

Blankets for babies

Retired teacher has personal mission to create blankets for newborn babies

PAGE A8



Love Indy activities

Annual Love Indy service projects to be undertaken on Saturday

PAGE B1



Spears Mfg. announces expansion

CANEY — Announcement is being made in the form of a Public Notice in this issue of the Montgomery County Chronicle about a major industrial project for Caney. Spears Mfg., is seeking \$13.2 million in taxable Industrial Revenue Bonds, also known as IRBs, for the construction of a separate facility at its manufacturing facility at 1200 S. State in Caney.

Complete details about the project — including the number of new jobs it will add to Spears’ payroll — will be announced when the Caney City Council holds a public hearing on Monday, May 5 concerning those Industrial Revenue Bonds.

However, the Public Notice on page A6 of this week’s Chronicle gives a general overview of the bonds. The Public Notice for that May 5 hearing says the bonds will be used “to pay the costs of the acquisition, construction and equipping of additional facilities adjacent to an existing manufacturing facility located at 1200 South State Street, Caney, Kansas.”

Also, at a recent meeting of the Montgomery County Action Council, MCAC executive director Melissa Johnson said the expansion project will employ more than 175 workers with average wages of \$40,000 per year.

In addition to the \$13.2 million paid for with bonds, Spears will add \$7 million in separate financing to make the Caney project possible.

The public hearing will be held at 6:30 p.m., May 5, at City Hall.

Representatives from Spears Mfg., as well as the Montgomery County Action Council, will be present at the May 5 public hearing to provide more details about Spears’ latest expansion plans.

Industrial Revenue Bonds are a frequently-used incentive by city and county governments to foster expansion or new construction of local industries. Under an IRB, bonds are issued through the local government in the name of the industry. Revenues derived by the private industry will then retire the debt associated with those bonds. No public dollars are used in the retirement of the bonds.

In exchange for paying off those bonds, the private industry is granted a 10-year property tax exemption on that project.

Spears Mfg., is one of Montgomery County’s largest employers. It has expanded multiple times since the company placed a manufacturing facility east of the Caney Industrial Park in 1983. It has two local facilities: including its mammoth facility that has grown from its 1983 facility, and the sprawling facility on South State Street.

The company is headquartered in Sylmar, Calif.



KAY Club accepts new, used shoes

Members of the Caney Valley High School KAY Club have been collecting shoes (new and gently worn) as part of a community service project: Soles 4 Souls. The collected shoes will benefit people in need throughout the country and world. The local shoe collection began April 1 and will continue through April 30. A donation box is located in Teffany Brandon’s room at Caney Valley Jr.-Sr. High School. As of April 19, more than 125 pairs of shoes have been collected. Persons wishing to donate used shoes should make sure they have been laundered, are clean and in usable condition. Pictured are (left to right) Nellie Eden, Tula Grassl, Brooke Gaff, Marayah Gulick, and Nadaley Gulick.

PHOTO BY TEFFANY BRANDON

Questions arise about college merger process

ICC trustees raise concerns about state law that puts selection of new trustee board ahead of consolidation plan

BY ANDY TAYLOR  
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There were more questions than answers about college consolidation when trustees from Coffeyville Community College and Independence Community College met for separate monthly meetings on Monday.

The subject of consolidation of both colleges was broached at each trustee meeting on Monday — one month after the two boards separately agreed to begin conversations that could lead to a possible consolidation or merger.

At the CCC meeting, trustees were pressed by a faculty member from ICC regarding the consolidation process. Ben Seel, who is an ICC government professor, asked CCC trustees how they envision a consolidation plan . . . and what that plan would entail.

In response, CCC trustee chairman Becky Barnhart said that the conversations between ICC and CCC have not started since their March meetings. The only thing that has happened were a pair of unofficial meetings in 2024 where representatives from both boards discussed op-

tions for future collaborative efforts, such as sharing of resources or joint purchases of goods.

However, the initial conversation evolved into a broader discussion about consolidation of the two college districts into one county-wide district, she said.

The “push” for a bigger conversation about consolidation was created when trustees felt the sentiments from leaders within the Kansas Legislature to reduce their state support for higher education or force a consolidation of community colleges, she said.

“It’s so early in the process that I really cannot tell you what a consolidation would even look like,” said Barnhart in response to Seel’s questions. “Everything that has happened thus far has never happened before between two community colleges in Kansas. It’s never happened. So, for us to proceed, I hope, should be thoughtfully and thoroughly done . . . and slow, slow, slow.”

Seel was asked by CCC trustees for his own sentiments about a possible consolidation. While he said he understood the academic perspective about consolidation, he felt the economic impact would be more drastic to one or both communities.

“It’s like closing down military bases,” he said. “It might help the military overall but it would be devastating to the community that has to give

• see CONSOLIDATION, page A3

Jason Boland & the Stragglers to perform in Caney

Red Dirt music legends were recently inducted into the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame

CANEY — The Fourth and Live concert series in Caney has announced its 2025 performance artist.

And, fans of Red Dirt country music will be in for a musical treat!

Fresh off a highly-touted appearance at the Boys from Oklahoma concert at Boone Pickens Stadium in Stillwater, Okla., Red Dirt pioneer Jason Boland & the Stragglers will appear in concert in downtown Caney on Friday, May 23. Gates open at 6 p.m. The concert will kickoff a busy Mayfest/Memorial Day weekend in Caney.

Tickets are now available at <https://www.eventbrite.com>. Type “Fourth and Live” in the Search field.

Jason Boland & The Stragglers are synonymous with the popular Red Dirt music scene that evolved from Boland’s native Oklahoma in the 1990s.

The group was inducted into the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame at the Boys of Oklahoma concerts in Stillwater on April 12. Also sharing the stage with Boland at that multi-night concert, which had more than 180,000 ticket buyers, were Stoney LaRue, The



Jason Boland & The Stragglers will appear at the Fourth and Live Concert in Caney on Friday, May 23. The country band just finished a successful appearance at the Boys of Oklahoma concert in Stillwater, Okla.

Great Divide, Turnpike Troubadours and Cross Canadian Ragweed — all of whom have their origin steeped in the influence of Oklahoma’s Red Dirt music scene.

Their appearance at the Boys of Oklahoma concert comes on the heels of the band’s chart-rising song, “Drive,” hitting #2 on the Texas Country Music Charts.

“Drive” is one of the hits coming from the band’s latest album: The

Last Kings of Babylon.

“This album is a mirror,” said Boland. “It’s a retrospective, a reflection of everywhere we’ve been and everything we’ve learned over the last 25 years on the road.”

The Last Kings of Babylon — Boland’s 11th studio album with his longtime band — is no nostalgia trip, though. Recorded with legendary producer Lloyd Maines, the collection finds Boland and the

band continuing to evolve, pushing sonic boundaries and challenging genre conventions even as they embrace history and tradition.

The songwriting is bold and muscular, filtering classic country through a kaleidoscopic lens of rock, punk, bluegrass, and folk, and the performances are raw and exhilarating to match, captured live on the studio floor in just two whirlwind days of basic tracking. The result is a timeless offering from a group of master craftsmen at the top of their game, a joyful, honest snapshot of a working band 25 years into their unlikely—and unstoppable—career.

“These songs are about the journey,” Boland reflects. “We were searching for something when we started this band, and we’re still out there searching for it now.”

Born and raised in Oklahoma, Boland grew up listening to a mix of country and rock and roll before eventually finding himself at the epicenter of the Red Dirt scene in Stillwater, where he put together the Stragglers while attending Oklahoma State University.

Beginning with 1999’s Pearl Snaps, the hard-touring band would release a series of critically acclaimed inde-

• see CONCERT, page A3



|                |       |
|----------------|-------|
| OPINIONS       | A4-A5 |
| SPORTS         | B3-B9 |
| PUBLIC NOTICES | A6    |

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| CLASSIFIED ADS   | B10 |
| OBITUARIES       | A2  |
| CROSSWORD PUZZLE | B9  |

Wit & Wisdom

from Will Rogers

From the Will Rogers Museum in Claremore, Oklahoma

“Well, we cuss the lawmakers . . . but I notice we’re always perfectly willin’ to share in any of the sums of money that they might distribute.” (April 7, 1935)