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Dennis Brown/LEWIS COUNTY HERALD

Damien Hebbeler is escorted to a transport vehicle after being found guilty of intentional murder in the death of Kylie Weitz. The jury recommended a 50 year sentence.

Hebbeler found guilty of intentional murder

By Dennis K. Brown

A Lewis County jury has found Damien Hebbeler guilty of intentional murder in connection with the 2023 shooting death of 20-year-old Kylie Marie Weitz of Garrison.

The verdict was returned last Tuesday following a trial prosecuted by the Kentucky Attorney General's Office. Jurors recommended a sentence of 50 years in prison.

According to the Attorney General's Office, Hebbeler intentionally shot Weitz at close range on August 9, 2023, resulting in her death.

The case stems from an incident in the Garrison community in which Kentucky State Police Post 8 in Morehead was contacted by Lewis County Dispatch to assist with a death investigation.

Officers located Weitz deceased inside a residence with what was initially reported to be a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

As the investigation progressed, authorities determined the shooting was not self-inflicted. Detectives concluded Hebbeler discharged the firearm that caused Weitz's death. He was subsequently arrested and charged with murder.

During trial testimony,



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Kylie Weitz

prosecutors presented evidence that Hebbeler had previously made statements indicating he wanted to kill Weitz. The Attorney General's Office also stated Hebbeler admitted to carrying a specific round of ammunition, which matched the bullet used in the fatal shooting.

Attorney General Russell Coleman said the verdict represents accountability in a domestic violence case.

"Today's jury verdict delivers hard-won justice and affirms that Kylie Marie Weitz's life mattered," Coleman said. "In Kentucky, we take domestic violence crimes seriously, and we will continue to hold offenders accountable."

The case was prosecuted by Assistant Attorney General Tony Skeans and Special Prosecutions Unit Executive Director

Tim Cocanougher. The Attorney General's Office of Victims Advocacy assisted the victim's family throughout the process.

Kentucky State Police led the investigation, with assistance from the Lewis County Sheriff's Department and the Lewis County Coroner's Office.

The jury's recommendation of a 50-year sentence reflects the seriousness of the charge, a Class A felony under Kentucky law.

Circuit Judge Brian McCloud presented options to the jury of finding Hebbeler not guilty, intentional murder, wanton murder under extreme indifference to human life, second-degree, or reckless homicide.

In closing statements, Hebbeler's attorney said there was no motive in the incident.

"There is no evidence that on August 9, 2023, Damien wanted Kylie dead," she told the jury during her eight-minute closing.

In explaining Hebbeler's actions following the shooting, she said, "That is not the behavior of someone acting with extreme indifference to human life. That is the behavior of a terrified young man who just realized, in an instant, that he caused the unthinkable."

Evidence indicated Hebbeler had called 911 after the incident and reported that Weitz had shot herself.

Skeans addressed jurors for 13 minutes in his closing statement, part of it to replay a video recorded by Weitz of an earlier event.

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Initiative garners local attention

By Dennis K. Brown

A locally founded business aimed at bringing travelers into small towns across Kentucky is gaining statewide recognition and new momentum.

The Kentucky Coffee Trail, founded in Vanceburg by Jenni Kaus and her husband, Mike Johnson, has been selected as one of six businesses in the inaugural 2026 Accelerate 606 cohort.

The competitive program supports high-potential small businesses across Appalachian Kentucky with mentorship, strategic planning, and access to funding.

As part of the program, Kaus will receive a \$10,000 grant during the Invest 606 Showcase scheduled for Thursday, April 2, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. at Creekside Gardens in London.

The Kentucky Coffee Trail is designed to connect independent coffee shops across all nine of Kentucky's tourism regions through a shared route, encouraging travelers to venture off main highways and into small communities.

Investigation launched in fatal KY 59 collision

By Dennis K. Brown

Emergency crews from multiple counties responded Saturday evening to a serious multi-vehicle crash on KY 59 near McCartney Bend south of Vanceburg.

Sheriff Johnny Bivens said the call was received shortly after 8:00 p.m. reporting a multi-vehicle accident with unknown injuries and at least one vehicle remaining in the roadway.

As the situation developed, additional information indicated that children were involved and that injuries were severe, prompting a large-scale emergency response.

Lewis County EMS units, initially tied up on other calls, coordinated with surrounding agencies for assistance. Portsmouth EMS responded, and additional resources were requested from neighboring counties to assist with transportation of those injured.

Fire departments from Vanceburg, Black Oak, Camp Dix, and Lewis County Station 2 were

dispatched to assist at the scene, along with the Lewis County Sheriff's Office, Kentucky State Police and the Lewis County Coroner's Office.

Air medical services were requested due to the severity of injuries. After coordination challenges and multiple requests, a medical helicopter was able to respond, and two patients were airlifted from the scene for treatment. One person was pronounced dead at the scene by the Lewis County Coroner.

First responders had also been dispatched to a serious crash with multiple victims in Mason County at the same time.

The roadway was shut down for an extended period as Kentucky State Police conducted a reconstruction investigation.

Crews remained on scene for several hours before clearing.

No additional details on the extent of injuries or identities of those involved had been released as of press time.

The crash remains under investigation.

SOS reports business filing scam

By Tom Latek
Kentucky Today

There are several scams making the rounds throughout the state, and the Kentucky Secretary of State's office says there is even a scam involving annual business filings required to be submitted to his office.

Secretary of State Michael Adams is warning business owners to avoid being hustled, as letters notifying them to file their annual reports hit mailboxes across the Commonwealth. Annual reports must be filed between January 1 and June

30 each year and can be submitted online or by mail for \$15.

However, some business owners are being charged upwards of \$160 in addition to the actual \$15 filing fee by unofficial parties sending solicitation letters to file reports on their behalf. To make matters more confusing, the total \$175 charge is the same amount most business owners pay annually for the limited liability entity tax ("the LLET") with their tax return filed with the Department of Revenue.

"Don't get hustled," Adams said. "File your annual business report directly with the Secretary of State and pay only \$15."

The Secretary of State's office added, "It's unclear whether these third parties even file the reports for the fees they charge. Business owners can search their business online to confirm whether their annual report has been filed. If they have paid for services they did not receive, they may file a dispute with their bank and also report the incident to local law enforce-



Jenni Kaus and Mike Johnson of Vanceburg founded The Kentucky Coffee Trail, which was recently selected for the Accelerate 606 program.

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Lynn Flinders
Gene Applegate

