

News-Sun

JAL EUNICE HOBBS LOVINGTON TATUM SEMINOLE DENVER CITY

Possible acid bomb investigated

NEWS-SUN STAFF REPORT

Hobbs emergency personnel were called to Mills Elementary Wednesday in response to juveniles mixing chemicals.

Police Department spokesman Officer Mike Stone said it appeared

seven or eight juveniles were preparing to make a "acid bomb" or similar chemical bomb by mixing chemicals.

Hobbs Fire Department Chief Manny Gomez said firefighters determined the chemicals were bleach, drain cleaning and baking soda.

"The intent of these juveniles is something we all have to be fully aware of," he said. "The intent is scary. ... They were trying to create something that essentially goes 'boom.'"

Gomez said acidbombs can irritate

eyes, cause loss of vision and inhalation of the fumes can cause a loss of consciousness.

No one was injured in Tuesday's incident.

Stone said if acid bombs damage property or injure a person, the mak-

ers could be charged with a crime.

"It's dangerous and it's dangerous to the area they're making (the acid bomb) in," he said.

None of the juveniles were apprehended, but Stone said their parents were contacted.

LEA COMMISSION Whitehead seeking re-election

KELLEY MCMILLAN
NEWS-SUN

County Commissioner Mike Whitehead said he's seen a lot of growth and development in Lea County during his last three years on the Lea County Board of Commissioners.

He hopes he will be on the board to see more growth in the next four years.

Whitehead announced this week he will run for re-election to his District 2 seat in the June primary election.

A Hobbs resident for 39 years and owner of B&G Transportation and M&M Tours, Whitehead said he'd never thought about running for office before when he ran and won the election on the Republican ticket in 2006.

"I just feel like, hopefully, I've done a good job the first term and feel like I can do an even better job the second term just because I'm more familiar with the processes," Whitehead said.

Whitehead said his greatest



Whitehead

SEE WHITEHEAD, Page 5

Contract of Jal school chief renewed

LEVI HILL
NEWS-SUN

The Jal School Board renewed a one-year, \$104,000 contract with Superintendent Rick Ferguson Wednesday night.

Jal School Board President Larry Crites said the district renews the contract annually and has done so for several years because of uncertain financial futures.

"Any pay increase is based on what we get from the

SEE FERGUSON, Page 5



Ferguson



Cindy Terasme screams Thursday after seeing the feet of her dead 14-year-old brother Jean Gaelle Dersmorne in the rubble of the collapsed St. Gerard School in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. A 7.0-magnitude earthquake hit Haiti Tuesday.

LES employee's relatives in Haiti all OK Native: Haitians 'very resilient'

BETH HAHN
NEWS-SUN

Mike Benjamin, the employee concerns manager for the National Enrichment Facility east of Eunice, left Haiti at an early age in the late 1960s.

Seeing his former home devastated by an earthquake Tuesday saddened him.

"Haiti had such a fragile infrastructure so everything was just like (matchsticks)," he said.

The island was hit by a 7.0 earthquake Tuesday, leaving thousands homeless and as many as 50,000 dead.

Benjamin's family relocated to New York, but he still has relatives in Haiti. He spent the early part of the week making phone calls to check on extended family.

One brother was working in Haiti as an engineer, but happened to be in Maryland on vaca-



Mike Benjamin, a native of Haiti, stands in his office at LES, east of Eunice. Benjamin is hoping to return to the island next month to volunteer in relief efforts in the aftermath of an earthquake that struck Tuesday.

BETH HAHN/NEWS-SUN

tion, he said.

"Everybody is OK," Benjamin said Thursday.

In the U.S., Benjamin joined the Army and served one tour in Vietnam. He retired after 24 years in the Army. He spent the past 37 years working in the nuclear industry and now lives in Hobbs and commutes to the NEF about five miles east of Eunice every day.

Throughout his career, Benjamin made friends in various professions — including doctors and engineers — and is contacting them now to see if any-

one is interested in volunteering as part of the relief efforts in Haiti.

Benjamin said he was familiar with Port Au Prince, Haiti's capital, and saw pictures of buildings toppled and people wandering the streets

SEE HAITI, Page 5



International Isotopes Inc.

NRC HEARING

Isotopes facility supported

LEVI HILL
NEWS-SUN

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission received an earful of support for the International Isotopes deconversion facility from Lea County leaders Thursday night at a public hearing.

NRC officials discussed the licensing process for the nuclear byproduct deconversion facility that is targeted for a 640-acre site 14 miles west of Hobbs, with a gathering of 85 community leaders and residents at the Lea County Event Center.

International Isotopes is proposing to build a \$93 million deconversion facility that would extract fluorine gas from uranium hexafluoride tails created in the nuclear enrichment process. The fluorine gases are used in medical equipment and the manufacturing of solar panels.

Matt Bartlett, licensing project manager with the NRC, said International Isotopes' application to the NRC was filed Dec. 30 and will go through a 45-day acceptance review followed by an 18-month intensive review and a simultaneous 24-month environmental impact review before the facility is approved.

Community leaders from the county, Hobbs, Eunice, Lovington and state representatives all stood and spoke in support of the Isotopes project. There were no comments against the project.

"I am here in unequivocal support of International Isotopes," said Lea County Commission Chairman Gary Schubert, who presented the NRC a letter of support for the project signed by the entire county commission.



KIMBERLY RYAN/NEWS-SUN

Lea County Commission Chairman Gary Schubert presented the NRC a letter of support signed by the entire county commission.

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OIL PRICES

West Texas intermediate		
	Price	Change
Spot	\$81.27	-.026
Posted	\$75.75	-.25
Sour	\$74.10	-.25
N. Gas	\$5.588	-.145



Interim leader Hardison named president of EDC

NEWS-SUN STAFF

Lisa Hardison of Hobbs was elected Thursday as president of the Economic Development Corporation of Lea County.

Hardison has served as interim president/executive director of the EDC since July 2009. She joined the EDC in August 2007 as senior vice president after working as dean of extended learning for New Mexico Junior College for four years.

Thursday was an exciting day for her, Hardison said.

"It's my pleasure and privilege to serve the communities in Lea County and our membership and our city and county governments," she said. "I am just honored to be able to do that, and hopefully we can keep the momentum going and continue growing our communities."

During her tenure as interim presi-



Hardison

dent at EDC, Hardison led efforts to secure more than 200 new jobs for Lea County through the recruitment of International Isotopes, SunEdison and Enertech Wireline Service.

"Behind the scenes, Lisa Hardison has professionally and skillfully managed research projects and coordinated the multifaceted economic development efforts of Lea County," EDC Chairman Sam Spencer said in a release. "Countless and often unrecognized hours are involved in helping Lea County further diversify its economic base and provide our area with well paying jobs. She has been

'Behind the scenes, Lisa Hardison has professionally and skillfully managed ... economic development efforts.'

Sam Spencer
EDC chairman

diligent in this important work."

Hardison's experience prior to joining NMJC in 2000 included working with large employers such as Arrowhead Mills of Hereford, Texas, as product development manager and Dairy Max of Amarillo as a marketing consultant.

As part of EDC's search committee

process, Spencer said more than 60 applications were received for the position, and the search committee conducted interviews with candidates from across the country.

"We found Lisa Hardison to be the most qualified candidate," Spencer said in the release. "She is a native of this region, she is proud to call Lea County home for the last 10 years, and she has the knowledge, dedication and experience to help Lea County continue to diversify and grow."

Hardison received her Bachelor of Science degree from Lubbock Christian University in 1991; her Master of Arts degree from New Mexico State University in 2003; and her Doctor of Education degree from NMSU in 2007.

She is currently completing requirements to receive the professional designation Certified Economic Developer.

Experts: Suspected minister searched 'overdose' online

WACO, Texas (AP) — In the month before his wife died, a minister in Texas tried to buy a prescription sleeping aid online and conducted an Internet search for "overdose on sleeping pills," computer experts testified Thursday in his murder trial.

Neal Kersh, a computer forensics examiner, testified that he examined data from Matt Baker's church-owned laptop and was able to retrieve information from a computer server at a youth center where Baker worked. Baker's computer went missing two months after Kari's death.

Kersh said Baker sent e-mails just before and after those 2006 Internet searches and site visits, indicating he — not anyone else — was at the computer looking at the pharmaceutical sites and online pharmacies.

Baker is accused of killing his wife Kari, whose death initially was ruled a suicide. A near-empty

bottle of over-the-counter sleeping pills and typed suicide note were found by her body, and Baker said she had been depressed.

A month before his wife's death in April 2006, Baker looked at six Web sites on the same day and did a Google search using the words "overdose on sleeping pills," Kersh testified. Baker looked at a dozen more sites on three other days in March, and looked at 11 more just three days before her death, Kersh said.

Mark E. Henry, the CEO of an online pharmacy, testified that Baker started to buy a 50-count bottle of the prescription sleep aid Ambien but stopped the order.

Henry, who said he examined records from his database to determine the activity from Baker's computer, said numerous customers in 2006 stopped their orders because at the time, the company's delivery could take 10 days and there was no way to track an order.

Ambien was one of three drugs found in Kari Baker's body, but the amount in her system or when it was ingested could not be determined because the autopsy was performed three months after her death and her body had been embalmed, two doctors involved in her autopsy testified earlier.

The autopsy listed her death as undetermined.

Kersh and Henry said Baker did not buy Ambien that day in March. But Kersh testified that he did not have Baker's youth center computer, where the hard drive would have stored deleted e-mails and Internet searches, so it was impossible to say whether Baker ever bought anything from an online pharmacy.

Defense attorney Guy James Gray told Kersh that Baker's credit cards showed no such purchases and that Baker looked at the sites because he was worried about his depressed wife.

Kersh said he also retrieved an e-mail to Baker in June 2006 from a resort employee "regarding your honeymoon in Fiji" and congratulating him on his engagement. Kersh said he retrieved a photo taken two weeks after Kari's death, showing five children, Baker and another woman — apparently taken at his daughter's birthday party.

Earlier Thursday, two people who had known the Bakers from church testified that they attended the party and saw that all of Kari's pictures were gone from the home — and that they had been replaced with ones of another woman.

Todd Monsey, who worked in some churches where Baker had been a pastor, said he noticed that Kari's closet was almost empty. He said that when he asked about it, Baker told him that it was best for his grieving daughters "not to be reminded so much" of their mother.



AP PHOTO
Former Baptist minister Matt Baker, accused of the 2006 death of his wife Kari, waits in a 19th District courtroom during his trial.

N.M. briefs

Tax returns accepted online next week

New Mexicans can file their state personal income tax returns online for 2009 starting Tuesday, Jan. 19, the state tax department announced.

This is the 22nd year that some form of E-Filing has been available to New Mexico taxpayers.

"E-filing is safe, secure and free. It not only saves the state time and money, but will also get New Mexicans their tax refunds more quickly and directly," said Rick Homans, secretary of the New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department.

The tax filing deadline for taxpayers with paper returns is April 15, 2010. The tax deadline for E-filers is extended until April 30, 2010. New Mexicans can file their tax returns online by going to www.tax.state.nm.us.

Those who do not have access to a computer or need help filing tax returns, please visit the following Taxation and Revenue Department offices in Santa Fe, 1200 South St. Francis Drive, Ph. 505-827-0951; Albuquerque, 5301 Central NE, Suite 300, Ph. 505-841-6200; Las Cruces, 2540 El Paseo, Bldg. 2, Ph. 575-524-6225; and Roswell, 400 N. Pennsylvania, Suite 200, Ph. 575-627-2900.

Isotopes

from PAGE 1

A representative of U.S. Rep. Harry Teague, D-N.M., read a letter from the congressman stating his support for the project and why the area is supportive of such projects.

"I am proud of being on the county commission that brought LES to Eunice," Teague's comment read. "Our community knows the facility is safe and proud to have them here. Lea County is and oil and gas country, but the people know the benefit of other forms of energy. You have my full support to bringing the INIS facility here."

Hobbs Mayor Gary Don Reagan said the LES facility has had a major impact on the entire county and similar expectations are held for the International Isotopes project.

Johnny Cope, chairman of the Lea Energy Alliance and chairman of the State Transportation Commission, said the community has fully embraced LES and from his position on the Transportation Commission there are no serious concerns about transporting the depleted uranium tails through Lea County.

More than a dozen other community leaders spoke in support of the INIS project.

One Hobbs resident voiced support for the project's economic development, but asked if International Isotopes had a supply stream of depleted uranium to process.

Bartlett said INIS has anticipated it will be able to handle about 25 percent of the depleted uranium tails produced annually in the country when it is fully operational. About 80 million pounds of UF6 tails are generated annually in the United States, Bartlett said.

He also said LES has been in talks with the Department of Energy to take some of the tails from its facility when it begins operations.

NMJC could break enrollment record this spring

BETH HAHN
NEWS-SUN

For months, New Mexico Junior College administrators have expected to see a surge in student enrollment and credit hours — and this spring, the college could break a previous record set in 2005.

"That's directly linked to the local economy," the college's director of institutional effectiveness Larry Sanderson said during an NMJC Board meeting Thursday. "When the economy is bad, people go back to school."

Sanderson said the previous record for credit hours is 60,000.

"We will be far north of that," he said. Credit hours and enrollment numbers

'That's directly linked to the local economy. When the economy is bad, people go back to school.'

Larry Sanderson
NMJC director of institutional effectiveness

will be released later this spring.

NMJC staff did not have a number for student enrollment during Thursday's

meeting, but Sanderson estimated the total will be close to a 20 percent increase from 2008-09.

"It's close to what other community colleges in the area and nationally are experiencing," he said.

Board member Pat Chappelle asked if the enrollment means more students or more classes are being taken. Sanderson said the increase is in both areas.

"We have more live bodies on campus taking more credit hours," he said.

Although the college has budget cutbacks because of declining revenues, Sanderson said NMJC has accommodated increased students and increased demand for classes with its existing class structure.

NMJC president Steve McCleery said the jump in enrollment and credit hours does not reflect another blossoming area of the school — work force training.

The college has more people enrolled in work force training classes than any other school in New Mexico, he said.

Sanderson said the weak economy means students are staying in school longer and taking more classes.

"They're not in and out of school," he said. "They're staying in school and taking more classes."

Late registration for NMJC ends today and carries a \$25 fee. The last day to add or enroll for credit or audit in an eight week term is Jan. 28.

Texas briefs

Exxon to inject life into old Texas field

HOUSTON (AP) — Exxon Mobil says it will use new technology to wring the equivalent of 40 million barrels of crude out of a Texas oil field that was first discovered in 1940.

Hawkins Field was a major energy source for the country during World War II and has since produced more than 800 million barrels of crude. It was one of the largest discoveries in the state and while it

still has active wells, production has slowed.

Exxon Mobil Production Co. says it plans to use injections of nitrogen and other gases to force oil to the surface and extend the life of the field by 25 years.

Ex-teller, boyfriend convicted of robbery

BEAUMONT (AP) — A former teller in Beaumont and her boyfriend face up to 25 years in prison after being convicted of robbing the bank

as she worked.

No sentencing date was immediately set for 25-year-olds Kimberly Michelle Kirkwood and Mark Anthony Owens of Beaumont.

A federal jury Wednesday convicted both of armed bank robbery.

Prosecutors say Kirkwood let Owens into Texas State Bank as she opened for business on Sept. 8, 2007.

Investigators say Kirkwood, with nearly \$90,000 in her teller drawer, posed as a victim

while Owens claimed to have a weapon and took another teller hostage.

Owens drove off with the cash, but the freed teller wrote down the truck's license plate number.

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