

★ ★ ★ RIVER REGION PROGRESS REPORT ★ ★ ★



Wickliffe Boat Ramp

Ballard County builds on river, energy and infrastructure opportunities

By Laurna Pruett
KPI Writer

Ballard County’s location at the meeting point of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers has long influenced its economy. Now, county leaders are looking to build on that advantage while preparing for new opportunities connected to maritime business, energy development and a proposed regional data center.

Ballard County Judge-Executive Todd Cooper said Traylor Bros., James Marine, ADM/ARTCO and Economy Boat Store, also known as PTL Marine, are among the businesses operating along the river in Wickliffe. Some have maintained a presence there since the 1980s.

Together with supporting businesses, Cooper estimates they provide more than 200 jobs. He said their impact reaches beyond employment because they also support schools, students, festivals and other community events.

“It is local government and economic development’s responsibility to help them

sustain and grow,” Cooper said.

The county is working with the City of Wickliffe, Ballard County Industrial Development Authority and West Kentucky Regional Riverport Authority to support those companies and encourage additional investment.

Recent improvements include the expansion of the Wickliffe boat ramp in 2023 and upgrades to the Court Street railroad crossing in 2026. The crossing project created a safer route for semitrailers making deliveries to riverfront businesses.

The city also secured \$140,000 in grants to begin environmental and other required studies on a 30-acre site extending north from Court Street to Willow Creek. Completing that work is an important step toward making the property ready for future development.

Cooper said Ballard County’s riverfront offers room for additional maritime businesses. Local officials have been told that approximately 80% of the

raw materials and goods traveling the Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Cumberland rivers pass Wickliffe each year.

“We believe we can add to the current businesses operating on the river in Wickliffe by tapping this tremendous opportunity,” Cooper said.

Preparing for Regional Investment

Economic-development efforts are also taking place in Kevil, where the county is partnering with the owner of a privately held 14-acre property. The site will be marketed to nuclear- and U.S. Department of Energy-related support businesses seeking locations near the Paducah DOE site.

Cooper said Ballard County already has three or four businesses that support work at the DOE facility. County leaders hope future investment at the site will help those companies grow while attracting additional

see **BUILDS**,
page C5

HCRA continues using new energy efficient Machinery from \$2.2 million infrastructure improvement project

By Ciro Astarita
KPI Writer

(HENDERSON, KY)—At the beginning of this year, The Henderson County Riverport Authority (HCRA) purchased a \$2.3 million dollar ‘electrical handler’. This state of the art piece of machinery is intended to assist operations by easing the pressure on the dock’s 40 year old 125-ton cable crane. More recently, the HCRA hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the official opening of the port on April 30th. Notable attendees include Rocky Adkins(D)—who is currently running for governor next year and recently left the Beshear Administration on July 10th— and Ben

Weithman, the HCRA Executive Director. The dock(originally for scrap/coal and later grain) was built in 2004 and was used primarily for exports. Weithman stated they have seen an increase in imports over the years including metals, fertilizers, and other bulk materials. The function of this machinery [as a tool for building infrastructure] serves to increase the turnover of maritime vehicles, reducing seasonal bottlenecks and demurrage costs for customers paying for the port’s services. Weithman explained this at the ribbon cutting event stating “it allows us to drive over to the railroad tracks and to

see **HCRA**,
page C4



“A big milestone at the Henderson County Riverport Authority today. For the first time, we unloaded two barges at the same time. Our new Sennebogen material handler unloaded fertilizer while our 125-ton American crane handled a barge of aluminum.”-Henderson County Riverport Authority. Photo sourced from HCRA LinkedIn post.

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Eagle Fabrication: Building on tradition, looking to the future

By Greg LeNeave
KPI Newspaper Group

Eagle Fabrication has a strong history—one built on hard work, experience and a commitment to doing things the right way. Much of that foundation can be traced back to co-founder Tim Thomas, whose vision helped establish the company as a respected name in the marine fabrication industry.

Eagle Fabrication launched its first barge in 1999. Nearly two decades later, the company reached a significant milestone when it completed its 100th barge in 2019. The 180-foot vessel weighed approximately 700 tons, marking an impressive achievement for a company that had grown steadily through years of dedication and craftsmanship.

Following Tim Thomas' passing in 2018, his son, Matt Thomas, stepped into a leadership role and continued the family tradition. Today, Matt and his crew are taking fabrication beyond the standard, combining generations of knowledge with a willingness to find practical solutions for today's marine industry.

Taking Fabrication Beyond the Standard

The marine industry is constantly changing, and today's barge operators often need equipment designed around the specific demands of their work. Custom fabrication gives companies the flexibility to make their equipment work harder and more efficiently for the jobs they perform every day.

Eagle Fabrication understands that not every project can be solved with an off-the-shelf design.

One example of the company's capabilities took Eagle's work far beyond the inland waterways of Illinois—all the way to Alaska's North Slope.

A 180-foot steel deck barge originated at Eagle Fabrication's Illinois facility before being shipped thousands of miles to Alaska. Once the components arrived, the barge was assembled and welded on-site in the harsh Alaskan environment. After construction was completed, the vessel was launched into the Beaufort Sea, ready to go to work.

It is a great example of what specialized fabrication can accomplish. The job required more than simply building a barge. It required planning, precision, transportation logistics and the ability to adapt to an entirely different environment.

The Advantage of Specialized Building Skills

There is a tremendous advantage to working with a builder that understands the realities of the marine industry.

Eagle Fabrication builds its barges with the customer's needs in mind. The company takes the time to understand how a vessel will be used and what the customer expects it to accomplish.

For those in the barge and river industry, that approach can make a significant difference.

Some customers require a highly specialized design built around a particular project or application. Others need a dependable inland river-going barge capable of handling the everyday demands of transporting equipment and materials.

Eagle Fabrication provides both.

Matt Thomas and his crew offer flat deck barges, spud barges and specialty vessels, giving customers the opportunity to choose a proven platform or develop a solution tailored to their specific needs.

Experience That Carries Forward

Perhaps one of the most valuable assets Eagle Fabrication brings to each new project is its ac-

cumulated knowledge.

Shipbuilding is an industry where experience matters. Lessons learned on one project become part of the next. Over the years, that knowledge becomes ingrained in the way a company approaches design, fabrication, welding and construction.

At Eagle Fabrication, that experience is also part of a family legacy.

The passing of knowledge from one generation to the next is one of the most rewarding aspects of a family-owned business. Tim Thomas helped build the foundation. Today, Matt Thomas and his crew are continuing that work while looking for ways to make things better; and that may be what sets Eagle Fabrication apart.

Building What the Customer Needs

In an industry where reliability matters, having a fabrication partner who understands the job can be a tremendous advantage.

Whether the need is a traditional inland river barge, a spud barge for a specialized project, or a custom vessel designed for a unique environment, Eagle Fabrication approaches each project with the same goal: build it right and build it for the work it needs to do.

That philosophy has carried the company from its first barge in 1999 to its 100th barge and beyond.

Today, Matt Thomas and the Eagle Fabrication crew continue to build on the foundation established by Tim Thomas. They are carrying forward the knowledge of one generation while embracing the challenges of the next.

What's good to see from the family business side of things is that knowledge passed from one generation to the next. Matt Thomas and the crew at Eagle Fabrication are making changes to make things better and that is always needed in today's economy.

Freeman Automation coming to Hickory Industrial Park, bringing investment and new jobs

Graves County Economic Development (GCED) is proud to welcome its newest tenant, Freeman Automation, LLC, to the

Hickory Industrial Park. Freeman Automation is purchasing 5 acres in the Hickory Industrial Park near Mayfield, with plans to build a 4,000

square-foot facility to house their expanding operation. They expect to add 10 new positions, bringing their total number of jobs to 20

over the life of the project.

“Kentucky’s advanced manufacturing sector is paving the way for investment and quality

job opportunities for communities across the entire state,” said Gov. Andy Beshear. “When a company chooses to expand its

operation here in the commonwealth, it

see **FREEMAN**, page C5



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Paducah’s Riverfront taking a whole new look

By Scott Waggoner
KPI Writer

PADUCAH, Ky. — A major addition to Paducah’s riverfront is nearing completion as construction continues on the city’s new \$10.4 million excursion pier at Riverfront Park. Funded through a BUILD grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation and a \$3.5 million allocation from Kentucky lawmakers, the project is designed to enhance river tourism and create a welcoming gateway for visitors arriving by water. Subcontractor C.J. Mahan Construction

is completing the massive structure, which measures approximately 200 feet wide and 500 feet long. City leaders have already met with several cruise line representatives to discuss future docking agreements once the facility is operational. The new pier may attract additional cruise ships to Paducah and encourage more visitors to explore the city’s downtown attractions, restaurants, and businesses. The excursion pier is part of a broader effort to improve the city’s riverfront experience. Schultz

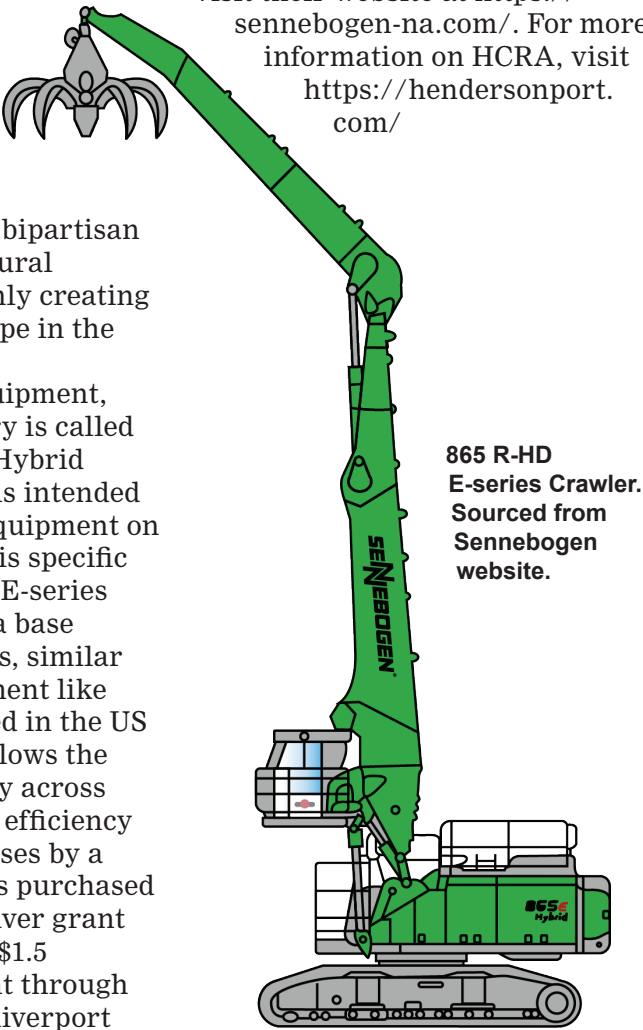
Park already features a transient boat dock, and additional improvements are underway, including new bus shelters near the National Quilt Museum, Walker Hall, and the Paducah Convention Center. City officials are considering additional enhancements to further improve the riverfront area. Local leaders believe the new excursion pier will strengthen Paducah’s position as a destination along the Ohio and Tennessee river systems while creating new opportunities for tourism and economic growth.

HCRA, from page C1

load and unload railcars, so we can make multiple uses of this.” Adkins [relating to infrastructure] said “I think the season that you’re seeing in Kentucky with record-breaking economic development announcements is because of the investment that’s been made in transportation modes, whether it’s on air, rail, road or here at riverports up and down this river.” This is following a string of rural infrastructure announcements from KY Republicans over the past months. KY’s bipartisan support of infrastructural development is certainly creating an interesting landscape in the State...given its past.

In regards to the equipment, this piece of machinery is called the Sennebogen 865E Hybrid material handler and is intended to supplement older equipment on industrial jobsites. This specific model is the 865 R-HD E-series Crawler and features a base with continuous tracks, similar to agricultural equipment like tractors and tanks used in the US Armed Forces. This allows the machine to move freely across the jobsite, increasing efficiency and operational expenses by a massive margin. It was purchased with help from state river grant programs including a \$1.5 million no-match grant through the Kentucky Public Riverport

Construction and Maintenance (KPRCM). On the Sennebogen website it states “The SENNEBOGEN 865 Hybrid impresses with state-of-the-art machine technology, comfort and the best reliability. Benefit from the most modern recuperation technology on the market! With the SENNEBOGEN Green Hybrid System, you can reduce your energy consumption by up to 50%.” For more information on Sennebogen and their various models of industrial machinery, visit their website at <https://sennebogen-na.com/>. For more information on HCRA, visit <https://hendersonport.com/>



865 R-HD E-series Crawler. Sourced from Sennebogen website.

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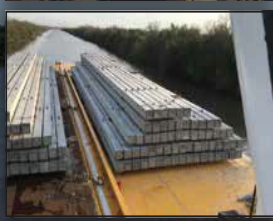
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from page C1

employers.

The region could also benefit from a proposed data center expected to be developed on DOE and privately owned property in McCracken County. Cooper said county leaders have been told the potential investment could reach \$100 billion.

“Being infused into a region, that is life-changing for future generations,” Cooper said.

He said Ballard County has spent about a decade working to create more local employment opportunities so young people will not have to leave the region after high school to find work.

Ballard County plans to compete for supporting businesses



by promoting its lower utility and operating costs, low local tax rates and lack of zoning and planning requirements.

Workforce preparation will be another important part of that effort.

Ballard County Schools has developed student pathways in health care, industrial maintenance, welding and agribusiness. West Kentucky Community and Technical College and Murray State

University are also developing programs to prepare adults and recent graduates for positions connected to the DOE site.

Infrastructure Remains a Challenge

While opportunities are growing, Cooper said maintaining the roads and bridges needed by residents, farmers and businesses remains a major challenge.

Ballard County’s Fiscal Year 2027 County Road Aid allocation is \$815,552—nearly \$200,000 less than the previous budget year. Meanwhile, construction and material costs continue to rise.

A recently completed 70-foot county bridge cost approximately \$375,000. Cooper said the county has about four additional bridges that could cost a

combined \$1 million to replace if they are closed.

“The road funding continually decreases, but our costs increase daily,” Cooper said.

Ballard County partnered with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and the seven other Purchase Area counties to apply for a \$39 million U.S. Department of Transportation grant. If awarded, the funding would help replace four Ballard County bridges.

Until more funding becomes available, the county may have to pursue additional grants, borrow money or install cross drains as temporary replacements to reopen roads.

Cooper said infrastructure investments are necessary for more than daily travel. They

also help preserve existing jobs and allow local businesses to grow. Farmers sometimes assist the county by mowing roadways or grading gravel roads they regularly use.

“Any community wanting to help sustain business and grow existing business must take care of existing infrastructure and look for ways to improve it,” Cooper said.

From the riverfront in Wickliffe to emerging opportunities near the DOE site, Ballard County is working to position itself for growth. The goal is not only to recruit new companies, but also to strengthen existing employers, improve transportation and create opportunities that allow future generations to build their lives close to home.

FREEMAN,
from page C2

is a reflection of the resources, workforce and business-friendly environment they have access to. The 20 good-paying jobs created from this project represent 20 Kentuckians who can continue providing for themselves and their families. I want to thank Freeman Automation for their belief in Kentucky and look forward to their future success.”

Freeman Automation manufactures electrical control panels for industrial machinery. They combine engineering, fabrication, and field expertise to deliver projects for a range of customers including municipal utilities, advanced manufacturing, public infrastructure, and commercial and

industrial projects.

“We’re excited to make this investment in Graves County and establish Freeman Automation’s new home in the Hickory Industrial Park,” said Josh Freeman, president, Freeman Automation, LLC. “Our new facility will give us the room to expand our capabilities while providing a better environment for our employees and customers.”

“We would like to express our deep appreciation to the governor’s office and to the Kentucky Cabinet of Economic Development for their support, along with Jason Lemle with Graves County Economic Development, Mayor Kathy O’Nan, and Judge-Executive Jesse Perry for their support and assistance throughout this process,” Freeman

added. “Their commitment to helping local businesses grow and invest in Graves County made a real difference in bringing this project together. We’re proud to make this investment here and look forward to being a part of the continued growth and success of the community.”

Local leaders are excited to welcome Freeman Automation as the newest member of the growing family of highly specialized, advanced manufacturing companies to make their home in Graves County.

“Announcements like this are proof that our central location, highly trained workforce, and business-friendly policies are bringing investments and good jobs to Graves County,” said Judge-Executive Jesse Perry. “We welcome Freeman

Automation and look forward to working closely with them in the future.”

Mayfield Mayor Kathy O’Nan echoed that welcome. “Every time a company elects to locate or expand in our community, they become an important part of our economic future. We appreciate Freeman’s commitment and will honor it by continuing to work hard to make our community a great place to live and work,” said O’Nan.

GCED President Jason Lemle said he is excited about this opportunity and grateful to the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development for their support of the project. “Freeman Automation is an ideal fit for Graves County,” said Lemle. “They already have several local customers here and I’m confident this move

will help them achieve their business objectives. Working with the owner has been a tremendously positive experience, and I’m excited to be part of that journey.”

The Hickory Industrial Park, managed by GCED, is home to five businesses, staffed by more than 600 employees.

Graves County Economic Development works to support local industry and create economic growth through the development of business and industry in Mayfield, Graves County and the surrounding area.

About Graves County Economic Development

Founded in 1981, Graves County Economic Development has become the driving force behind business expansion and development

opportunities in the community. GCED continues to foster strong relationships with existing businesses and attracts new industry to Graves County. We strive to make our community a better place to work, live and raise a family.

About Freeman Automation, LLC

Freeman Automation is a manufacturer of electrical control panels for industrial machinery. We deliver integrated automation and electrical solutions that keep critical systems running efficiently and safely. We offer deep technical knowledge, field-tested craftsmanship, and a commitment to doing the job right. Learn more about Freeman Automation at www.freemanautomation.com.

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Paducah’s Four Rivers Legacy:

How History Shaped a Modern Barge Industry

By **Laurna Pruett**
KPI Writer

Paducah, Kentucky, is more than just a river town—it is a strategic crossroads where four major waterways converge: the Ohio, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Cumberland Rivers. This geographic advantage has shaped the region’s identity for nearly two centuries, transforming it into a hub of commerce and industry that remains vital to the U.S. economy today.

The Origins: A River Town on the Rise
Founded in the early 19th century, Paducah quickly became a transportation and trade center thanks to its location at the confluence of the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers. In the era before railroads dominated the landscape, rivers were the primary highways for goods and people. Steamboats



see **LEGACY**, page C7

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LEGACY,
from page C6

became a common sight along the riverfront, carrying cotton, timber, livestock, and other goods to markets across the South and Midwest.

By the mid-1800s, Paducah’s river access made it an essential link in the nation’s expanding trade network. During the Civil War, its location was considered so strategic that Union forces occupied the city to control river traffic. The rivers were not just a means of transportation—they were lifelines for military logistics, commerce, and regional development.

Industrial Growth and the Barge Era

The 20th century ushered in a new era for river transport with the rise of the barge industry. Unlike the steamboats, barges offered the capacity to carry massive quantities of cargo—grain, coal, petroleum, and construction materials—more efficiently and at a lower cost than rail or truck transport.

Paducah emerged as a central hub for these operations. Its proximity to multiple rivers, including access to the Mississippi, positioned it as a gateway for goods moving from the Midwest to the

Gulf of Mexico and beyond. The completion of locks and dams further enhanced navigability, making inland waterways a dependable mode of transport even during low-water seasons.

World War II and Postwar Expansion

World War II marked another turning point for Paducah’s river economy. The demand for steel, coal, and petroleum skyrocketed, and the inland waterways became critical to supplying America’s war machine. After the war, barge companies expanded operations, investing in fleets and infrastructure to meet growing demand from agriculture, energy, and manufacturing sectors.

The 1950s and 1960s saw a surge in economic activity tied to river transport, with Paducah becoming home to shipyards, repair facilities, and a skilled workforce specializing in marine engineering. The region also attracted federal investment in navigation infrastructure, securing its role as a long-term transportation hub.

Today’s River Economy

In modern times, Paducah’s river heritage continues to power economic growth. The inland waterways remain

one of the most efficient, cost-effective, and environmentally friendly methods of freight transportation. Each barge can carry the equivalent of 70 truckloads, reducing congestion on highways and minimizing fuel consumption.

Companies based in the region provide essential services that keep the river economy moving. Barge operators, logistics firms, and marine service providers ensure goods flow smoothly from Kentucky to markets across the globe. These industries support thousands of local jobs and drive investment in infrastructure, education, and workforce development.

A Legacy with a Future

Paducah’s history with the rivers is a story of adaptation and resilience. From steamboats to barges, from the Civil War to the global marketplace, the city has leveraged its location and ingenuity to remain at the forefront of inland navigation. As new technologies and infrastructure projects continue to modernize the river system, Paducah stands as both a guardian of a proud legacy and a leader in shaping the future of America’s inland waterways.

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Barney Schulte (Left), lead engineer for the Kentucky Lock Addition Project, confers with Jody Robinson, Contract Team lead at Western Kentucky Area Office, while standing on top of the completed cofferdam at the Kentucky Lock Addition Project March 22, 2021 on the Tennessee River in Grand Rivers, Kentucky. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Nashville District is constructing a new 110-foot by 1,200-foot navigation lock at the Tennessee Valley Authority project.

(USACE Photo by Lee Roberts)

Mississippi and Ohio Rivers News Briefs

Mississippi River
Louisiana International Terminal: Federal permit approved for the new deepwater container terminal in St. Bernard Parish.

Osceola Harbor: \$6.5 million secured to extend the navigation channel 3,000 feet.

Low-Water Inspections: Mississippi River Commission reviewed drought resilience and navigation restrictions at major ports.

Port of Gulfport: Channel deepening to 46 feet continues through federal review.

Ohio River
Regulatory Changes: Huntington District will oversee Ohio's Corps permitting statewide starting Oct. 1.

Brent Spence Bridge: River-based construction operations are underway at the Kentucky-side logistics hub.

Big Rivers Dredging: Maintenance dredging continues at D.B. Wilson through Sept. 18.

Cairo Port: The \$300 million container-on-barge project continues pursuing federal and state funding.

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Cairo Port: The \$300 million container-on-barge project continues pursuing federal and state funding.

Cumberland River Port
Cumberland River Water Management: Corps continues balancing drought-related low water levels with navigation, hydropower and water-supply needs

River Infrastructure Maintenance: Corps crews continue maintenance work on locks and dams supporting Cumberland River navigation.

Cheatham Lock: The navigation lock remains a key link connecting Middle Tennessee commerce to the Mississippi River system.

Tennessee River Port Navigation
Maintenance: Corps maintenance crews continue supporting locks and dams along the Tennessee River to keep commercial traffic moving.

Tennessee River Dredging: Navigation dredging remains an ongoing priority at shoaling locations along the river system.

Paducah Riverfront: The major riverfront improvement project is nearing completion, with a September 2026 opening planned.

Regional Navigation: The Tennessee River

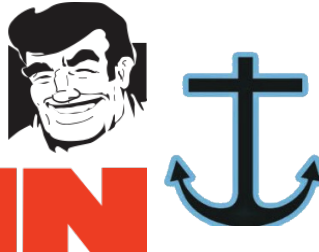
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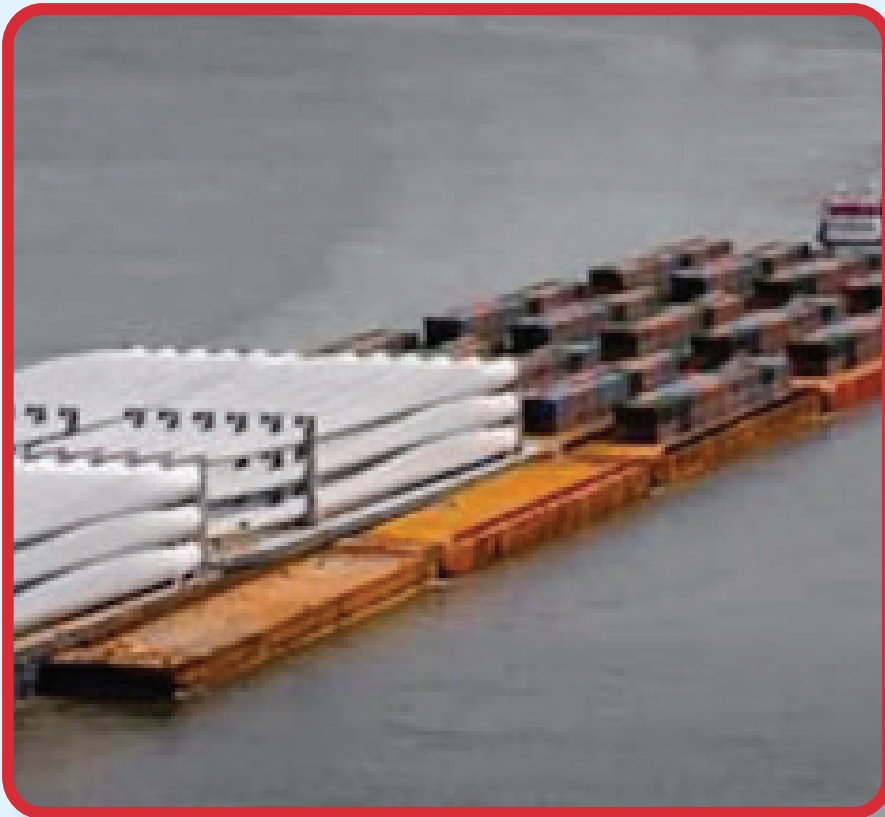
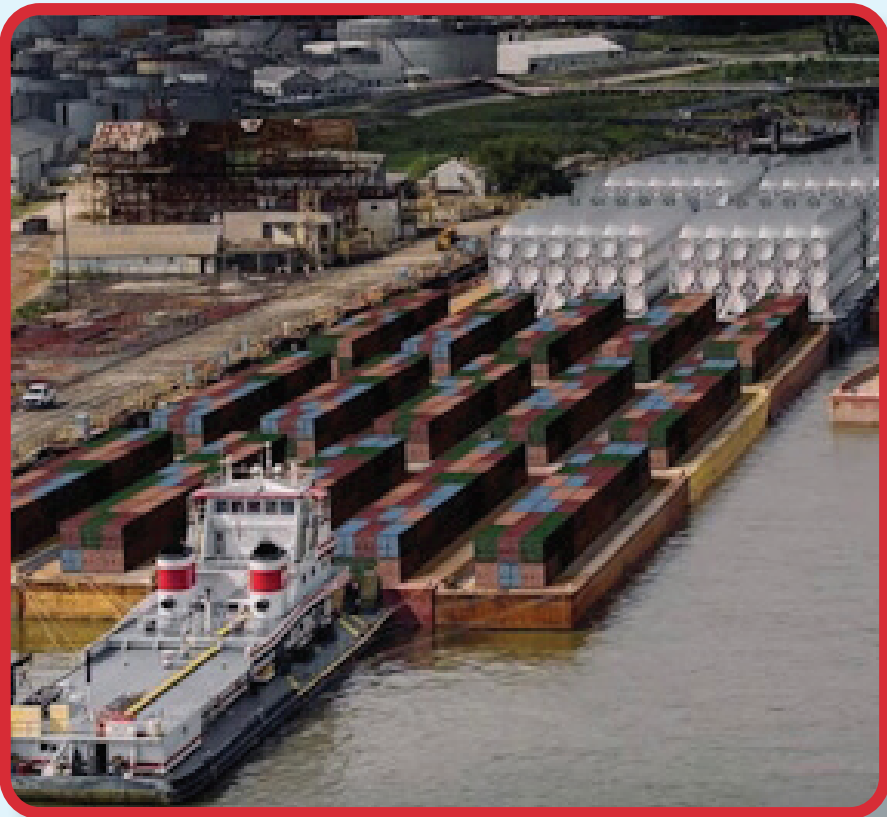


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Hines Furlong’s: how a WWII Vet expanded the River Industry

By: **Ciro Astarita**
KPI Writer

Hines Furlong is a very well known and prominent fixture in the barge/river transportation industry in the four river region. It started as a family business—originally named “The Bowling Green and Evansville Packet Company”—started by Captain Richard T. Williams and his three sons. Two of the sons—Tom & Edgar Williams—were Captains and Will Williams was their engineer. Together, they built a

steamboat and began operations in the 1870s. They transported passengers and goods from Evansville, TN to Paducah, KY, even stopping at popular tourist attractions like Mammoth Cave. Later in 1940, grandson of the founder—James R. Hines—formed James R. Hines & Company with T. C. Melton. They towed asphalt from Kyrock, KY to Bowling Green, KY on the Barren River. James R. Hines had a son himself. His name was James G. Hines, making him the Great-Grandson of

the originally Packet Company. He started working for his family at 14 and continued to help the business until he was enlisted to serve in WWII after graduating high school in 1943. The Rock Asphalt operation closed and the company entered the gasoline transportation business by adding Gulf Oil Company as a client. While James G. Hines was serving, the business continued to grow. Eventually, James G. Hines returned from his service. In 1946, He took 15 thousand dollars from

his time in the Armed Forces and savings from his river work to help create ‘James R. Hines’ Corporation with his father, who already had his boat ‘The New Hanover(100p)’ and a wooden asphalt barge. There barge was then replaced with a massive steel tank barge. They later purchased two more vessels, increasing their fleet of purchased and chartered tank barges. Later, The company was formed into Hines Furlong Line Inc.(HFL) and was incorporated in 2004 by Kent E. Furlong,



M/V John J. Kelley(320 hp). Photo from Hines Furlong Line

the Grandson of James G. Hines. Since then, they purchased the assets of Hunter Marine Transports Inc. of Nashville, TN

in 2017 and acquired the Campbell Transportation Company, Inc River Division in Januray, 2026.



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Community Ventures Breaks Ground on Cannonball Run Subdivision, Bringing New Housing to Tornado-Impacted Cayce

7 home development represents another step in Fulton Co.'s long-term recovery & investment in rural housing

SUBMITTED

CAYCE, Ky. — Community Ventures joined state and local officials, funding partners and community members Wednesday to break ground on Cannonball Run, a new seven-homesite residential development in Cayce that will expand housing opportunities while advancing the Fulton County community's long-term recovery from the 2021 tornado.

The project represents years of collaboration among Community Ventures, Fulton County and state, federal, regional and local partners to acquire property, secure resources, navigate environmental and development requirements, and prepare the site for new housing.

"The measure of this project will be the homes that rise here and the families who make their lives inside them," said Bart Horne, president of real estate development for Community Ventures. "We're humbled by this community's trust and grateful for the opportunity to help deliver on it."

Public investment supporting Cannonball Run includes Community

Development Block Grant–Disaster Recovery resources from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through the Kentucky Department for Local Government, as well as support by Kentucky Housing Corporation and the Rural Housing Trust Fund. Community Ventures also recognized Fulton County Fiscal Court, the Purchase Area Development District, and the public, nonprofit and private partners whose cooperation helped advance the development.

Fulton County Judge-Executive Jim Martin emphasized both the time required for disaster recovery and the importance of cooperation between the county and Community Ventures.

"I remember standing out in this road looking at this rugged property and these old, dilapidated houses that the tornado had smashed around and thinking, 'I wonder if we'll ever do anything with this?'" Martin said. "You have to buy land. You have to go through the grants process. You have to go through the environmental process. It just takes a lot of time. But we're

here today, and we're ready to go."

Martin described his vision for what the property will become. "I want to look over here and see children out here in the street riding bicycles," he said. "I want to see houses. I want to see neighbors being neighbors to other people. That is the dream of this project."

Sen. Jason Howell, who represents Fulton County and grew up in the area, emphasized the need for quality housing as the county works to retain families and strengthen schools, workforce and industry.

"We can't have people staying home, and we can't have people moving here and bringing families into our communities and into our schools, without a good place to live," Howell said.

Howell also stressed the importance of public-private collaboration in addressing Kentucky's housing needs.

"There aren't any silver-bullet answers," he said. "There are a lot of things that we have to do. Public-private partnerships and groups like Community Ventures are absolutely essential to this process."

Mark Welch, president of the

Fulton-Hickman Counties Economic Development Partnership and a Community Ventures board member, described housing as fundamental economic infrastructure.

"For those of us working in economic development, we see every day how housing is a foundation of a strong local economy," Welch said. "When a family considers staying

here or moving here, they're asking: 'Can I build a good life here? Is there a home for my family? Is this a

see **VENTURES**, page C15

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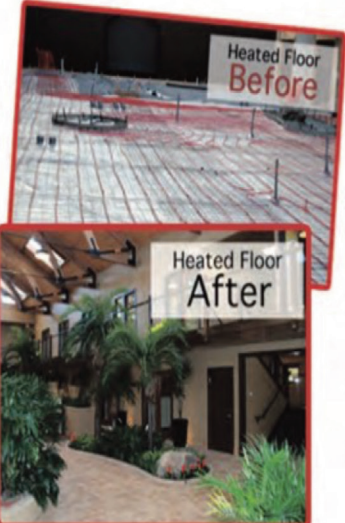




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Dr. Alexandra Oldham returns to Western Kentucky to care for local families

By Lurna Pruett
KPI Writer

A dream that began in middle school will soon bring Dr. Alexandra “Lexie” Oldham, DMD, to Western Kentucky.

Oldham will join Warmath Family Dentistry, located at 2418 New Holt Road in Paducah, and Ballard Family Dentistry, located at 148 E. Kentucky Drive in La Center. She will begin seeing patients in September and will provide general dentistry services for the entire family.

A graduate of Todd County Central High School, Oldham knew by middle school that she wanted to



become a dentist. While in high school, she participated in ULEAD, the University of Louisville's early-admission program for high school students. Through the program, she interviewed for early admission to dental school and began preparing for her future

career.

Oldham earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Louisville before completing four additional years at the university's School of Dentistry. Her education combined academics, technology, community involvement and hands-on training. During her final two years, she treated patients while continuing her classroom work.

Oldham graduated among the top 10 students in her dental class, but reaching that point required long and demanding days.

"The hardest part was balancing the hands-on and academic portion of school," Oldham said.

“Some days I would come home exhausted, but knowing that I was working toward moving back home to Western Kentucky always kept me motivated. I am so happy to be back and to be near family again.”

Oldham is married to Ballard County native Jarret Oldham. The couple welcomed a son this year and wanted to return to the area where Jarret grew up so their family could remain close to relatives.

Caring for children is one area of dentistry Oldham especially enjoys. She believes a child's earliest visits to the dentist can shape how that person views dental care for years to come.

"I love working with kids and making an effort to make their first dental experiences a positive memory," she said. "How they are treated as a child can affect how they view the dental office for the rest of their life, so it is important to me that we try to make them feel as comfortable as possible."

Oldham is also looking forward to providing more

procedures within the offices, giving patients additional opportunities to receive treatment from a dentist they already know and trust rather than being referred elsewhere.

She understands that many patients enter a dental office feeling nervous, embarrassed or worried that they will be judged. Her goal is to replace that fear with trust.

"I hope they feel welcome, cared for and know that they are never being judged," Oldham said. "I always make my recommendations based on what I would recommend to a family member."

She said the overall goal is to help patients feel good about their smiles while building a strong foundation for long-term oral health.

For Oldham, serving a smaller community also means taking time to listen and involving patients in their care.

“I think for smaller communities, it is important that health care professionals make the patients feel heard,” she said. “I think it’s important to make

decisions together that balance what the patient wants and the best care available.”

Her desire to help others was also evident during her time at UofL. Oldham served as a student liaison for raiseRED Dance Marathon, the university's largest student-run philanthropic organization. Its efforts benefit the Norton Children's Cancer Institute and the UofL School of Medicine. The organization is also part of the national Miracle Network Dance Marathon movement supporting children facing serious illnesses.

Outside of dentistry, Oldham enjoys spending time with her family, hiking, kayaking, crafting and taking part in almost anything outdoors.

As she prepares to meet local patients, Oldham wants people to know that her concern for them does not end when they leave the dental chair.

"I went into dentistry wanting to help others," she said. "The most important thing to me is working with the patients and helping them reach their goals. I want them to know that I'm here for them and that I think about them and their case even when I'm home."

Warmath Family Dentistry's Paducah location is open Tuesday through Friday. Ballard Family Dentistry in La Center is open Monday through Wednesday.

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Murray-Calloway County Hospital welcomes new Chief Financial Officer, Valerie Bryant

MURRAY, KY – Murray-Calloway County Hospital (MCCH) is pleased to announce the appointment of Valerie Bryant as Chief Financial Officer (CFO).

Bryant brings extensive healthcare financial leadership experience to MCCH, including 15 years of service as a Chief Financial Officer for hospitals in Michigan, Illinois, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Throughout her career, she has developed a strong background in healthcare finance, financial strategy, and operational leadership.

As CFO, Bryant will oversee MCCH’s financial operations, including budgeting, financial planning and reporting, revenue cycle management, and other key financial functions. As a member of the hospital’s executive leadership team, she will also help guide financial strategy and support MCCH’s continued growth and investment in healthcare services for

the region.

“We are excited to welcome Valerie to the Murray-Calloway County Hospital leadership team,” said Reba Celsor, CEO of MCCH. “Her extensive healthcare financial experience, strategic insight, and understanding of the challenges facing community hospitals will be tremendous assets to our organization. Just as importantly, Valerie shares our commitment to ensuring MCCH remains strong, independent, and positioned to continue serving this community for generations to come.”

Most recently, Bryant served at Vanderbilt University Medical Center’s Clarksville hospital. Her healthcare career has included financial leadership roles with hospitals across four states, giving her a broad perspective on the opportunities and challenges facing healthcare organizations today.

Bryant holds a Bachelor of Accountancy and a Master of Business Administration with a specialization in Finance from Walsh College of Accountancy and Business Administration in Troy, Michigan.

Originally from Michigan, Bryant currently resides in Clarksville, Tennessee, and plans to relocate to Murray in the near future. She and her husband, who were high school sweethearts, have been married for 37 years and have two adult children, a son and daughter, who reside in Michigan.

MCCH welcomes Valerie Bryant to its executive leadership team and looks forward to the experience and leadership she brings to the organization and community.

For more information, contact the Marketing Department at 270.762.1382, or visit our website at www.murrayhospital.org.

About Murray-Calloway County Hospital

Murray-Calloway County Hospital is a not-for-profit, community-owned hospital dedicated to providing outstanding healthcare services to Murray and the surrounding region. With a commitment to excellence and compassion, MCCH offers a full range of medical services to meet the needs of patients and families across Western Kentucky and Northwest Tennessee.



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How communities can help to grow local businesses

A community is comprised of various resources that coalesce to make it unique. Businesses are important components of that formula, and successful enterprises increase the chances a community will thrive. According to the business development experts at WSB, businesses help support and diversify a community property tax base, provide goods and services for existing and future residents, and contribute to a strong, local economy. There's much to gain from a thriving local business sector, and communities can help

them thrive and grow in various ways.

- Prioritize shopping at local businesses. Before making purchases online or at big-box retailers, shoppers can explore the offerings closer to home. Local businesses often have high-quality items that cannot be found elsewhere.
- Choose local restaurants. When searching for places to enjoy a meal, community members can select local restaurants instead of chains. They also can purchase gift cards to local restaurants when gifting others.
- Encourage and support small business



influence businesses' own purchasing decisions and encourage them to prioritize local suppliers and products.

- Be informed about local policies. Community members should advocate for policies that are favorable to local businesses and entrepreneurs. This can create a diverse and robust local economy.

The relationship between community members and local businesses is symbiotic. Each provides benefits to the other and the relationship can be nurtured to grow a strong local business community.

partnerships. According to research by Faire, an online wholesale marketplace, a majority of retailers are focused on establishing partnerships with other local businesses to set them apart

from larger competitors. Shared loyalty programs, co-hosted events and joint promotions are popular ways that businesses can benefit from partnerships. Community chambers of commerce can

promote such efforts and residents can support them by patronizing these companies.

- Influence local sourcing. While patronizing local businesses, consumers can suggest options to



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VENTURES,
from page C11

community with a future?” Cannonball Run helps us answer yes to all of those questions.”

“Seven new homes will not solve every housing challenge in our region, but they will be tangible proof that this community can meet a need, bring the right partners

together, secure resources and move from planning to construction,” Welch added.

The development’s name was inspired by Cayce’s railroad heritage and the community’s connection to legendary railroad engineer Casey Jones, who grew up in the area. Horne said the connection reflects

“service, courage, responsibility, and remembering where you came from when you move forward in life.”

The August 12 ceremony included remarks from Horne, Howell, Martin and Welch, followed by a ceremonial groundbreaking. Community representatives, local officials, economic-

development partners, contractors, school representatives and other community stakeholders were among those in attendance.

Construction of Cannonball Run will turn the seven planned homesites into new opportunities for families to establish roots in Cayce while contributing to the community’s

ongoing recovery and economic future.

Individuals interested in Cannonball Run or other Community Ventures housing and homeownership opportunities may contact Joshua Wessel at jwessel@cvky.org.

About Community Ventures

Through partnerships and community-

based investment, Community Ventures empowers individuals, families and communities to build stronger financial futures by expanding access to opportunities including housing, homeownership, lending and business development, creating sustainable economic opportunities in communities across Kentucky.

How to master remote work

Remote working might not be as common as it was during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when a significant percentage of working professionals were required to work from home as a safety precaution. A 2025 report from Wow Remote Teams estimated that 22 percent of American workers would spend the year working remotely, while the staffing and recruitment experts at Robert Half anticipated four in 10 workers being afforded some amount of remote work opportunities in 2025.

Those figures might be a far cry from remote work statistics earlier in the decade, but they still indicate that a significant percentage of professionals are spending at least some, if not all, of their workday working from home. Working from home poses some unique challenges that are not necessarily present when commuting to an



office each day. A few simple strategies can help remote workers overcome the unique issues that may arise when working from home.

• **Schedule each day.** A work calendar that includes daily tasks and meetings can help remote workers stay the course and avoid succumbing to distractions present at home that are not around in a typical office. In addition to listing tasks and meetings,

add goals to a daily schedule, which can keep remote workers motivated to continue working during lulls in the workday.

• **Minimize in-office distractions.** Remote workers who spend enough time working from home to merit a separate home office space should do what’s necessary to minimize in-office distractions. For instance, a television in a home office can be a needless

distraction that remote workers may turn on even when they have a full day’s work on their plate. Additional creature comforts also can be nice but distracting. Minimizing such distractions in a home office can ensure remote workers are as productive at home as they were when they commuted to an office each day.

• **Stay in touch.** One of the hurdles companies face when allowing workers to work from home

is maintaining open lines of communication between staff members. Remote workers should prioritize communication with colleagues and coworkers even if they no longer see them each day. Identify ways to remain in touch so productivity does not suffer and projects are completed on time and up to par. Utilize communication channels such as email, messaging

apps, text messaging, and Zoom to remain connected with colleagues. Management personnel can consider daily or weekly meetings with necessary personnel to ensure workflow is not suffering and confirm everyone is on the same page with projects and expectations.

• **Remain flexible.** Flexibility is often cited as part of the appeal of remote work, but remote workers must recognize that’s a two-way street. If employers and supervisors allow remote workers flex hours and other perks exclusive to working from home, then that flexibility must be reciprocated when the need arises. A willingness to work some late nights or even weekend hours is a good tradeoff for the benefits of working from home.

Remote working remains a fact of life for millions of workers, who can employ various strategies to remain productive when working from home.

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Ag commissioner looking into data centers

Kentucky Dept. of Agriculture

The placement of data centers has been a heated topic in several communities across Kentucky in recent months, not only because of their utility needs and noise, but also because of the land — sometimes farmland — they are targeting.

Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner Jonathan Shell said recently that his office is working to make sure citizens have answers to many of the uncertainties surrounding the projects, including who owns the companies.

“The biggest concern that we have is around the unknown of who has ownership of the companies, and then also around taking prime farmland out of commission,” Shell said. “So what we have been focused on, and this is whether it’s been solar projects, wind projects, or data centers that are coming in now, is that we’re seeing an extreme use around electricity rates, we’re seeing potential property value increases, and then we’re also seeing

farmland being taken up for purposes that are other than farmland. So what we want to do is to make sure that we give and help procure as much information as possible for a local community to make the decision that’s best for them.”

Shell, however, said his office is not anti-data centers.

“What we want is the correct policies being put in place so that there is as little negative impact for the future as possible,” Shell said, “because what we recognize is a couple of things: One, we’re in competition with China for the data race that’s out there right now. And from a national security standpoint, these things are going to have to be developed and built here in America, the same as they are other places. And we want to make sure that they are American-owned data centers that are here.

“I have a pretty hard stance on that, that we should have American-owned data centers that are here that’s American data that’s owned by American citizens.”

Shell said, in addition to having a clear understanding of what entities own

the data centers, his office wants to make sure there are no negative impacts on the state’s citizens.

“We have to make sure that we protect the residents of a community as much as possible from negative effects, whether it be the tax base or whether it is increased electricity rates or whether it’s around property values increasing,” Shell said. “So it’s one thing for a company to come in and promise all these beautiful things from tax bases to new schools and new buses. But we want to make sure that those things are true. And then the third thing is looking at this expensive technology that’s inside, especially around property values, of having these located in communities, of making sure that it doesn’t negatively impact unduly from where they’re located.

“So we’re putting together some proposals that we want the legislature to look at around disclosure of ownership, around negative impact statements for communities, and then around new



Jonathan Shell

zoning regulations that potentially could be considered for local citizens and local governments to be able to consider, because we also know that this is data we all use every single day. And we’ve got to have the information, the ability to use it.”

Shell said those in agriculture often embrace technology early because of how it helps offset labor issues.

“We can’t get enough people to work on the farm,” he said. “We need technology to increase the ability for us to increase yields and have market availability and be able to play in a global (economy) that we live in to date. And so when we talk about data centers, we’re not trying to be anti-data center to the point that they can’t exist. What we want to make sure of is that local officials

have the information that they need in order to make the best decision and put them where people want them.”

Shell said he’s encouraged that many of the projects announced have been at previous industrial sites. However, it hasn’t erased his concern about the potential loss of farmland.

“I think it’s a concern, because what we’re seeing is these data centers don’t require the amount of acreage that these companies are buying in many cases,” Shell said. “You know, a lot of these data centers can go on 3 to 15 acres, but they’re buying 500. And a lot of places where they’re going is extremely prime areas for farming operations.”

When it comes to losing farmland, Shell said he’s more concerned about the impact from solar farms.

“They need thousands of acres, a lot of ground, and once you remove that ground and you move it around, it doesn’t come back,” he said. “But it doesn’t seem like the pushback is as high on solar farms as it is data

centers.”

Shell said the best way to calm concerns about the potential impact of data centers is to erase the unknowns about them in residents’ minds.

“I think people are just uncomfortable because of the unknown, and whether it’s false information or true information, there’s just a lot of misinformation ... that’s out there,” he said. “We need more information on how these things are being built, how they’re being run, and what the effects of them may be in the future. But as far as seeing the need for them, we see the need. I’m not going to say I’m all in. But there is a need for them.

“We just want to be cautious in how we move forward. But we do definitely see a need for them in the race internationally, for national security, to be able to have the data. But we have to make the right and the smart decisions with these, in our rural communities especially.”

This article was written by Scott Hagerman, Messenger-Inquirer.

Historic Castleton on offer during Keeneland Championship Sale October 28

Keeneland’s Championship Sale during Breeders’ Cup week will take place Wednesday, Oct. 28 at historic Castleton, which will itself be the final lot of the evening, according to a press release from Keeneland on Wednesday afternoon.

The auction team will offer the farm-listed by Bluegrass Sotheby’s International Realty—marking a first-of-its-kind collaboration between the two entities.

The third annual Championship Sale will once again allow buyers access to unique offerings,

including fractional interests in Breeders’ Cup contenders, stallion shares, breeding rights, elite broodmares, racing prospects and other rare offerings.

“Every year, we ask ourselves how we can push the Championship Sale forward, giving our guests an unforgettable event and buyers something they can’t find anywhere else,” Keeneland President and CEO Shannon Arvin said. “This year’s auction promises to be exceptional, set against one of the most picturesque backdrops in the

Bluegrass, and closing the evening with the offering of Castleton. These historic moments are what make the Championship Sale so special.”

Founded in 1793 by John Breckinridge, Castleton is one of

the Bluegrass’ oldest and most storied horse farms, its roots reaching back to the beginning of the nation. The farm rose to prominence in the late 19th century, producing 1896 Kentucky Derby winner Ben

Brush among other champions.

Today, under the stewardship of the Ryan family, the farm continues that legacy.

“We have been blessed to be part of Castleton’s history, and I would welcome whoever takes over those reins to wrap their arms around this place and truly enjoy it,” said current Castleton owner Shane Ryan. “If possible, live here—live here full-time. Make it your home and enjoy every moment of it. It’s only when you spend even a little time here that you begin to understand what makes the farm so

extraordinary. Enjoy the grande dame that is Castleton.”

To learn more about the Keeneland Championship Sale, including details for prospective sellers and pre-registration for remote and in-person bidding, visit www.Keeneland.com.

For more information on Castleton, visit www.BGSIR.com or contact listing agent Ken Donworth at kdonworth@bgsir.com or (859) 983-9933.

Additional details about the Championship Sale, including equine offerings, will be announced.



Castleton Greek Revival Mansion | courtesy of Keeneland

Farmers respond to EPA Biofuels announcement

American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall commented today on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) announcement regarding small refinery exemptions, which impact biofuel demand by exempting refineries from blending renewable fuel as required under the Renewable Fuel Standard.

“Renewable fuels have been a tremendous success story for the country and the rural economy. They reduce our country’s dependence on foreign oil, lower

prices at the pump for consumers, support farm income, and provide good-paying jobs in rural America.

“While we have concerns about granting any small refinery exemptions that undercut a strong domestic biofuels market for farmers, we are pleased to see EPA’s commitment to 100% reallocation of exempted volumes before the end of October. Reallocation is necessary to maintain robust demand for American grown crops. We called on the president to carefully consider the

impact of changes to the Renewable Fuel Standard that would destabilize this important market, and we're pleased that our concerns were heard.

“Farmers are proud to answer the call to help meet America’s energy needs. Farm Bureau looks forward to working with the administration to ensure 100% reallocation of exempted renewable fuel volumes, strengthening the biofuels market that supports America’s farmers while moving our country closer to energy independence.”



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\$G +142; \$B +313; \$C +506**

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Agriculture Commissioner Shell's Farm to Fork Dinner

Renee Shaw headlines event benefiting Kentucky foster families



FRANKFORT, Ky. – Agriculture Commissioner Jonathan Shell hosted the third annual Commissioner's Farm to Fork Benefit Dinner on Wednesday, Aug. 19, at the Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville.

The event raised funds to provide Kentucky State Fair and agricultural tourism experiences for foster children and families through Kentucky Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and the Kentucky Exposition Foundation.

Proceeds from the dinner will help provide foster

children and families with memorable experiences that many might not otherwise have, including a day at the Kentucky State Fair complete with food and rides, West Kentucky 4-H Camp, fall festivals, and other agricultural tourism opportunities.

Since launching in 2024, the program has served nearly 1,000 foster children and families across the Commonwealth.

"There was no better way to kick off the Kentucky State Fair than by bringing people together around a table filled with Kentucky Proud

products while supporting children and families across the Commonwealth," Commissioner Shell said. "Kentucky CASA gives vulnerable children a voice when they need it most. We're proud to help advance that mission and create opportunities for the families they serve."

The Farm to Fork Benefit Dinner was held on Wednesday, Aug. 19, the evening before opening day of the Kentucky State Fair.

This year's featured speaker was Renee Shaw, one of the Commonwealth's most respected journalists who recently retired after nearly three decades at Kentucky Educational Television.

"One of the things that makes Kentucky special is the way our communities rally around children and families in need," Shaw said. "I'm honored to be part of an evening that celebrates Kentucky agriculture while helping create meaningful opportunities and lasting memories for foster children across the Commonwealth"

Each year, trained CASA volunteers serve as advocates for

abused and neglected children involved in Kentucky's court system, ensuring their voices are heard and their best interests remain the priority throughout legal proceedings.

"The Kentucky CASA Network was excited to once again partner with Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner Jonathan Shell for the third annual Farm to Fork Dinner to kick off the Kentucky State Fair," said Andrea Bruns, State Director/CEO of The Kentucky CASA Network.

"This dinner is an opportunity to share CASA's mission with the agriculture community and raise funds for foster youth. Funds raised go toward the CASA mission as well as funds directly to support foster youth engagement in agriculture tourism and enrichment opportunities statewide."

The event is part of the Kentucky Proud® Farm to Fork Program, administered by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture to celebrate Kentucky-grown food while supporting charitable organizations across the Commonwealth.

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