



The Light and Champion

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"Covering Shelby County Like The Pine Straw Covers The Ground."

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Celebrating 139 years of service to Shelby County

Wed. - Thurs. June 28 - 29, 2017 30 Pages 75 Cents

Kidscoop



Mars: The Red Planet
Explore our weekly kids' feature, Page 14

Obituaries

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- Tiffany Luman
- Dennis Ray Gardner
- Vicki Thomas



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Thank a veteran and military person every day for their service to our country.



Tournament a homerun for local businesses



Center Recreation Director Jason Mitchell takes a phone call while trying to locate five cases of Diet Coke amid 400 cases of other beverages at the Center Youth Baseball complex in Center.

Steve Fountain/Light and Champion

State baseball, softball events spur spending

By Steve Fountain
Editor and Publisher

Six people are hustling to find homes for 400 cases of soft drinks, sports drinks and water in the concession building at

the Center Youth Baseball complex.

The refrigerators are being filled with drinks. What doesn't land in the refrigerators is being organized in rows in the adjacent room.

"There are no Diet Cokes," says one of the volunteers, looking at an empty space in the otherwise packed refrigerator.

"They're back there – wait, let me see if I got

charged for them," says City of Center Recreation Director Jason Mitchell as he scans a receipt. "Five cases of Diet Coke – they're back there."

For Mitchell, such are the days leading up to Center hosting Dixie Baseball Tournaments.

Workers, food, umpires, scorekeepers, programs, team photos, schedules

See BASEBALL, Page 9A

What-A-Melon Festival



The 2017 Texas Watermelon Queen, Miss Chloe Elizabeth Brown will visit the What-A-Melon Festival. Brown is the daughter of Keith and Beth Brown and a 2015 graduate of Joaquin High School. She is currently a junior at SFA University.

Courtesy Photo

A watermelon celebration for all

By Susan Watkins
Staff Writer

It's time to celebrate the official melon of summer, July 6-8, during the 2017 What-A-Melon Festival on the historic downtown square. The family-oriented festival will have something

for everyone including live music, entertainment, What-A-Melon Festival Pageant, 5K What-A-Melon Crawl and largest melon contest. The 2016 largest melon weighed 112 lbs and was raised by Doug Cogswell. We are just days

See MELON, Page 11A

Best of the Best winners inside!

Staff Report

More than 2,000 ballots were cast in The Light and Champion's 2017 Best of the Best Readers' Choice Award, with more than 100,000 votes tabulated to determine the winners in 117 categories.

The winners are listed in a 14-page special section inside today's edition.

Voting was conducted using both the ballot



The Light and Champion

found in our print edition and the online ballot

See BEST, Page 11A



The signage for The Reserve has been removed from the building at 130 Nacogdoches St. The W. Club will operate as an event rental location.

Steve Fountain/Light and Champion

Former Reserve site now open for event rental as The W. Club

By Steve Fountain
Editor and Publisher

While The Reserve restaurant may have closed, but The W. Club is now available for special events.

According to the

building owner Don Walker, the building at 130 Nacogdoches St., is available for rent.

"The venue is open for special events, private parties and weddings,"

See CLUB, Page 11A

June celebration shows off gardeners

By Susan Watkins
Staff Writer

As part of Center Garden Club's June celebration of gardening the club has spent the month of June recognizing our local gardeners. "We are so proud of the beautiful horticulture (produce, flowers, shrubs, and trees) that our featured gardeners are sharing with us," club mem-

ber Carolyn Bounds said. "We encourage others to follow their examples and the examples of the many other gardeners in our midst."

Within the month of June also falls National Garden Week. The Center Garden Club took this opportunity to dedicate the proclamation signing of National Garden Week, June 4-10, by Mayor David Chadwick in memory

of Pam Phelps, a past president of the Center Garden Club.

The Club invites the public to share photos of their gardening. Submit to Center Garden Club c/o The Light and Champion, PO Box 1989, Center, TX 75935 or email to subject line Center Garden Club to news@lightandchampion.com. See page 2A for more photos.



Theresa Hume – see page 2A for more photographs.

Photo by Walter (Buster) Bounds

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Baseball

From Page 1A

and more need to be in place by Friday, when youngsters from Splendora to the south and east Texas arrive to take part in the Dixie state championships for T-Ball, Machine-Pitch and Coach-Pitch.

Center Youth Baseball bid a total of \$38,000 for the right to host this weekend's three tournaments. Add in the July 8-10 state tournament for teams of 9-year-olds, 11 and 12 year-olds and 13 and 14 year-olds; and the July 15-17 state Dixie Girls Softball, Center Youth Baseball will have more than \$80,000 tied to hosting all the tournaments. The money is all from Center Youth Baseball and does not involve taxpayer dollars.

Each three-day tournament can bring upwards of 2,000 players, coaches and family members to Center for three to four days. There will be 45 teams in Center this weekend.

In July, 117 teams will travel to Center – the most the city has seen in eight years of hosting tournaments.

It is a huge economic boom for the city.

“The impact of the state baseball tournaments has been obvious for several years with increased hotel occupancy, restaurant traffic, and sales tax improvements during one of the traditionally lowest re-

Fireworks Show

Opening ceremonies will be held starting at 7 p.m. Friday at the Center Youth Baseball fields. A fireworks show will follow at 9:15 p.m.

tail months of the year,” said Center City Manager Chad Nehring.

TR's Steaks & More, 825 Hurst St., can attest to the July boost.

“We always lost money for the month of July – that's was the trend since 1991, when we bought the restaurant (then a Golden Corral franchise),” said Rose Specter, who co-owns the restaurant and a catering business with her husband, Tommy.

“But the first year of the tournament – and since – we have broken even. Back when it started we didn't have all the hotels, so this was a place to eat and then have impromptu meetings. Now they just eat.”

The influx of hotels benefitted from the tournaments, as well.

“The next three weekends are totally booked,” said Stephanie Matias, manager of the Hampton Inn and Suites, 141 Express Blvd. “It's all the baseball.”

Mitchell was scrambling to find two more rooms for this weekend. All the hotels in Center are full.

“Jason and the youth baseball league have worked hard to develop

these tournaments to not only provide funding for continued ballpark improvements but also provide a Summer boost to the local economy, which allowed the City Council to prioritize participation and expansion into what is now a solid month of tournament activities,” Nehring said.

When Center started hosting tournaments eight years ago, it was a means for the organization to raise money. Mitchell points out that \$128,000 in lights were paid off over the first three tournaments. Back then, all the labor was volunteers.

But now, Mitchell says most the staff is paid in order to maintain consistent staffing and avoid the no-shows that can happen with volunteers – and to reflect the work involved with each tournament.

That has changed the goal: if Center Youth Baseball breaks even, it has accomplished its goal.

“When we first started, it was a way to generate revenue for our league,” Mitchell said.

“As it evolved, it was about generating revenue for city – sales tax,

hotel tax, driving local businesses.

“If the league breaks even – we're good with that – because revenue will bust out on all the other levels. When I bid, I bid based on what money we get back on it. As long as we can do that, from our standpoint, we've done good. It's about bringing people to town.”

The bid process is very competitive. City representatives gather each January to submit sealed bids. Mitchell lost out to Athens for a 10U tournament. Mitchell said he bid \$8,700. Athens bid \$11,000.

Once the winning bids are announced in January, Mitchell has about four months before he has to focus the bulk of his attention and energy on the tournaments.

“The first of the year, I'm excited,” said Mitchell. “When it gets close to the tournaments, I'm nervous. It's not that I'm not excited, it just that you're nervous when you are, number one, representing the city. You want it to go well. You want to make sure you have everything you are supposed to do.”

“You know, I'm stressed. That's the easiest way to say it – I'm stressed a little bit. But, it's nothing that I am not used to.”

NOTES ON A SCORECARD

Center body builder Bailey takes fifth at Louisiana event

By Steve Fountain
Editor and Publisher

Center body builder Todd Bailey placed fifth in the heavy-weight division at last weekend's Greater Gulf States event in Louisiana.



Bailey

The Top-5 finish qualifies him for the Junior Nationals, Team Universe, North Americans and the Junior USA competitions.

“I am not at all unhappy where I placed,” Bailey posted. “I brought my best and better showed up and gave me a lesson. That's life – and I'm happy with my results and I gave my best.”

Bailey extended his thanks to his wife, Tonya: “I'd like to thank my beautiful wife who has been my anchor during this prep; she's been my cook, my workout partner, my mentor, my hero and my strength!”

Bailey trains at All Hours Fitness on the Historic Courthouse Square in Center and works for

Tyson Foods.

• Hennigan update

Former Center High School pitcher Jonathan Hennigan had a rough first outing coming out of the All-Star break of the Class A South Atlantic League season Saturday night at Delmarva.

Hennigan entered the game in the seventh with the Lakewood BlueClaws trailing Delmarva 7-3. He was tagged for two runs on two hits and two walks. He pitched a scoreless eighth in the 9-3 loss. On a positive note, Hennigan struck out five of the 10 batters he faced.

Showing the changing fates in baseball, Hennigan pitched two scoreless innings against the same Delmarva Shorebirds in his previous outing.

Hennigan has thrown 31 2/3 innings over 20 appearances out of the bullpen. He has a 5.12 ERA with two saves, 43 strikeouts and 19 walks.

The BlueClaws, which finished second by percentage points for the Northern Division's first-half title, have stumbled out of the gate in the second half by losing four straight.

Texas Bandits 14U softball team



The Texas Bandits 14U softball team – featuring six players from Shelby County – earned a berth in the July 30 to Aug. 6 ASA 14U-A Nationals in Johnson City, Tennessee with a fourth place finish last weekend in an ASA tournament in Killeen. The team members are, from left to right, back row: Alyssa Mireles (Diboll), Victoria Byrd (Joaquin), McKenzie Murray (Shelbyville), Ashlee Gurley (Logansport), Kennedy Stanley (Joaquin), Mia Mireles (Diboll), Chrislyn Pena (Joaquin), Kianna Coutee (Lufkin); front row: Kalie Brooks (Joaquin), Chloe Mason (Alto), Miranda Morin (Rusk), J.J. Bass (Joaquin). The team is in the process of raising \$16,000 to cover travel costs to Tennessee. The Bandits will host several fundraisers over the next month and welcome any assistance from local area businesses. Any one interested in making a donation should call Jason Stanley at (903) 754-9213 or e-mail jstanleytsoftball@yahoo.com.

Photo courtesy of Texas Bandits

East Texas fishing report

From Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

- **BOB SANDLIN:** Water lightly stained; 80–85 degrees; 0.35' high. Black bass are good on Texas rigged worms, white buzzbaits and hollow body frogs. Crappie are good on minnows and jigs. White bass are good on minnows. Catfish are fair on trotlines.
- **CADDO:** Water stained; 82–85 degrees; 0.80' high. Black bass are fair on black and blue jigs, black buzzbaits, and hollow body frogs. Crappie are good on minnows. Catfish are good on trotlines with cut bait.
- **CONROE:** Water stained; 75–79 degrees; 0.01' low. Black bass are fair on chartreuse and watermelon Carolina rigged soft plastics and spinnerbaits. Striped bass are fair on chrome spoons. Crappie are fair on minnows over brush piles. Catfish are good on stinkbait, nightcrawlers, and shrimp.
- **FORK:** Water lightly stained; 81–85 degrees; 0.07' high. Black bass are fair on football jigs, deep diving crankbaits and Carolina rigged worms. White and yellow bass are fair on slabs. Crappie are fair on minnows and white jigs. Catfish are good on trotlines and cut shad.
- **HOUSTON COUNTY:** Water stained; 81–85 degrees; 0.01' high. Black bass to 9 pounds are good on Rouges with red bellies, and Carolina and Wacky rigged red/blue worms. Crappie are good on live minnows over brush piles. Bream are very good on live worms in coves. Channel and blue catfish are good on live worms, and on trotlines baited with shad. Yellow catfish are slow.
- **LAKE O' THE PINES:** Water stained; 82–86 degrees; 2.33' high. Black bass are good on Texas rigged creature baits, hollow body frogs and buzzbaits. White bass are fair on minnows and slabs. Crappie are good on

- minnows and jigs. Catfish are fair on trotlines.
- **LIVINGSTON:** Water stained; 75–79 degrees; 0.20' high. Black bass are fair on watermelon spinnerbaits and crankbaits. Striped bass are slow. White bass are very good on pet spoons, trolling tubes, and Charlie slabs. Crappie are good on minnows and blue tube jigs. Blue catfish are good on cut bait and live bait. Yellow catfish are slow.
- **MARTIN CREEK:** Water lightly stained; 81–86 degrees; 0.39' low. Black bass are fair on buzzbaits, hollow body frogs, and Texas rigged craws. Crappie are fair on minnows. White bass are fair on minnows and topwaters. Catfish are fair on trotlines.
- **MONTICELLO:** Water stained; 82–86 degrees; 0.43' high. Black bass are good on hollow body frogs, deep diving crankbaits and Senkos. Crappie are fair on minnows and jigs. Catfish are good on trotlines and cut shad.
- **SAM RAYBURN:** Water stained; 74–78 degrees; 0.16' high. Black bass are good on white spinnerbaits and dark soft plastic worms. White bass are fair on silver and gold spoons. Crappie are good on minnows and pink tube jigs over baited holes in 20–25 feet. Bream are slow. Catfish are very good on trotlines baited with liver and cut bait.
- **STEINHAGEN:** 1.78' high. No report available.
- **TOLEDO BEND:** Water stained; 75–79 degrees; 0.13' low. Black bass are good on chartreuse/black spinnerbaits and crankbaits. Striped bass are fair on silver slabs and green striped jigs. White bass are good on pet spoons and troll tubes. Crappie are fair on minnows. Bream are good on crickets and nightcrawlers. Channel and blue catfish are slow. Yellow catfish are slow.
- **WRIGHT PATMAN:** Water stained; 7.23' high. No report available.

Schlitterbahn 4x10.5