

LOCAL AND STATE NEWS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Damaged roads

COOLVILLE — There will be a community meeting for concerned citizens of the Coolville and Hockingport areas to discuss the Ohio Department of Transportation proposals for damaged roads.

The meeting will be held at the Coolville Elementary School on Thursday at 6:30 p.m. Representatives from the offices of Jimmy Stewart, Ted Strickland, George Voinovich and Mike DeWine have been invited.

Friends of Lake Hope

ZALESKI — The group "Friends of Lake Hope" will meet Dec. 10 at 4 p.m. in the Sycamore Room at the Lake Hope State Park dining lodge.

Sewage treatment

An informational meeting on draft sewage treatment rules will be held in Athens by the Ohio Department of Health.

The meeting is Friday from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Extension Office, 280 W. Union St.

The draft rules are available as Chapter 3701-29 on the Ohio Department of Health's Web site, www.odh.ohio.gov/rules/drafts/drafts_afts.aspx. Also on the Web site is information on how to comment on the draft rules.

Holiday closing

Hocking-Athens-Perry Community Action Agency will be closed Nov. 24 and Nov. 25 in observance of the Thanksgiving holiday.

Kroger strike looms as negotiations continue

COLUMBUS (AP) — The Kroger Co. was bracing for a strike by 10,000 unionized employees at 82 central Ohio stores if last-ditch negotiations don't produce an agreement on a new contract.

Talks with Local 1059 of the United Food and Commercial Workers union were to continue Wednesday headed into Thursday's deadline. The old contract expired Nov. 5 but the agreement was extended until 2 p.m. Thursday.

Kroger spokeswoman Monica Gordon said managers from other stores were headed for Columbus to help keep stores operating if workers hit the picket lines.

Union spokesman Greg Denier said members have completed strike training and were prepared to walk out.

Gordon said some stores may be closed during a strike. She said the company also would begin advertising for temporary help.

Health care costs are at issue. Kroger wants the union to begin contributing to health insurance; the union says its workers can't afford significant benefit changes.

The average wage for Kroger workers is \$9.85 per hour, Denier said.

Kroger said its health costs have more than doubled in the past five years under the current contract, to \$41 million a year.

Suit seeks to block private judges

COLUMBUS (AP) — A Cuyahoga County Common Pleas judge has gone to the Ohio Supreme Court seeking to block private judges from using public funds, employees or courtrooms.

Judge Nancy Russo said Ohio law limits private judges to hearing non-jury trials at locations outside of county courthouses.

She opposes providing county jurors, employees and courtrooms for private judges' civil trials.

Russo said she objects to the way a handful of private judges have been reaping financial benefits at public expense without many of the responsibilities of an elected official.

Russo filed for a writ of prohibition from the Supreme Court after the Cuyahoga County court's presiding and administrative judge, Richard McMonagle, and the 8th Ohio District Court of Appeals rejected her arguments.

CRIME

Woman indicted in elections case

An Athens woman accused of forging signatures on a petition for the state's redistricting process was indicted Tuesday in Athens County Common Pleas Court.

Cinseree Johnson, 36, of South Shafer Street, was indicted by the Athens County Grand Jury on charges of forgery and filing false signatures. Johnson is accused of filing forged petitions with the Secretary of State's Office in support of State Issue 3, which was on the Nov. 8 ballot. Johnson was allegedly being paid for each signature she obtained, and all the signatures appear to be forged, according to the Athens County Prosecutor's Office.

The Board of Elections forwarded the petitions to Prosecutor C. David Warren. Johnson's name was listed as the name of the person who submitted three petitions containing suspect signatures. Board of Elections employees said they were alerted to the problem because the signatures all looked to be written in the same handwriting.

As directed by law, the employees called one person from each of the petitions, and all three said they did not sign them. Even one forged signature is enough to invalidate a petition. Two of the names on the petitions were Ohio University employees — Alan Geiger, who is the assistant to the president; and Frank Myers, professor emeritus of family medicine.

Johnson will be arraigned Dec. 7.

ATHENS CITY

Council discusses raising pay scale for non-union employees

By CASEY S. ELLIOTT
Messenger staff writer

Adjusting the pay scale for non-union employees might come up at the next Athens City Council meeting.

Council members have discussed at past meetings the possibility of raising the pay range for non-union workers. The change could cost the city an estimated \$74,000 annually, Athens Mayor Ric Abel said.

Some of the positions that could be affected include bookkeepers, data entry personnel, secretaries, administrative assistants and code enforcement officers, Abel said.

The reason for the suggested change is to bring those individuals more in line with industry and city union pay ranges, in order to keep Athens competitive in being able to fill those positions, Councilman Dale Tampke said. The change would

raise the minimum pay and the maximum pay an individual could make in that position.

City Auditor Kathy Hecht said the need for this change is great. Just in her office alone, she has had three or four people in the past few years move to higher-paying positions at Ohio University doing jobs similar to their city work.

"We want to be able to retain good people as well as be able to attract them," she said.

Abel recommended the change to only the first five pay grades, which were the ones in most need of a change. He noted individuals in those city positions make an average of \$1.70 to \$1.80 less an hour than those in comparable positions elsewhere.

Tampke said the scale has not been changed in some time, so an adjustment is understandable.

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ATHENS CITY

New services fees discussed

By CASEY S. ELLIOTT
Messenger staff writer

Athens City Council may raise fees for a variety of city-provided services starting in 2006. The matter was discussed at several Council meetings, and Council plans to introduce an ordinance at Monday's meeting.

The idea falls on the heels of a study done by Maximus which pointed out a range of services the city is either not charging for or undercharging for based on the city's actual cost of the services. The study was submitted in February. The study examined fees in the code enforcement, recreations department and the mayor's office, City Auditor Kathy Hecht said.

Some of the fees noted range from costs for rentals at the community center to charges for home inspections, she said. The study then suggested fees which might be appropriate to charge in the city, Auditor Kathy Hecht said.

"Part of the issue is there's a lot of time involved (in some of these departments) and we could charge more than we do," she said. "The idea is what we charge for those services should pay for those services."

Athens Mayor Ric Abel said estimated revenue from the fee

changes could be \$100,000.

The only fees Council members disagreed with were for those proposed for Zoning Board of Appeals variance requests and right-of-way revocable license requests. The study suggested the variance requests should cost more than \$500, but Council members felt it would be more appropriate to charge \$50 for those.

"I think this is not something we should charge citizens for," Councilwoman Nancy Bain said. "I think charging \$500 is contrary to the interest of property rights."

Bain said those variance requests fall under the right of the property owner to do what they wish with their property, and by making the fee that high, it might prevent them from asking for a variance, thus infringing on their rights.

Other members agreed and suggested a fee of \$50 for the request.

Council members also believed the right-of-way request should be \$150 instead of the suggested \$205. All felt the \$205 charge was too high.

Abel said reports similar to the Maximus study should be completed every three years to keep fees for city services in line.

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Adrian T. Medley

"First and foremost I would buy my parents a house. Then I would invest half the money so I can pay for taxes. I'd also buy my friends new cars — buy each a Mustang. I'll help fund my family's publishing company, buy a house in Oregon on the beach-front and start a rock band. And I'll save \$2 million to \$3 million to help in New Orleans."

Adrian T. Medley, 27, Athens



Netta Cook

"I'd finish paying for my education and buy my mom anything she wanted — she's taken so much care of me and I want to take care of her. I'd give some to my whole family. And then I'd probably donate a large amount to the animal shelters around here."

Netta Cook, 24, Athens

What would you do if you won the \$310 million Mega Millions jackpot?

Asked Tuesday at Dale's BP in Athens of customers taking a chance in the lottery



Joann Wolfe

"My parents would be well taken care of. I would take care of my family and friends. Then I'd buy a Harley for every day of the week, buy my own record label so I could sing my own music, get my own hairdresser and personal trainer."

Joann Wolfe, 34, The Plains



Julian James

"I would do nothing — I would do anything I wanted, and that would amount to nothing."

Julian James, 24, Athens



Mike Meyer

"Since I teach in the department of accounting at Ohio University I would give some to the department, and give my family members a couple of million dollars. The rest would depend on what my wife wanted to do."

Mike Meyer, 39, Athens

Police learn hard lessons about mental illness, crisis intervention

By MATT GALLAGHER
Messenger staff writer

Ten percent of all police calls in the U.S. involve a mentally ill person in crisis. In Athens County, that number is significantly higher — due to the fact that the area is home to two colleges, and mentally ill people generally suffer their first crisis in their 20s.

That's why police from Athens County participated in Crisis Intervention Training this week, learning about the most common mental illnesses and how best to diffuse a crisis involving someone suffering from a mental illness.

The program is taught by Steve Noftz, a lieutenant with the Ohio University Police Department, and David Malawista, a psychologist and reserve commander with Athens Police Department. The program is a national program which began in 1989 in Akron. Ohio is one of its strongest proponent states, but the available programs only begin to scratch the surface, Malawista said.

"With the decline in available services, law enforcement is having to deal with the mentally ill much more frequently," Malawista said. "When we deal with the mentally ill population in crisis, we need to know how to deal with them effectively and humanely. It becomes a standard of care. It helps the clients and it helps law enforcement, and reduces the likelihood of such a crisis leading to a bad situation. When these situations are handled correctly and humanely, everyone is much safer."

Participants included officers from the Athens Police Department, the Athens County Sheriff's Office, the OU Police Department, the Hocking College Police Department and O'Bleness Memorial Hospital security. Officers learned about the most common mental illnesses and medications, toured local mental health facilities, learned about a local mental health services and listened to a panel of mental health consumers and family members.

Milt Greek, a schizophrenic who spoke to the officers about how the world might be experienced by a schizophrenic in crisis and ways to de-escalate a crisis, said this type of education can make crisis situations safer both for police and mentally ill individuals.

"I hope I can provide ways to deal with a crisis calmly in order to make it better and safer for everyone," Greek said. "Officers need to understand that mentally ill people have a chemical imbalance that causes behaviors that lead to these problems."

Tom Walker, a member of the Crisis Intervention Training and Jail Diversion Committee, said the training helps the officers

realize the potential for recovery.

"They can see these people as human beings and learn what it's like from a mentally ill person's point of view," Walker said. "They can understand what sorts of things drive a mentally ill person into crisis. They learn that mentally ill people are human beings who can recover from their illnesses."

Roman Brandau, an Athens police officer, said the program opened him up to a wide range of knowledge that will come in handy on the streets.

"In the future, I will have a much better idea of how to handle a crisis situation or what clues I can pick up on the street to know a situation involves a mental illness," Brandau said. "It has really been an amazing experience."

Dan Stewart, an officer with the OU Police Department, said the training helped him empathize with the mentally ill.

"It helped me understand that what seems real to them at the time is what is real at the moment," Stewart said. "It's our job to try to calm them down and diffuse the situation, get them help and keep them safe."

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Authorities search for plane that vanished

Disappeared from radar near Toledo Express Airport

FAYETTE (AP) — Authorities searched Tuesday for a small plane that disappeared from radar at nearby Toledo Express Airport.

Lt. Robin Schmutz, with the Toledo post of the State Highway Patrol, said an emergency locator signal was being given off near this town about 40 miles west of the airport, but no aircraft had been found.

Schmutz said the plane could have crashed or simply landed somewhere.

"We're trying to rule out every possibility," he said.

The signal, being monitored at an Air Force base in Virginia, wasn't as clear Tuesday night

because of rain in the area, patrol Sgt. Frank Day said. The device that emits the signal works for up to four days, he said.

The plane, which the patrol said was possibly a Cessna, disappeared from the radar Monday evening.

The aircraft's destination and identity of occupant or occupants wasn't known.

The Federal Aviation Administration had no reports or information about a missing plane, according to Tony Molinaro, spokesman for the FAA's Great Lakes office in Chicago.

However, he said conducting a search was the prudent thing to do.