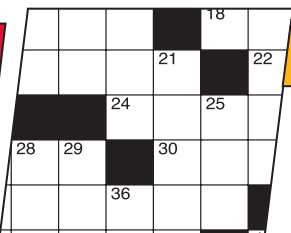


SPORTS

Spare a few moments
to check out bowling **1B**



PUZZLEMANIA

Give your brain
a workout **7A**

FRIDAY
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The suspense is over! The **Southern Standard's** long-awaited Best of the Best special publication is inside today's edition with Earl and Hazel Barr gracing the cover as Mr. and Mrs. Warren County. To find out who won everything from best waiter to best bank, see inside today's edition.

212 years

Sentence believed to be local record

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

Joel Ernest Blanton must have known what was coming when he broke out of Van Buren County Jail on Monday with the help of his mother.

On Wednesday, Blanton was sentenced to 212 years in prison by Circuit Court Judge Bart Stanley for six counts of child rape and two counts of aggravated sexual battery.

"It's the longest sentence I can ever recall," said assistant district attorney Tom Miner, who has served as a local prosecutor for nearly three decades. "It should be noted that child rape is time that's served at 100 percent."

It is believed John David Smartt, sentenced to 153 years for five counts of child rape in 2016, previously held the record for longest local prison sen-

tence.

Contributing to the 212-year sentence is the fact Blanton has a previous aggravated sexual battery conviction involving a juvenile and served prison time for that crime. He escaped from jail during his legal proceedings on that occasion too.

"He's not a good guy," said Miner.

Blanton, 37, committed the child rapes in Van Buren County between December 2016 and February 2017. The rape victim was 11 when the sexual abuse reportedly began. Blanton was also sentenced for one count of aggravated sexual battery against a sibling who was 10 at the time.

Blanton was convicted on the charges April 17 and had been await-



BLANTON

ing sentencing at Van Buren County Jail. In a last-ditch gasp for freedom, Blanton escaped from jail early Monday morning at approximately 1 a.m. His mother, Darlene Marie Blanton, reportedly helped him escape when she made a false 911 call about gunshots being fired. The call lured a deputy at the jail away from his post.

Mr. Blanton had already jimmied open the lock to his cell, according to reports, and darted out the door when the false 911 call provided a distraction. His mother was reportedly waiting in a car for him outside. She then drove him to another car she had waiting for him.

Continued on **2A**



Charity Thielen, front, and Jonathan Russell, right, of Head and the Heart perform their folksy blend of rock to a sell-out crowd Tuesday night at Cumberland Caverns.

Sold-out crowd packs cave

BY **ATLANTA NORTHCUIT**
Southern Standard staff
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

The Head and the Heart gave a heartfelt performance at Cumberland Caverns Live on Tuesday night.

With tickets sold out, the cave was packed with an energetic and anticipatory crowd. It marked the first sellout for Cumberland Caverns Live, a concert series which launched this year.

Forlorn Strangers from Nashville was the opening act and brought a retro Americana presence. The two female lead singers had abundant energy in their per-

formance.

As the Head and the Heart took the stage, audience members were on their feet the entire concert, singing along and waving their hands in a joyous show of celebration to hits like "Lost in My Mind" and "Down in the Valley" or clapping along to "Shake."

Lead singer and guitarist Jonathan Russell was impressive on vocals with a soulful, bluesy sound, saying he had gotten one of the guitars he was playing in Nashville the day before. One of the biggest awe moments was during the last song of the encore.

"Rivers and Roads" is one of The Head

and the Heart's most well-known songs and it never loses the raw and real power of emotion it captures no matter how many times you hear it. Singer and musician Charity Thielen's voice filled the cave with a melodic harmony that tugged at heartstrings.

It was an exclamation point to a beautifully upbeat folk-rock night at Cumberland Caverns.

Next up in the Cumberland Caverns Live concert series is an Aug. 4 performance from Todd Snider with special guest Elizabeth Cook. On Sept. 9, Son Volt will play the cave. More shows are set to be announced in the near future.

Woman charged for funny money

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

A homeless woman has been charged with passing phony money in Warren County.

Naomi Michelle Cole, 41, is charged with one count of criminal simulation for allegedly passing \$500 in counterfeit bills at Walmart. She is also charged with driving on a revoked license sixth offense. She will face hearing July 3.

Jail records list Cole as homeless. She is believed to have been staying in this area for at least several weeks. Her last known address is Bledsoe County, according to McMinnville Police.

The Police Department says several businesses have filed reports of counterfeit bills being used over the past few weeks. No known suspects had been generated until last Friday, June 22, when Walmart added its name to the list.

While reviewing that incident, police officer Stephen Daniels generated Cole as the suspect who allegedly purchased items with counterfeit money. One of those items was a pre-paid debit card. Daniels issued a be-on-the-lookout alert for the vehicle Cole had been driving.

Continued on **3A**



COLE

Volunteer fire departments could get \$8K

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

Warren County government could provide volunteer fire departments with another significant financial boost, a decision under consideration while reviewing nonprofit allocations for 2018-19.

Last year, commissioners doubled the county's allocation to its seven volunteer fire

departments from \$3,000 to \$6,000. That decision was made after listening to pleas from Harrison Ferry's Fire Chief Lynn Curtis regarding the financial strain caused by lack of membership dues being paid, the cost of insurance premiums, and the cost of fire engines and equipment.

Commissioner Terry Bell suggested they provide an additional \$2,000 each during a county Procedures and Rules

Committee meeting on Tuesday, which would bring the county's contribution to each department up to \$8,000.

"I'd like to see us make a better commitment to our volunteer fire departments," said Bell. "They are having a hard time with insurance and stuff. I know we'd have to take it from other places within the budget. I'll find it in the budget."

Continued on **2A**



After doubling the amount it gives volunteer fire departments last year, the county could increase that amount \$2,000 more this year.

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