

Marion's FY27 budget aims to invest in equipment

STAFF REPORT

Despite navigating two of the largest infrastructure challenges in the city's recent history, Marion officials say the community is entering a new phase focused on rebuilding equipment, improving services and investing in long-term capital needs.

The Marion City Council recently approved the city's fiscal year 2026-27 budget, which takes effect this week. The spending plan projects approximately \$7.2 million in revenues and \$8.15 million in expenditures. While the overall budget is noticeably smaller than the previous fiscal year's plan, City Administrator Adam Ledford said that comparison is misleading because last year's budget included millions of dollars tied to the completion of the city's sewer rehabilitation project.

The city has been through a great deal over the past few years with the sewer project and then the water issues surrounding Lake George. Yet the city administrator said the town's financial framework is on solid footing and it can now begin focusing on replacing equipment and making improvements that have been put off for years.

While the water situation has not been completely solved, plans are to eventually move toward buying water wholesale from Crittenden-Livingston Water District, which is building a new plant on the Cumberland River. When that



The City of Marion is preparing to rehabilitate and repaint its two clear well water storage tanks at the treatment plant, a project officials say will improve water quality while extending the life of the infrastructure. The \$443,000 project will include interior and exterior repairs and painting of the 200,000- and 110,000-gallon tanks, which have not been painted in more than two decades. Water Superintendent Jeff Black said the work will help eliminate accumulated iron and manganese deposits, allowing the tanks to "start fresh." One tank will remain in service while the other is rehabilitated, with each phase expected to take seven to eight days.

happens, the city will mothball its own water plant and rely solely on the two-county water supplier, which is spending more than \$50 million to increase capacity at its plant and improve the distribution system.

The city spent the past several years completing a major sewer system rehabilitation project while simultaneously confronting the water crisis after a leak was discovered in

the earthen dam at Lake George, Marion's longtime water source. Those challenges required significant financial commitments and forced city leaders to concentrate resources on critical infrastructure.

With the sewer project complete and the city continuing to move forward with long-term plans to secure a more reliable water supply, Ledford said Marion is now in a position to

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address other needs that have accumulated over time.

One of the most visible priorities is upgrading the city's aging fleet of equipment.

Ledford said Marion has gone years without owning a street sweeper. Likewise, equipment such as a leaf vacuum has been absent from the city's inventory despite its usefulness in maintaining neighborhoods and storm drainage systems.

"We haven't had some of this equipment for a long time," Ledford said.

Such equipment, the city administrator said, helps the maintenance department do its jobs more efficiently and provide better services to residents.

"People will begin seeing some of those investments over the next few years," Ledford said.

The city's capital improvement plan reflects that renewed emphasis on replacing aging equipment and investing in municipal infrastructure. Among the planned purchases are a street sweeper, additional police vehicles, new firefighting equipment and self-contained breathing apparatus, park and trail improvements, and continued upgrades to the city's water and sewer systems. Larger utility projects, include water line replacements and improvements to clearwells at the water plant. Those holding

tanks will be used now in support of the city's water plant, but can also be used going forward when Marion switches over to Crittenden-Livingston Water District.

Those water projects are expected to rely heavily on grants and other outside funding rather than local tax dollars.

The operating budget also continues to prioritize public safety and essential city services. Funding is provided for police, fire, street maintenance, parks, planning and zoning, utility operations and tourism while maintaining debt obligations associated with previous infrastructure investments.

Ledford said city officials have worked to balance maintaining existing services while preparing for future needs.

Infrastructure isn't something people see every day, Ledford said, but it's critical to the community.

"Now we're reaching the point where we can also begin replacing equipment," he added.

While much of the city's recent attention has focused on major infrastructure projects, Ledford said the newly adopted budget represents a transition from addressing urgent needs to planning strategically for the future. He said the city has weathered some significant challenges and now it's time to invest in the future.

Ugandan missionary leaves mark on local churches

BY DAVID R. DRENNAN
THE CRITTENDEN PRESS

Pastor Ross Atwell and his wife Devon were preparing for just a regular Wednesday night business meeting recently at Freedom General Baptist Church when the unexpected happened. A missionary from Africa came to their church for Bible study.

"Once he learned that we would be having a quick business meeting, he decided he would leave and come back another time," Devon Atwell recalled.

But the Atwells couldn't just let him leave without knowing more about this seemingly random visitor.

It wasn't just random. Atwell explained.

"Our church, Freedom General Baptist, had been discussing and praying about various missions and missionaries," the pastor said.

Now there was a missionary literally at their door. They learned that his name was Samuel Kiguli, and that he was a pastor from Uganda. Though based in North Carolina, he had actually been to western Kentucky several times to speak at local churches about his faith and Light with Truth Ministries, an orphanage in Uganda.

"The entire congregation was in awe that everything unfolded as it did that night. We all kept saying it was a "God thing!" Atwell added.

That random meeting wouldn't be the only time Kiguli spoke at Freedom. The Atwells have learned much more about Kiguli and the orphanage in Uganda.

"Through Light With Truth, he is able to spread the gospel near and far," Atwell stated.

The Atwells are also excited about future opportunities with Kiguli.

"We don't realize how blessed and

fortunate we really are and how only one person can make all the difference in someone's life. By supporting Sam and his ministry, if even just one person accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior, it was well worth it," the pastor said.

Kiguli has also spoken at Emmanuel Baptist Church three times since coming to America.

"His spirit is contagious. Our congregation was encouraged and inspired by his presence and message," said Emmanuel Baptist Pastor Kirk Greenfield.

Hearing from people like Kiguli is a great reminder of the Great Commission, Jesus' instruction to take the gospel to all nations, the pastor said.

That Great Commission is something Kiguli takes seriously, as that is the reason why he is here. Since his arrival in America in 2017, he has preached in various states, including Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, Ohio, and Alabama.

"Wherever the doors open..." Kiguli stated.

Kiguli will also tell you that living out the Great Commission also requires sacrifice. He hasn't seen his family, including his wife and daughter, since he left Uganda in 2017. Despite missing his family and home, Kiguli keeps his focus on serving the Lord. He described it as "a calling, a command to go no matter what."

"God is always there to take me through," Kiguli added.

In addition to preaching the Gospel, Kiguli tells congregations he speaks to about the ongoing ministry in Uganda that he and his wife founded. Light with Truth Ministries serves 350 orphaned children by providing them clean water, food

and healthcare. The children attend classes as well as church.

"We assist families and reach people for Christ," Kiguli explained.

Kiguli notes that being a Ugandan missionary in America has some distinct challenges.

"The challenge is to go where no one knows you, to get established and do what God is telling you to do," he said.

Kiguli has worked to build trust with churches and leaders here, particularly emphasizing that he is not just here after money. Kiguli explained,

"I am here to promote salvation and God's grace. I go to many churches with different names, but I just preach Jesus," he said.

As far as funding, Kiguli says many churches and associations have blessed him while he has served in the area. This included the Ohio River Baptist Association allowing him to stay at their office. These blessings have allowed him to continue his ministry both here and back home in Uganda.

"God is faithful. When you need money for food or gas, you have it. If you don't have it, wait till tomorrow," Kiguli said.

He considers every opportunity to share Christ with others – whether in Marion or anywhere else – a privilege.

"It is an opportunity I don't want to lose. I do it with all my heart," he said.

Kiguli also noted that his ministry here was an opportunity to say "thank you" in person as he recalled how American missionaries travelled to Uganda and shared their faith. That was how he became a Christian.

"The Bible changes lives," he stated.



Missionary Samuel Kiguli and Freedom General Baptist Pastor Ross Atwell stand inside the church's sanctuary.

Auditions open Monday for CAF's outdoor play Macbeth in September

STAFF REPORT

Auditions for the Community Arts Foundation's production of *Macbeth* will be held Monday, July 6 at Fohs Hall. According to the CAF, the classic Shakespearean tragedy has been abridged and adapted for younger audiences. Auditions are open to students in fourth through 12th grades.

The production marks the CAF directorial debut of Marion native Katie Keene, a Hollywood actress best known for her role as Galina in Netflix's *Rogue Warfare* trilogy.

CAF officials Kim Vince and Braden Locke said the choice of *Macbeth* was intentional.

"It's recognizable, has an interesting storyline and is seasonably appropriate," Vince said, noting the play's witches and ghosts make it a good fit for the fall season.

"We've been growing our youth program through musicals," Vince said. "This gives local youth a different platform to showcase their on-stage talents."

Students interested in participating can register and obtain audition materials at communityartsfoundation.org.

The production opens Sept. 19 and is free to the public. Performances will be held outdoors on Hayward Lawn, across from Fohs Hall at the site of the former hospital. The show serves as CAF's pilot project for an annual outdoor production at that location.

POSTAL

Continued from page 1 ignore. Here we are asking people to use the mail to save the mail. Yet that may be exactly what is required.

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Chris Evans, a newspaperman since 1979, has been editor of The Press for more than 30 years and is the author of South of the Mouth of Sandy, a true story about crime along the Tennessee River. You can find it on Amazon or wherever books are sold.

TOURISM

Continued from page 1 eral Museum in Marion.

Among neighboring counties, Caldwell County posted the region's largest increase, with visitor spending rising 23.5% to \$14.03 million. The state's figures came with no explanation for increases or decreases in each county.

Regional rankings for total visitor spending placed Lyon County first at \$31.18 million, followed by Livingston County at \$23.44 million, Caldwell County at \$14.03 million, Union County at \$5.72 million, Webster County at \$4.40 million and Crittenden County at \$4.26 million.

Within Crittenden County, transportation-related spending accounted for the largest share of visitor expenditures at \$1.36 million, followed by lodging at \$1.07 million. Retail purchases totaled \$900,000, while food and beverage spending reached \$750,000. Recreation spending was reported at \$180,000.

The figures come as Marion's Tourism and Recreation Commission continues to invest in community events, heritage tourism and local attractions. The commission is funded through a 3% restaurant and lodging tax, and local officials have noted that tax collections have shown steady growth in recent years.

"Marion and Crittenden County offer unique visitor experiences," said Michele Edwards, executive director of the Marion Tourism Commission. "With limited lodging availability our travelers are typically day users. They are visiting our Amish Community, the Marion-Crittenden County Park and attractions such as the Clement Mineral Museum and the Cave-In-Rock Ferry."

Edwards said Marion Tourism and Recreation Commission's newly approved budget for FY27 offers an opportunity to increase marketing for attractions, event funding and quality-of-life projects such as Community Arts Foundation, city-county park and city beautification.

"We plan to expand our downtown mural trail and possibly add a new Christmas event," she said.

Statewide, tourism generated a record \$14.6 billion economic impact in 2025 and supported nearly 97,000 jobs. Gov. Andy Beshear said 81.1 million travelers visited Kentucky during the year, spending a total of \$10.4 billion across the state.

"Kentucky has the best experiences," Gov. Andy Beshear said while announcing the report. "From climbing and hiking at the Red River Gorge, to witnessing the rare moonbow at Cumberland Falls State Resort Park."