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## Knoxville celebrates Emancipation Day

By Mike Steely  
Senior Writer  
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It was a celebration of freedom tinged with promises yet unfulfilled. The 157th National Observance and 7th Knoxville Observance of the Signing of the Emancipation Proclamation on New Year's Day saw many speakers

talk about the history and future of African Americans.

The Historic Mt. Zion Baptist Church was packed for a celebration that could only be described as inspirational. Much in the spirit of a church service with hymns separating the speakers, the ceremony recounted President

Abraham Lincoln's proclamation and the struggles since then to achieve full freedom as American citizens.

Rev. John A. Butler spoke along with several other local pastors including Rev. Harold A. Middlebrook. Also speaking at the Knoxville NAACP-sponsored event were state

Representative Rick Staples and Vice Mayor Gwen McKenzie.

Staples recalled Knoxville's first African American state legislator, Bob Booker, and noted some of the accomplishments and proposals in the legislature.

Councilwoman McKenzie

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Vrondelia (Ronni) Chandler spoke at the NAACP's Seventh Annual celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation. She spoke of the struggle for freedom and what is yet to be done. Photo by Mike Steely.

## Rural Metro opens new Strawberry Plains Pike fire station

By Mike Steely  
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Homeowners, business owners and facilities in the Forks of the River Industrial Park have a new fire station. Rural Metro Fire officially opened their new facility, Fire Station 27, at 5651 Strawberry Pike just off Governor John Sevier Highway, just before Christmas.

Fire Chief Jerry Harnish spoke briefly and, along with several elected county officials, cut the ribbon on the new facility. Harnish said it is the first new station in three years and thanked several people, including the community, for their support.

The fire station was formerly located in Industrial Park and the new location, according to Harnish, improves response time and reduces insurance premiums. The new fire station houses a pumper and a squad truck that carries specialized equipment for hazardous material incidents and other emergencies.

"Giving them a better location and equipment



PHOTO BY MIKE STEELY

Rural Metro Fire Chief Jerry Harnish cuts the ribbon on the new Strawberry Plains Pike fire station. The chief was joined by state and county officials including Knox County Sheriff Tom Spangler.

enables them to do an even better job of protecting our citizens and their property," said Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs.

Rural Metro is self-sustaining with subscription-based

service. No tax dollars are involved in the operation or the new station. Property owners who are not subscribers may still receive service but at a higher rate than subscribers.

Rural Metro Fire is

the largest private fire department in the nation and provides fire response and medical response with paramedics on fourteen fire engines in the county. The company has operated in Knox County since 1977 and is designated as the

"duly constituted" public fire department serving the community.

"The partnership with Rural Metro has been phenomenal," Mayor Jacobs told those attending the ribbon cutting.

## Something for Everyone at Grand Opening for Southern Sweet Boutique and Salon

By Focus Staff



The Grand Opening of the newest location of Southern Sweet Boutique and Salon will be Saturday, January 11, 2020, 10:00 a.m. at 7415 Maynardville Pike, Suite 103 in Halls

Sisters Nikki Monroe and Lauren Humphrey grew up in Halls Crossroads and both have daughters of their own in Halls schools. So when Monroe decided to put her fashion sense and hairstylist skills to work by starting her own boutique and salon, locating in Halls was an easy decision.

Southern Sweet Boutique and Salon opened two years ago in a small location near the YMCA in Halls and the business grew so quickly, she already has had to move the business twice. When her sister Lauren, who is also a highly skilled hairstylist and

skincare consultant, decided to join the team, the business really took off. Joined by longtime Halls cosmetologist Kathy Morgan Joy and stylist Nicole Wittenauer, the salon offers a variety of hair and beauty services.

The Grand Opening of the newest location of Southern Sweet Boutique and Salon will be Saturday, January 11, 2020, 10:00 a.m. at 7415 Maynardville Pike, Suite 103 in Halls. With a convenient location directly in front of Halls High school, the store appeals to both high school teens and their moms with cute, fashionable boutique clothing

and accessories as well as attractive haircuts, hair color experts, and stunning hair styling for special occasions.

During the Grand Opening, the store will offer several specials and flash sales on both boutique items and salon services. Ham 'n Goody's will have a pop-up store with their famous lemon cookies in the parking lot on opening day from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., with a special gift from Southern Sweet for each box sold. They will also have sandwich boxes available and an array of other delicious treats.

"We have something for

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