



Harlan claims 'All A'  
Regional Title.  
Page 8A

# Harlan Enterprise

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WEDNESDAY, JAN. 21, 2026



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Longtime first responder Delmas "DW" Baker was brought back to Harlan County with a police and EMS escort after dying from a long illness

## Baker, longtime first responder, remembered for service to area

By **JENNIFER MCDANIELS**  
*Harlan Enterprise*

Local first responders are mourning the loss of one of Harlan County's most devoted emergency workers who committed his career to service for others. Delmas Wayne "DW" Baker, who has been residing in Richmond in recent years, died after a long illness on Jan. 9.

Baker, 48, was a flight medic for Air Evac, but he had served many years working for the ambulance services of Harlan EMS, Mountain EMS and Knox EMS. Baker had also served for a number of years with Harlan City and Sunshine Volunteer fire departments. His impact among first responders was so profound that a police and emergency services escort was organized to bring Baker back to Harlan County and to Anderson-Laws and Jones Funeral Home, which is in charge of his funeral. First responders in Harlan County who knew and worked with Baker said it was his professionalism, dedication and

strong desire to help that made him a standout in emergency services. Baker was also a mentor to many first responders.

David McGill, District 9 Regional Response Manager for Kentucky Emergency Management, knew Baker for 27 years, having worked with him at Mountain EMS and Harlan EMS. They were also fellow firefighters. McGill formerly worked as Harlan County Emergency Management Director, and he knew firsthand how valuable Baker had been to the area and how respected and admired he was.

"What I admired most about DW was his compassion and his constant willingness to help others, no matter the situation," McGill said. "He was caring, compassionate and funny with a genuine willingness to help anyone in any way he could. "He loved being a first responder because it allowed him to serve others, make a real difference in people's lives and help his community when it needed him most."

McGill said Baker's impact on

Harlan County included his commitment to training and mentoring first-responders.

"His guidance shaped countless individuals who continue to serve the community today," McGill said, "ensuring his legacy lives on through their work and commitment."

Harlan County Sheriff Chris Brewer worked briefly with Baker when he was a young deputy, but he still remembers how inspiring Baker's commitment to helping people was as well as his tenacity in coaching rookie first responders. Brewer said Baker's knowledge was vast and his heart was big.

"I am thankful for DW's many years of service as a first responder," Brewer said. "Any scene that I can recall working with him, he showed professionalism and compassion to the public, which is invaluable to a community. I offer my prayers to his family."

Charles Bailey, who has risen through the ranks of emergency services to currently serve as

See **BAKER**, 2A

## Several arrested for heroin, meth trafficking in Cumberland

**Jennifer McDaniels**  
*Harlan Enterprise*

An ongoing investigation led to heroin and methamphetamine arrests made on Saturday by police in the New York Section of Cumberland. The arrests happened after Cumberland Police Department (CPD) officers, assisted by deputies with the Harlan County Sheriff's Office, served a felony warrant. According to CPD officer Aaron Smith, the investigation has been taking place for an extended period of time, stemming from other drug investigation in the area.

"These investigations require coordination and thorough work to ensure cases are built properly and charges are supported by evidence," Smith said. "We do not rush these cases, and we act when the time is right."

Names of those arrested are being withheld for now as, according to Smith. The several arrests that occurred on Saturday included charges of possession of methamphetamine, trafficking methamphetamine, trafficking heroin, drug paraphernalia and a convicted felon possession of a handgun. The arrests were made without

incident.

"Saturday's arrests were conducted safely and without incident," Smith said. "Officer safety and public safety remain our top priorities during all enforcement actions."

The New York Section of Cumberland has been the location for many of CPD's drug-related complaints. While Smith said drug complaints come from a variety of people and places, the New York Section has been an area of concern for both residents and police. He added that other drug arrests had been made in the New York Section just a couple of nights ago and just a couple of houses up from Saturday's arrests.

"We arrested five individuals for drug charges," Smith said. "Drug activity is not confined to one location, and we respond wherever complaints, intelligence or criminal activity is identified."

Smith said the recent arrests were proof that CPD is taking the community's drug problem "extremely seriously." He said officers dedicate countless hours to investigations, surveillance and coordination with partner agencies to remove illegal drugs from

See **SEVERAL**, 2A



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Heroin, meth, drug paraphernalia and a handgun were seized by police after several arrests were made Saturday in the New York Section of Cumberland.

## City hears reasons for water rate increase

By **JOE ASHER**  
*Harlan Enterprise*

The Harlan City Council heard from Harlan Municipal Water Works Superintendent Otis Lews during a recent meeting regarding the need for a 15 percent increase in water rates.

The Harlan Municipal Water Board controls the water service and sets rates for the city of Harlan, according to a previous report.

Mayor Joe Meadors called on Lewis to speak to the council shortly after calling the meeting

to order.

"Last council meeting, you all requested we get Harlan Municipal Water Works here to give us an update on what the rational was behind the increase on the water bill," Meadors said. "Tonight, I have Otis Lewis, who is the superintendent of Harlan Municipal Water Works."

Lewis then addressed the council.

"I want to make everybody aware of what's going on," Lewis said. "I'll start out by saying the Harlan Municipal Water Works Board has always been conservative. We put our

customers in mind."

According to Lewis, the board puts customers first when making decisions. He explained that the 15 percent water rate increase is the first since 2013.

Lewis informed the council an upgrade project was delayed due to COVID.

"That project was supposed to have been underway in 2021," Lewis said. "In 2020, COVID hit and shut it all down. There were major delays, and here we are today five years later trying to get out project underway."

Lewis said a rate increase was expected at that time to help

fund the upgrade project along with the increase in operational expenses.

"It just kept getting put off," Lewis said. "So, the board reached a point where they decided they were going to have to move forward to cover the operational costs now."

Lewis noted a review of finances showed a need for a 15 percent rate increase.

"I am hopeful that you have been provided with information about those rates," Lewis said.

Meadors confirmed the council has been provided with the rate information.

Lewis explained many operational costs have greatly increased since 2013.

"The cost for lab analysis and lab services and out water treatment processing has skyrocketed just from 2020 to now," Lewis said.

Lewis pointed out inflation has caused significant price increases over the years.

"We haven't had a rate increase since 2013," Lewis said. "We will have to have another rate increase at some point...it will be required for debt service on loan payment. That will

See **CITY**, 2A

### INDEX

Classifieds	7A	Sports	8A
Crossword	5A	Sudoku	5A
Deaths	3A		



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### OBITS

EARL ALLEN COTTRELL, SR., 65  
BRENDA GAIL NEAL, 77  
MICHAEL RAY CREECH, 79

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