

# Era nabs 19 individual awards, 2nd place overall in state competition

BY ERA STAFF

The Oldham Era won second place overall for newspapers of its size during the annual Kentucky Press Association (KPA) awards ceremony in Louisville Friday night.

The Era won 19 individual awards enroute to winning the overall second place award for general excellence, including:

- First place: Best Headline Writer — Grant Gerstner
- First place: Best General News Photo — Wyatt Sparkman
- First place: Best Feature Story — Bobbie Curd
- First place: Best Editorial Page — Staff
- First and third place: Best Sports Photo — Wyatt Sparkman
- First place: Best Sports Columnist — Chuck Harper
- First place: Best Special Section — Barbara Duncan and Jane Ashley Pace
- First place: Best Creative Use of the Newspaper — Jane Ashley Pace
- Second place: Best Breaking News Coverage — Grant Gerstner
- Second place: Best Front Page — Staff
- Second place: Best Sports Feature Story — Wyatt Sparkman
- Second place: Best Business/Agribusiness Story — Bobbie Curd
- Second place: Best Feature Photo — Jane Ashley Pace



Photo by Benji Hamm

**The Oldham Era and Henry County Local staff pose for a photo following Friday night's Kentucky Press Association Awards in Louisville. From left are Era Sports Columnist Chuck Harper, Local Sports Editor Abby Hooven, Era and Local Publisher Jane Ashley Pace, Local Correspondent Joe Durbin, and Era and Local Editor Grant Gerstner. Not pictured are Era Sports Editor Wyatt Sparkman, Era Correspondent Bobbie Curd and Era Advertising Representative Barbara Duncan.**

- Second place: Best Photo Essay — Jane Ashley Pace
- Second place: Best Sports Photo — Brian K. Wood
- Third place: Best Breaking News Coverage — Staff
- Third place: Best Sports Story — Wyatt Sparkman
- Third place: Best Special Section — Staff

in second this year behind our sister paper, the Larue County Herald News. I am immensely proud of my Era team, the quality work we produce and the level in which we continue to compete.

"This year, as we celebrate our 150th year publishing, I am thankful not only for my dedicated staff but our loyal readers and advertisers too. You allow us to print week after week. We strive to publish a newspaper that you can be proud of and trust — that informs, celebrates our community and archives our history."



Photo by Nicky Byers

**An aerial photo taken by drone of Bluegrass Spring — formerly known as FRP La Grange Quarry — nearly fully frozen over.**

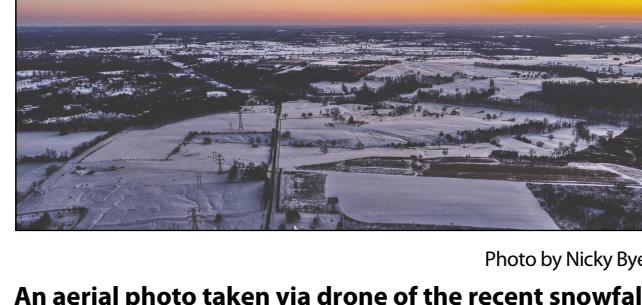


Photo by Nicky Byers

**An aerial photo taken via drone of the recent snowfall.**

water and wastewater systems are operating under limited capacity. Hundreds of Kentuckians are being sheltered in warming centers, and evacuations have taken place in several communities.

Beshear issued a state of emergency declaration last week, activating state resources and implementing price-gouging protections. Federal emergency assistance has also been approved to support the state's response.

Officials urged residents to take safety precautions, including avoiding overexertion while shoveling snow, using generators outdoors and away from homes, and calling 911 for emergencies. Non-life-threatening needs can be reported through the state's Rapid Needs Assessment system.

More than 500 drinking water systems are under boil water advisories, and several

investigation — the rest screened out. Of those, 8,196 cases of abuse or neglect were substantiated, according to an annual report by the cabinet.

Mortenson said she believes cases may be falling through the cracks of a chronically overworked and understaffed child welfare system.

Mortenson is not a lawyer but is representing herself in her open records lawsuit. She also plans to contact state legislators and enlist their support.

"My goal is to help identify the gaps and push legislation that will help protect children," she said. "If I can help create the rules, maybe we can save some lives."

## EXTREME

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facilities are also serving as warming centers.

Northern Kentucky received up to 12 inches of snow, with 6 to 8 inches reported locally across Oldham County and 4 to 6 inches reported across central portions of the state.

Ice accumulations were higher than expected and caused widespread power outages and hazardous road conditions, particularly on bridges and overpasses, the release said. Allen, Barren, Monroe and Pulaski counties were among the hardest hit, though every county experienced impacts.

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet reported nearly 1,500 plow trucks and 12 heavy-duty wreckers remained in operation Monday to keep priority routes passable and clear crashes.

"We want to thank Kentuckians for limiting travel — your help made a real difference," Transportation Cabinet Secretary Jim Gray said in the release, noting that icy conditions can persist or refreeze as temperatures remain near or below freezing.

The Kentucky National Guard has personnel positioned at 53 armories statewide, with cut-and-toss teams deployed to assist with debris removal. Kentucky State Police have handled thousands of storm-related calls for service, including wellness checks and motorist assistance.

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## WELFARE

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Screening out of CPS referrals has been a concern addressed by the panel for many years and continues to be the most frequently identified area of concern," its report said.

The cabinet, which investigates and decides whether to substantiate suspected abuse or neglect of children, says that while reports of suspected abuse have risen over the past several years, substantiations have "steadily decreased" over the past five years.

In 2024, 127,342 suspected cases were reported while 43,668 were accepted for

## GRAND

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the driver and the passenger" as well as "a plastic baggie containing marijuana."

Both Johnson and the passenger denied ownership of the cocaine. Johnson allegedly "made multiple statements to the passenger ... in attempt to coerce him to claim ownership of the cocaine."

After placing both subjects under arrest, police noted that the arrest was in violation of Johnson's conditional discharge from a 2024 Oldham County case where Johnson pleaded guilty to trafficking marijuana.

Johnson has an arraignment for his new charges scheduled for Jan. 29 at 1 p.m. Also indicted was 38-year old Earl A. Coleman, III, who is charged with being a convicted felon in possession

of a firearm, a class D felony; intimidating a participant in a legal process, a class D felony; first-degree possession of a controlled substance, first offense,

methamphetamine, a class D felony; first-degree criminal trespass, a class A misdemeanor; third-degree terroristic threatening, a class A misdemeanor; and first-degree persistent felony offender.

According to a police citation, Coleman was arrested at 6:48 a.m. on Dec. 12, 2025, in cold and snowy weather conditions.

Upon a search, police located a "small yellow pill with multicolored specks" as well as "a torn corner bag containing a residual white powdery substance, consistent with methamphetamine" in his front right pocket.

Coleman is currently being held at the Oldham County Detention Center on

a \$10,000 full-cash, no-surety bond and has an arraignment scheduled for Jan. 29 at 11 a.m.

The following individuals were also indicted:

Eric D. Traynor, 46, is charged with second-degree escape, a class D felony; and first-degree persistent felony offender. An arraignment has not yet been scheduled for Traynor as of press time.

Daryl T. Vance, 20, is charged with first-degree promoting contraband, a class D felony. An arraignment has not yet been scheduled for Vance as of press time.

Charles J. Conder, 50, is charged with flagrant non-support, a class D felony. An arraignment has not yet been scheduled for Conder as of press time.

Melanie Arnold-Zeitz, 32, is charged with flagrant non-support, a class D felony. An arraignment has not yet been scheduled for Arnold-Zeitz as of press time.

additional Open Records Request for further information on the matter as of

Jan. 26, but has not received a response as of press time.

According to the Open Records Act, the district will have five days — not including the day of submission, weekends or federally-recognized holidays — to respond to the Era's request.

Look for updates in upcoming editions of the Era.

## SCHOOL

FROM PAGE A1

needed to have a safe and successful opening day.

"Perceived preferential treatment to certain employees in the transportation department, leading to a negative, hostile culture. Specific examples include, but are not limited to, greater flexibility with some employees comings-and-

goings while holding others to a more strict routine with no justifiable reasoning."

Prior to receiving a response to the Open Records Request, the Era asked for confirmation of Webb's termination and received the following statement from Assistant Superintendent of Support Services Niki Brown:

"As a matter of practice, we do not comment on individual employment matter or employment status."

The Era has submitted an

## In loving memory of Stephen "Pete" Barnhill Smith

June 11, 1943 - January 13, 2026

Stephen Barnhill Smith (82), affectionately known as "Pete" to family and friends, passed away peacefully at his home in New Castle, KY on January 13, 2026, surrounded by family.

He was born in LaGrange, KY on June 11, 1943, one of twelve children born to Ferdinand and Arlena Smith.

He grew up on the Smith family farm in Oldham County, KY, where a passion for farming the land was instilled in him. He went on to spend much of his life farming, either in a full time or part time capacity, and retired from Louisville Gas & Electric in 2001. Pete was a devout Christian and lifelong member of Westport Baptist Church in Westport, KY.

Pete's family was his pride and joy and his memory will be cherished as a beloved husband, Dad, and Poppy. He leaves behind his devoted wife of 40 years, Grace Smith, five children, Aaron Smith (Cindy), Melanie Costelle (Gary), Melissa Jeffries (Loren), Alva Gibson (Jacquelyn), and Cole Gibson (Adrienne), grandchildren Devan Espindola (Ricardo), Connor Jeffries (Jessica), Sloane Norton (Hunter), Corbin Kauffman (Seth), Mason Smith, Whitney Lay (Ethan), Anna Costelle, Dylan Smith, Jordyn Smith, Jacob Kirven, Isaac Jeffries, Sawyer Gibson, and Benjamin Jarboe, a great-granddaughter, Noah Grace Espindola, and three additional great-grandchildren expected in the coming months. He is also survived by four sisters, Betty Rittenberry, Patsy Lentz, Janet Straughn, and Judy Winters (Donnie) and many nieces and nephews.

A private memorial service will be held for the immediate family.



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