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Wednesday, January 30, 2008

Samson Man Dies in Trailer Fire

Stephen Crews
Geneva Newspapers

Samson fire and rescue responded to a trailer fire just off of Highway 52 East of Samson on Monday morning, January 28. The fire claimed the life of 68-year-old James Catrett of Samson.

The fire call came in at approximately 2:46 a.m. according to information provided by law enforcement officials. The fire was in the Louie Cort Trailer Park.

The state fire marshal's office was already on the scene of the fire early Monday morning.

On Monday, January 21, Samson fire assisted the Geneva Fire Department with the "Black Home" fire. Officials have not been able to determine a cause for either fire at this time.

Additional information, as it becomes available, will be in next week's paper.



Preachers Sentenced to 30 Years New Categories Created for Geneva Businesses

Stephen Crews
Geneva Newspapers

Geneva County Judge Kenneth Quattlebaum sentenced Steven Lomax Preachers to 30-years in the state penitentiary as part of a plea-agreement between Preachers and the District Attorney's office.

Preachers was sentenced to 30-years for the murder of Angel Marie Whitley on June 10, 2003 in a home near the town of Samson.

Preachers was originally sentenced to life in prison

without the possibility of parole at the August 2005 hearing and sentencing.

The decision was overturned in the appeals courts due to the makeup of the jury and was sent back to Geneva County to be retried.

After consulting with the victim's father, a plea agreement was reached that would require a 30-year sentence as well as the payment of all fees and court fines. "The victim's family is pleased with the outcome of this case and are extremely proud to see

it come to an end," said District Attorney Kirke Adams. "Sometimes the public is not aware of all of the circumstances behind each case and this is one of those instances," Adams continued. "We feel that this is the best possible outcome considering the circumstances involved."

On June 5, 2003, the child was at the home of Steven Lomax Preachers of Samson when she suffered traumatic injuries from an alleged fall. Preachers was the mother's boyfriend. After the child's death on

June 10, 2003, Preachers was charged with first degree murder.

District Attorney Kirke Adams, Chief Assistant D.A. Bill Fillmore, and Assistant D.A. Steven Smith represented the state of Alabama in this case when it was originally tried in a Geneva County Courthouse.

ABI Agents Tommy Merrit and J.R. Ward obtained a signed confession from Preachers on June 11, 2003. Angel Marie Whitley was 21-months-old at the time of her death.

Ann Henderson
Geneva Newspapers

The Geneva City Council had to create several new business categories and determine new license fees during the January 21 meeting.

City Clerk/Treasurer Lisa Johnson made the recommendation after she explained several businesses were missing a category as the city hall staff were getting the license packets ready for mail.

One example is a sporting goods store.

The state code also places a gun shop in that category. But Pope's was scheduled to pay \$100 in a flat fee and 25 cents per \$1,000 worth of gross receipts.

The Gun Barn had already paid a license of \$50, she said. Any change would be reflected in that license for next year.

The council decided to drop the sporting goods shop to \$50.

For used merchandise shops, the flat fee was going to be \$75. The category would also include antique shops and consignment stores.

Doc Parker, who owns an antique store, questioned why a gun shop would pay \$50 and he be licensed at \$75?

Council member Rufus Lee also said the Christian Mission Shop has new merchandise as well as used clothing.

The council agreed to set the fee for used merchandise shops at \$50.

Commercial screen printing was omitted from the original list and will now be placed in the same category as manufacturing and charged a flat fee and 25 cents per \$1,000 of gross receipts.

Quick printing will be charged 25 cents per \$1,000 of gross receipts.

Brick and stone wholesalers will be charged 50 cents per \$1,000 of gross receipts.

Floor covering stores were left off the original list and will now be included at a flat fee of \$50 and Schedule C for gross receipts. The license fee for this type of business had been based on inventory

last year, said Johnson.

A check cashing business will pay a flat fee of \$50. If the business also has cash loan credit, a flat fee of \$75 will also be charged.

The flat fee for either a security guard or security system company will be \$50.

Other services for a building or dwelling such as janitorial will pay a flat fee of \$50.

Counseling services were omitted and the council decided a flat fee of \$100 would be paid. Any doctor who works at the service must have an individual license.

By comparison, a hospice service pays a flat fee of \$150.

The license for a traveling amusement arcade is \$50.

The license for a caterer is \$50.

In other business, the council adopted a resolution for the policies and procedures for applying and accepting state grants.

The resolution was required so the paperwork could be filed for the next phase of housing rehabilitation. The area will be the same as the first phase. Some street upgrades will also be included.

Regarding the demolition grant, the council accepted the low bid of \$44,344.68 from CA Environmental & Construction Services, Inc. Six companies submitted bids, included Watson Enterprises LLC, of Noma, Fla. which was awarded the bid to complete the first phase of demolition, and Skinner Grain & Fertilizer Company, of Hartford.

The list of properties for the second phase includes:

* 410 South Commerce Street - the interior of the Osceola Hotel;

* 315 East Campbell Avenue - structure, fallen trees and three large pines;

* 406 Railroad Avenue - house trailer and two small buildings;

* 125 French Avenue - house, gas tank, two trees and debris;

* 414 South Commerce Street - shrubbery and backfill with sand;

* 312 Promenade Avenue - mobile home frame;

* Intersection of Choctaw,

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Hartford Receives Audit Report

Stephen Crews
Geneva Newspapers

The Hartford City Council met for their regular scheduled meeting on Tuesday night, January 22. The council had several issues on the agenda.

* Britt Finch with Carr, Riggs and Ingram presented the 2007 audit for the city of Hartford. Finch provided several items of information for the council. Overall Finch said that the city is in really good financial shape. Finch said that Hartford is one of the soundest municipalities

that his firm represents including several large municipalities.

* Brad Kimbro and Carrie Hatcher with Wiregrass Electric were in attendance at the meeting to present a privilege franchise tax check in the amount of \$4,482. This tax was based on a percentage of funds received by Wiregrass Electric from residents in the city jurisdiction. (See Related Story)

* Council discussed a vacancy on the abatement board. No names were available so the item was tabled until the next meet-

ing.

* Approved the January 7 meeting.

Mayor's Report

* There are some problems with the street in front of the concrete plant. The problem is due to water. The mayor says the issue must be addressed and that it is his understanding that ADEM may become involved. The mayor advised city attorney Jason Eubanks that his assistance may be needed in drafting a letter to those causing the problem to get the situation ad-

ressed.

* The specs are ready for a garbage truck. The mayor says that the council can now advertise for bids. Councilmember Paul Fondren said that he feels the council needs to declare it an emergency situation due to the fact that the current truck is on a day-by-day situation and there isn't much of a backup according to Councilmember Ken Hales.

Council discussed with city attorney Jason Eubanks whether or not

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County Schools Look Upward with Bond Proceeds

Ann Henderson
Geneva Newspapers

When David Snell was a young child, he thought \$1 million could buy anything.

Now as superintendent of the Geneva County School System, he realizes \$1 million may only solve one of several leaking roof problems.

Geneva County was allocated \$2.4 million from the Alabama Department of Education from the proceeds of a state-wide bond issue to help pay for capital improvement projects, such as new construction or building repairs.

"We will meet with Chuck Dunseth this week to discuss the criteria of the bond issue and how the money can be spent," Snell said. "We have to go by the state building commission

rules."

A priority list of construction-rehabilitation projects was developed by the Geneva County Board of Education last fall.

Some items on the list are:

* the roof on Samson Elementary School;

* the roof on the gymnasium at Geneva County High School in Hartford;

* Samson High School gymnasium entrance and restrooms;

* heating and air conditioning at Slocomb High School;

* parking lots and bus loading zones at all schools;

* awnings to the entrance at Geneva County High School and the side entrance to the lunchroom;

* the roof on Slocomb High School; and

* the roof on the small gymnasium at Slocomb Elementary School.

"We have projects in all the schools in all the towns. We want to share and be fair all across the county," he said. "But some things cannot wait. The priority will be keeping the integrity of the buildings."

"We are going to be very frugal when we make decisions," he said. "If we do not save the building, it will cost the system more in the long run."

He hopes to announce the first and second project at the school board meeting on Thursday, February 7.

Samson Elementary School was built in the mid-1980s with a wave roof. "It was a new concept at the time."

The plan is to now in-

stall a gabled roof. The initial estimate is between \$600,000 and \$1 million, said Snell.

But with any older building, an initial estimate may only be the starting point, he said.

"We have no idea of the total project," he said. "We don't know what problems we might find that are not in the original project design."

"We know the air conditioners that are on top must be moved to the ground," said Snell. "We may find structural problems that will be an add-on cost. It's hard to make an estimate of how many projects we can do until the bids come in."

The rounded roof on the gymnasium in Hartford

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