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DARKE COUNTY — The year 2019 was a busy one for Darke County and its residents. In no particular order, the following is a sampling of some of DarkeCountyMedia.com's most read stories as well as some other highlights the newspaper reported on during the past year:

**Tornado does damage in May**
The National Weather Service in Wilmington confirmed an EF1 tornado did touch down in the village of New Madison. Multiple reports of downed trees and power lines, as well as structural damage to buildings and homes within the village prompted a massive response of emergency personnel from across Darke and Preble counties. Mutual aid was received from various departments. Roadways entering the village were closed off to all incoming traffic, while rescue and cleanup activities took place. Multiple streets and sidewalks were blocked by downed trees and live power lines making travel unsafe inside the village.

**Great Darke County Fair fire levels swine barn, arsonists caught**
It was Oct. 25, 2018, when a fire at the Great Darke County fairgrounds brought the historic swine barn to the ground. Nine departments responded to the blaze that also damaged surrounding buildings and destroyed a host of items stored inside, including tractors and boats. In July, two area men were arrested for arson with one, Christopher L. Garland pleading guilty in October. He was sentenced to ten years in prison. The second indicted individual, Randy R. Mogle, is currently awaiting trial.
Yolo Park opens in downtown Greenville

A project that had been four years finally came to fruition in August. The YOLO Urban Park, located at the corner of Martin Street and South Broadway, opened to the public with a grand opening celebration.

The grand opening was held during Main Street Greenville’s First Friday in August. The park officially opened at 6 p.m. and there was music from 6:30-9 p.m. and a movie was shown in the park at dusk. They also had hot dogs, drinks and games.

Leading the charge to beautify the downtown district was Phillip Pierri and Matt Steyer of the YOLO Festival of Races. Several meetings with the city of Greenville’s administration and Greenville City Council set the project in motion and fundraising began.

State Route 127 ODOT project to curtail accidents

A source of controversy for several years, the US 127 and Kruckeberg Road intersection underwent a face-lift with a Partial RCUT design meant to reduce points of contact by approximately 25 percent. Between 2011 and 2015, there were two fatalities and 45 accidents at the intersection. A fatality that took the life of a teen driver in August 2016 prompted a petition leading to an ODOT safety study. The project was awarded to Brumbaugh Construction and completed last month.

Wayne HealthCare breaks ground for a new addition

This time next year, Wayne HealthCare will open the doors to a new 85,000-square-foot addition currently under construction. The $60 million expansion will include a birthing center, 32 private inpatient rooms, and a Wellness Center and gym with an indoor track. Once complete, a renovation will begin on existing hospital space with work to be completed by April 2021.

Darke County farmers face a tough year

A deluge of rain made it difficult for area farmers this season, the challenges creating a widespread ripple effect from an inability to get into fields to a livestock feed crisis.

Darke County is the largest corn and soybean producer in the state of Ohio, and by September, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) had declared the area a disaster.

The local OSU Extension office is currently conducting a survey to help make better management decisions should farmers face another 2019.

Arcanum welcomes new mayor and police chief

It was this time last year when former village council member Greg Baumle was sworn in as village mayor after the resignation of Judith Foureman that took effect on Dec. 31. Since then, Mayor Baumle has overseen the building of a new village administration and police headquarters, a new wastewater treatment plant, and welcomed several new businesses. The village also gained a new police chief, Marcus Ballinger, who has been busy with several projects, including an update to policy and procedures for special functions.

Arcanum High School gains 20,000 square foot addition

The high school welcomed a much needed and highly anticipated 20,000 square foot addition for agricultural education and athletics. It was a dream that began some 40 months ago when the school restarted the FFA Chapter with a vision for a top-notch program that needed...
proper facilities. The addition, which includes a community center, was possible thanks to multiple financial contributors.

Area county schools go high-tech for student safety
The Versailles school district mounted high-quality, HD video and picture cameras on all their school buses to help in the fight against too many drivers putting students at risk. Meanwhile, the Franklin Monroe school district installed HALO Smart Sensors in the school building to deter students from vaping and e-cigarettes after mysterious lung problems and even death grabbed national headlines.

Polar vortex puts a freeze on nation
A blast of polar air enveloped much of the Midwest in late January, closing schools and businesses and straining infrastructure across the Rust Belt with some of the lowest temperatures in a generation. The deep freeze snapped rail lines and canceled hundreds of flights in the nation's third-largest city, which was as cold as the Arctic. Heavily dressed repair crews hustled to keep water mains and gas pipes working. At least eight deaths were linked to the system. Darke County was also affected.

Courthouse annex project almost complete
The new security entrance to the Darke County Courthouse is scheduled to be completed soon. The original plan was to have the new back entrance open by mid-December, but a delay in building materials delayed completion. The project began this past summer and includes a 1,000-square-foot annex at the rear entrance. New features include bullet-proof glass and a holding cell to fit three prisoners. When the annex is open, the front entrances to the courthouse will be permanently closed, and will be used only as emergency exits. The cost of the courthouse project stands at $753,786.89.
The newest styles.
The trendiest trends.
The latest of the very latest.
Eight volunteer firefighters resign from Greenville Township

In June, DarkeCountyMedia.com learned that several volunteer firefighters, as well as the volunteer assistant chief, submitted their resignations to Greenville Township Trustees. According to trustee Matt Kolb, there was a difference in opinion in the way the department was being run. When asked if the rumors were true that the township fire department will disband and the city of Greenville Fire Department would take over, Kolb emphatically stated, “There is no truth to that at all.”

Versailles celebrates 200th birthday

On Sept. 14, the village of Versailles celebrated its bicentennial at Heritage Park. One of the day’s highlights was the grand opening of the park’s newly constructed amphitheater. The Versailles High School Band was the first of several musical performances during the celebration, which also included historical displays, vendors and activities.

Missing UC woman dies in fatal crash

On Aug. 9, the Darke County Sheriff’s Office, along with other local jurisdictions began a joint missing person investigation of Shawna Rue Ressler of Union City, OH/IN. Ms. Ressler had been missing since Aug. 4, when she left her home for an appointment in Celina. On Aug. 14, the Mercer County Sheriff’s Office was notified that a vehicle had been found in a steep ditch and was covered in a woods and vegetation. The vehicle matched the description of Ms. Ressler’s vehicle and she was identified as the sole occupant.

Motorcycle shop denied Broadway opening

Greenville Planning and Zoning turned down a request for a variance for a proposed downtown Harley-Davidson store after hearing from local business owners who had concerns with the business. Chris Lovett wanted to put the store on South Broadway. Business and property owners did not oppose the retail store, but argued the “repair shop” would cause problems due to noise and fumes coming from the facility.

Sure Shot Tap is in the making

Andrew Riffle and father Daryl are planning a new venture, the Sure Shot Tap House. After deciding to invest in Greenville, Andrew reached out to Main Street Greenville and the Darke County Visitors Bureau to start discussions looking for the perfect property last fall. The 622 S. Broadway property was purchased. They were able to close on the building in January and demo actually started on the project just a few days after closing. Revival Design Studio is the project designer. Sure Shot will offer a full experience in craft beer with 30-50 draft beers, ciders and wines as well as a beer inspired full menu.

Neff Co. closing its doors

The Early Bird has learned earlier this year that Neff Co. will be closing its doors completely in Greenville by the end of the year. The Neff Company has bounced from one owner to another over the past several years. The company had approximately 60 employees that were be affected by this transition. Some employees may be placed with different operations within Jostens. The Neff Company provided such items as varsity letters and numbers, school patches and awards, school outerwear, varsity jackets, pins, trophies and display frames.

Chicken farm coming?

Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) representatives conducted a public meeting in November to hear comments from area residents on a draft Permit to Install and a draft Permit to Operate for the Golden Heritage Egg Farm, proposed to be located at 13285 Rhyndar-Fink Road in Allen Township. Nearly 150 people attended the event in the Youth Building at the Darke County Fairgrounds, but those who wanted to speak were given only three minutes to do so. Several months before that, a public meeting was held in the New Weston Community Building with questions raised and comments spoken. The ODA has yet to make a decision.

Bethany Royer-Delong, Linda Moody and Susan Hartley compiled this report.
Wave upends Sidney to claim Jug

By Gaylen Blosser
DarkeCountyMedia.com

Editor’s Note: This article was first published Nov. 5, 2019.

GREENVILLE – Trailing Sidney 14-13, Greenville rallied with 1:46 remaining in Miami Valley League play on Friday with a Tyler Beyke to John Butsch 23-yard touchdown pass to re-take the lead and return the Little Brown Jug to GHS with a 19-14 senior night win at Greenville’s Miami Valley Hospital North Stadium at Harmon Field.

“We had a lot of success this year and we have been through a lot,” said first year head Greenville coach Bart Schmitz. “That final drive when we had to go win a game, they did exactly what they were coached to do and it’s unreal…unreal…unreal.”

“It’s why I do this,” Schmitz, a member of a Versailles state championship football team added. “I said it when I got the job – I said I wanted the kids to have the same experiences that I had.”

The Greenville win marked the first Green Wave victory over the Yellow Jackets since 2015 giving the team possession of the Little Brown Jug for the next 365 days to go along with Greenville’s first winning season in 11 years.

“I told the senior the other day I had a goal and I had a vision of where I wanted this program to go,” Schmitz said. “The seniors laid the foundation and that foundation is awfully strong right now. I would go up against anybody and I would go to war with these kids any day of the week. I couldn’t be more proud of them.”

The game for the Jug was the final regular season game for both teams with the Sidney Yellow Jackets finishing with a 3-7 mark while Greenville completes the season with a winning 7-3 record.

Greenville took the opening kickoff and was quickly forced to punt going three-and-out setting the Yellow Jackets up with a first-and-10 from the Greenville 43-yard line.

The Jackets took advantage of a Cedric Johnson to Lathan Jones 43-yard touchdown pass on the team’s first offensive play of the night to put six points and the Wave upends Sidney to claim Jug See WAVE | 12

Gaylen Blosser | DarkeCountyMedia.com

Greenville players celebrate in the endzone following Tyler Beyke’s touchdown pass to John Butsch with 1:46 remaining in the game to give the Wave a senior night win over Sidney and return the Little Brown Jug to the GHS trophy case.

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Wave

From page 8

board and take a 7-0 lead at 10:20 in the first quarter with Hallie Truesdale making good on her PAT kick.

Greenville answered with a 69-yard 7-play drive to get on the board at 2:41 in the first. Facing second-and-18, a 55-yard touchdown strike from the GHS senior combo of Beyke to Butsch followed with four year senior placekicker Ethan Planery splitting the uprights out of the hold of Beyke to tie the game a 7-7.

Greenville would get its second score of the first half with a Beyke 8-yard quarterback keeper around the right side outracing the Jackets to the end zone with 1:07 showing on the second quarter clock. A blocked extra point attempt and solid GHS defense over the final minute of first half play sent the teams to the break with Greenville holding a 13-7 lead.

The teams played scoreless for the first 18-minutes of the second half before the Yellow Jackets drove 90-yards in 12-plays to score on a halfback pass from running back E.J. Davis to receiver Lathan Jones with 3:36 left in the game. With the PAT kick good, Sidney took a 1-point 14-13 lead.

“We tried to change the mindset when I got here – you expect to win,” noted Schmitz. “You don’t hope to win, you expect to win.”

Unfazed, Greenville marched 65-yards down the field scoring on a 23-yard touchdown pass from Beyke to Butsch – a leaping catch Butsch would make while falling on his back just inches inbounds with 1:46 left.

In what proved to be the winning drive, the march ate up 1:50 on the game clock with Greenville using 7-plays to complete the comeback drive and return the Little Brown Jug to the Greenville Senior High trophy case.

Coach Schmitz took time to thank his wife and three children, his father, Dave Schmitz and the entire Greenville coaching staff.

“I couldn’t ask for a better wife, late hours, she never lets me get to high and never lets me get too low,” Schmitz said. “The support, always my biggest fan. My wife, my three kids, they don’t get to see me a whole lot in football season but they love it.”

“I got to coach four years with my dad (Dave Schmitz) at Lehman and obviously I played for him (Versailles),” said Schmitz. “He brought a tremendous knowledge to this team and I just couldn’t be happier that he was able to come and coach with me.”

“Defensive coordinator (Adam Eberwein) stuck with me and he coached his tail off like we all did,” Schmitz said. “I am really happy with my coaching staff. Hopefully we stick together for a long time.”

The seniors would make one final victory lap around the field before heading back to the team locker room.

Greenville had 286 yards of offense, 163 rushing and 123 passing while Sidney had 257 offensive yards, 190 rushing and 67 passing. Beyke complete 8-of-14 passes with two TDs, both to John Butsch.

Tony Sells finished with 40-rushing yards on 10-carries, Butsch 37-yards on 4-attempts, Marcus Wood 6-carries for 29-yards and Connor Mills 3-carries for 24-yards.

Butsch had 2-catches for 78-yards with both going for touchdowns. Wood 4-receptions for 25-yards and Alec Fletcher 2-catches for 20-yards.

Butsch led Greenville with 7-tackles including a sack, Brennen Siefring and Mills accounted for 6-tackles and Haydn Sharp 5.

Greenville had the ball for 27:29 and Sidney 20:31 while first downs mirrored the score; Sidney 14, Greenville 19.
Versailles gets OT win over Brookville

By Gaylen Blosser
Sports Editor

Editor’s Note: This article originally ran in the March 5, 2019 with DarkeCountyMedia.com

CLAYTON – The Versailles Tigers took advantage of an Evan Hiestand tip-in at 0:03.6 in overtime to defeat the state’s No. 10 ranked D-III Brookville Blue Devils 48-46 and advance in tournament play.

“They have 20-wins for a reason,” said Versailles coach Travis Swank. “They are senior led, they have a lot of guys that have played at the varsity level for several years – they have very good players. We’re just happy to get out of here with a win.”

A Michael Stammen basket at 7:31 in the opening period gave the Tigers an early 2-0 lead. Brookville evened the score at 2-2, 6’6” Austin Toner got a stick-back at 4:36 giving Versailles a 4-2 advantage only to have Brookville even the score at 4-4.

The teams exchanged baskets for the game’s third tie at 6-6 with 3:22 on the board followed by an old fashioned Hiestand 3-point play to give Versailles a 9-3 lead.

Four unanswered points gave the Blue Devils their first lead of the night, 10-9 with 1:14 showing. Hiestand closed out first quarter scoring with a layup to give Versailles an 11-10 lead after one period of play.

Brookville took the second quarter 14-11 but not before Versailles would own the largest lead of the night for either team, a 6-point 18-12 score coming at 6:08 by way of a Stammen layup and a Ryan Martin 3-pointer.

The Blue Devils battle back with a 9-0 run to lead 21-18. A Hiestand reverse layup with nine seconds remaining sent the teams to the break with Brookville holding a 24-22 advantage.

Brookville moved out to a 26-22 third quarter lead before Hiestand would score five unanswered points to give the Tigers a 27-26 advantage.

The Blue Devils used a 5-0 run of their own to go back on top 31-27 only to have Versailles close out third period scoring with four Stammen unanswered points by way of a driving layup and 2-2 at the line with 0:03.9 showing sending the teams to the final period of regulation play with the score all even at 31-31.

Stammen buried a 3-pointer from the top of the key for 34-31 Versailles lead at 7:24 in the fourth followed by a Brookville basket and 3-pointer to give the Blue Devils a 36-34 advantage.

Connor VanSkyock drilled a Tigers 3-pointer to put Versailles back on top 37-36 and Hiestand scored in the paint to give the Tigers a 39-36 lead.

A Brookville goal had the Versailles lead down to one at 3:56 with Hiestand getting a stick-back at 2:39 giving the Tigers a 41-38 advantage with 2:39 remaining.

A Brookville 2-point goal had the Tigers lead down to one at 41-40, Stammen with 2-2 at the line put Versailles back up by three at 43-40 and a Blue Devils layup had the Tigers lead down to 43-42 with 43-seconds on the clock.

Stammen hit the front end of two free throws to push the Tigers

See WIN | 14

SCORES:

BOXSCORE:
VERSAILLES 48, BROOKVILLE 46

3-POINTERS
Versailles 3 (M. Stammen 1, R. Martin 1, C. VanSkyock 1)
Brookville 4 (Wade Turner 2, J. Gudorf 1, AJ Eller 1)

SCORE by QUARTERS:
11-11-09-13-04 48 Versailles
10-14-07-13-02 46 Brookville

Michael Stammen brings the ball up-court for Versailles in win over Brookville.
**Win**

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lead to 44-42 at 0:39 only to have Brookville hit a 4-foot running baseline floater at 0:10 to send the game to overtime tied 44-44.

Toner hit the back-end of two free throws to put Versailles up 45-44 followed by a Blue Devils basket putting Brookville on top 46-44.

Stammen hit the second of two Versailles free throws to knot the game at 46-46 with 1:02 on the overtime clock. With Brookville’s offense working the clock down, was unable to score setting up a Hiestand tip-in of a Tigers missed shot with 0:03.6 on the clock to give Versailles a 48-46 lead bringing a timeout following the Blue Devils timeout from the Brookville bench.

Versailles senior Evan Hiestand led all scorers with a game high 24-points.

“I’m glad he got those 24 because 22 wouldn’t have been enough for us,” Swank stated. “He played his tail off – he doesn’t want his season to end. He’s not the vocal leader that you would think of a senior but he works his tail off in practice. The guys just gravitate towards him because he plays so hard not only in practice but games too and when you have leadership like that, sometimes it’s just as good as being a vocal leader.”

With the win, Versailles advances to compete for the district championship trophy for the third consecutive season.

“We expect ourselves to be there,” Coach Swank stated, “You can say what you want – a lot of people didn’t expect us to be very good this year. Maybe that’s a chip that we hold on our shoulder right now as a team. We’ve lost a lot of good talent and we know that you’ve just seen a kid (Justin Ahrens) dropping 29 in the Big Ten off of our team the other night, so I don’t think a lot of people gave us chances to be at this point and time but it doesn’t matter when every single one of our guys in the locker room, coaches and managers believe in themselves and believe in what we’re doing and you can get there then.”

**Stonebraker named new Versailles principal**

Steps down as girls basketball coach

By Gaylen Blosser

DarkeCountyMedia.com

Editor’s Note: This article first ran July 5, 2019.

VERSAILLES – The Versailles High School held a special school board meeting Wednesday, July 3 at 7 a.m. to approve Jacki Stonebraker as the school’s new high school principal.

“I feel so blessed to have the opportunity to do this in my career with the support of the community,” said Stonebraker.

Stonebraker said, “It’s been 20 great years in the classroom and on the basketball court with the girls and my students. I still enjoy the classroom, I still enjoy coaching and I don’t think that will ever go away.”

“There were a couple of signs I just felt like that were coming at me and you never know if you’re
Downtown businesses spoke against allowing the owner of the Hogg Shop to change oil and install accessories on motorcycles at a downtown store.

Early in 2019, good news was revealed for downtown Greenville. The owners of the Whistle Stop announced they were making plans to bring in the Sure Shot Tap House.

Ackley continues to stir-up community with drawings

By Ryan Berry
DarkeCountyMedia.com

GREENVILLE – The mention of one man’s name in Greenville will usually elicit some type of response. For some it’s a cringe and for others it is a huge smile. The man is Paul Ackley. For over 40 years, he has been holding local elected leaders to task and giving tributes to community leaders that have passed.

Since 2013, Ackley’s cartoons have appeared in The Early Bird and prior to that his cartoons were published weekly in the Daily Advocate.

In 2019, Ackley found a way to bring attention to issues facing Greenville and Darke County. Whether it was a decision by the Greenville City Council, Darke County Commission or some other local government agency, Ackley was able to express his opinion through his thought provoking cartoons in a humorous way.

The following were Ackley’s top 5 cartoons determined by the number of online shares and views.

#1 - In the top spot was his cartoon on the proposed Hogg Shop in downtown Greenville. Several business owners spoke out against allowing the new business to change oil in motorcycles or attach accessories purchased at his shop to the bikes. With Greenville Planning & Zoning voting to not allow the change in zoning, the building space remains vacant with paper covering the windows. The cartoon appeared in the Oct. 27th edition.

#2 - For nearly six months, Greenville City Council discussed a proposal to widen Wagner Avenue north of Lowe’s. Property owners that abutted that portion of the road were responsible for the cost of widening the road, installing sidewalks, lighting and other infrastructure improvements through an assessment on property taxes. The city received a

After a lot of great detective work, two suspects in numerous arsons around the county were arrested.

See DRAWINGS | 16
Drawings

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30-year zero interest loan. The proposal was eventually approved, but not until an agreement was made on how the city would pay back its portion of the project. Ackley’s cartoon featured a huge, rundown sign that read, “Welcome to Greenville – We’re Business Friendly.” Councilmen John Hensley and Clarence Godwin, opponents of the original proposal, were shown discussing why Greenville wasn’t growing. The cartoon appeared in the Nov. 17 edition. The two councilmen also appeared in a cartoon with Geoff Surber that was in the top 10. Council reversed its decision from approval to allow Surber to access city services at a property on Sebring-Warner Road that is part of the township, but surrounded by the city limits.

#3 – Not all of Ackley’s cartoons brought humor to issues in the county. Some were serious and sentimental. Such is the case for 2019’s third most viewed and shared cartoon. Shortly before Thanksgiving, a family near Arcanum got the news no family wants to hear – their mother and wife had been killed in a car crash on I-75 near Troy. Kimra Skelton was doing her job as a motor carrier enforcement inspector when a driver crashed his pick-up truck into her vehicle. Skelton’s funeral was attended by law enforcement and first responders from all over the country. No decision has been made as to whether or not the driver of the vehicle that killed Skelton will face charges. The cartoon appeared in the Dec. 8th edition.

#4 – The most shared cartoon for the year came from a good news story. In early 2019, the owners of the Whistle Stop announced they were developing a new business in downtown Greenville, The Sure Shot Tap House. The cartoon featured Annie Oakley reading the newspaper and proudly declaring “Oh my. I’m still remembered.” At last word, plans are still being finalized for the new business that hopes to open sometime this year. The cartoon appeared in the March 3rd edition.

#5 – For much of the latter part of 2018 and into 2019 there was a series of Arsons that burned several barns to the ground. One of those barns was at the Darke County Fairgrounds. In August, two suspects were arrested and charged. The cartoon showed a Sheriff’s Deputy and a Greenville Police Officer standing next to two handcuffed suspects in front of a judge. One of Ackley’s characters said, “With all due respect, your honor, these brave officers did their job. Now please do yours.” One of the suspects pleaded guilty and received 10 years in prison. The other suspect is awaiting trial. The cartoon appeared in the Aug. 4th edition.

Some of the other top cartoons in 2019 included a tribute cartoon on Fred Matix, the County Commission choosing to not give an estimate on the cost of courthouse annex building, candidates running for Greenville City Council and a cartoon on the proposed poultry farm.

All of Ackley’s past cartoons can be found at DarkeCountyMedia.com on The Early Bird’s website. The cartoons are available for sale on a first-come, first-served basis.

Contact Editor Ryan Berry at rberry@aimmediamidwest.com or (937) 569-0066. Read more news, features and sports at DarkeCountyMedia.com.

Named

From page 14

going to get the chance again being halfway through my teaching career,” added Stonebraker. “I feel like it was maybe now or never and I don’t want to look back and have any regrets.”

Coach Stonebraker completed her master’s degree immediately following graduating from Bowling Green State University.

“I got my masters right out of college and worked towards my principalship right away,” stated Stonebraker. “There is a lot that has changed over the last 20 years since I’ve taken those classes so there is a lot to learn. There are a lot of seminars to go to, even some more classes that I feel like I need to take. With all that time and energy that has to be put into this job I just felt like coaching was not going happen anymore.”

The new position will still allow Stonebraker to be involved with her school-aged children’s activities.

“It is still a job that I can see my kids, all their sporting events and do all those things that I do with them,” Stonebraker noted. “It still gives me that flexibility but yet still further myself in my career.”

Contact Sports Editor Gaylen Blosser at gblosser@aimmediamidwest.com or (937) 853-6390 Ext. 1751. Read more news, features and sports at DarkeCountyMedia.com.
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