

Rountree kicks off board re-election campaign



School board member Amber Rountree (left) hosted a re-election campaign kickoff Tuesday night at Three Bears Coffee Co. in South Knoxville.

By Ken Lay

Knox County Schools Board of Education member Amber Rountree hosted her re-election kickoff party Tuesday night at a South Knoxville coffee shop.

Rountree, who represents the 9th District and serves as the school board's vice chair, played a vital role in hiring current Knox County Schools Superintendent Bob Thomas. She felt compelled to head the search for a new superintendent in 2017, despite having a very busy schedule.

"I was asked to do that," Rountree said of heading the search committee in 2017. "I did it. I was going to school and I had a newborn at the time."

She joined the school board in 2014. During her stint, she has worked with Knox

County Mayor Tim Burchett and the county commission to address sidewalk and traffic issues at South-Doyle High School. She's also worked with the Great Schools Partnership and worked to expand community schools and pushed for new athletic fields at South-Doyle Middle School.

She's a proponent for the promotion of literacy and encouraged those who attended last week's gathering to donate new or gently-used books which will be distributed throughout the schools on the south side of town.

"These books will be donated to the libraries in all of the schools in South Knoxville County," said Rountree, who played a key role in developing and supporting the renovation of South-Doyle High School's library.

"Growing great readers is a key to growing great schools. School libraries are a place where students can borrow, return and give books within their school community. Reading is the foundation of success for our students and more access to books will help strengthen that foundation."

Rountree is an advocate for public education and she has served the people of South Knoxville proudly.

"It's been an honor to serve the people of South Knoxville," she said. "If I'm re-elected, I plan to implement more literacy programs and continue the 21st Century Library Model that we have at South-Doyle High School. I will work to expand CTE programs."

New data center to be the first of its kind in Tennessee

By Pete Gawda

The East Knoxville Community meeting held Thursday evening at the Burlington Branch Library looked at the Magnolia Avenue Market Area from Burlington to Broadway from three different perspectives.

Since the intersection of Magnolia and Broadway is ground zero for the homeless, Michael Dunthorn of the city's Office on Homelessness gave his perspective on that problem. On the economic side, Eric Wolburg of Commerce Bank and Doug Lawyer of the Knoxville Chamber of Commerce spoke of economic development. The program was rounded out by Commissioner Bob Thomas, who is running for Knox County Mayor. Thomas spoke of his childhood days growing up in East Knoxville and his hopes for the future of the area.

"Homelessness is not an acceptable circumstance our community," Dunthorn said. He said the city tries to prevent homelessness, reduce the time a person is homeless, and end homelessness if possible. To achieve those goals the city council has adopted a plan to deal with homelessness and the mayor has a quarterly round table meeting with agencies dealing with homelessness. While it is good to give things to people under the bridge, Dunthorn said it is more important to get people off the street than to make it more comfortable on the streets.

In January of 2017 the city recorded a total of 812 homeless people. However, throughout the year 2017 the city found that 7600 people experienced homelessness in some way. Dunthorn said that number remains fairly constant.

He said the number of shelters for homeless families is limited and that there is not enough affordable housing. He said there is also a need for additional mental health and drug abuse prevention programs. Dunthorn stated there is a need for more permanent support housing. This is low-income housing with no end date and social services built in. He said the average time in such shelters is three years.

The city is working on a day-time center with security for the homeless and outreach to get the people into some type of housing. The city is also building a new intake system.

Continued on page 2

Parkridge selects new board, officers

By Mike Steely
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It took about three hours to do it but the Parkridge Community Organization has a new board and new officers.

Debbie Sharp of the Office of Neighborhoods returned to guide last week's meeting and election. The attendance was so large extra chairs had to be brought into the meeting at the Candler YMCA to accommodate the more than 70 members who attended. The circulation of flyers in the East Knoxville neighborhood apparently boosted attendance.

Parkridge has been divided for more than a year over the possibility of expanding the existing Historic Overlay to most of the homes. Renters, low-income households and other neighborhood residents were upset over what they saw as a



PHOTO BY MIKE STEELY

More than 70 Parkridge residents turned out last week to elect a new board for their community organization. Now the new board will be working on revising the bylaws.

Continued on page 4

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