

OBITUARY

Mary E. Sowell, 102, of Lone Oak, passed away Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2026, at Rivercrest Assisted Living. Mary was born on Feb. 29, 1924, a leap year, to Robert M. McLuckie and Clotus Elizabeth Herring McLuckie. She was a member of First Baptist Church of Paducah. Mary graduated from Union University and completed postgraduate work for her master's degree and Rank One Certification at



Murray State University

and Southern Illinois University. She taught in the McCracken County School System for 10 years and 28 years in Massac County, Illinois. Mary enjoyed quilting, tole painting, and ballroom dancing. She always attended the quilt show in Paducah every year, where she got ideas for her wall hangings and quilts. Many hours were spent quilting wall hangings and sharing

them with family and friends. Her family always made a point to celebrate her birthdays, but her 100th birthday was especially memorable. She was especially blessed to have continued to drive until the age of 100! Survivors include two daughters, Mary Elaine Hays, Ooltewah, Tennessee; Elizabeth Ann Sarles (John), Bluffton, South Carolina; five grandchildren, Gene

Hays (Virginia), Scott Hays (Candice), Beth Cawthon, Matthew Sarles and Mark Sarles (Nataile); six great-grandchildren, Naomi Hays, Mariah Hays, Evelyn Cawthon, Anna Cawthon, Evan Sarles and Ruby Jane Sarles. Preceding in death were her parents and one brother, Clayton McLuckie. Visitation will be held 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday,

Sept. 5, at the Lone Oak Chapel of Milner & Orr Funeral Home. A private family graveside committal service will be conducted by Rev. Jason Browning. Expressions of sympathy may be made to First Baptist Church of Paducah, 2890 Broadway, Paducah, Kentucky 42001. Share a memory or leave a message for the family at www.milnerandorr.com.

DOMESTIC

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you learn in here can be applied to all of your human relationships. The key here is to identify, 'Is someone trying to control me, or are my behaviors maybe ego-driven from a place where I feel the need to control others?' That's kind of the central question around domestic violence." Kentucky has the second-highest rate of domestic violence in the nation, with 45.3% of women and 35.5% of men predicted to experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime. According to Team Kentucky's 2025 Domestic Violence Data Report, 33,786 electronic JC-3 forms related to domestic and/or dating violence were filed by law enforcement in 2025, and 20,129 emergency protective orders and temporary interpersonal protective orders were ordered by the court. "The thing we know about domestic violence is incredibly deadly," Neal said. "A lot of first responders, including law enforcement, will tell you the most dangerous call they will ever, ever take is that of a domestic dispute."

Despite the dangers, Neal said that survivors return to their abusers an average of seven times before permanently separating — falling into what can feel like an unbreakable cycle. "There's a lot of what we call 'recidivism' or return in domestic violence. That's because of patterns. We're human; we just fall into cycles," she said. "Safety planning is probably the most actionable thing that you can offer someone because no person is going to leave their abusive partner until they're actually ready, and that readiness process varies for everyone. A big portion of it is mentally being able to see a future where you are not under somebody else's thumb." Part of safety planning includes being able to recognize different forms of abuse and understanding what the cycle of domestic violence looks like. Some forms of abuse Neal highlighted were physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and economic abuse, in addition to control, intimidation, the use of male privilege and isolation. According to Neal, male privilege and isolation are two forms of abuse that are seen in abundance within the local region —

especially in smaller towns and rural areas. "Isolation can be like, 'Oh, this person is protecting me, and they're keeping me safe, and they're taking care of me.' But really, it's under the guise of taking away all of the things that would allow you to exist on your own without them," she said. "If you have a domestic dispute that law enforcement is responding to, there's a pretty good chance that the responding officer may have gone to school with the abuser and also the victim — [or] maybe is related to them in some way — and it can definitely affect the outcome of that situation." In this light, victims of domestic violence may experience both physical and emotional isolation. To further explain this, Neal introduced the "Power and Control" wheel — a graphic used to dive deeper into what abuse can look like in the real world. "The axle says power and control, and the spokes around it represent the ways in which power and control is maintained. Then you have our border around the edge representing the threat of physical or sexual violence, which is what makes all of these effective — because the actual definition of

domestic violence is kind of a combination of what you all just said — it's a pattern of behaviors intending to exert control and power over someone else." Neal also defined the cycle as abuse, guilt, rationalization, "normal" behavior from the abuser, fantasizing about what the victim has done "wrong" and how to make them "pay" for it, planning the next moment of abuse and putting the plan of abuse into action. She added that many survivors will face setbacks, or "looping out," while still continuing to try and move upward in life. One example, she said, is moving away from an abuser but facing barriers like unemployment. "If you feel like you're on that back loop, just remind yourself of a previous time you were on a back loop, and think about your circumstances between then and now," she said. "Really ask yourself — 'Am I in a better situation? Do I know better? Have I learned something from that experience that I can apply on my next loop up?'" For those aiming to "loop out" of a domestic violence situation, Neal noted that Merryman House has an emergency shelter and non-residential services including housing and financial support programs,

case management, dedicated advocates and clinical and therapeutic services. Additionally, she shared that Mercy Health has a specialized scanning device to detect and document strangulation. "If your partner is willing to strangle you for any length of time, even if it's just like cutting off these airways without even grabbing with both hands — it can be using a pillow or just pressure — if someone is willing to cut off your airways, they are 300 times more likely to kill you," Neal said. "Even under the pretense of being consensual, any time strangulation comes into play — it's connected to really, really high rates of death." Break the Cycle classes are currently offered four times each month, alternating monthly between modules one and two. Neal said the second module discusses healthy and unhealthy relationships, self-esteem, self-care, the "relationship bill of rights," steps to recover attachment with children after leaving an abusive situation and setting boundaries. Those who are interested in participating in Break the Cycle are encouraged to reach out to Merryman House or RSVP on Facebook.

WATER

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"Utilities in Kentucky are not competitive businesses, but instead monopolies," Thomas said. "The Public Service Commission exists to regulate utility rates to ensure that they're fair, just, and reasonable, and that the service is adequate. So, changing utility rates is a legal process. Governed by statutes and regulations." According to Thomas's presentation, Bluegrass Water operates wastewater systems in McCracken County: Great Oaks Timberland Arcadia Pines Carriage Park Marshall Ridge Magruder Village "The application requests authorization to increase Bluegrass Water's water base rate total revenue by \$100,001," according to a news release from the PSC. "Residential water customers would see an average monthly water bill increase of \$28.22 or approximately 36.3%. This means the average residential customer's bill would be about \$105.85, up from an average bill of \$77.63. The application also requests authorization to increase Bluegrass Water's wastewater base rate total revenue by \$2,633,981. Residential wastewater customers would see an average monthly bill increase ranging from \$33.95 to \$79.80 for a total of \$111.72, up from an average bill of \$34.92 to an average bill of \$77.77. This represents an increase ranging approximately from 43.7% to 219.9%." Before public comments began, Thomas explained that PSC mem-



Three members of the Kentucky Public Service Commission attended the meeting, listening to community concerns as they prepare to consider Bluegrass Water's case.

bers would not be able to respond to public comments, but would collect them for public record and consider them in their decision. PSC Chair Angie C. Hatton, Vice Chair Mary Pat Regan and Commissioner Barry L. Mayfield were present. Hatton addressed the crowd, saying that the PSC is not required to hold public comment hearings, but decided to hold them because they want to hear what the community has to say. "This is your opportunity to say what you want to say, and it will be on the record," Hatton said. "It will be in the case file. It will be recorded. Other people can see it. It's as if you're giving testimony at the hearing. That said, we're going to be the judges in the case, so it's frustrating for you to have questions that we can't answer because we can't prejudge a case. Just like a judge who's going to hear evidence, they can't tell you their opinion before they hear evidence, and your testimony works sort of like evidence tonight. So if you have questions, go ahead and ask them. Those may be questions that we write down and ask of the applicant at the hearing. It's always good to ask questions. It's important for us to hear what your questions are. But I hope you'll under-

stand that we can't answer questions tonight." Several public commenters accused Bluegrass Water — and their parent company Central States Water Resources, which operates across 11 states — of buying up water and wastewater systems and charging excessive prices for their services. Don Barger, a resident of the Marshall Ridge subdivision in Paducah, said he paid a \$ 15-a-month sewer rate before the system was purchased by Bluegrass Water, and the current request would bring his rate to \$114 a month. He called the increase excessive, saying it does not reflect the level of service provided or the cost of living in the area. "Residents have faced repeated rate increases every 18 to 24 months, forcing us to continually fight for affordable rates," Barger said. "Despite previous hikes, there is little evidence of promised infrastructure repairs. Issues like foul sewer odors and rare utility truck visits persist. The proposed \$114 monthly bill is unaffordable for many, especially seniors and families on fixed income. Meanwhile, corporate overhead appears to be growing. Before any further rate hikes are approved, there must be transpar-

ency and an independent audit of how previous rate increase revenues were spent. We receive no annual report as to what has been completed with the Marshall Ridge system, and as has already been mentioned, we are a captive audience with no alternative for sewer service. I respectfully request that you deny the proposed increase and demand a full, independent audit before considering any further rate adjustments." Robert Evans described himself as an executive of an asset-based company, saying he was "embarrassed to admit" his profession had similarities to the "people that are behind the problems" of everyone in the room. He said while his business shares the same need to make money off its assets, that's where the similarities end. "This is not a utility company," Evans said. "This is, plain as day, a very greedy private equity firm that goes out to find the many rich people that have money that they want to invest at a high rate of return. They spend whatever it takes to acquire these assets from our neighborhoods. You don't see them buying in cities. You see them buying unincorporated property. It's easy for them to get their



"I know hedge fund people that have admitted to me that this is a seedy business to buy into, private utilities, because they have control of their customers. Don't let them abuse these people. I can pay it. Some of them can't," Robert Evans said during his public comment.

hands on. Grossly underpaying for it, or, because it's distressed, overpay for it. They then do not care how much money they spend, because they know they can hire the best accountants and auditors and show you this exorbitant cost because then they know they can use that over and over again." "This is their business model in 11 states," Evans continued. "Every single state, they charge significantly more than the other public and private companies that are reasonable and fair. There is nothing reasonable and fair about them. This is a business model that discounts all of us except as ATM machines to keep paying their profit returns to their investors." Jack Russell, a retired Baptist preacher, brought attention to there seeming to be no clear definition for the PSC's need to determine that rates are "fair, just, and reasonable." He said he knows of one in scripture. "Thou Shall not steal," Russell said. "Now I'm not saying you're the ones that are doing the stealing, but what I am saying is you're enabling the ones that are doing the stealing. There are widows and widowers in our Carriage Park subdivision. They've got to worry about paying

their medical bills, putting groceries on the table, living off social security, and you fine folks are sitting behind your desk enabling a bunch of people that are extortionists, that are taking food from their tables. They can't afford to buy the medicine from their pharmacies and wonder how they're going to pay their taxes, and it doesn't seem to bother our state, our attorney general, or absolutely your commission that much. I wonder what Jesus would do with this proposal. I don't know whether you're Christian or not, but you don't have to be a good Christian to understand that this is not fair, just, or equitable." Another public comment meeting will be held at 4 p.m. CT, 5 p.m. ET at the Ensor Learning Resource Center in Georgetown, Kentucky. Comments can also be submitted at psc.ky.gov/Case/SearchCasesPublicComments, emailed to PSC.comment@ky.gov, or mailed to 211 Sower Boulevard, Frankfort, KY 40601. Comments should include the commenter's name, address and case number 2025-00354. The PSC will hold a formal hearing on the rate increase application on Sept. 21 in Frankfort. Their decision on the case is due Mar. 9, 2027.