



Police Chief Evan Burton and Mayor Pamela Hoots welcomed Trey Stephens, Grant Avis of Elizabethtown and Hannah Cease of Louisville. (Photo courtesy: City of Columbia)

Learning Leadership at the Local Level: McConnell Scholars Tour Columbia

By Mig Feuser

Three students from the University of Louisville McConnell Center spent part of Monday, Jan. 5, getting a close look at local government and community life during a visit to Columbia.

Columbia native Trey Stephens welcomed fellow McConnell Scholars Grant Avis of Elizabethtown and Hannah Cease of Louisville to City Hall, where the group met with Pamela Hoots and Evan Burton. The visit offered an inside view of how municipal government operates and how local leadership shapes day-to-day life in a small but growing Kentucky community.

The McConnell Center is a non-partisan educational institution at the University

of Louisville dedicated to identifying, recruiting and nurturing Kentucky's next generation of leaders. Its core principles—leadership, scholarship and service—are woven throughout the McConnell Scholars Program, a competitive four-year experience that supplements traditional coursework with enhanced academic and civic opportunities under the direction of Gary L. Gregg, PhD.

Programming for McConnell Scholars emphasizes the foundations of leadership and American political and social thought. Students regularly participate in Socratic-style seminars with University of Louisville faculty and nationally recognized scholars, authors and public leaders. Recent discussions

have ranged from dystopian literature and the women's suffrage movement to America's British political tradition and the Federalist and Anti-Federalist debates at the nation's founding.

For Avis and Cease, Monday's stop marked their first visit to Columbia. After their meeting at City Hall, the students toured the community to learn more about its history, institutions and recent growth, gaining a ground-level perspective on how civic leadership functions outside the classroom.

City officials said visits like this help connect future leaders with the realities of local governance, while also giving Columbia an opportunity to share its story with students who may one day help shape Kentucky's public life.

Police, Sheriff's Office Report Busy Close to 2025, Early January Arrests

By Mig Feuser

The Columbia Police Department closed out December 2025 with a steady workload, while law enforcement activity continued into the first days of the new year with arrests handled jointly by city and county officers.

According to the department's December activity report, Columbia Police officers opened six criminal cases during the month and investigated 28 traffic accidents. Officers also responded to more than 800 calls for service, reflecting a consistently high demand for police presence throughout the city during the holiday season. One of the month's highlights was recognition for Officer Elliot Smith, who received the 2025 Governor's Impaired Driving Enforcement Award. The annual honor is presented by the Kentucky Office of Highway Safety and recognizes outstanding efforts in impaired driving enforcement across the state.

The department also reported continued emphasis on training and school safety. During December, elementary school resource officer John Harris completed 40 hours of Department of Criminal Justice Training in-service instruction. In addition, Columbia Police finalized an updated School Resource Officer contract with Adair County Schools, continuing cooperation between law enforcement and the school district.

Law enforcement activity carried into the new year with an arrest Sunday evening on the Cumberland Parkway. Columbia Police officers were dispatched at approximately 5:16 p.m. on January 4, 2026, in response to a reckless driving complaint. Following



John Harris (left), here with Sheriff Gary Roy, is the new School Resource Officer for Adair County's elementary school. (Photo courtesy: Gary Roy)

investigation, Debra S. Clark, 63, of Columbia, was taken into custody.

Clark was charged with Reckless Driving; Operating a Motor Vehicle Under the Influence of a Controlled Substance, 1st Offense, under aggravated circumstances; Prescription Controlled Substance Not in Proper Container, 1st Offense; Tampering with Physical Evidence; Possession of a Controlled Substance, 1st Degree, 1st Offense (Hydrocodone); and Possession of a Controlled Substance, 1st Degree, 1st Offense (Opiates). Clark was transported to the Adair County Regional Jail. The arrest was made by the Columbia Police Department with assistance from the Adair County Sheriff's Office.

Earlier in the week, Adair County Sheriff Gary Roy

reported an arrest following a complaint in the Pellyton Community. Deputies were dispatched last Monday after receiving a report of someone possibly being behind a residence in the woods. Chief Deputy Brandon Hitch and Deputy Josh Durbin located William Hanson, 45, of Columbia. Hanson was arrested by Deputy Durbin and charged with Public Intoxication; Possession of Drug Paraphernalia; Possession of Marijuana; and Possession of a Controlled Substance, 1st Degree, 1st Offense, Methamphetamine.

The December activity report and early January arrests reflect ongoing coordination between city and county agencies as they continue enforcement, training, and public safety efforts across Columbia and Adair County.

State Audit Finds No Issues With Adair County Clerk's 2024 Financial Statements

By Mig Feuser

State Auditor Allison Ball has released the audit of the 2024 financial statements of Adair County Clerk Lisa Greer, with the review noting no instances of noncompliance or material weaknesses.

Under state law, the Auditor of Public Accounts is required to conduct annual audits of county clerks and sheriffs. Auditing standards require

the auditor's report to state whether the financial statements fairly present receipts, disbursements and excess fees in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

While the clerk's financial statement did not follow that specific format, the audit found it to be fairly presented under the regulatory basis of accounting, an accepted reporting method used for all 120 county clerk audits conducted statewide.

The audit also reported no matters involving internal control over financial reporting that would be considered material weaknesses. The Adair County Clerk's Office is responsible for collecting certain taxes, issuing licenses, maintaining county records and providing other statutory services, with operations funded through fees collected in conjunction with those duties.

Adair County Wrestlers Earn Podium Finishes at Pulaski County New Year's Bash

By Kelly Wooley Sports Coordinator

Members of the Adair County Indians wrestling team turned in strong performances at the Pulaski County Maroons New Year's Bash, earning three fourth-place finishes in a competitive field. Keylin Bergin placed

fourth in the 132-pound weight class after a solid run through the tournament, battling tough opponents throughout the day. Leo Garsee followed with a fourth-place finish at 141 pounds, showcasing determination and consistency on the mat. At 175 pounds, Bowen Furkin also earned a fourth-place finish, adding to Adair

County's success at the event.

The Pulaski County New Year's Bash featured teams from across the region, providing a challenging test for the Indians. Adair County's podium finishes highlight the team's continued growth and competitiveness as the wrestling season moves forward.

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