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# Harlan Enterprise

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WEDNESDAY, DEC. 31, 2025

## Candidates still have time to file for primary

By **JOE ASHER**  
*Harlan Enterprise*

The Kentucky 2026 Primary Election is shaping up, with candidates already filed to be their party’s candidate for multiple offices in Harlan County. The deadline to file is Jan. 9, leaving just a few weeks to file for one of the offices on the ballot. Primary Election Day

is May 19. Perhaps the most watched contest in Harlan County will be that of Harlan County Judge-Executive. Since current Judge-Executive Dan Mosley announced he does not plan to run for reelection, several candidates have decided to run. As of Dec. 24, candidates filed for the Republican Primary for Harlan County Judge-Executive

are Paul Browning, Colby Goss, Mitch Alford and Robert Crider. No Democrats have filed as of Dec. 24. Many are also seeking the Republican nomination for seats on the Harlan County Fiscal Court. In District 1, Magistrate Paul Caldwell has filed, with Reggie Raleigh, Matt Napier, Ralph Allen Turner, Jason Colinger

and Austin Miller also set to appear on the Primary Election ballot. No Democrats have filed as of Dec. 24. District 2 Magistrate Republican Primary candidates include John H. Buell, Melton Middleton, Burl Fee Jr., Dereck R. Sage, Willard Wilkinson, Mark Stewart and Carl E. Canterbury. No Democrats have filed as of Dec. 24.

District 3 Magistrate Republican Primary candidates include Jeff Wilder, and Jon Fields. Dale R. Halcomb Jr. has filed as an Independent, the only non-Republican candidate in Harlan County as of Dec. 24. No Democrats have filed as of Dec. 24. The only Republican Primary

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## Celebrating history, overcoming adversity among Harlan County's top 10 news makers

By **JENNIFER MCDANIELS**  
*Harlan Enterprise*

From celebrating history to once again battling infrastructure emergencies and flooding, Harlan County saw both ups and down in 2025. The grand opening of the Historic Harlan Museum gave good reason for celebration as county leaders joined residents in relishing in their heritage and the county’s many accomplishments and success stories through the generations. The same spirit of celebration spread into the Tri-Cities with the unveiling of the “Story of Benham” exhibit at Benham City Hall and the completion of a long-awaited overlook atop Kentucky’s highest peak on Black Mountain. With joy, however, comes grief. It is the balancing act of any community, and in Harlan County, flooding, infrastructure emergencies, loss of health care and the deaths of people who made great impacts on the area are the challenges that happened to Harlan County’s well-being. The challenges came with strong resolve and resiliency, and in 2025, we see a community fiercely proud of its past and boldly committed to securing its future. The following are the top 10 news stories that helped shape Harlan County’s continued evolution as a community:



PHOTO BY JENNIFER MCDANIELS

The grand opening of the Historic Harlan Museum took place in November and landed the fifth spot in The Enterprise’s Top 10 news making stories of 2025. Jim Blevins looked over one of the displays.

### 10. FEBRUARY FLOODING

The mountains of southeastern Kentucky were once again ravaged with destructive flooding as a prolonged period of heavy rain poured in the region in mid-February. The impact of the heavy rain front was felt throughout the state, including Harlan County. Kentucky state government reported over 300 road closures, 40,000 plus power outages, and over 1,000 swift water rescues were executed. Harlan County was included in the list of counties that were declared

federal emergency disaster areas for federal assistance. Much of the flooding in Harlan County occurred in the Clover Fork area where members of the Harlan County Sheriff’s Office and the West Cloverfork Department had to wade swift water in response to numerous rescue calls. FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) set up an office at the Harlan County Courthouse and stayed through spring to assist residents who sustained property damage.

### 9. NEW ERA IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College got a new president in 2025 and embarked upon a renewed dedication to community educational and cultural service. After a national search concluded, KCTCS named Andrea “Lee” Harrison as the next SKCTC president. She officially stepped into the role on July 1. Retirements took place for both the superintendents of the Harlan County and Harlan

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## County elementary schools recognized

By **JOE ASHER**  
*Harlan Enterprise*

The Harlan County School Board held its regular meeting for December recently, taking action including recognizing three of the district’s schools for excellent scores on the Kentucky Summative Assessment (KSA). Chairman Gary Farmer called the meeting to order, soon after turning things over to Superintendent Brett Johnson for his report. “The last board meeting we discussed the results of the KSA (Kentucky Summative Assessment),” Johnson told the board. “As we covered last month, we had a lot of positive, great things going on, but we want to take an opportunity tonight to recognize a couple schools that scored exceptionally. Those would be Green Hills Elementary, Cumberland Elementary and Cawood Elementary. Johnson said he would address he schools alphabetically. “With the color coding, and we anticipate the assessment system changing and that’s

See **COUNTY**, 2A

## Harlan Independent sees enrollment increase

Staff Report

The Harlan Independent School District experienced an increase in enrollment recently, cementing the district’s place as one of the fastest growing school districts in the state. According to a press release, the Kentucky Department of Education published data showing that the Harlan Independent School District is one of the top five fastest-growing districts for the third time in four years. Growth Factor data tracks enrollment used to decide the amount of state funding

received by schools. The process was paused during the COVID 19 pandemic and returned in the 2022 – 2023 school year. At that time, Harlan Independent recorded significant gains, showing an increase of 14.25 percent in enrollment. Harlan Independent enrollment has continued to grow, showing a 30 percent increase since 2019 – 2020. The 2025–2026 Growth Factor Report shows an additional 6.56 percent increase, putting Harlan Independent at second in the state. The upward trend is occurring while overall enrollment

decreases across the state and eastern Kentucky. Harlan Independent School District leaders credit a culture of academic success as one reason for the district’s growth. It is believed the district could see approximately 1,100 students by 2030, a significant increase following decades of decline. Superintendent Jennifer Parsons emphasized the significance of the trend, noting its impact on both student services and staff support. “We are extremely pleased – but not surprised – by the growth. Once restrictions were

lifted and tuition for K–12 students was eliminated, we anticipated renewed interest. This growth has helped us remain competitive with salaries, keep pace with rising costs, and maintain some of the lowest tax rates in Kentucky,” said Parsons. Director of Pupil Personnel Cathy Thomas highlighted the connection between enrollment, attendance and student success. “The growth we’ve seen is a strong indicator of the overall health of the district. Our attendance rate has steadily

increased since the pandemic,” Thomas said. “While we want to continue improving, the progress is encouraging. Enrollment and attendance are foundational for learning, and there is strong evidence linking both to student outcomes. We’re committed to strengthening our academic culture and reinforcing the value of a high-quality education.” Parsons recognizes increased enrollment will bring with it new challenges, and the priority remains to procure enough

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