



INSIDE
100th
birthday
celebrated

Page 3



YOUR FORECAST

Cloudy and mild

Highs today near 70.
Lows tonight around 60.
Another round of storms
headed in on Wednesday.

SPORTS

Diamond
'Dogs go 1-3
vs. Arkansas

Page 2



Ruston Daily Leader

Tuesday, March 12, 2019

Follow us:

www.rustonleader.com

75¢

Simsboro Tigers Take State



Photos by TONY VALENTINO

The Simsboro High School boys basketball team celebrated with their championship trophy on the floor of Burton Coliseum Saturday only minutes after capturing a second straight Class B boys state championship with a 59-53 win over Zwolle. See congratulations for all our playoff teams on page 10.

Little things pay off big SHS wins second straight state title

By T. Scott Boatright
scott@rustonleader.com

LAKE CHARLES— Sometimes winning big means focusing on the little things.

Simsboro High School did just that Saturday as the Tigers took care of business late at the free throw line to capture a second straight Louisiana High School Athletics Association Class B state championship with a 59-52 win over top-seeded Zwolle at Burton Coliseum.

Leading in the final minute, Simsboro's Jakemin Abney and Gianni Nelson took care of business by making four-of-five free throws in the final 30 seconds to close out the title run for the Tigers.

"We knew this was going to be a 32-minute game this year," said SHS head coach Josh Brown. "We've really been focusing at the free-throw line. I just had a feeling that this year it was going to come down to the wire and we'd have to make free throws, and it paid off. Gianni and Jakemin made their free throws at the end to seal the win."

After falling behind by two points with time winding down, Simsboro's Kalep Crane nailed a 3-pointer to put the Tigers back on top with 3:30 remaining.

The Tigers held Zwolle to three points from there to secure the win.

Abney led the Tigers with 18 points and 10 rebounds to earn game MVP honors, picking up his first win over Zwolle of the season after missing the regular season contest between the two schools that was won 60-59 by the Hawks on Nov. 13.

See SIMSBORO, page 2



Simsboro's Braxton Taylor (10) pulls up for a jump shot against Zwolle in Saturday's Class B state championship game.

Grambling talks water

Mockingbird Lane could be connected to city sewage

By T. Scott Boatright
scott@rustonleader.com

GRAMBLING — During Thursday's monthly Grambling City Council meeting, one of the main focuses was on the future of the city's water and sewage system.

Henry Schuler of Shuler Consulting talked to the council about the longtime effort to upgrade and expand the city's sewer system. "We have been working since 2009 — that was when the city applied for a pretty massive sewer expansion that in general is from the historic limits of the city of Grambling to the historic limits of Ruston," Schuler said.

"That project has never been fully funded at any point, and the state has kind of chipped away at it with next to no activity the past few years."

But recently, state Sen. (W. Jay) Luneau has helped direct \$190,000 to Grambling to help with such a project.

"Sen. Luneau was told there was some surplus money available and was asked where it needed to be directed, and Sen. Luneau openly chose Grambling as one of the recipients," Schuler said. "It's roughly \$190,000 at your disposal. The capital outlay plan is very confusing, so when you look it up, it's shows \$195,000. Believe me, you have about \$190,000 that's not spent."

But then Schuler talked about what he called "the kicker."

"That is 100 percent grant money, so the city would not put up a penny," Schuler said.

See GRAMBLING, page 5

The problem is real

LPSB talks mental health in schools

By Caleb Daniel
caleb@rustonleader.com

Last week, the Lincoln Parish School Board received a reminder of the reality of mental health issues among the school system's students, as well as the resources in place to address such issues.

While the disturbing "Momo challenge" spotlighted in Sunday's *Ruston Daily Leader* is perhaps the most popular source of mental health challenges today, Pupil Appraisal Coordinator Becky Stutzman told board members that is just one small example of how "suicidal or homicidal ideations" can manifest.

While the district's pupil appraisal department has a wide umbrella of jobs, including performing disability evaluations, one of its major focuses is the provision of mental health counseling services for

the parish's students.

Stutzman said any time a child in Lincoln Parish schools reports either suicidal or homicidal ideations of any kind, a "threat assessment" is performed by a counselor or other pupil appraisal designee to gauge any potential danger posed to the student or to others.

As of the end of February, 102 threat assessments have been performed this school year alone, along with 504 counseling referrals.

"It's not always as severe as it sounds," Stutzman said. "It could be something as small as a child writing in their journal, 'I just don't want to be here anymore,' or a child being angry and saying, 'I'm going to kill you.' We have to take that seriously and do a threat assessment to determine what that means for that child."

See LPSB, page 6

LPPJ to receive grants, appoint library board member

By Caleb Daniel
caleb@rustonleader.com

This week's Lincoln Parish Police Jury agenda features a couple of actions related to grant monies for repair projects as well as consideration for two candidates to fill a hole on the Lincoln Parish Library Board.



of Control.

Both the personnel committee meeting at 6:30 p.m. today and the regular meeting at 7 p.m. will be held in the Lincoln Parish Library Events Center's Dubach room, as elevator repairs at the courthouse are not yet complete.

The body is expected to authorize jury President Randy Roberson to sign documents related to a FEMA public assistance agreement reim-

bursing the parish for road repair work done following the flooding events of 2016.

Parish Administrator Courtney Hall said initially FEMA had provided reimbursement for 75 percent of repair work, and now additional funding totaling roughly \$65,000 has come available.

"The reimbursements that were eligible were based on a 25 percent cost share," Hall said. "Since it was such

a large-scale disaster, some money became available after the fact to help take care of that additional 25 percent cost share the entities (like the police jury) had to provide."

The jury is also expected to take action on bids received this morning for a project making repairs and improvements to the Lincoln Parish Sewer District #1 lift station.

See LPPJ page 6

The threats are tiered as "low," "medium" or "high," with the high threats often ending in a student being hospitalized for his/her safety or arrested, depending on the threat's nature.

But Stutzman said a "very small percentage" of the district's threats are in this category.

"To think that in a small community like ours there's been over 100 threat assessments this year — it's a scary statistic, but at the same time, considering the number of students we have, percentage-wise it's not that alarming," she said.

"More than anything, that is 102 cases where a child was crying out for help in some way, shape or form. So we want to take that seriously."

In addition to these threats, Stutzman said

parish students also face issues like teen pregnancy, domestic and dating violence, bullying and cyberbullying, an increase in chronic health conditions, human trafficking and substance abuse.

Schools Superintendent Mike Milstead said he recognizes the mental health dangers in the parish and that they are no more or less present than in any other part of the country.

"Ruston is no different than any other community in the United States," he said.

"We're not a community without problems, but we're not unique in the problems we have."

So what systems are in place to respond to these issues? For starters, the school board employs four mental health professionals

strictly for the purpose of offering counseling services to students. Three are based at one school each — Ruston Elementary, Cypress Springs and Choudrant High — and a fourth splits time between Ruston Junior High and I.A. Lewis.

There are a few other mental health professionals in the district acting as guidance counselors or working with pupil appraisal, but the majority of their time is devoted to tasks other than therapeutic services.

When District 7 board member Hunter Smith asked Stutzman at last week's meeting what the counseling services in Lincoln Parish would look like in a perfect world, with no budgetary restrictions, she said there should be a

full-time mental health professional in every school.

"If you are going to get credentialed, licensed people, they can go to the private sector and make more money," she said. "But a lot of them, like myself, are willing to accept a teacher base salary because I love what I do, and I have kids. So being able to offer them a board-hired package is ideal."

Milstead agreed with Stutzman's vision. One of the would-be millages in the proposed PROJECT SECURE would have funded three more mental health specialists, but the plan was pulled from the school board agenda back in January due to a lack of board support.

"We know there are problems out there, and there's a moral obligation

on our part to address that," he said. "One of our goals is to increase the number of mental health specialists in our schools. We need to make it across the board in our district to address the issues we have. Of course, we're not there yet."

Even so, Stutzman said the district has found ways to "get creative" to provide the needed services. This includes partnerships with local entities such as the Lincoln Health Foundation, Louisiana Methodist Children's Home, the Center for Counseling and Psychological Services and others.

Another potential future for counseling in Lincoln Parish is the expansion of services from outside the district's payroll.

"(The Center for Counseling and Psychological Services) came to us because Medicaid is paying a lot for mental health," Stutzman said. "So they're able to come to the schools and bill. If we can get that going, we can then start to sustain what we're doing."

Stutzman said her goal in bringing these things to the school board's attention was to create an awareness that these needs are right here at home in Lincoln Parish.

"We have kids who are struggling," she said. "It's not kids from one part of town or one school or one socioeconomic status. It's all kids."

"And we're fortunate to have a community where over the years the mental health awareness has grown."