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Mayor: Anniston's animal shelter costs to go up after county contract ends

BY TIM LOCKETTE
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No matter where Anniston sends its stray animals after March 1, the city's cost to take care of them is about to go up, Mayor Jack Draper said Tuesday.

"We can't reasonably expect to pay what we've been paying," Draper said. In a called meeting Tues-

day, the Anniston City Council voted 3-0 to grant Draper and City Manager Jay Johnson the ability to negotiate a contract for care of stray animals caught in the city after Calhoun County's government parts ways with the nonprofit Cheaha Regional Humane Society at the end of this week.

Anniston has historically sent its strays to the county

animal center on Morrisville Road. The county owns the facility, but Cheaha Regional ran it under contract with the county. County commissioners late last year voted to terminate the contract and staff the center with county employees.

The move followed months of controversy at the shelter, as Cheaha Regional management and staff feud-

ed over working conditions and other issues, though commissioners at the time cited a desire to move to a "metro concept" of animal control.

Cheaha Regional officials have said they intend to take the equipment the nonprofit owns and open another shelter somewhere else. The Tuesday vote would

Please see SHELTER I Page 3A



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Pelicans float on the Coosa River Tuesday near Ohatchee. While spotting the birds in the northern half of Alabama used to be a rarity, they've become an increasingly common sight in recent years.

PELICAN POWER

Jowly water birds find northern Alabama hospitable

BY B. SCOTT MCLENDON
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Decades ago, spotting a pelican in north Alabama was rare, according to experts, but now residents can spot many of the jowly birds spending their winters hanging out along various waterfords.

"They are now a very common winter bird," said Geoffrey Hill, professor of biological sciences at Auburn University. "They used to mostly go down to the Gulf Coast. You didn't see them inland very often, only if you got lucky and caught them moving from site to site."

Hill said thousands of American white pelicans could be spotted on Dauphin Island, but now they're hardly seen there. The birds now spend their

winters as far north as Decatur, across the Tennessee Valley, in the great lakes along the Coosa River and down into Eufaula.

They breed up in the upper Midwest, in states such as Minnesota and North Dakota, and migrate south for the winter. The pelicans arrive in the area in November and stay until April, according to Hill. Scoops of the birds — that's one name for a flock of pelicans — can sometimes be seen in the summer as well. A group of pelicans can be referred to as a brief, pod, pouch or squadron.

Pelican sightings aren't out of the ordinary to residents along the Coosa River area, according to Richard Thomas, who lives near the river.

"I see them white birds out there all the time," he said.

Hill said he was recently in St. Clair County, where he saw "many hundreds" of the pelicans.

"Apparently it's a great fish stop in the Tennessee River Valley and the Coosa River Valley," Hill said. "They eat better up in those rivers than they did down in the Gulf of Mexico."

In the winter birds go where the food is, he said, and the fact that they have shifted their winter range from the Gulf Coast to the Tennessee River Valley indicates the food is better up north.

"The birds probably pushed them to a place we aren't used to seeing but I just drove up and I bet there were 500 white pelicans," Hill said, referring to the St. Clair location.

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CLEBURNE COUNTY

Woman dies after being struck by vehicle



Bill Wilson/The Anniston Star

First responders work Monday night at the driveway of a home on County Road 710 near Ranburne, where a Cleburne County woman was killed by a vehicle.

BY BILL WILSON
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RANBURNE — A Cleburne County woman died Monday night after being struck by a vehicle near Ranburne.

On Tuesday, Coroner Adam Downs identified the woman as Bryttanie Russell, 25. Downs said an investigation into Russell's death was continuing Tuesday, and that her body had been sent to a state forensics lab in Huntsville for an autopsy.

According to Cleburne County Sheriff's Office Investigator Joseph Freeman, the incident happened around 6 p.m. Monday.

Freeman said the driver of the vehicle was taken to the Sheriff's Office to get an official statement to see if it matches with the evidence.

The incident took place on a driveway off of County Road 710 near County Road 10.

Family members and friends, some weeping, gathered around the driveway and adjoining houses Monday night as law enforcement agencies investigated and interviewed witnesses and others.

Freeman said investigators from the Jacksonville State University Center for Applied Forensics would process the scene.

Sunday alcohol sales debate back on menu

Council vote aimed toward holding a referendum

BY BEN NUNNALLY
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OXFORD — Residents here may soon have a chance to vote on whether to allow Sunday alcohol sales in their city.

During its Tuesday night meeting, the City Council voted 3-2 in favor of having Mayor Alton Craft ask local legislators for authorization to hold a citywide referendum on Sunday sales. Councilwoman Charlotte Hubbard introduced the resolution just before the end of the meeting, without any apparent prior discussion among council members.

The issue has received a tepid response in the past. Oxford residents most recently debated the issue last April, when the city held a public hearing attended by about 130 people, including restaurant and bar owners. Opinion seemed mixed at the gathering, and the council took no further action.

Councilman Steven Waits seconded Hubbard's motion. Council members Chris Spurlin and Mike Henderson voted against it, while Hubbard, Waits and Councilman Phil Gardner voted in favor.

Waits said before the vote that he believed the issue deserves another look.

"I'd just like to say that over the last six months, the number of Oxford residents that I personally spoke with who support a referendum is such that I think a referendum is appropriate," Waits said.

Hubbard said last March that holding a referendum on Sunday sales would cost the city about \$14,000 if it were held after the close of the legislative session. This year's session runs from March 5 to May 3.

Please see OXFORD I Page 3A

Study claims bad roads cost Anniston drivers hundreds of dollars per year

BY TIM LOCKETTE
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Wear and tear on roads costs the average Anniston-area driver \$1,300 per year, local officials claimed in a press conference in Anniston Monday.

"To keep up with demand, we need to pave 371 miles every five years, and right now we're only paving 75," said County Commissioner Lee Patterson.

During a meeting with reporters at the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce, Patterson and other local officials called for more highway spending. They based their call on a study by TRIP, a D.C.-based nonprofit, which claims that local residents pay more for gas and vehicle repairs because of the poor state of the area's roads.

Discussion of the study was the stated reason for the meeting, but the meeting could also be said to kick off a week-long publicity push by advocates of a gas tax increase, timed just in advance of the March 5 start of the

Please see ROADS I Page 3A



Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

Traffic is seen Monday at the intersection of Quintard Avenue and Alabama 202 in Anniston.

INDEX
Classifieds 1D
Editorial 6A
Food 1B

WEATHER, 5C

Jayden Veazey,
Pleasant Valley Elem.
RAIN CHANCE
HIGH: 71 LOW: 54

OBITUARIES, 3B
Tora Masha Burrow, Anniston
Lowell Ford, Piedmont
Allen W. Hammett, Jacksonville
Mary Jean Lee Heany, Weaver
Mary Margaret Hug, Piedmont
Willie N. Mallard, Alexandria
Sacanda Velise McCallum, Anniston
Bonnie McDougal, Oxford
Joseph Bryan Pope, Anniston
Robert Hobson Reedy, Piedmont
Sheila L. Sears, Munford

Washington Post editor's Anniston lecture called off

BY STAR STAFF

The Washington Post's executive editor, Martin "Marty" Baron, will not speak in Anniston on Thursday as had been planned.

Baron had been set to deliver the latest installment in the Ayers Lecture Series, a cooperative effort between The

Anniston Star's founding Ayers family and Jacksonville State University. He contacted organizers Tuesday night to say that health reasons would prevent him from traveling.

The lecture series has since 1988 brought nationally and internationally

Please see BARON I Page 3A

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