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PHOTO BY WELLS POKOL

The Focus' own Mike Steely was recognized by the East Tennessee Historical Society last week.

Focus' Mike Steely receives award from ET Historical Society

By Steve Williams

Cherel Henderson may have summed it up best.

"I think he just has a natural love for history," said the executive director of the East Tennessee Historical Society after presenting Mike Steely of The Knoxville Focus with a "History in the Media Award" Tuesday evening, May 2, at the Foundry on World's Fair Park.

The prestigious honor is part of the historical society's annual Awards of Excellence program, which was established in 1982. The "History in the Media Award" is presented to someone in the field of broadcast, print media or Internet for outstanding contributions to the promotion of the region's history.

"In his busy career as

a writer for The Knoxville Focus, Mike Steely manages to add articles on a wide variety of historical topics and to inform readers of current events in the history community," it was noted within the pages of the event's program.

"His popular 'A Day Away' column spotlights sites and attractions within a day's drive of Knoxville. His articles are a great contribution to the public's knowledge and interest in history."

Steely has written about the history of many neighborhoods throughout Knox County and also stories about surrounding counties.

"The Knoxville Focus deserves a lot of credit for giving the space in the

paper and giving him the time to do these historical articles," added Henderson.

"I see Mike out covering a lot of events throughout the community. I see him come and do research and he makes calls to find information, so I know he tries to do a really good job to inform the public."

Steve Hurley, publisher of The Focus, said, "We at The Focus are very fortunate and proud to have Mike Steely as our senior columnist and reporter. Mike's experience spans nearly 50 years and covers all roles of the newspaper business including owner, publisher, reporter, columnist and sales. Mike's integrity and dedication are second to none. His

passion for Knox County and area history is exemplary. As publisher, I extend my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the East Tennessee Historical Society for their selection and recognition of Mike Steely as this year's media award winner."

Steely has won other awards in his newspaper career but said this latest honor brought special satisfaction.

"It's satisfying to me because my family in East Tennessee goes back to 1780," he pointed out. "My forefathers settled in upper Cumberland County when it was still considered Kentucky. I've been interested in history ever since my grandmother started telling

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SUPPORTING EACH OTHER



PHOTO BY STEVE WILLIAMS

They are distance runners, yet they share a close bond. After competing in the grueling 1600-meter run in the KIL Championships, three runners from different schools (left to right) -- Taylor Cossey of CAK, Callie Tucker of Catholic and Niki Narayani of Webb -- support each other after the race, as other runners (far right) bend over and try to catch their breath. Narayani placed third, Tucker fifth and Cossey seventh in the event, which was won by CAK's Rebecca Story in a stadium record time of 4:48.16. See other photos and coverage of the annual KIL meet in The Focus' Sports & Recreation (Section C).

Cultural competency, bathroom policy addressed at board of education meeting

By Pete Gawda

Last Wednesday evening's meeting of the Knox County School Board was a time when citizens gathered to express their opinions on the emotional and controversial issues of cultural competency and the districts bathroom policy concerning transgender students. Many of the speakers received applause from the large audience and some even received standing ovations. There were 13 people signed up to speak in the public forum portion of the meeting. However, some of those 13 were not present to speak when their name was called.

Crystal Yamazaki, who introduced herself as the parent of a daughter who is transgender, spoke against the school system bathroom policy. She claimed her daughter is prohibited from using the girls' bathroom with her friends. "It is psychologically damaging and unnecessary," she said of the school policy and added that the policy does not allow her daughter to be who she is. Yamazaki claimed that over 40 percent of transgender people attempt suicide because they are bullied. She quoted her daughter as saying, "I belong in the girls' bathroom because I am a girl, I am transgender and there is nothing wrong with that."

Another speaker, Brianna Rosenbaum, read to the board an account of a court case challenging the bathroom policy of a New Jersey school district.

She cited medical organizations that claim that being transgender in itself is not a disorder but that emotional problems come when students are not allowed to express their gender.

Stephanie Webb of LGBT claimed that Knoxville students are being denied basic dignities.

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Burchett's budget has some special items

By Mike Steely
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Within the \$798 million budget Knox County Mayor Tim Burchett proposed last week are the standard appropriation requests you'd expect: money to schools (over \$471 million), public safety (more than \$84 million), and engineering and public works (\$5.1 million). Although the proposed budget is about 3.48% higher than the current budget, Burchett is proposing no new taxes. Some of

what he is proposing is rather unusual.

About \$750 thousand is being requested by the mayor for a proposed BMX bike facility. Burchett said that the money will go for new athletic fields at South-Doyle Middle School and a new BMX track at the site of the current stadium. BMX, or Bicycle Motor Cross, is a track for off road bicycles and there are five tracks in the state in Cleveland, Ducktown, Nashville, Memphis and

Morrisstown.

Parks and Recreation will host a public meeting on the BMX proposal on Thursday, June 1 at 6 p.m. to hear from the public on the proposal.

"BMX is surging in popularity and organized BMX events are having millions of dollars in economic impact on cities around our area like Louisville, Kentucky, and Rocky Hill, South Carolina," Burchett told the budget presentation meeting at the City-County

Building.

"These events are putting heads in beds, diners in restaurants and shoppers in stores," he added.

The county mayor said that once the facility is built it won't just be for large events but also for local use. He said the track should boost local tourism in South Knoxville.

The mayor is also asking the Knox County Commission for funding to purchase 45 new

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