

Devoted To The Interests Of Lunenburg County

Police chief resigns

By Crystal Vandegrift
The K-V Dispatch

KENBRIDGE

After three years of serving as police chief, Ben Barnes has called it quits with the Kenbridge Police Department.

According to Kenbridge Town Manger Tony Matthews, Barnes resigned as of Dec. 31 and did not give a reason as to why.

"His resignation letter did not state the reason, and we did not ask," Matthews said. "He (Barnes) thanked the

Mayor, Council and Town Manager for the experience and opportunity."

According to Matthews, Barnes also did not state any future plans.

Barnes, who grew up right outside Kenbridge and attended Kenston Forest School, joined the Kenbridge police force in 2017 and served as interim police chief until the

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Crews respond to structure fire

On Saturday, Jan. 7, four fire departments responded to a propane tank explosion that destroyed several buildings. According to a Facebook post by Meherrin Fire and Rescue, crews received the call around 3:25 p.m. for an explosion of a propane tank and a fully involved structure. In addition to Meherrin Fire and Rescue, Burkeville Volunteer Fire and EMS, Rice Volunteer Fire Department and Keysville Volunteer Fire Department were dispatched to Glasscock Road for additional assistance. On arrival, crews found a fully involved 25x25 building with a small brush fire. Crews quickly contained the brush fire, protecting the other nearby buildings along with knocking down most of the fire on the structure.

School officials ask for help in next budget

By Brian Carlton and Connor Thompson
The K-V Dispatch

We're making it work, but at some point, that's not going to be doable unless empty positions are filled. That was the message delivered Monday to the Lunenburg County School Board by school administrators and staff. During the year's first public discussion on the upcoming budget, officials outlined needs in the district and were very realistic about the struggles they've faced.

For years, the district has had two Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teachers, Dr. Andrea Shell explained. She serves as Coordinator of Elementary Special Education for Lunenburg County Public Schools. ECSE classes are specially designed to meet the needs of preschool children with disabilities. This year, Lunenburg lost one of those teachers, as she moved to North Carolina.

"We were unable to fill her position," Shell said, adding that the district is still advertising the opening, trying to fill it. However, due to the teacher's absence, they've faced some challenges. "We have had to find creative ways to serve the students with other personnel."

A lack of personnel is a problem for other parts of the district as well. Lunenburg Middle School had a special education teacher (SPED) position that was open at the beginning of the school year. They faced the same problem, unable to find someone to

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Counties still not funding homeless project

By Crystal Vandegrift
The K-V Dispatch

the budget process at the beginning of this year.

STEPS is still on a mission of reducing poverty throughout the region, despite still waiting to receive the requested funding from the counties it will be helping.

Last year STEPS announced that after years of providing temporary sheltering and case management services for the homeless in Lunenburg and surrounding areas, the company came up with the idea of building tiny homes for those in need.

The tiny house project would serve the homeless from Amelia, Buckingham, Cumberland, Lunenburg, Nottoway and Prince Edward but be located in Farmville.

To date, STEPS President and CEO Sharon Harrup said no county had given the requested funds to help with the project.

In Lunenburg, the request was referred to their finance committee for review during

WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?

STEPS Vice President of Housing Shawn Rozie said the funding would go towards purchasing land and constructing a supportive housing tiny home village.

"Currently, we have received \$508,833 in grant funding and pledges toward these costs, which include a \$168,833 grant from Centra Health," Rozie said. "It is estimated that the land purchase and first phase of construction, which includes the community center and 11 tiny homes with water and sewer infrastructure, will cost 1.32 million."

According to Rozier, the total amount of requests that STEPS has made to the region's six counties and the Town of Farmville is \$625,000.

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Cataldo sentenced to 36 months in jail

By Titus Mohler
The K-V Dispatch

A former Lunenburg County resident and business owner will serve three years in jail. Giosafat Cataldo, of Franklin, was sentenced to 36 months in jail Thursday, Jan. 5, in Southampton Circuit Court after pleading guilty in August to four misdemeanors, including three counts of contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

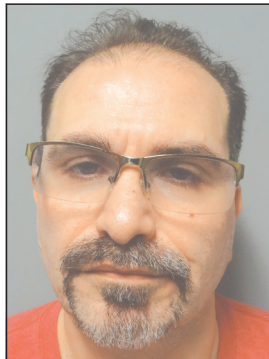
According to the Virginia Judiciary's Online Case Information System 2.0, Cataldo received 12 months each for two of the contributing to

delinquency counts, and six months for a third instance of the same count. He also received six months for a count of sexual battery.

His attorney, Jack T. Randall, said that Cataldo is not required to become part of the sex offender registry in this case.

A Feb. 12 Southampton County Sheriff's Office press release stated

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Giosafat Cataldo

History SOLs changing for Virginia students

By Crystal Vandegrift
The K-V Dispatch

The commonwealth's K-12 History and Social Science Standards of Learning (SOLs) could be changing for students.

On Thursday, Jan. 5, Superintendent of Public Instruction Jillian Balow released a 68-page draft revision that she says tells a more complete story about how the past has shaped the commonwealth, the nation and the world.

"These draft standards will build student understanding of the attributes, ideals and actions that have

made America the world's exemplar of freedom and opportunity," Balow said. "At the same time, the standards are unflinching in their presentation of those times when Virginia and the nation failed to live up to our founding ideals."

According to a release from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the standards recommend a sequence of grade-level content and courses that begins in kindergarten with a focus on essential skills, state and national symbols, and communities and culminates in high school

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District honors Spelling Bee champs
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RESIGNS: 'He has done an impeccable job'

FROM PAGE ONE

council officially appointed him as chief in 2020. "He has done an impeccable job leading the Kenbridge Police Department over the last three years, almost single-handedly building a great team,

Matthews said of Barbes. "He will be missed, but we wish him the best." Matthews said Lt. Chris Wallace was promoted to Chief beginning Jan. 1, "He has done a great job as Sergeant and Lieutenant; undoubtedly, he will continue to thrive as Chief." Matthews said.

"Chief Wallace was hired as Sergeant and was promoted to Lt. by Chief Barnes. He has served in that capacity and worked for hand in hand with Chief Barnes. He has a promising outlook for the future of the Kenbridge Police Department and plans to implement this."

At one time, the police department had found itself with few officers to serve the town, but that has since changed. According to Matthew, the police department now has three full-time officers, in addition to two new hires who are in the police academy and three part-time officers who help with the scheduling of officers for complete coverage.

BUDGET: Administrators detail list of needs in year's first public hearing

FROM PAGE ONE

hire. In order to make sure students received the needed help, a Central High teacher was sent over. But that in turn puts strain on the high school staff.

"Our people are doing what they can do to make it work," Shell said. "(But) if we continue to just make it work, it will put a strain on our teachers (and staff)."

Her point was to make sure board members understood that just because the positions are currently open, that doesn't mean they're not important to the district. They need to be kept in the upcoming year's budget.

"We're making it work, but all of those positions are necessary," Shell said. "We've just had to find ways to give

the kids their services. It's not that we can do without any of those positions. We still need them."

CENTRAL HIGH CONSIDERS CHANGES

Central High Principal Michelle Howell told a similar story. Even though the school staff made it work, handling extra assignments after the special education teacher was moved to the middle school, that position is still needed at Central.

As Howell pointed out, special education students often have an individualized education program (IEP), specific rules that have to be followed.

"Things are getting very tight with us, trying to meet all of our IEP (requirements)," Howell told the board. "We're making it work (but) moving

forward a (SPED) position here would be very helpful."

She also explained that the extra SPED teacher could help in other ways, working with remedial English and Math classes. And remedial classes are something that's needed at the high school right now.

"Our students are not staying after school for remediation," Howell told the board. "We have to find a way to meet them when they are in our buildings. And so (maybe) that's creating what would have been a homeroom back in the day, where we have that SPED teacher, partnering with a Gen Ed teacher, meeting those needs to move them along."

Howell also asked for the board to fund a position for an attendance clerk at Central. "We don't always realize

sometimes the direct impact (attendance) has on student success," Howell said. "Anything you read will tell you that attendance directly impacts student outcomes. I have some students that have missed 43 days, 50% of the semester. They did not pass a (Standards of Learning test). That's not surprising."

OTHER REQUESTS

Beyond additional teaching positions, district staff requested the board consider funding assistants on school buses, as there have been issues with discipline throughout the semester.

One issue raised is what would happen to assistants on the bus once the route is done? Since bus drivers typically take their buses home, they would either have to drive all the

way back to school to drop the assistant off or drive the assistant to their home. Either option would mean more driving and possibly increased costs

A question was also raised if the district could find alternatives to a paid position. Maybe instead of paid assistants, board members questioned if they could use high school students who need community service hours.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

This was the first of five scheduled discussions on the upcoming budget. The next will be held at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 25 at Lunenburg Middle School. More budget discussions will be held on Wednesday, Feb. 22 and Wednesday, March 22, with another public hearing on March 29.

PROJECT: 'Homeless individuals in all of the counties'

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"There are homeless individuals in all of the counties in this region, and it will take leadership from our local elected officials to provide what is needed to serve them," Rozier said. "We hope they will not miss this opportunity to develop this critically needed resource when there is this level of available funding. Right now, several counties are waiting to see what the other counties will do. It is time for them to step forward and fund this project so that the homeless in their county can be included in the tiny home village supportive housing."

NO PROGRAM IN PLACE

Currently, the region has no on-site housing program, which requires STEPS to utilize hotels for sheltering or refer homeless individuals to shelters outside of the region.

According to STEPS, those shelters are often full, so there is nowhere for the homeless to stay except in cars, sheds, woods, or other places

not meant to live in. "During the two years of the pandemic, we provided hotel sheltering for 730 individuals in 388 households in the region, utilizing 1.15 million of COVID-related funding," Rozier said.

Currently, STEPS primarily shelters the homeless who are 65 and older, persons with physical disabilities/severe health conditions which create life-threatening risks to living outdoors, families with children, and those trying to re-enter the community from prison with no place to stay.

"The level of funding during the pandemic is no longer available to our region, so we desperately need to develop a resource for serving the homeless," Rozier said.

Harrup said the tiny houses would do more than just focus on a quick solution.

"Our solution has been to focus on the immediacy of their situation. It gets them out of the cold, but case managers can't address some of the issues the homeless deal with in a few days. We need something bet-

ter." Harrup said.

MORE ABOUT THE TINY HOUSES

Rozier said the tiny houses would come in two sizes and house individuals, couples or families; the homeless would stay from 60-90 days, enough time (with case management guidance from STEPS' staff) to help them get on the more solid financial ground and enhance their opportunity for success once they leave.

"When residents are ready, Move On services assist them with finding another apartment, utilizing less rental assistance, or obtaining a personal housing voucher with follow-up case management after they move out," Rozier said.

"When you consider the average cost of a home in this economy, this is a fiscally responsible option to address this problem," Harrup said. "Plus, it is an investment into the lives of people in need. This would help address the root of individual/family homelessness issues so that clients can build a better life."

"This is the best opportunity we have ever had to get some forward momentum for a project like this," Harrup said. "This is really needed, and we are all working together to ensure that all the pieces come together."

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