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Joel Blanton, 37, is shown in custody Monday night on Salem Road in Warren County after an escape from Van Buren County Jail that lasted less than 24 hours.

CAPTURED

Jail escapee apprehended

BY **JAMES CLARK**
Editor for the Southern Standard
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

A Van Buren County Jail escapee who was added to the TBI's Top 10 Most Wanted List on Monday afternoon was captured in Warren County on Monday night around 7 p.m.

Joel Ernest Blanton, 37, was wanted after escaping from Van Buren County Jail at approximately 1 a.m. on Monday morning with the help of his mother. He was captured about 18 hours later at a home on Salem



BLANTON

Road, a rural road toward the northern part of the county between Bluff Springs Road and Faulkner Springs Road.

Blanton was transported to Warren County Jail where he is being held. "We had gotten word he might be there on Salem Road," said Warren County Sheriff Jackie Matheny. "He was hiding in a closet and marshals had to use tear gas to get him out."

The TBI announced the capture of Blanton online: "PARTNERSHIP PAYS OFF! Teamwork by the Van Buren and Warren County Sheriff's

Departments, the U.S. Marshals, ATF, and TBI has resulted in the arrest of this escaped child rapist. Thank you for joining us in staying vigilant! Great job all around!"

On April 17, Blanton was found guilty of four counts of rape of a child and two counts of aggravated sexual battery. He was awaiting a Wednesday sentencing hearing when he escaped Monday morning. Law enforcement officials say Blanton faces what could amount to the rest of his life behind bars.

Blanton's mother, Darlene Marie Blanton, reportedly helped him escape early Monday morning when she made a false 911 call about gunshots being fired around 12:30 a.m. Monday. The call lured a deputy at the jail away from his post.

Continued on **3A**

Making the big time

Cumberland Caverns named to top 100 list

BY **JAMES CLARK**
Editor for the Southern Standard
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

There are 100 reasons to love America, according to *People* magazine, and one of them is right here in Warren County.

Cumberland Caverns has made the distinguished top 100 list at No. 19 in the July 2 edition of *People* that's available in stores now.

"To be included and to make the top 20 is great stuff," said Cumberland Caverns marketing director Kelly Roberts. "Cumberland Caverns is just a jewel. It's good, quality time to spend in nature. It's not surprising people are starting to recognize us."

Tim McGraw and Faith Hill grace the cover of *People* and are listed as the No. 1 thing that's great about America.

Meghan Markle and her mom, Doria, are listed at No. 2 before the right to vote comes in at No. 3.

Continued on **6A**



Commissioner pleads not guilty

Judge Locke recuses self

BY **LISA HOBBS**
Reporter for the Southern Standard
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

A Warren County commissioner charged with attempted assault has pled not guilty.

Michael Martin entered the plea during an arraignment hearing Tuesday before General Sessions Judge Bill Locke, who voluntarily removed himself from hearing the case.

"I'm going to recuse myself," Locke told Martin at his hearing. "I'm a county employee and you're a county commissioner. I don't feel comfortable hearing your case."

A judge can recuse himself or herself in any proceeding in which impartiality might reasonably be questioned.

Martin was hit with the attempted assault charge after an argument escalated between

him and Warren County Animal Control director Kim Pettrey. The incident occurred Tuesday, June 12, during a county Health and Welfare Committee meeting.

The charge specifically pertains to Martin's attempt to close the door as Pettrey occupied the entrance, ousting her from the open meeting.



MARTIN

According to the warrant, "Mr. Martin jumped up and walked at Ms. Pettrey with his hands out in a manner to touch her. Ms. Pettrey being a reasonable person was placed in fear of bodily injury at this time."

Martin, who chaired the Health and Welfare committee at that time, was removed from the committee June 18 by the full Warren County Commission.

Judge Bratten Cook from Smithville will hear the case Aug. 3 at 9 a.m.

Tradition continues

Yankee Doodle Parade to highlight downtown 4th of July festivities

BY **MARGARET HOBBS**
Lifestyles Editor for the Southern Standard
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

The annual Yankee Doodle Children's Parade, sponsored by Junior Auxiliary of McMinnville, is a popular way to kick off July 4 activities.

The downtown McMinnville event will start at 9 a.m., with registration beginning at 8 a.m. There will be no pre-registration this year, and there is no entry fee.

The parade is open to youngsters from birth through 11 years of age, as well as small groups. They will cruise around Court Square in their patriotic mode of transportation. Vehicles cannot be motorized, but battery-powered vehicles are acceptable if the child can keep it under control. Patriotic decorations and themes are encouraged.

"This is such a fun event, and we are happy to continue the tradition for the public to enjoy," said JA public relations officer Amanda Collier. "It's an enjoyable time for everyone -- kids, par-

ents, grandparents and spectators. It's amazing at just how creative the children and parents are in their entries."

Prizes will be awarded to winners in various categories, all donated by local businesses. JA member Julie Carr is the Yankee Doodle Parade chair.

MR. AND MISS STARS AND STRIPES PAGEANT

Organizers of the annual Mr. and Miss Stars and Stripes Pageant are encouraging youngsters to participate in the patriotic activity.

Boys and girls between the ages of birth through 6 years can participate, with the Miss Stars and Stripes title available to girls 7-9 years of age.

Categories include: Baby Miss and Mister, 0-11 months; Mini Miss and Mister, 12-13 months; Tiny Miss and Mister, 4-6 years; and Miss Stars and Stripes, 7-9 years.

The pageant is presented by the Miss McMinnville Scholarship Pageant and will be held on downtown stage starting at 11 a.m. Dress can be patriotic or church attire, with no pageant gowns.

A registration fee of \$25 is required, with day-of registration held at the Miss McMinnville tent. Pre-registration can be completed on Facebook at Little Miss and Mr. Stars and Stripes event calendar.



Children up to age 11 are being encouraged to participate in the annual Yankee Doodle Children's Parade set for next Wednesday, July 4, in downtown McMinnville.

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