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\$1,500 bonus for deputies in approved Knox budget

By Mike Steely
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Knox County Sheriff Tom Spangler's persistence won out Wednesday with a victorious split vote granting a bonus to his deputies. The county commission also passed the amended budget that included the

bonus payments during the special session.

The sheriff's department discovered it was ending the fiscal year with a \$3 million surplus and was requesting that \$1.5 million of that go to 820 deputies. Spangler appealed to the commission's midmonth work session for approval to give his

non-administrative employees a bonus.

In an earlier meeting, Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs presented a reduced county budget and proposed a \$750 bonus to frontline officers to be paid in December. The mayor said that an additional one-time bonus might be

considered depending on revenue then.

"I'm not backing down," Spangler said to Jacobs and noted the county is losing experienced deputies to other East Tennessee law enforcement agencies because of the disparities in pay and retirement. Spangler, backed by a

contingent of deputies, spoke out again at last week's open meeting and, eventually, seven of the commissioners agreed. The bonus, about \$1,500 per deputy below the rank of captain, will be paid out in early December.

Finance Director Chris Caldwell sided with the

mayor and, just prior to the vote, said the \$1.5 million could come from a combination of anticipated state funding and the unspent "rainy day funds" set aside by the county. He adjusted the proposed \$84.9 million budget up to cover the allocation.

Continue on page 6

Changes at PARC demanded by some citizens

By Mike Steely
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On the heels of revised Knoxville Police Use of Force procedures, some local citizens feel those reforms are not enough and let a meeting of PARC know so in a loud and verbal confrontation Thursday evening.

Meeting publicly for the first time this year due to COVID-19 the Police Advisory and Review Committee voted to approve Mayor Indya Kincannon's selection of LaKenya Middlebrook as executive director. There had been 18 applications for the position and Middlebrook told The Focus she thought "long and hard" before accepting the position.

PARC Chair Rosa Mar welcomed Middlebrook and a new member, Ken St. Germain, to the group and told the new director she's facing many changing situations ahead for the body and the police department.

Police Chief Eve Thomas detailed the changes in the Use of Force policy that were made following a meeting she had with Mayor Kincannon. Policy changes and updates include banning choke holds, de-escalation training, warning before shooting, exhausting all options before use of force, banning shooting at moving vehicles, and comprehensive reporting by officers.

PARC member Jerrod Croom addressed several concerns saying that a police officer "is no higher or lower than me." He asked if a report is required when an officer draws a gun on someone. The police chief said that incident requires to be noted on a report.

Knoxville citizens spoke and demanded more changes in the police department and the PARC membership and duties.

Maura Connelly said PARC should have independent powers, the complaint form needs changing, and PARC should become

Continue on page 4



Congressman Tim Burchett and Knox County Commissioner John Schoonmaker meet with attendees at the GOP headquarters at 5710 Kingston Pike.

Knox County GOP celebrates re-opening of headquarters

By Ken Lay

It was not only the first day of summer but it was a day for the Knox County Republican Party to celebrate the grand re-opening of its headquarters in West Knoxville.

It was a warm and slightly humid day but that didn't dampen spirits as the local GOP celebrated the re-opening of its headquarters, which closed in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Music played and food was

available for purchase thanks to a food truck provided by John Gabriel.

Several elected officials and candidates who are running in the upcoming August election were on hand to meet voters and campaign volunteers.

The building that houses headquarters was open as party officials including Knox County Republican Party Chairman Randy Pace and Knox County Republican Women President Manuela Ptacek

drew numbers for door prizes and other Knox County Republicans sold merchandise including hats, t-shirts, bumper stickers and ink pens.

Ptacek organized the meet and greet, which was held on Saturday, June 20. And she did it in a quick fashion.

"I was on a vacation and someone said that we want you to organize this and you have a week and a half," Ptacek said.

Continue on page 2

Election office prepares for August

By Mike Steely
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The upcoming August 6 local general election and state and federal primaries may be one of the most trying in recent history not only for voters but especially for the Knox County Election officials and poll workers.

The new Administrator of Elections, Chris Davis, told the Knox County Election Commission recently about the challenges of this year. Hiring poll workers and training new and existing staff on the new paper ballot system and its equipment would be a challenge on its own without considering the limitations imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the huge increase in requests for absentee ballots. Twenty-four boxes are set back for the expected absentee ballots, estimated now at more than 7,500.

The election office has been training poll workers, about 12 at a time, in the Downtown West office. Additional space and one more room are being prepared in the Old Courthouse to handle incoming results and to store the paper ballot boxes. Counting the absentee ballots

Continue on page 4

Community task force discusses reopening Knox County Schools

By Ken Lay

The Knox County School system took another step toward possibly reopening its doors in August, as scheduled, Wednesday night.

The schools' community task force held the first of its two scheduled public meetings and mulled through data from a countywide survey, which took place from between June 1-19 and was conducted online. The

meeting was held at the Sarah Simpson Professional Development Center.

The community focus group is one of several such groups involved in the decision on when to open schools, closed since March by the Coronavirus pandemic, and how things are going to look once schools reopen. There are also other focus groups comprised of teachers, students and school

administrators.

Knox County Schools Superintendent Bob Thomas said that his goal is to have schools open by Aug. 10, which is the scheduled start date for the fall semester.

"Our ultimate goal is to open and have students in the building on Aug. 10," Thomas said. "It's going to look different."

"I think we all agree that the best way that learning takes

place is when the teacher is in the classroom with his or her students."

While the superintendent wants the schools to reopen with full classrooms, which may not happen, the task force will consider three options as schools prepare to reopen and those options include traditional reopening, remote distance learning and a hybrid model.

Continue on page 2

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