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Questions surround KCATA board's CEO selection and salary

BY MIKE HENDRICKS
mhendricks@kcstar.com

The Kansas City Area Transportation Authority promised a nationwide search for a new

leader to run the regional bus system after the agency's governing board fired CEO Robbie Makinen last July.

Blaming Makinen for poor bus service and perceived financial mismanagement, city officials

had pushed for his ouster and hoped someone with more transit experience would replace Makinen, who had none other than as a board member before becoming chief executive.

But within weeks of announc-

ing the national search for a new CEO, the authority's board of commissioners abandoned the effort without posting so much as a single help wanted ad, The Star has learned.

The board quietly decided against hiring any of the three headhunter firms that interviewed for the job. Five months later, it announced that another insider without transit management experience, then interim CEO Frank White III, would get the job permanently.

Like Makinen, White had no experience running a bus system of any size, let alone one as big as the KCATA, which has a \$90 million budget and employs 630 drivers, mechanics and adminis-



Frank White III

trative staffers. On Thursday, the board issued a statement defending that decision, saying it was critical to move swiftly at a time when the agency faced a number of challenges to its finances and operations and that White as interim CEO had "demonstrated his passion for our mission" by quickly addressing those issues.

Key among them was the need to hire more drivers and mechanics for a workforce that

SEE KCATA, 5A

Executive wants to thank 'guardian angels' who saved his life

BY ERIC ADLER
eadler@kcstar.com

If you're going to jog and essentially drop dead on the sidewalk, you'd want it to happen like it did for Jon Cook of Johnson County — who'd still like to find the unknown "blonde with a dog" and other guardian angels who helped save his life.

"We've tried hard. We've gone door to door. I've tried going on (the app) Nextdoor," Cook, the global CEO of the marketing firm VMLY&R, said of the efforts he and his wife, Lisa, have made.

So far Cook, who may be among the luckiest people to have his heart stop, has had no luck finding them to offer thanks.

Cardiac arrests strike some 350,000 adults each year outside of a hospital. Abnormal rhythms cause the heart to stop beating. (Heart attacks, with their narrow or blocked vessels, are a prime cause of cardiac arrest.) Only a tiny 10% of people survive them outside a hospital, the American Heart Association says.

Of course most people, unlike Cook, probably don't drop to the ground and, in some odd convergence in timing, have 10 strangers jump in to help — two of whom just happen to know CPR, followed by three others who aren't just doctors, but cardiac physicians from the nearby University of Kansas Health System.

"He's one lucky guy, for sure," said KU cardiologist Prakash Acharya, who ultimately helped Cook regain his pulse



EMILY CURIEL ecuriel@kcstar.com

Jon Cook suffered cardiac arrest when he was out jogging near his Fairway home. He's hoping to find the guardian angels who helped save his life.

and life that evening.

Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin was similarly fortunate to be surrounded by trained medical personnel when, in January, he sustained a hit in Cincinnati against the Bengals that thrust his heart into cardiac arrest. He made a full recovery.

For Cook, it happened on Oct. 6.

Age 52, trim and a regular runner (4 miles, six times per week) with zero history of heart disease, Cook trotted from his home in Fairway for an evening jog. In February, he recounted the story in a video for KU and,

this past week, shared it with The Star.

"I really had no warning signs," he said, although, looking back, he now realizes he did.

The time: just after 7 p.m. Cook was on his own that night. His wife was in Colorado. His three daughters also live out of town. He was running south on Mission Road, with his earbuds in, rounding the curve beyond Shawnee Mission Parkway.

He felt a rush to his head, "getting all hot," Cook said. "I went down to one knee, 'Oh, my gosh, what's happening?'"

He rested his arm atop a

political yard sign; he looked up to see a blond woman with a dog walking toward him.

"I haven't found her yet," Cook said, "but she's the one who must have flagged others down. I went out, passed out, lost pulse."

She apparently caught the attention of two other women who were either walking or driving by. Just then, Acharya's car was rounding the corner.

It was not his normal route, but that evening his brother-in-law was in town from San Diego. Acharya, still dressed in his hos-

SEE COOK, 6A

Two abortion cases come before Kansas Supreme Court

BY KATIE BERNARD
kbernard@kcstar.com

TOPEKA

The Kansas Supreme Court on Monday will consider whether abortion should be a guaranteed right in the state constitution for the first time since the federal right to the procedure was eliminated.

Four years after the Kansas court's landmark 2019 decision establishing abortion as a right, justices will hear arguments about whether that decision was correct and what restrictions should be allowed under that right.

The oral arguments come nearly eight months after Kansas voters overwhelmingly rejected an anti-abortion amendment and voted to uphold the 2019 decision's state-level protection for abortion.

The court will consider two cases that touch on both whether abortion should be a right in Kansas and to what extent the Legislature is allowed to regulate or restrict abortion if it is a right.

Their eventual ruling will determine whether two anti-abortion laws, which have never been enforced, can take effect. Both bills were signed into law by former Republican Gov. Sam Brownback.

"The stakes are really high, of course, because either one of those cases could have a huge impact on the availability of care," said Emily Wales, president of Planned Parenthood

SEE ABORTION, 2A

Lawsuit describes police racial profiling, illegal ticket quotas

BY GLENN E. RICE
grice@kcstar.com

As a criminal defense attorney, Stacy Shaw has been handling traffic law cases for decades and has seen her share of drivers appear before Kansas City municipal judges.

So it will be no surprise to Shaw if police are targeting minority motorists and those in the city's poorest neighborhoods, as described in a lawsuit

filed Monday in Jackson County Circuit Court by a 21-year veteran of the Kansas City Police Department.

It would also be no surprise to her, Shaw said, if Kansas City police are pushed to meet ticket quotas, as the lawsuit also describes, even if it is against the law.

"Everybody knows that they have quotas and we have known that for years. They can deny it all they want," Shaw said. "This whistleblower is confirming

what the community already knows."

Racial profiling is a violation of the federal Civil Rights Act and enforcement of the law could come from the U.S. Department of Justice or a lawsuit. And in Missouri, ticket quotas are also illegal under a state law passed in 2016, billed at the time as a deterrent to local governments relying on revenue generated through

SEE LAWSUIT, 2A



EMILY CURIEL ecuriel@kcstar.com

Kansas City Police Chief Stacey Graves spoke during a South Kansas City Alliance meeting on Jan. 9, one of the first public meetings Graves attended since becoming chief.



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