

ATVs now street-legal in LaRue

BY VICTORIA COX
EDITOR

With a change in state law putting the decision in local hands, LaRue County has officially opened county roads to all-terrain vehicle (ATVs) traffic.

The determination, which was passed by Fiscal Court via an ordinance on Tuesday, July 8, stems from legislation approved by the Kentucky General Assembly earlier this year. The bill allows certain special purpose vehicles to operate on highways within the Commonwealth but leaves regulation and allowance up to local governing bodies.

The general assembly defines a special purpose vehicle as an “all-terrain vehicle, utility terrain vehicle, minitruck, pneumatic-tired military vehicle, or full-size special

purpose-built vehicle, including a vehicle that is self-constructed or built by the original equipment manufacturer and a vehicle that has been modified.” To be classified as street-legal, the vehicle must be registered with the county clerk, inspected by the sheriff’s office and meet specific requirements, such as having headlights, a braking system and a horn or other warning device.

Per the approval, the vehicles may only be operated on county highways — not interstates or parkways — and are prohibited from traveling more than 20 miles on a highway that displays centerline pavement markings. Minitrucks are also prohibited from operating as a street-legal special purpose vehicle on a highway that has been constructed pursuant to

a federal highway program.

Magistrate Ricky Whitlock voiced concern regarding the influx of inspections the sheriff’s office will receive and said he believes the matter is a bad idea. Agreeing that he also isn’t fond of the idea, Magistrate Darin Williams said he had heard from multiple constituents who requested the ordinance be approved. Magistrate Dean Higdon said members in his district had also asked him to support the measure.

The ordinance was ultimately approved in a 4-1 decision, with Whitlock being the sole nay vote. It became effective immediately after passage.

Other business approved at the fiscal court’s first meeting of the fiscal year include:

- Awarding the bid to repair two eight-foot

bridges, one on Parkers Grove Road and one of Hawkins Road, to Hornback Construction. Each bridge is expected to take seven days to repair, with construction beginning on approximately Sept. 1. The projects will cost a total of \$103,900; due to funding from the 80/20 Bridge Program from the state, the county will only be responsible for 20% of the total cost.

- Awarding the road fund lending services loan to Magnolia Bank. The line of credit will have an interest rate of 4.65% for a loan up to \$199,999.99, available for use until June 30, 2026. LaRue County Judge Executive Blake Durrett said the loan will be utilized to allow the road department to work more efficiently and cost effectively by not having to wait for reimbursements before

beginning new projects.

- Awarding the auction bid to Lewis Auction Company.

- The surplus of three vehicles — a 2003 GMC Sierra, a 2013 Ram 1500 and a 2011 Chevrolet Silverado 3500HD — due to all being at the end of their useful life. The GMC and Chevrolet will be surplused via advertisements for sealed bids while the Ram will be sold via public auction.

Department Reports

LaRue County Road Supervisor David Wood informed the court that the department has completed work to J.E. Jones Road, including replacing topsoil in ditches, where needed; adding proper tiles; installing channel line in the ditch line; and grading the roadway. To prevent further erosion, crews will return to the area in the fall to disc

and sow grass.

Other work completed by the road department includes mowing in Roanoke, Lyons Station, White City, Howardstown Hill and KY-210, with mowers now headed into Buffalo, Mt. Sherman and the East side of Magnolia; mow trimming on Parkers Grove Road; cleaning ditches on Grover Thompson Road and Hawkins Road; and installing a French drain on Price Hill Road where water had been standing.

Magistrates thank Wood for his and the department’s work and requested various roadworks in their districts, including mowing, ditch clean-outs, road sign replacements and pothole repairs.

The next meeting of the LaRue County Fiscal Court will be held at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, July 22 at the LaRue County Courthouse.

Houck, Lawson found guilty

BY DENIS HOUSE
PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

BOWLING GREEN

— It took a jury around four hours on July 8 to reach a verdict in the case of Crystal Rogers, the Bardstown woman who went missing on July 3, 2015.

Brooks Houck, the former boyfriend of Rogers, was found guilty of murder and tampering with physical evidence. Joseph Lawson was found guilty of conspiracy to murder and tampering with physical evidence.

The jury recommended a life sentence for Houck, and 20 years for conspiracy to commit murder and five years for tampering with physical evidence for Lawson, to be served consecutively.

“Today, justice was delivered in a Bowling Green courtroom,” Kentucky Attorney General Russell Coleman posted on X. “Our Commonwealth never forgot Crystal Rogers, her children, and loved ones, Prosecutor Shane Young and law enforcement’s dedication



Brooks Houck



Joseph Lawson

to justice, coupled with the tenacity of the Rogers’ family, is the reason for this victory.”

The FBI Louisville Field Office released the following statement. “The men and women of

FBI Louisville officially began Operation Justice Rising in the fall of 2020. Five years later, after countless hours spent conducting numerous interviews and searches, analyzing evidence, collaborating with various FBI Headquarters entities, and coordinating with our federal, state, and local partners, we are proud of the pivotal role we played in seeking justice for Crystal Rogers and her family. We

recognize today’s guilty verdicts would not have been possible without the exceptional efforts of our law enforcement partners at the Kentucky Office of the Attorney General, United States Attorney’s Office-Western District of Kentucky, Kentucky State Police, Internal Revenue Service, Nelson County Sheriff’s Office, and the Bardstown Police Department. We hope this outcome brings some semblance of peace to Crystal’s family and the larger Bardstown community. The FBI will always stand with its partners to pursue justice no matter how long it takes.”

FAMILY STILL SEEKING ANSWERS

Members of Rogers’ family were in attendance and were emotional and relieved once the verdict was rendered, but are still seeking answers about where Rogers’ body is and for Houck to admit he murdered her.

“I think Rosemary (Houck’s mother) and Nick (Houck’s brother)

had something to do with it, and I think that will all come out within time,” Rogers’ daughter, Ashley Miller, told WKLY. She added that while this brought some closure, she still wishes “we could lay her to rest the way she needs to be.” Miller was 14 when her mother vanished.

“I do hope that will happen in time,” she added.

Houck, who was Rogers’ boyfriend and the father of one of her children, was a suspect from the beginning, but wasn’t charged until 2023. Despite extensive searches over the past 10 years, Rogers’ body has never been found.

Sherry Ballard, Crystal’s mother, posted on Facebook that the last couple of weeks “were some of the hardest days of my life,” and added that riding to Bowling Green every day then coming home every day mentally and physically exhausted “took a lot of getting used to.”

She also criticized the defense attorneys (“hav-

ing to sit there and listen to someone defend the person you knew murdered your family was sometimes more than I could take”) and thanked everyone for their support.

“I can’t say thank you enough to everyone in this community that stood by me and supported me through all these years,” she posted. “You are the pillars that kept me supported. I’m very blessed to live in a small town that comes together in events of tragedies.”

Lawson’s father, Steve Lawson, was found guilty of similar charges in May after jurors took just two hours to come to a verdict. He is scheduled to be formally sentenced on Aug. 6 but has already appealed.

OTHER UNSOLVED MURDERS

A year after Rogers went missing, her father, Tommy Ballard, was killed while hunting with his grandson, shot to death by a gun that, according to lead prose-

cutor Shane Young, was purchased from Nick Houck, who used a fake name during the sale.

In 2013, Bardstown Officer Jason Ellis was killed when he was ambushed on the Bluegrass Parkway while moving debris. In 2014, Kathy and Samantha Netherland were found murdered in their home.

Many believe these cases are related, especially those of Ballard and Ellis. Nelson County Sheriff Ramon Pinieroa has said they aren’t officially linked, but there are a lot of similarities. He also told WLKY that the search for Rogers’ body continues.

Houck’s defense attorneys were Steven Schroering and Brian Butler, while Kevin Coleman and Bobby Boyd represented Lawson. The lead prosecutor in the case was Shane Young.

Houck and Joseph Lawson’s sentencing hearing is Aug. 21. Both are expected to file appeals.

BILL

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to \$2,200 per child; and end the taxation of tips and overtime pay.

Social Security obtained by seniors will also be impacted. However, instead of eliminating federal taxes on the income, the bill provides a bonus \$6,000 standard deduction for those 65 and older; the full deduction is available for individuals with an income up to \$75,000 for single filers and \$150,000 for joint filers, and stacks on top of the existing extra deduction for seniors. According to the most recent data released by the Social Security Administration, 104 LaRue Countians aged 65 or older receive SS.

“About 88% of [Americans who seniors who receive SS] will qualify,” Guthrie said in an interview in Hodgenville on Tuesday, July 8. “So, if you essentially live on your social security or it’s a big part of your income, you’ll qualify.”

The above tax provisions will take effect for the 2025 tax season (the April 2026 Tax Day) and expire in 2028. The White House estimates the bill will increase the take-

home-pay for a four-person household in Kentucky between \$6,400 to \$10,600 annually.

Reforms to Medicaid are also expected to affect the local community. While the bill has been slammed for its projected ~\$1 trillion in Medicaid cuts, Guthrie said the changes were essential to preventing fraud, waste and financial abuse within the system; improving accountability at both the individual and state level; and strengthening eligibility requirements to ensure help reaches those who need it most.

“The big thing is, if you’re disabled, a single mother — the original reasons for Medicaid — we didn’t change benefits for people in those categories. What we did was change benefits for people who are able-bodied and able to work,” he said. “I don’t think it’s fair to ask people to wake up every day and go to work and people who get free healthcare can just choose not to work.”

An able-bodied individual is defined as someone between the ages of 19 and 64 who is not pregnant, does not have a dependent child under the age 14 in their household and is not considered legally disabled.

Specified changes

include requiring individuals demonstrate “community engagement” by either working, volunteering or participating in a work program for a combined minimum of 80 hours per month or being enrolled at least half-time in an educational program. The bill also implements more frequent eligibility checks, requiring redeterminations be conducted every six months instead of annually; removes Medicaid access to non-U.S. citizens; and adds a new \$35 co-payment that can be charged to patients using Medicaid services.

According to the Congressional Budget Office — a nonpartisan analysis for the U.S. Congress — the Medicaid provisions within the bill will increase the number of people without health insurance by 7.8 million in 2034; approximately 61% of this number will be due to not meeting community engagement requirements, 28% due to the increased frequency of eligibility checks and 18% due to citizenship requirements.

Guthrie said the bill will also stop a loophole that allowed states to use a provider tax to increase federal Medicaid matching rates in order to meet their payment share to

healthcare providers. Known as provider taxes, the new legislation freezes all current tax rates and implements incremental decreases beginning in 2028.

Critics of the bill contend that the above measure will cause 338 rural hospitals nationwide to close — 35 of which are in Kentucky. This number was determined by the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research at the University of North Carolina by identifying hospitals that are either 1) in the top 10% of Medicaid payer mix of rural hospitals across the county and/or 2) has experienced three consecutive years of negative total margin.

Stating that he had not been provided data on how the Kentucky hospitals were identified, Guthrie said the accusations not only assume that Frankfort will not provide the matching funds necessary to fund Medicaid and the rural hospitals but also does not take into consideration that the reductions will not begin until 2028, which

gives organizations time to assess their current financials and implement necessary changes. He also highlighted a \$50 billion provision of the bill that aims to support rural healthcare and hospitals.

“If you’re a hospital, I certainly understand that you were getting paid more and now you’re going to get paid less over time, but they have time to plan for it and they know it’s coming,” he said. “I spent a lot of time with our Kentucky hospitals ... and we’re going to continue to work with them to make sure we get the policy right.”

“And, [with the Rural Hospital Fund], if there are stressed hospitals, we can help them get through that stress and make sure people have access to rural care.”

Guthrie also highlighted the legislation’s decrease of tax credits for electric vehicles and solar initiatives, stating it’s not the government’s responsibility to subsidize or mandate the expansion of either; securing of American energy dom-

inance by providing funding for the production and transportation of gas and oil within the nation, which will in turn keep the price of energy lower; and appropriation of approximately \$150 billion to support the administration’s border and immigration goals, such as completing the border wall and increasing detention facilities and deportation efforts.

“The passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act is a victory for the millions of American families who will receive a historic tax cut,” Guthrie said. “As part of this legislation the Committee on Energy and Commerce worked to secure major victories targeting waste, fraud, and abuse in federal spending. The bill strengthens Medicaid for those who need it most, ensures American energy dominance, and supports the rapid innovation of American industry. Thank you to President Trump and all our Committee members who worked tirelessly on this legislation.”

