

Lynch at Large

Franken Friday

July 28, 2006

Over the opposition of one member, the state Board of Health approved the regulations that guide the state's new workplace smoking ban. The regulations establish a civil fine of up to \$1,000 to go along with the \$100 to \$500 criminal fine written into the law. The regulations also require some businesses that claim to be exempt from the law to certify that exemption with the state Department of Health and Human Services.

A top official with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services says he is impressed with the way Arkansas officials are preparing for a potential flu pandemic. Dr. John O. Agwunobi, the department's assistant secretary of health, praised the state's preparedness plan during a meeting of the Arkansas Board of Health, saying "very few (states) have come as far as Arkansas" in developing their plans.

A group opposing the sale of alcoholic beverages in Faulkner County has asked a Pulaski County circuit judge to overturn the state Alcoholic Beverage Control Board's decision to grant a new downtown Italian restaurant in Conway permission to sell alcoholic beverages.

Springdale's Chamber of Commerce and its Minnesota baseball consulting firm **refused Thursday to release documents** generated during negotiations with a minor league team for the use of a proposed city-owned stadium, **against the recommendations of the city attorney.** The Democrat-Gazette has requested those documents **under the Freedom of Information Act.**

The recently discovered Fayetteville Shale natural gas deposits, thought to be an economic boon to the state, are causing headaches for property tax officials. Poor record keeping of mineral-rights transactions, inconsistent tax assessments and questions over how to divvy up lease payments for natural gas deposits on state land likely mean the state Legislature will need to get involved next year.

As a state task force nears its deadline to offer recommendations on how to curb homelessness in Arkansas, State Rep. Wilhelmina Lewellen of Little Rock, the leader of the panel, says that it likely needs another year to flesh out a comprehensive plan.

The family of Kimberley Nicole Benck, one of two Siloam Springs teenagers killed on a roadside after stopping to help with a flat tire, filed suit Thursday in Benton County Circuit Court against the driver who admitted running the girl down. The suit claims David Orman failed to maintain proper control of his vehicle and seeks unspecified damages. Orman has been charged with two counts of misdemeanor negligent homicide.

FOX 16 reports two Pulaski County pre-teen sisters survived a horrifying night, after being chased through a truck-stop by a 48-year-old man, believed to be their uncle. The

ten and twelve year old girls reportedly escaped from the man's eighteen wheeler, and started running, the youngest only in her underwear. Milton Wofford is charged with criminal attempt to commit rape and second-degree sexual assault.

Benjamin Carl Johnson is in the Springdale city jail in connection with felony rape charges. Johnson allegedly admitted having sex with a seven-year-old girl the past three to four months.

After preliminary DNA-testing results in the New Year's Eve rape and attempted murder of an 87 year-old Pope County woman came back from the State Crime Lab, Louie Carabajal's attorney is now trying to get his client out of jail. Carabajal has been held in lieu of a \$300,000 bond since sheriff's investigation linked him to the New incident in March.

Robert Charles Brown, a convicted murderer in Colorado has told authorities he is responsible for up to 48 slayings, including one in Arkansas about 15 years ago, but an Arkansas State Police spokesman said the information provided by the man is "less than specific." Browne claims he strangled a woman in November 1991 and dumped her body in the St. Francis River.

Two state Game and Fish Commission wildlife officers have been suspended with pay pending an investigation into allegations of hunting violations. The agency would not disclose the names of the officers or give details about the allegations against them.

Northwest Arkansas officials, business executives and the public got their first glimpse inside the new \$33 million John Q. Hammons Center at Pinnacle Hills in Rogers during a grand opening reception Thursday.

Opinion in Vilonia is divided over reopening Logan Young's mud racetrack, which was shut down in 2004 because it was not licensed by the state. Logan has applied for a "motor vehicle racing facility" permit. Contestants take turns driving their four-wheel-drive trucks and sport utility vehicles at night along a 160-foot mud-and-water track. They are judged on time and distance. Neighbors object to the noise, trash, and polluted runoff.

Helena will be the site of a new music festival based on one-man bands and cigar-box musicians who make their own instruments. The Mother's Best Music Fest, named after a 1940s radio show in the historic city, will be Aug. 19 from noon into the evening. The Delta Cultural Center, an agency of the Arkansas Department of Heritage, and the Sonny Boy Blues Society are coordinating the event.

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