

Geneva County Reaper



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Wednesday, February 7, 2007

Fire Leaves One Dead

Another Geneva Teen Severely Injured in Fire

Stephen Crews
Geneva Newspapers

Geneva Police and the Alabama Fire Marshall's office are working together on the investigation of a house fire that left one dead in the early hours of Saturday, February 3.

Geneva police, fire and rescue responded to the blaze on West Campbell Street during the early hours of Saturday morning. When they arrived they found the home fully engulfed.

After approximately 10 minutes on the scene, emergency personnel learned that someone may be inside the home. They soon discovered the body of 19-year-old Jeffery Scott Hall of Geneva.

Also injured in the blaze was Jeremy Thompson. He attempted to pull Hall from the home but was unable to do so. He was transported by helicopter to Gainsville, Florida to Shands Hospital for treatment of severe burns he received from the fire.

Geneva Police notified the state fire marshal of the death and fire along with Geneva County Coroner Max Motley. The fire is still under investigation and additional details will be provided as they become available.

This is the second fire in recent weeks for Geneva emergency personnel that involved a death as a result of a structure



Geneva Police are investigating the cause of a house fire during the early hours of Saturday morning, February 3. The fire resulted in the death of 19-year-old Jeffrey Hall. (Staff photo by Stephen Crews)

fire.

A fire at a fishcamp on Highway 85 North, about six miles north of Geneva, left one dead on Saturday afternoon, January 20.

The Alabama Fire Marshall's office and coroner reported to the fatal mobile-home fire in rural Geneva County.

The building was being used as a bait shop and fish camp.

Fire Safety

There are a number of things that you should remember to do in the event your home catches on fire while you are in it.

- Make sure all family members know what to do in the event of a fire. Draw a floor plan with at least two ways of escaping every room. Make a drawing for each floor. Dimensions do not need to be correct. Make sure the plan shows important details: stairs, hallways and windows that can be used as fire escape routes.

- Test windows and doors—do they open easy enough? Are they wide enough. Or tall enough?

- Choose a safe meeting place outside the house.

- Practice alerting other members. It is a good idea

to keep a bell and flashlight in each bedroom.

Jeffery Scott Hall Remembered

Jeffery Scott Hall, 19, died Saturday, February 3, 2007.

Funeral services will be held at 2:00 p.m., Wednesday, February 7 in the Chapel of Bottoms Garden Chapel Funeral Home in Geneva with the Rev. Janet German officiating.

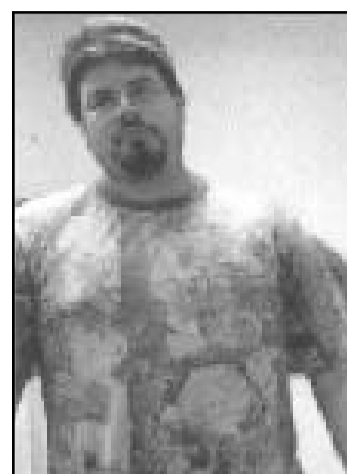
Burial will follow in Sunset Memorial Gardens Cemetery.

Visit at ion will be Tuesday night February 6

from 6:00 until 8:00 p.m. at the funeral home.

Jeffery was a graduate of Geneva High School and was employed at Second Chance Body Armour.

Survivors include his mother and step-father: Barbara and John Stiefel, Geneva; sister: Jessica Hall, Geneva; step-brother: Quaid Stiefel, Geneva; maternal grandparents: Frank and Jennie Hall, Geneva; uncles: Raymond Holmes; Alfred Holmes; Ronald Holmes; James Stiefel; Donnie Hall; and aunts: Donna Stokes; Belinda Stiefel; and Kimalice Golden.



Rod Perez

Former Geneva Police Officer Arrested

Stephen Crews
Geneva Newspapers

A former Geneva Police officer was arrested and charged with sexual abuse crimes against his children. He has since bonded out of the Geneva County Jail.

Agents with the Alabama Bureau of Investigations arrested 41-year-old Rolando Perez over the weekend. Perez faces two-counts of sexual abuse and three counts of sodomy.

During the 1990's, Perez worked as a K-9 officer with the Geneva Police Department. He also served in other law enforcement positions including Samson. He also served as a pastor at a Geneva church and has trained dogs for a living.

Perez was recently released from the Geneva County Jail under a \$100,000 dollar bond.

Smoking Attitudes vary at Geneva restaurants

Ann Henderson
Geneva Newspapers

"You'll love it down there," was all Sean Jones heard from his wife, Jacquie, after a visit to Geneva last April. By September, the couple and their four children and his parents had moved from Connecticut and New Hampshire and opened "I'm Jonesin for..." on Maple Avenue.

"The name is a funny play on the words 'I have a hankering' or 'I'm craving,'" said Sean.

His eatery is mainly delivery to offices and homes across Geneva. Many customers still walk up and order a shaved iced drink or sub sandwiches or soup, he said.

"They usually put out their cigarettes before they come up the stairs," said Sean.

Although he won't have tables for customers until spring, the debate over allowing smoking at his establishment wouldn't

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Hartford Mayor Disappointed at lack of 167 Plans for Geneva Co.

Ann Henderson
Geneva Newspapers

"Of course I'm disappointed," said Hartford Mayor Eria Sorrells that the southern tip of the Alabama Highway 167 is not in the construction plans for widening to a four-lane in the next five years. "It's an important thoroughfare for a number of reasons."

Tourism, evacuation and economic development top his list.

Sorrells attended a

meeting in Enterprise on January 30 with the Alabama Department of Transportation and government officials from Coffee and Geneva counties.

"The fact that we're not on the five-year plan was disappointing," said Sorrells. "I know there are other priorities. But not much of anything on the five-year plan is in Geneva County."

He said five-year plans are misleading. "It's a five-

See Hartford, Page 3A

In Search of the Ivory Bill

John Fleming
Editor at Large
The Anniston Star

CHOCTAWHATCHEE RIVER BASIN, NORTHWEST FLORIDA - On Christmas Eve, a professional birder named Tyler Hicks was walking along a channel in this remote cypress swamp. He described the day as strange, beset by frigid downpours punctured several times by letups that faded into short, still calms.

It was mid-afternoon when the pelting rain decided once again to go slack, but he kept his borrowed camera - a Cannon Digital Rebel - tucked under his rain coat. As he rounded a slight bend in the channel he spotted a large bird clinging to a tree ahead.

He immediately knew it to be the holy grail of the birding world, the Ivory-billed woodpecker.

"I came around the bend, and there on a tupelo tree, about two meters off the water, was a female Ivory-billed woodpecker," Hicks told The Star. "She looked at me and I looked at her and in a millisecond she was gone."

He described a surreal moment held in abeyance when the finest details grew mammoth. The light was bad, the day was overcast, but the bill of the woodpecker was a brilliant white and her colors -- dark head, white markings on the back,



Dan Mennill, left, Brian Rolek and James Hill search for signs of the Ivory-billed woodpecker in the swamps of the Choctawhatchee River Basin in Florida. (Photo by John Fleming/The Anniston Star)

a white trailing edge in flight - all hammered themselves into his memory, for good.

And, of course, he was carrying out the obvious from the moment their eyes met, pulling the camera out as she sprang from the tupelo tree and shooting as soon as the automatic setting on the Rebel decided what it should focus on, which turned out not to be an Ivory-billed woodpecker in flight, but bad images of the background.

"At first I was very angry," Hicks said after failing to capture the photograph. "I felt like I let every-

one down. I felt physically ill, like I was going to vomit."

It is easy to understand why Hicks took it so hard when you know what could have been.

The last undisputed images and confirmed sighting of the Ivory-billed woodpecker was in 1935, in a swampy area in Louisiana known as the Singer Track. For decades after that, only occasional sightings of the birds were reported, so few that many scientists concluded the species was extinct.

A flurry of excitement came in 2005 after reported

sightings in the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas. That research included blurry video footage and recordings of the bird's calls, known as kent calls.

Then, in 2006, researchers from Auburn University, including Hicks, and staff from Windsor University in Ontario, reported evidence suggesting Ivory-billed woodpeckers dwell along isolated stretches of the Choctawhatchee River.

The group collected 210 separate recordings of the birds' kent calls as well as 99 recordings of "double Ivory Bill, Page 3A

Geneva should see sidewalk construction in the spring

**Ann Henderson
Geneva Newspapers**

A new set of bids were opened Thursday, January 25 for the sidewalk replacement project along South Commerce Street in Geneva.

City officials had asked for new bids after the initial price was above the money that was earmarked to replace cracked sidewalks from the Merle Norman Studio to the Law Offices of Knowles and Hatcher in the Chapman Building.

But the bids were again above the \$117,547 that has been collected from a state transportation grant, private donations, a grant from the Wiregrass RC&D and a contribution from the River City Renewal Project.

The bid from Carter's

Construction of Andalusia was \$160,713 for stamped concrete and \$8,739 to use brick pavers.

The bid from Burnette Civil Constructing of Montgomery was \$137,152 for the stamped concrete and \$14,560 for brick pavers.

The difference in the type of bid was the concrete would be colored and stamped to resemble brick rather than using real bricks at the expansion joints of the concrete slabs.

The bid is about \$20,000 more than the accumulated funds.

The bids will be reviewed by Tim Ramsden, the engineer with CDG Engineers & Associates from Andalusia who designed the project. They will then be sent to officials with the Alabama

Department of Transportation, the state agency that is funding the project.

If ALDOT approves the bid, Ramsden said Geneva officials have two options.

They can accept the low bid for the decorative stamped concrete or reject the bids, return the money to ALDOT and submit a new application next year, he said. But Ramsden said there would be no guarantee a grant for a sidewalk project would be funded next year if Geneva refused the project this year, he said.

Geneva Mayor Karen Simmons and City Clerk/Treasurer Lisa Johnson said they thought the project should continue.

"The businesses have been promised a new sidewalk for the past four

years," said Simmons. "I think it would be best for their morale," said Johnson.

The bids should be ready to present to the Geneva City Council during the regular meeting on February 19. The meeting will begin at 6 p.m. in the new fire station.

The sidewalk bid is the third project that has come in higher than anticipated. The lowest bid to build 10 T-hangars at the airport was about \$140,000 higher than expected and the new roof and heating/cooling system for city hall was about \$150,000 more.

U S D A - R u r a l Development was able to allocate all but \$6,000 for the T-hangars from an emergency fund. But the extra cost for the work at city hall will come from

local revenue.

If the city council agrees to continue with the sidewalk project, Ramsden said Geneva could go ahead and submit a grant application this year for the second phase.

The initial design is completed so most of the funds from a second grant should go for sidewalks. The plan is to replace the sidewalks from city hall to the American Bank and from Hayes Tire & Auto to Major Deals during the second phase.

Ramsden said Geneva would have to wait a year between the funding of the second phase and the third project that would turn down East Town Avenue toward the Christian Mission Center and Geneva County Gas District Office.

When the construction

begins, all of the old concrete will be removed. "But it's part of the contract for each merchant to maintain access to their business," said Ramsden. Usually plywood is placed over the area for customers to enter the stores.

When the project is completed, there will be 24 regular parking spaces, three handicap accessible spaces and ramps on each end and in the middle. There are cut-outs for four plants and spaces for five street lights. Simmons said the lights have been purchased and closely resemble the lights at The Junction around the Benson Memorial Gazebo.

She said she will recommend the plants be camellias since that is the state flower. "We want the plant area to be as maintenance free as possible."



Nursing Graduates

Lurleen B. Wallace Community College MacArthur Campus graduated nine new Licensed Practical Nurses in a ceremony at the MacArthur Campus on Dec. 15, 2006. Pictured are (Back Row Left to Right) Debi Spicer, Seth Ard, Inell Taylor, Rosa Ball and Shannon McIntosh. Front Row: Jessica Duffell, Terri Maurer, Hanna Killingsworth and Elizabeth Westfall.

Terrorist at Geneva Schools to Test School Safety Plans

**Ann Henderson
Geneva Newspapers**

A large-scale emergency drill scheduled for February 17 at Geneva High School will help school officials practice and identify areas to adapt safety plans.

"When I was coaching, I never went into a game without practice," said Geneva City School System Superintendent Jim Bixby, a former basketball and football coach. "This will be a good opportunity for us to practice."

The school system has safety policy and procedures in place at each campus, said Stephen Swann, an assistant to Bixby. "They will be re-examined to determine what areas work and those that do not."

The drill is planned for the school campus to test the response in Geneva County by emergency departments who have received homeland security funding, said Geneva County Emergency Director Margaret Mixon. More than \$400,000 in these federal funds has been received in Geneva County, the majority in communication and first response equipment.

The drill is planned to begin at 9 a.m. on Saturday, February 17 at the high school. But specifics about the exercise are not being released so the response will be more realistic, she said.

"The drill will be extremely good for us," said Bixby. "The first responders will get to know how the

school is laid out."

Depending on the drill, the school may go to "lock-down," said Bixby. Each classroom door is locked when a class is in session. The students are not usually allowed out until after the emergency, he said.

Once the nature of the terrorist attack is determined and the law enforcement agency that is in command, Bixby said the school system will follow their instructions. "They will determine if we evacuate," Bixby said.

"In the event of an intruder, the school staff will know what to do," said Swann. "This will be the first joint exercise."

The staff at Wiregrass Medical Center is also planning to participate in the drill.

"We have to have drills during the year to meet our requirements for emergency preparedness. This will count as one of them," said Doreen Bock, the chief nursing officer. "We will activate our in-house disaster plan. Depending on the type of emergency, the emergency room and surgical staff will be notified and called in."

While the medical facility and the emergency responders are testing their real-life skills, the school will have volunteer "victims."

There are several adults who have agreed to participate, said Bixby. He has asked the Student Government Associations at the high school and middle school if they are interested.

A release of liability will be signed by each adult or student with the company that is coordinating the drill, he said.

Swann said each campus now has a severe weather exercise and a fire drill each month. A bus evacuation drill is held twice a year. "This will be the first joint exercise."

Although the terrorist attack is planned to be as authentic as possible, a notice will be repeated during the exercise the event is a drill. "We have to give advance notice because of the scale of the exercise," said Mixon.

Bixby said neighboring counties will also be called to let the emergency personnel there know the event is an exercise. "Normally, they all would come to our aid."

The drill is required by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to test the use of the equipment that was purchased with grant funds, said Mixon.

She suggested that a member of each response department should be at the exercise for the experience.

The critique of the response will not focus on things a department did wrong but on equipment or training that might be needed for a real emergency, she said.

Bixby said he has asked officials with the Alabama Department of Education to attend the drill. "We discussed it at a safety planning seminar last month. The state director is very excited we are taking part."



The mission of the Southeast Alabama Child Advocacy Center is to serve as advocates for children and to reduce trauma and anxiety for child victims of sexual and severe physical abuse. Last year over 1,350 children and non-offending family members were served at the CAC. In an effort to raise community awareness about child abuse, each April during National Child Abuse Prevention Month, the CAC coordinates a Blue Ribbon Campaign. Blue door ribbons and Blue Ribbon Friday for Kids t-shirts are available for a \$10.00 donation to the CAC. Committees in Houston, Henry, Dale and Geneva Counties are seeking t-shirt sponsors and orders. For information on how you can help, call 671-1779. The Geneva County committee is pictured left to right (Standing): Kathy Peterson, Geneva County Family Resource Center; Emily Miller, Geneva County Family Resource Center; Renee Owens, Sysco Food Services; and Kirke Adams, Dale/Geneva County District Attorney. Left to right (Seating) Lee Ann Taylor, CAC Family Advocate; Lisa Spears, Sysco Food Services; and Anna Whitehead, Sysco Food Services.