

Beautification, clean-up work to begin soon in Butler

By Tommy Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER — Mayor Ben Smith reported at the Jan. 23rd meeting of the Butler Town Council that a beautification grant from the state has been approved and a notice to proceed with the project — which will mean decorative street lighting and trees planted along sidewalks on Hamburg Street (on the west side of the Courthouse), south on Mulberry Street to First United Security Bank, and east on Pushmataha Street to Hardees.

Sentell Engineering has been notified, he said, and as soon as the contractor's performance bond is received work will begin on the project, hopefully in February.

Smith commented that a Downtown Beautification Committee has been formed and is working with local businesses and property owners to clean up

and spruce up their places of business or vacant lots.

Some businesses are already talking about repainting, adding new awnings, and decorative signs and lighting.

"The committee is working to get weeds cut, and old dilapidated buildings torn down or repaired and made useable," Smith said. "There may be some disgruntled people but they need to take care of their property."

"That old motel on Hwy. 17 south is a disgrace," Council Member Mirian Heaton said. The property was once Major's Motor Grill in the 1960's but has changed hands several times since. The roof on the motel wings has fallen in, several of the brick walls are crumbling and falling onto other people's property, and the overgrown lot is infested with rats and insects, according to numerous SoundOff calls received by the Sun.

"I went down there today

and the back of that things is a disgrace," Mrs. Heaton said. "I can understand why that lady who lives next to it is concerned. I would be upset if it were next door to me, too. There's big wood rats all over."

Mayor Smith said that the property is one of several that has been targeted for cleanup.

"It's on the list," Council Member John A. Boney said.

"The old (Mosley) house across from the motel also needs to be on that list," she said. That house was badly damaged during one of the hurricanes of the past three years.

N Water pressure issues are still a concern for several families on Ala. 17 north. Mayor Smith said these are being looked into.

N A large, washed-out culvert on the south side of Ala. 10 in front of First Baptist Church was installed by a private business in the 1960's, it was reported. Even though it is actu-

ally on state right-of-way, the culvert may not be replaced by the state.

The pipe is about 150 feet in length and runs across two different commercial properties. The cave-in has resulted in a large "wash out" that some on the council feel is unsafe.

(ED. NOTE: Since the Jan. 23 meeting, the State Dept. of Transportation has repaired the washed-out culvert. See photo elsewhere in this issue.)

"We've also got a culvert on Ala. 17 south in front of the Methodist Church that's falling in," Smith said. "It seems like every time we get a new paving job we have to replace a culvert."

Concerns were also voiced again about the poor traffic striping on the repaving job that was recently completed on Ala. 10 and 17 through the town.

"The State has been in contact with Asphalt Supply, which did the work, and they said as soon as the weather breaks they

will repaint the striping," Smith said, adding that reflective paint was apparently not used in the process.

"You can't see anything when it rains or is foggy," he commented. Asphalt Supply is also going to correct the turn-lane markings in town which were also not properly painted.

N Financial statements were reviewed and Mayor Smith said for the month of December the town's General Fund showed a net profit of \$41,748.

N Chamber of Commerce Director Nancy Gibson reported that she had attended the State Chamber's annual meeting in Birmingham, and that the state plans to again hold a "sales tax holiday" prior to the beginning of the 2007-08 school year this fall.

She said that a customer service workshop with motivational speaker Ramona Hill is tentatively planned for May.

Alabama's children deserve the best

By Rep. Marc Keahey
Alabama House, Dist. 65

MONTGOMERY — It's no secret that Alabama's education funding hasn't been adequate. We rank near the bottom on what we spend per student in our schools. However, Alabamians are resilient. We are known for making the most out of less-than-desirable situations. Our children succeed and compete with students from all over for awards, scholarships, and jobs. It is a testament to our teachers, parents, and other education employees.

Yet there's still no denying that Alabama's education isn't exactly where it needs to be. According to a report published by Education Week, Alabama's children have a difficult path to success when compared to most other states. The study, Quality Counts 2007, examined non-education statistics such as family income and employment rate, and combined them with school indicators such as test scores and graduation rates.

The study ranked each state by comparing their scores to the national average. Alabama finished in a three-way tie with Mississippi and Tennessee for 45th. Alabama ranked 47th in student performance. While gains have been made in student test scores, Alabama's fourth and eighth-grade reading and math scores are still well below the national average.

There were some bright spots in

the study. The state's education policy fared substantially better. Alabama ranked eighth nationwide in aligning education policies to the state's labor market. Alabama also ranked 18th in assessment and accountability. The achievement gap for children in poverty also fell below the national average.

This study shows that our state is headed in the right direction, but that there is still much work to do. Our positive education policy, our assessment system and how we hold schools accountable indicate that much of the structure for success is in place. However, success in the classroom comes from more than just policy and accountability.

The one area the Education Week report did not mention is the impact of per student spending. Studies have shown that the amount of money spent per student has a huge impact on academic success. It makes sense. More money means smaller class sizes, better technology, and more remedial and advanced classes to push academic progress. Although Alabama has always hovered near the bottom when it comes to putting money in the classroom, this is slowly beginning to change.

Recent economic successes have allowed us to better fund our schools. Last year, the Legislature passed a \$6.2 billion Education Budget — the highest in the history of our state. We did this without raising taxes by protecting the sources that fund the state's educa-

tion budget. The Legislature was even able to put money aside for a rainy day. We all remember the days of seeing our schools suffer because tax revenues faltered. With this money set aside, we can ensure that our schools won't fall back into proration in the event of a future economic downturn.

However, it is important to remember that while the funding has been increased over the last few years, the results in the classroom aren't immediate. The report's researchers noted that states that are aggressive in improving standards will make gains in student performance over the long run; but the gains take some time to show themselves.

Almost everyone can agree that 45th place is not where we want to be, and now more than ever is the time to continue our dedication. In order to make sure that our student performance continues to rise, our state must continue to be aggressive in supporting proven, quality learning programs such as the Alabama Reading Initiative, and math and science programs. We've made progress, but we must continue to move forward.

Although many of Alabama's brightest have succeeded with far less, wouldn't it be great to see what our children could accomplish when given the same resources as children from other states? That is why we must protect the education fund from any cuts now and in the future.

Ala. car tag numbers

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 1 — Jefferson | 35 — Greene |
| 2 — Mobile | 36 — Hale |
| 3 — Montgomery | 37 — Henry |
| 4 — Autauga | 38 — Houston |
| 5 — Baldwin | 39 — Jackson |
| 6 — Barbour | 40 — Lamar |
| 7 — Bibb | 41 — Lauderdale |
| 8 — Blount | 42 — Lawrence |
| 9 — Bullock | 43 — Lee |
| 10 — Butler | 44 — Limestone |
| 11 — Calhoun | 45 — Lowndes |
| 12 — Chambers | 46 — Macon |
| 13 — Cherokee | 47 — Madison |
| 14 — Chilton | 48 — Marengo |
| 15 — Choctaw | 49 — Marion |
| 16 — Clarke | 50 — Marshall |
| 17 — Clay | 51 — Monroe |
| 18 — Cleburne | 52 — Morgan |
| 19 — Coffee | 53 — Perry |
| 20 — Colbert | 54 — Pickens |
| 21 — Conecuh | 55 — Pike |
| 22 — Coosa | 56 — Randolph |
| 23 — Covington | 57 — Russell |
| 24 — Crenshaw | 58 — Shelby |
| 25 — Cullman | 59 — St. Clair |
| 26 — Dale | 60 — Sumter |
| 27 — Dallas | 61 — Talladega |
| 28 — DeKalb | 62 — Tallapoosa |
| 29 — Elmore | 63 — Tuscaloosa |
| 30 — Escambia | 64 — Walker |
| 31 — Etowah | 65 — Washington |
| 32 — Fayette | 66 — Wilcox |
| 33 — Franklin | 67 — Winston |
| 34 — Geneva | |

Bio fuel

From page 1-A

"Promoting and using E-85 is simply the right thing to do for our environment, our economy and our national security," Governor Riley said at the site. "E-85 contains more oxygen, so it burns cleaner and with less tailpipe emissions than gasoline. E-85 is good for agriculture because it's made from crops grown by our farmers, so it's a real growth opportunity for Alabama's rural economy. And E-85 reduces our dependence on imported foreign oil, so we rely less on countries that do not have America's best interests at heart."

According to Riley, Alabama is positioned to become a national leader in the development and use of alternative fuels because of its agricultural base and the availability of natural resources.

Dr. David Bransby —

nationally-recognized authority on biofuel alternatives and a professor at Auburn University — joined Governor Riley at the State Motor Pool to help promote the use and development of E-85, as well as biodiesel.

Bransby met with President Bush last year when the President visited the city of Hoover to praise the efforts of the city as having the largest fleet of municipal law enforcement vehicles using E-85 in country.

In October 2006, Alabama — along with the states of Kentucky, Indiana and Tennessee — was awarded a federal grant to add pumps for E-85 ethanol fuel at six Alabama gas stations and B-20 biodiesel fuel at five stations along Interstate 65.

The grant funds will cover up to 50% of the cost for a retailer to add the infrastructure necessary to offer the alternative fuel. In addition, the fed-


eral government also offers a 30% tax credit for the installation of alternative fuel stations up to a maximum of \$30,000 per year.

Governor Riley has also said he would propose tax incentives for the production of biofuels from soybean and other oil-producing crops in the state and for the purchase of hybrid and flex fuel vehicles.

While Biodiesel can be used in conventional com-

pression-ignition engines like diesels without engine modifications. E-85 requires modifications of engines in order to be used.

Riley's incentives are expected to increase the numbers of vehicles that use alternative fuels — and the numbers of stations that offer it — in an effort to combat high oil prices and offer cleaner-burning environment-friendly fuels.



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Train

From page 1-A

involving the Federal Railroad Administration and other agencies was ongoing at presstime Monday afternoon.

The incident occurred sometime between 3 a.m. and 5:30 a.m. on Jan. 28, 2007.

The two-engine train was pulling about 97 cars, according to Bill Gibson, Director of Choctaw County's Emergency Management Agency. Several boxcars loaded with new kitchen appliances sustained heavy damage, Gibson said.

An M&B spokesman said a total of six cars derailed.

"It was a mess, but we are thankful that there were no injuries and no hazardous materials were involved," Gibson said.

There have been numerous complaints and

allegations made by area residents in recent months to the EMA and Choctaw Co. Commission regarding trains blocking access to county roads, excessive noise, smoke, and litter being thrown out by railroad employees.

The company suspects vandalism may have been involved in Sunday's incident, and a spokesman asked that anyone who saw any suspicious persons or vehicles in the area about that time to contact Choctaw Co. Sheriff James Lovette at (205) 459-2166 or EMA Director Bill Gibson at (205) 459-2153.

A dollar-amount estimate of the damage was not available at presstime.

Yantley is in northwestern Choctaw County about a mile from the Lauderdale Co., Miss., line.

M&B Railroad is owned by Genesee and Wyoming, Inc.

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