



TIME FOR SOME FUN

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CHEROKEE COUNTY

Kelley: SRO program a success

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CENTRE | After almost two years, it appears the county school system's School Resource Officer (SRO) program is doing what it is supposed to do.

Sgt. Jordan Kelley with the SRO program gave an update during a recent meeting of the Cherokee County Board of Education.

"We have seen reports that have mainly remained the same over the

past two school years even though last year was kind of a half a year with the pandemic and us getting started in September," said Kelley. "Our referrals through juvenile probation or juvenile custody are the same but they are down from the years prior before we had full time SROS in the schools."

Kelley said one of the main concerns resource officers hear from



Kelley

parents is whether the SROS are taking over school discipline.

"No we are not," said Kelley. "The same things that had been happening are still happening. We are just having to deal with them on a daily basis."

Kelley said an early attempt to reach out to students was a "Too Good for Drugs and Violence" program aimed at every fifth grader and ninth grader in the county school system.

"That was our goal, what we wrote the grant for," he said. "Some

schools have expanded it to include sixth grade. In some schools, ninth and eleventh graders are taking the course, so it has become a part of the curriculum. That is a true prevention campaign to try to keep kids from falling into (drugs)."

Kelley said SROS are also at work outside the school walls.

"We are trying to do home visits for some of these virtual kids that may not have been completing work for a while," said Kelley.

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EDUCATION

New county MHSC getting settled into her position

By Terry Dean
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CENTRE | Teachers, administrators and others in education have for years recognized the importance of students' physical well-being for success. And they are



Browder

increasingly seeing the need for mental and emotional support. With this in mind, the Alabama Department of Education (ALSDE) worked with the State Legislature to establish the position of mental health service coordinator (MHSC) and appropriate \$4.5 million in grants for school systems to help coordinate services in Alabama's schools.

Laura Browder has been employed as the MHSC for Cherokee County schools since Oct. 1. She is one of more than a hundred who have been hired since August.

"My duties are to support the social and emotional wellness of the students, the whole child, for better outcomes and for academic success," said Browder.

Prior to her role with Cherokee County, Browder worked in a neighboring county for 17 years. She is a licensed professional counselor with a certification in substance abuse counseling and has worked as a women's shelter.

"I am enjoying this new role," said Browder. "I have worked in the mental health realm but I have never done so at a school level so I am excited to be back in my community to use my professional knowledge to help the people here rather than having to go to a neighboring county. That has been a plus for me."

And so far, so good, she said.

"It has been great," said

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HIGHWAY 411 PROGRESS



Heavy construction equipment sits idle along the edges of Highway 411 due to a recent rainy day in Cherokee County. Work began in earnest late last year on the long-planned four-laning of the final five-mile stretch of Highway 411 between Leesburg and Gadsden. The project is expected to take up to five years to complete. PHOTO BY LEANN HILL

ALABAMA NEWS

Vaccine skepticism lurks in town famous for syphilis study

TUSKEGEE (AP) | Lucenia Dunn spent the early days of the coronavirus pandemic encouraging people to wear masks and keep a safe distance from each other in Tuskegee, a mostly Black city where the government once used unsuspecting African American men as guinea pigs in a study of a sexually transmitted disease.

Now, the onetime mayor of the town immortalized as the home of the infamous "Tuskegee syphilis study" is wary of getting inoculated against COVID-19. Among other things, she's suspicious of the government promoting a vaccine that was developed in record time when it can't seem to conduct adequate virus testing or consistently provide quality rural health care.

"I'm not doing this vaccine right now. That doesn't mean I'm never going to do it. But I know enough to withhold getting it until we see all that is involved," said Dunn, who is Black.

The coronavirus immunization campaign is off to a shaky start in Tuskegee and other parts of Macon County. Area leaders point to a resistance among residents spurred by a distrust of government promises and decades of failed health programs. Many people in this city of 8,500 have relatives who were subjected to unethical government experimentation during the syphilis study.

"It does have an impact on decisions. Being in this community, growing up in this community, I would be very untruthful if I didn't

say that," said Frank Lee, emergency management director in Macon County. Lee is Black.

Health experts have stressed both the vaccines' safety and efficacy. They have noted that while the vaccines were developed with record-breaking speed, they were based on decades of prior research. Vaccines used in the U.S. have shown no signs of serious side effects in studies of tens of thousands of people. And with more than 26 million vaccinations administered in the U.S. alone so far, no red flags have been reported.

Tuskegee is not a complete outlier. A recent survey conducted by the communications firm Edelman revealed that as of

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ANNE'S AMBLINGS

Looking back on the Challenger disaster



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GOP WANTS CHANGES

Record turnout leads to call for restrictions



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FINANCIAL FOCUS

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