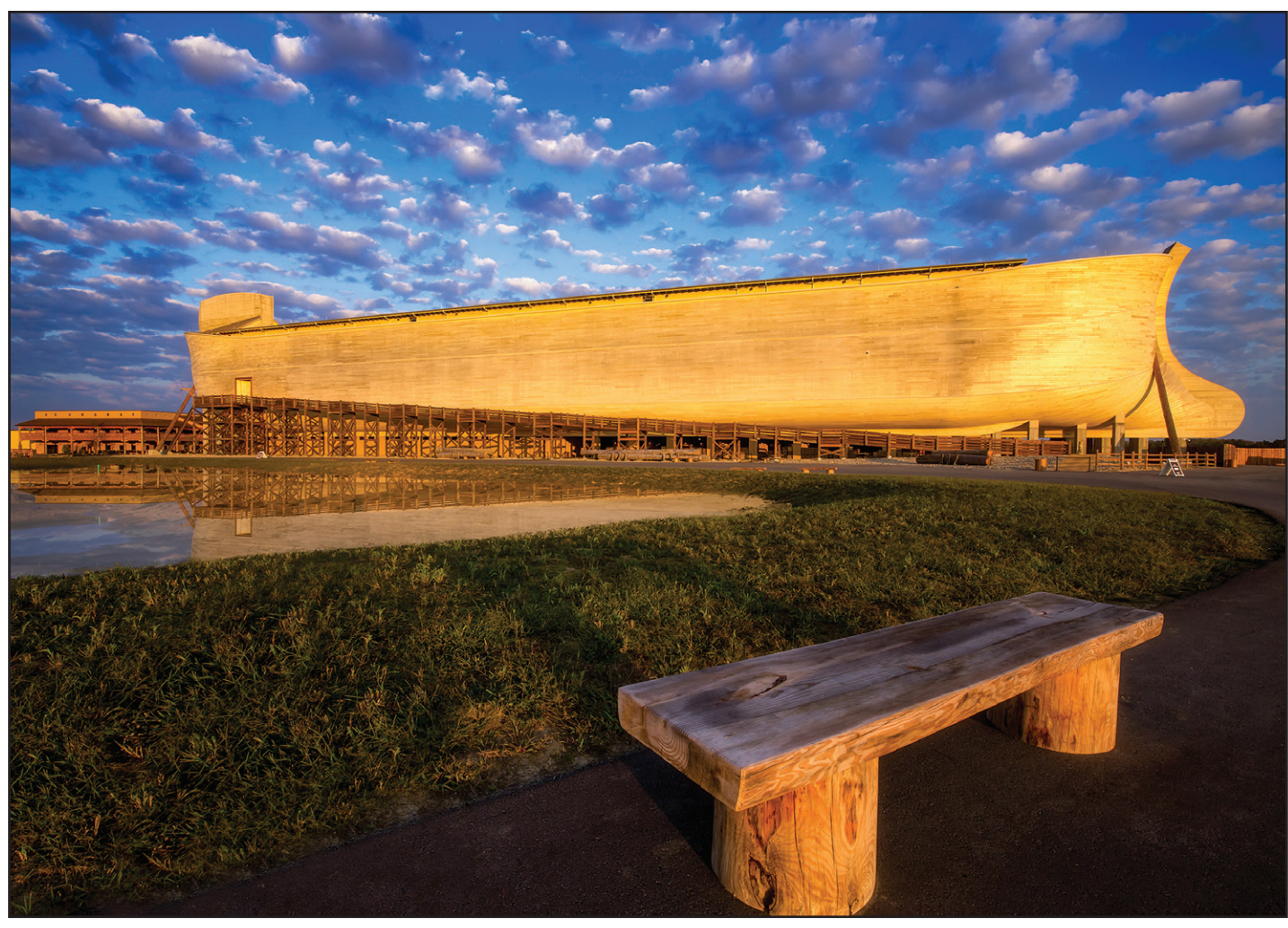
Livingood recently announced he would retire at the end of December.

The Grant County School Board now has named Matt Morgan, assistant superintendent of finance and personnel, as interim superintendent beginning Jan. 1, 2017.

“I am honored to be chosen by the board of education to lead this district in the wake of Dr. Livingood’s retirement,” Morgan said. “I plan to continue the good work that we have started to work to ensure that students are engaged in learning and will graduate college and career ready.”

Morgan is in his 26th year in education with all but one being with Grant County Schools.

See SUPERINTENDENT page 22



Ark attendance nearing 500,000

By Bryan Marshall
Editor

Since opening on July 7, the Ark Encounter in Williamstown has been flooded with more than 425,000 visitors in four months.

The life-sized Noah’s Ark attraction is expected to reach a half million visitors by the end of the month, according to Mark Looy, chief communications officer for Answers in Genesis and the Ark Encounter.

“We are not only ecstatic with the turnout, but also with the rave reviews we are receiving from our guests,” Looy said. “I want to point out, too, that because the Ark opened in July, we missed several weeks of the vacation season. So for the second year, we may see even high-

er attendance at the Ark. That belief is shared by experts with the respected America’s Research Group.”

Research commissioned by Answers in Genesis through America’s Research Group estimated that a minimum of 1.4 million people will visit the Ark in its first year.

Looy said the same research group predicted the Creation Museum would receive 400,000 visitors in its first year.

The museum, which Looy said is having its best attendance year, ended up with 404,000 visitors in 2007-08.

By the end of September and in under three months, the Ark Encounter had already surpassed 325,000 visitors, the attendance figure Looy said a state of

“With new phases to be added to the Ark Encounter over the next few years, such as the walled city, the attendance should be higher and Grant County will be blessed with even more visitors taking advantage of the services in the county.”

- MARK LOOY
AIG and Ark Encounter CCO

Kentucky study said would take one year to achieve.

Looy said the state added that if the attraction was less creationist and not as religious, 500,000 people might come the first year.

“Well, we are certainly religious and creationist, and yet by the end of this month, we will be closing in on that 500,000 figure,” he said.

Motor coach bookings have been higher than expected for the fall as group tours visit the Ark.

On some days this fall, summer-like numbers of 6,000 or more visitors have toured the Ark on some Saturdays in October, according to Looy.

Into November, Looy said the Ark has even had around 5,000 guests on some days.

As opposed to visitors coming to the Creation Museum, Looy said the Ark appears to be drawing many more unchurched people.

See ARK page 22

Health officials see success in needle exchange

by the NUMBERS



BATTLING THE HEROIN EPIDEMIC- Grant County is the only needle exchange program operating in the Northern Kentucky Health Department’s jurisdiction. Officials have seen success in the first six months of the program’s operation.



By Bryan Marshall
Editor

In its first six months, the Grant County Syringe Access Exchange Program has had 57 participants and 40 visits from return clients.

The goal of the needle exchange program, which allows participants to exchange dirty, heroin-tainted syringes for clean needles, is to halt the dramatic rise of hepatitis C cases in northern Kentucky during the heroin epidemic.

Northern Kentucky’s rate of hepatitis C infection is among the highest in the country, with more than 1,100 cases diagnosed in 2015.

The program began at the Grant County Health Center on March 16.

Of the participants, 47 percent live with someone else who uses heroin.

Eighty-four percent of participants are between the ages of 18 and 39.

Statistics recently released by the Northern Kentucky Health Department are through Sept. 14.

Dr. Lynne Saddler, district director of health for the health department, said she is pleased

with the program’s operation so far in Grant County.

“The program has operated exactly the way that it was designed to,” Saddler said. “It provides clean syringes and equipment to help prevent the spread of infectious diseases from IV drug use, but does more than that. Program participants have taken advantage of other health care services, like testing for pregnancy, hepatitis, HIV and STDs; vaccines and naloxone overdose reversal kits. Syringe access exchange programs are also a link to substance abuse treatment, and that has been the case in Grant County. In the first six months, 27 referrals were made to addiction treatment; and nine people were verified as having entered a detox program.”

Grant County is the only needle exchange program operating in the health department’s jurisdiction.

Senate Bill 192, passed in March 2015, allows for syringe exchanges to operate in Kentucky.

However, their use must be approved by the Board of Health and county/city government (if applicable) in which they operate.

See NEEDLE EXCHANGE page 16



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ARK

Continued from page 1

A walk through the parking lot of the Ark Encounter shows that many visitors are traveling from not only from outside of Kentucky, but as far as Texas and California and many states in between.

“We estimate that about 95 percent of our guests are coming from outside our tri-state region of Kentucky, Indiana and Ohio,” Looy said. “This means that tourism dollars are flowing into Kentucky from all over the country as Ark visitors are staying in hotels, eating in restaurants, shopping in stores and so on. Also, the state’s treasury is certainly benefiting from all the state sales tax Kentucky is collecting from Ark visitors.”

The interest in the project has even gone global, said Looy.

A Japanese TV crew recently spent two days filming at the Ark and a report on the attraction just appeared on a German TV network.

Looy anticipates the 1.4 million visitor mark should be exceeded by July 2017, especially with an expected spike in attendance in May and June as summer vacation season ramps up.

“About 7,000 to 7,500 guests is the maximum number of people we have been seeing in a day at the Ark,” he said. “But it’s not because we can’t handle more visitors inside the massive Ark. That 7,000 cap is due to the reality of not having enough hotel

rooms in the region for everyone who wants to visit the Ark. People who are discovering that hotels are sold out in the region and that they may have the only option of staying overnight in Indiana means that many potential visitors just give up trying.”

The limited hotels located in Dry Ridge have seen a large jump in guests with many rooms sold out to Ark visitors.

Before the Ark Encounter opened, the average occupancy rate for local hotels ranged from 40 to 70 percent, with the NASCAR race at Kentucky Speedway bringing in the biggest draw, said Tracie Kinman-Brown, director of the Grant County Tourism and Convention Commission.

Since July, when the Ark opened its doors, the hotel occupancy rate has skyrocketed to an average of 97 percent.

That rise of in hotel guests also has led to increased revenue.

In the first quarter of the 2015-16 fiscal year, about \$36,000 was generated through the 3 percent transient room tax. However, the amount raised through the tax from July through September of this year has increased to more than \$63,000.

Kinman-Brown said that 3 percent of the money from the tax goes to the county while the remaining funds are used by the tourism commission to promote Grant County.

While Looy admits he hopes more hotels will be built in the county, he

said many local businesses, especially in Dry Ridge, appear to be delighted with all the tourism being brought to the region.

A stop inside Cracker Barrel at the Dry Ridge Outlet Center proves the number of diners have been boosted as visitors browse around the store waiting to be called to sit at a table.

Ark officials repeatedly have pointed to Beans Café and Bakery off exit 156 as another business seeing a significant increase in the number of patrons.

At the Ark, brochures produced by the Grant County Chamber of Commerce listing some of the businesses and attractions in the county are being distributed.

The Grant County News is also on sale inside the attraction.

“With new phases to be added to the Ark Encounter over the next few years, such as the walled city, the attendance should be higher and Grant County will be blessed with even more visitors taking advantage of the services in the county,” Looy said.

The walled city and a large theater are two projects that will likely open next at the Ark.

However, Looy said it depends on several factors, including funding.

“In my mind, I think the walled city, in its own special way, will be just as impressive as the Ark,” he said. “Over the months, we will be building an outdoor village and expand the

popular zoo behind the Ark. Meanwhile, we are using some large space inside the Ark for guests to watch films and hold special events.”

For its first holiday season since opening, the Ark Encounter also will offer Christmas at the Ark during the evenings of December 16-23 and Dec. 26-30. “After walking through the Ark, guests can stroll the beautifully decorated grounds to see thousands of twinkling Christmas lights,” Looy said. “They can also have dinner at Emzara’s Kitchen and also shop for unique gifts from our fair trade vendors that are located inside the retail boutique that is located under the Ark.”

Months after being open, Looy said Ark officials still deal with misinformation about the tourist attraction.

The biggest falsehood, according to Looy, is secularists continuing to claim that taxpayer money helped build the Ark.

Looy said the claim is false and the Ark’s construction was funded entirely by supporters through bonds, donations and memberships.

“The irony in this false claim is that while no state money has been used to construct the Ark, the state will actually see money added, not taken away, to the treasury as sales tax is collected at the Ark and at other places where tourists will go,” Looy said. “The tax burden on citizens will be lower. Tourism dollars are pouring into the state, and as sales tax is col-

lected, Kentucky’s taxpayers are ultimately benefiting.”

Secondly, Looy said some atheists have been using blogs and the social media to try to downplay the success of the Ark.

Some have suggested that attendance was struggling because the parking lot was not even half full.

However, Looy said not everyone realizes the 4,000-spot parking lot, along with several spaces for tour buses, was built to handle future phases as the Ark Encounter grows.

“We wanted to build the full parking lot now in order to be good stewards and save money,” he said. “So, if you see that the parking lot is, let’s say, one third full, that would mean that around 1,400 cars and buses were there, and that translates to about 4,000-5,000 people at the Ark.”

Although he was there through construction and has toured the grounds countless times, Looy said his reaction to seeing the recreation of Noah’s Ark is still the same as the first time.

“I still get goosebumps whenever I drive up and see the huge Ark come into view,” he said. “It’s a jaw-dropping experience. Also, as I watch the reaction of our guests as they pull up to the 510-foot-long Ark, the gasps and comments are wonderful to observe.”

For more information about the Ark Encounter, go to www.arkecounter.com.



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November 27, 2016

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SUPERINTENDENT

Continued from page 1

After a year as a math and science teacher at Nelson County High School, Morgan spent seven years at Grant County High School teaching math and serving as an assistant soccer and football coach.

Morgan then moved on to become assistant principal at Grant County Middle School under Livingood.

At GCMS, he also was the middle school football coach and athletic director.

Morgan then moved to the board of education office as district director of pupil personnel for

six years before spending the past 10 years as the assistant superintendent for finance and personnel.

“I have been fortunate to work closely with Dr. Livingood and I have been able to have a wealth of experiences that I feel have prepared me well for this role,” Morgan said about being named interim superintendent. “The biggest change for me will be that I will be flying solo, so to speak. Plus, I will also still be completing the majority of my current duties in my position as assistant superintendent.”

The timeline for a permanent replacement for Livingood will not begin until after the new year.

Two new board positions will be filled in January and then the superintendent search can begin.

A new superintendent is expected to be in place by July 1, if not earlier.

Morgan said he does plan to apply for the position.

“Grant County schools has a dear place in my heart,” he said. “I was raised here and am a graduate of the high school. I have made my home in Grant County and my children are and will be graduates of the system. I can think of no better place to spend my time and energy than serving to work for the betterment of the students of Grant County.”



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