



Friday Finale

The Crashers to conclude Friday After 5's 30th season • C1

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Reaching for the stars



Photos by Alan Warren, Messenger-Inquirer | avarren@messenger-inquirer.com
New Principal Sarah Brown greets first-grade student Tiana McCook as she arrives at the front entrance on the first day of school, Thursday, at Estes Elementary School.

Students, staff kick off new school year across OPS

BY FREDDIE BOURNE
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Enthusiasm filled the air early Thursday morning across Owensboro Public Schools as the district welcomed students for the first day of the 2026-27 school year.

“We’re really excited to have some fun, friendly faces back in the building with us,” said Dr. Sarah Brown, principal of Estes Elementary School, ahead of students’ arrival at 7:30 a.m. “We’ve actually been prepping over and over and over again. The whole staff has been coming together and talking about exactly how this day would go.

“Obviously things will pop up, but you try to prepare the best that you can,” Brown added. “We’re more than excited to welcome everybody into the building to show that hard work we’ve been prepping for pays off when the kids are here.”

Before the doors officially opened, siblings



Car ride parents line up to drop off students on Thursday outside of Estes Elementary School on the first day of school.

Blaize and Hazel Riley waited outside on a green bench beneath the front entrance awning with their mother, Kayla McElyea.

Though 10-year-old Hazel Riley, who is entering fifth grade and plans to finish elementary school in May, is already familiar with Estes, Thursday marked her brother’s first day of school — bringing with it some minor apprehension.

“I’m kind of nervous because he (doesn’t) really know anyone around

him,” she said.

Hazel Riley said she planned to show 5-year-old Blaize Riley around the building, making sure he knew where important areas of the school were located.

“Definitely the cafeteria,” Hazel Riley said, “and the gym.”

From first glance, however, Blaize Riley appeared to be at ease as he began his academic career at Estes.

“I’m feeling good,” Blaize Riley said with a grin, giving a small

SEE OPS/PAGE A2



Photos by Greg Eans, Messenger-Inquirer | geans@messenger-inquirer.com
Burns Elementary School Principal Heather Newman hugs fifth grade student Hazel Boarman while greeting students Thursday on the first day of the new school year for Daviess County schools.

DCPS welcomes back students

BY JAMES MAYSE
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

When the first bus rolled up to the entrance of Burns Elementary School Thursday morning, Principal Heather Newman and the Burns staff were ready.

Shortly before the first bus arrived at 7 a.m., the staff had set up balloon arches just inside the main doors. A stereo played “Celebration” and other upbeat songs. As students filed off the bus, Newman and the teachers greeted them with smiles and hugs.

Newman, who has had a long career in education, said the new school year is as big a day for teachers and staff as it is for students.

“The first day, after 27 years, is still very exciting,” Newman said. “We have a lot of kids coming in who are anxious to see their friends, to meet their teachers, to see their classmates.” Newman said she is always happy to see “the smiles coming into the school.”

“We’re ready to get the school year started,” Newman said.



Burns Elementary School counselor Kelli Fueger, left, and second grade teacher Susie Stevens wave to parents and students as they arrive at the school Thursday, the first day of the new school year for Daviess County Public Schools.

Traffic was busy around Daviess County Public Schools on Tuesday morning as students arrived for the first day of the 2026-27 school year. While the students at Burns Middle School were calm as they jumped off the buses, the Burns Elementary students were bubbly.

For students starting their first year, school can be a little intimidating. Newman said the staff has already worked to get newcomers acclimated and said a goal on the first day is to make the

students feel at home.

“We actually hosted an open house prior to school starting, and for our littles we had pre-school orientation and Kindergarten jumpstart,” Newman said. “So they’ve already been inside the school, they’ve already been in their classrooms, and I think that helps alleviate some of those nerves.”

At Burns Middle School, Principal Kendra Bronsink chatted with students coming off the

SEE DCPS/PAGE A2

City looking to upgrade facades of East 4th Street businesses

BY JAMES MAYSE
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

The city’s Community Development Department is planning to beautify several Fourth Street businesses in the Monarch Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area by using grant funding to renovate building facades.

Community Development Director Abby Shelton said additional funds are available for other business owners in the NRSA who want to upgrade their building exteriors.

The city is advertising for contractors to renovate the facades of six storefronts in the 1000 block of East Fourth Street. The block

includes several businesses, including The Oven, Ten O Six and Distro.

Funding for the work comes from the city’s Commercial Facade Rehabilitation Program, which uses federal Community Development Block Grant dollars. The program is a matching grant, providing an equal amount of grant funding for every dollar a developer commits to a project.

The goal of the grant program is to promote “commercial revitalization, private investment and corridor beautification — enhancing the visual appeal, walkabil-

ity and economic vitality of Owensboro’s commercial areas,” according to the city’s website.

The city launched the Monarch NRSA earlier this year. The NRSA is roughly bounded by West Ninth Street and the riverfront, with the east-west boundary between Clay Street and Dixie Court.

The city has established several NRSA’s, most recently on the northwest side. The goal of the program is to improve affordable housing, expand housing opportunities and improve hous-

ing conditions for young, first-time homebuyers and renters, while also beautifying neighborhoods.

“We have already done 818 East Fourth St.,” Shelton said. “Our hope is this gives other business owners (an idea) of what is possible with their properties.”

With facade improvements, “there are some buildings that could really pop” along the East Fourth Street corridor, Shelton said.

The needs of the buildings vary. Collectively, the projects will include replacing awnings, beam and masonry work, painting, window replacement, installing lighted signs, and replacing doors and

doorframes.

The city is accepting bids from construction firms for the facade work, with the goal of selecting a contractor in the near future.

Getting the word out to other businesses in the Monarch area has been difficult, Shelton said.

“They have a lot going on in the first place with owning their business,” Shelton said. “(But) we definitely want everyone to participate.”

Interested contractors and businesses in the area seeking to improve their facades can find more information on the city’s Community Development webpage.



Abby Shelton

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INSIDE

Asking Eric/Weekend, C6
Astrology/Weekend, C6
Classifieds/Weekend, C5-6
Comics/Weekend, C7
Crossword/Weekend, C6

Lotteries/A2
Food/B6-7
Records/A3
Weekend Ticket/
C1-4, C8, E3-4

89
High

72
Low

Details, Page A8