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PHOTO BY MIKE STEELY

Yassin's Falafel House staff member, Yassin Terou, Councilman Andrew Roberto, Cameron Brooks and Ventrice Hodge prepare to deliver the 200 bagged lunches to KAT workers.

Giving back to KAT employees

By Mike Steely
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"They are our front line people we don't think about. They provide an essential service," said Cameron Brooks of Realty Executives Associates and the Knox County Election Commission.

He was talking about Knoxville Area Transit employees. Brooks had been pondering how he might show them some appreciation and he called

Councilman Andrew Roberto. The two men talked about it and decided on a meal for the employees and followed through with the idea Friday.

Brooks and Roberto began raising funds on Facebook and contacted Yassin's Falafel House. "KAT Worker Appreciation Day" was announced and Friday at 11 a.m. Brooks and Roberto met at the restaurant at 706 Walnut Street to pick up individually wrapped and bagged

chicken or steak gyros and french fries.

Ventrice Hodge, vice president of the Amalgamated Transit Union, joined the two men in helping to bag the 200 lunches with restaurant owner Yassin Terou. The staff of the Falafel House spent many hours and effort to prepare and begin bagging the food.

"I know Yassin really wanted to give out to the community," Brooks said.

They worked to coordinate the meals with KAT's

Human Resources Office and delivered the meals to the KAT office on Magnolia Avenue to be given out to employees.

Hodge said the bags of food would be picked up by transit drivers as they report for their work shifts.

Brooks said that a fund raising effort to cover the cost of the food exceeded what was sought and the rain held off as they loaded two vehicles to deliver a free meal to the KAT workers.

Budget cut proposed for Knox County

By Mike Steely
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Probably the most interesting item in next week's Knox County Commission Work Session is the last on the agenda.

Chairman Hugh Nystrom is asking for a "Discussion item regarding the Knox County Budget." While the commission probably won't vote on it until their regular meeting

on June 29, they must approve Mayor Glenn Jacob's proposals by July 1.

Jacobs released his budget last week, proposing \$4 million less than the current budget and with no property tax increase. He reached into the "Rainy Day Fund" to find \$3.7 million in order to balance the budget and, overall, is proposing

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City Human Resources Department passes first reading

By Mike Steely
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Knoxville Mayor Indya Kincannon's push to create a Human Resources Department passed in a split vote Tuesday. Several citizens called into the Zoom meeting to speak for and against the measure but a 7-2 vote passed the creation of the new department on first reading at Tuesday's city council meeting.

Mayor Kincannon said she hopes the next city council meeting won't be via the internet but live. That meeting could see the second and final reading of the ordinance.

Dr. Vickie Hatfield, Civil Service Merit Board Director, remarked that the amended ordinance excluded employees and the public from the process during the pandemic. Hatfield, who will lose several of her powers with the

creation of a new department, said the ordinance was "not written in a cooperative experience."

The 21-year employee also said the creation of a new Human Resources Department moves most of her duties to HR where they become the duties of one person appointed by the mayor.

Hatfield said the idea is "the most divisive" she has ever seen and that most of the city employees oppose it. The Civil Service Merit Board voted 3-2 against creation of the HR department.

However, the spokesman for the fire department and the past president of the Knoxville Fraternal Order of Police supported the creation. Mark Taylor said the current system of hiring and overseeing complaints by the

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Absentee voting expanded to everyone

By Mike Steely
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Until last week voting by mail in Tennessee was permitted only for registered voters who were 60 years old or older, traveling or had physical conditions that qualified for applying. Fearing exposure to the COVID-19 virus was not a qualifying condition.

But Davidson County Chancellor Ellen Hobbs Lyle ordered the state

to let anyone who requests an absentee ballot to receive one. She ordered that state and local election commissions update their websites to let voters know how to request an absentee ballot.

Two weeks ago retiring Knox County Director of Elections Cliff Rodgers reported that applications for voting by mail had already been increasing. Absentee ballot request forms are available online at knoxcounty.org/

election for the August 6th primary and local election. The election commission is also available by calling 865-215-2480.

In the election four years ago 880 absentee ballots were cast according to Cliff Davis, the new director of elections. He told The Focus Friday that 3,915 requests had been received, or about 100 new requests a day.

"We've got almost 4,000 requests

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Knox Education Foundation Announced at BOE Session

By Amy Box Fellhoelter

The executive staff of Knox Education Foundation attended last Wednesday's work session to announce the new establishment's arrival and introduce its new CEO Chris Letsos. Member Virginia Babb filled in for Susan Horn as interim chairperson in her absence. Babb led a vote to approve the agenda before board member Terry Hill led a moment of silence and the Pledge.

Announcements given by Babb included a June 19 call for members to participate in the annual evaluation of Superintendent Bob Thomas, and a reminder for members to complete their required annual board training by June 30.

The superintendent's report included announcing high school graduations starting on Monday, June 8, and the launch of KCS at Home last week for Pre-K through twelfth grade students who choose to access material they missed in the spring semester. "I hope our families will find it very valuable," he added. Next, Superintendent Thomas explained a three-part strategy to opening the schools this fall. The first strategy is a survey to solicit feedback from students, families, and staff members that is available on the KCS website. Second, is the creation of a task force of community members from each board district to provide communication to guide

KCS planning. It will be led by Dr. Jerry Askew who is the president of the Alliance for Better Non-profits. The third component is a focus group made of students, teachers, principals, and parents to find different perspectives for the fall semester opening.

An update of the Great Schools Partnership was next to seize the attention of board members. The new non-profit organization, named Knox Education Foundation, has combined Project GRAD Knoxville and Great Schools Partnership's Community Schools and Innovation initiatives. Chris Letsos will follow interim CEO Jonathan Scoonover and serve at the helm as of June 3. Letsos has 25 years of leadership and

fundraising experience with Boys & Girls Clubs. He comes to Knoxville after serving as the CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Tampa Bay for the past five years where he partnered with Hillsborough County, one of the nation's largest school districts.

"I look forward to working on behalf of all students, all schools, and all communities during these most uncertain times. It's when we all come together that kids know they have a bright future ahead of them," said Letsos.

Scoonover, now Knox Education Foundation director of innovation, explained to the board the transition of the two organizations to join together in the past seven months. He clarified

the transferring of one MOU from Great Schools to Knox Education Foundation instead of two because Knox Ed Foundation is utilizing the federal tax ID number as Project GRAD. Therefore, the MOU of Project GRAD wasn't on the agenda so agenda item C5 read, "Approve Amendment to Great Schools Partnership Memoranda and Restated Memoranda of Understanding for Knox Education Foundation."

Project GRAD Executive Director Ronni Chandler said KCS and Project GRAD have partnered to help 7,000 students mostly in low income schools. "So we did a pivot, encouraging staff to pay attention to self-care and their

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