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Sam Houston lecture today

By Mike Steely
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It is only fitting that the East Tennessee Historic Society will host a bring-your-own luncheon and lecture on Presidents Day to honor Sam Houston. Why, you may ask—he was never president.

Well, yes and no. The former Blount County resident, school teacher and former soldier under Andrew Jackson also served in the U. S. Congress and Senate and as Tennessee's governor.

Houston resigned as our state's governor and joined fellow East Tennesseans in the Texas Independence effort in their war with Mexico. After becoming a Texas military leader he was chosen twice as president of the Republic of Texas.

So, in a sense, Sam Houston was a president.

The unique history of Houston, like so many East Tennesseans with wanderlust, is complicated and fascinating. Many people don't realize that the man lived long enough to not only serve in the early Tennessee militia but also to serve as Texas governor where he opposed the state's effort to join the Confederacy. His efforts failed and his son served in the rebel army. Houston died in 1863 as that war was still underway.

"Sam Houston's Quest" will be presented by Dr. Robin Montgomery and Joy Montgomery today at 11:45 a.m. as part of the history museum's "Brown Bag Lecture" series. The East Tennessee History Center is located at 601 South Gay Street downtown and the event is free to the public.



Governor Bill Lee and his wife, Maria, are welcomed to South-Doyle High School by Mayor Glenn Jacobs (right) and Knox County Superintendent Bob Thomas (far right). Photo by Amy Box Felthoelter.

Governor Bill Lee visits South-Doyle to discuss vocational programs

By Amy Box Felthoelter

On his first trip as governor to Knox County, Governor Bill Lee discussed expanding access to vocational, technical, and agricultural Career Technical Education (CTE) programs for high school students throughout the state at a roundtable discussion held at South-Doyle High School last

Friday. As part of the Governor's Investment in Vocational Education (GIVE) Initiative, Gov. Lee wants to increase state funded dual-enrollment credits by two for students enrolled in vocational, technical, agricultural courses, and launch new CTE programs in 25 school districts.

Prior to meeting with Mayor Glenn Jacobs, Superintendent

Bob Thomas, South-Doyle Principal Tim Berry, Knoxville Chamber of Commerce Exec. V.P. Rhonda Rice, Knox County School CTE Director Dr. Keith Wilson, and other industry leaders at the roundtable, the governor toured three CTE classrooms. He congratulated South-Doyle High for its vocational career programs after talking with students in the

collision repair, welding, health-care, and business and marketing classes.

"We need to be reminded that we are here for the children, for the future of these kids. That's why we are engaged in this," Gov. Lee said with passion.

Other topics discussed during

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New special education teachers may get \$7,000 bonus

By Mike Steely
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The Knox County Board of Education breezed through everything on their agenda during the regular monthly meeting Wednesday afternoon until it came to the approval of a three-year bonus plan for new special education teachers.

The "Pilot Recruitment Incentive Plan" discussion saw some serious questions. Currently new special education teachers get a one-year \$5,000 bonus for their first year at a Knox County school but the system is having a hard time keeping those uniquely qualified instructors. Adding the two additional years and upping the annual bonus by \$2,000 may encourage teachers to remain in the Knox County School System. Under the incentive plan, new special education teachers

would make a \$3,000 bonus the first year and \$2,000 for year two and year three.

BOE member Mike McMillan asked what would happen if the new incentive plan is not adopted and the reply was that outside contractors would need to be hired. Those could cost \$85 to \$105 per hour.

McMillan said the system may be looking to "throw money" at resolving the problem.

BOE members Jennifer Owen and Tony Horman spoke in opposition to the increased bonus idea with Owen saying that many special education teachers leave the county not because of pay but due to working conditions. Nationwide the turnover in that field is higher than any other teaching group.

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PHOTO BY AMY BOX FELTHOELTER

Dollie Leach was honored at the Knox County Board of Education meeting Wednesday as a 50 year school bus driver. She was joined on stage by BOE Vice Chair Susan Horn and Superintendent Bob Thomas, not pictured. The board also honored other contracted drivers with more than 10 or 20 year's experience.

Securus \$250,000 payment to sheriff department on commission agenda

By Mike Steely
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Possibly the most controversial item on the Knox County Commission's work session agenda for their Tuesday, February 19 meeting is a payment or donation by the supplier of the county jail's video visitation to the county. The

commission meetings are usually held on Monday but today is "Presidents Day" and county offices are closed.

Securus is making a one-time "additional development payment" of \$250,000 to the Knox County Sheriff's Office of Corrections Division.

Acceptance of the funds is requested by the Sheriff. Since being elected last year Sheriff Tom Spangler has been pushed by some citizens to either drop the video visits, the only option for visiting relatives, or to create an in-person visitation policy that would permit face-to-face

meetings.

The Knoxville Focus inquired about the \$250,000 payment and the sheriff's department's Kimberly Glenn relayed a note she received from Allison Rogers about the payment.

"The \$250,000 payment by Securus was approved

by Knox County Commission in October 2018. The resolution, however, failed to appropriate the funds to the Sheriff's office and instead the funds were going to the General Fund. This is the reason we are back before Commission this month so we can have the funds appropriated to us," Rogers said.

"Securus is paying us because they could not deliver an improved inmate management system. We spent 16 months working with them on the project with no success. The \$250,000 payment is a reimbursement of our

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