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TWO DOLLARS

## Ferry Remains Closed Talks appear stalled after KY's final offer

Cave-In-Rock Ferry remains closed this week, and negotiations appear to have stalled after the ferry operator rejected what local officials believe is Kentucky's final contract offer.

Crittenden County Judge-Executive Perry Newcom said the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet's latest proposal, which was rejected by the ferry owner, appears to be the state's final offer at this point. Without a new agreement, ferry service remains suspended across the Ohio River between Kentucky and Illinois.

Newcom said state legislators have limited options to intervene until the Kentucky General Assembly returns to session in January. Any immediate change in the contract offer would likely have to come through the governor's office or state transportation officials.

Newcom is encouraging residents, commuters and businesses impacted by the ferry closure to contact state officials and explain how the shutdown is affecting them. To leave a message regarding the Cave-In-Rock Ferry crossing, contact the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet at 502-564-8100 or the Illinois Department of Transportation at 217-782-7820 or 866-273-3681.

## Riverview Park pier remains on dry land

Persistent high water on the Ohio River has delayed installation of the seasonal courtesy dock at Riverview Park. However, it could go into the water next week, according to county officials.

The floating pier, first installed in 2021, is normally in place by this point in the summer boating season, providing a convenient place for recreational boaters and anglers to load and unload. However, river levels have remained too high to safely launch the dock.

The dock can be safely installed when the Ohio River stage at Shawneetown is between 15 and 16 feet. Delays are not unprecedented. Last year, the Riverview Park dock was not installed until late July because of continued high water.

Riverview Park, also known as Dam 50, includes a concrete public boat ramp that remains available for use while boaters await installation of the seasonal floating pier. County officials are expected to launch the dock once river conditions allow.

## MPD: Uptick in DUIs

Marion Police recorded an unusual increase in DUI arrests during June, reporting three impaired-driving arrests in a single month. Historical department data show June 2026 had more DUI arrests than any June in at least the past eight years and nearly equaled some recent annual totals. MPD reported just two DUI arrests during all of 2024 and six during all of 2022. See complete MPD monthly data from June on Page 3.



## Transportation Disruptions Mexico Bridge out for bid

STAFF REPORT

After more than a year with Mexico Road closed at Clement Creek, Crittenden County is taking the next step toward replacing the bridge, one of several local crossings affected by closures or weight restrictions.

Crittenden County Fiscal Court is accepting sealed bids for the full replacement of the bridge, which has been closed since May 22, 2025, after inspections determined the structure had critical deficiencies. Bids will be opened July 27, with the fiscal court expected to award the contract during a special called meeting July 30.

According to the request for proposals, engineers determined the bridge's substructure was in criti-



This bridge near Mattoon is one of a couple still out on state roads across the county.

cal condition and that complete replacement was the most practical and economical solution. The new bridge will be significantly larger than the existing structure, expanding from a 32-foot span to a 60-foot-by-24-foot structure to better protect against scour and improve water flow be-

neath the bridge.

The project includes demolition and removal of the existing bridge.

The Mexico Road bridge is one of three county bridges approved for 100 percent replacement funding through a state bridge program, according to Judge-Executive Perry Newcom. It is the only one of the three currently closed. However, there are two state highway bridges closed for replacement.

The other two county bridges set for replacement are on Copperas Springs Road across Butler Creek between KY 506 and Blackburn Church Road, and Nunn Switch Road, between US 60 East and Fish Trap Road. Both re-

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### Not so simple to solve this!

If there has been one thing I've learned covering this story over the past several years, it is this: everybody has a solution.

My phone has rung. My inbox has filled up. Social media has offered everything from practical ideas to pie-in-the-sky dreams. Build a bridge. Charge a toll. Move the ferry somewhere else. Hire another operator. Surely somebody can just step in and make it happen.



Chris Evans  
Press Editor & Publisher  
About Town

Let's take them one at a time.

Why not just charge a toll? That sounds easy enough, and it may very well become part of the eventual solution. The problem isn't whether people would pay. Most people I've talked with would gladly pay a few dollars if it meant keeping the ferry running.

The problem is collecting it. Right now the ferry operates with a licensed pilot and one deckhand. They're busy enough loading vehicles, operating the vessel and getting people safely across the Ohio River. There isn't another employee standing around to collect money, make change, answer questions or deal with credit cards.

Each state could install a ticket booth on its side of the river, but then somebody has to build it, maintain it and staff it. An automated payment system sounds attractive until you consider the cost of installing it and keeping it operating in an outdoor river environment.

There has even been discussion of some type of pass system or windshield decal for frequent users.

That works fine for commuters. But what about the family from Indiana pulling up with a boat headed to Kentucky Lake? Or the tourist who has never crossed before? Where do they buy their first pass?

Those are details that sound small until somebody has to solve them. Why not find another contractor? This may be the biggest misconception.

The ferry isn't simply a boat floating on the river. Lonnie Ray Lewis, Inc., owns the Kentucky landing property and operates under an exclusive franchise dating back more than 150 years. Kentucky law still recognizes those old perpetual and irrevocable ferry franchises.

In other words, this isn't like putting out bids to mow the courthouse lawn. The owner has made it clear he isn't interested in selling the franchise, although leasing arrangements could always be explored if everyone agreed.

Even then, who would take it? Starting a ferry operation

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## Floral Ensemble

Pamela Buijk of the Salem Garden Club waters a planter at Salem City Hall featuring an ensemble of blooming pink mandevilla, purple zinnias and ornamental sweet potato vine. Buijk volunteers her time to help keep the flowers healthy and colorful throughout the summer, adding to the appearance of the downtown civic grounds.

## Clarke's cowboy ministry is expanding

KENTUCKY TODAY

Most pastors dream of building a healthy, growing church. Chris Clarke believes God is calling him to leave one.

After serving Kentucky Lake Cowboy Church for the past 16 years, Clarke recently announced he will step down as pastor to plant a new cowboy church in White Plains, about an hour east of the Marshall County congregation he helped establish.

The decision wasn't prompted by declining attendance or ministry challenges. In fact, Kentucky Lake Cowboy Church is experiencing one of its strongest seasons yet. The church averages around 110 in attendance and re-



Chris Clarke is a regular columnist for The Crittenden Press. His writings are typically published the first newspaper of each month. Clarke grew up in Salem and lived and worked around Crittenden and Livingston counties much of his life.

cently celebrated its anniversary with a record crowd of 150.

For Clarke, the decision

came down to faithfully following what he believes God was asking him to do.

"When God speaks, we have to make the decision," Clarke said. "We're either going to obey Him or disobey Him."

That sense of calling came unexpectedly just a few months ago while he was cleaning horse stalls at his home in White Plains in Hopkins County.

"I felt the Lord clearly saying, I'm through with you at Kentucky Lake Cowboy Church, and I want you to start a new work for Me right there where you live in White Plains," Clarke said.

The call to start over

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