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Jury clears deputy, sheriff's office in shooting death

THOMAS J. BARR
THE PIONEER NEWS

SHEPHERDSVILLE – On a dark morning of Jan. 30, 2021, Eric Kessler was found in his vehicle unresponsive at the wheel. His foot was on the brake but the car was in gear. When members of the Bullitt County Sheriff's Office approached, they tried for 13-14 minutes to awaken Kessler. When the vehicle began to move toward officers, deputy Nick Hibbs

fired a shot and then eight other shots, fatally wounding the occupant. But a nine-man, three woman jury took less than an hour on Tuesday to determine that Hibbs was not guilty of excessive force and negligence in the death of Kessler. Hibbs and sheriff Walter Sholar were both sued by the minor daughter of the deceased. Under the jury instructions, the plaintiff could have been awarded up to \$33 million.

After four days of testimony, the jury listened as the attorneys for both sides made their final arguments. Carol Pettitt, defending Hibbs and Sholar, said that it is easy to sit back after the event and determine what could have been done differently. It was a matter of seconds from the time the vehicle started moving to the time Hibbs fired his first shot. He would fire nine shots over the course of several seconds. Two of which hit the deceased.

“Nick didn’t have slo-motion video or a pause button,” Pettitt said of the split second decision. Fellow deputy Compton was behind the vehicle when it began to move. Two other deputies were also at the scene. “Nick Hibbs had a few seconds to fire his weapon to protect himself and fellow deputies,” she added. While the jury was shown still photos and a how the crime scene looked during the day, it was not the same scene that Hibbs faced at 5

a.m. on a damp, rainy morning with slippery ground and ditch next to the vehicle. The deputies all stated that things happened quickly and that it was dark and difficult to see the surroundings. In the situation, she said Hibbs knew that the individual had a past, including being a suspect in Louisville of a crime. The deputy also knew that the suspect was

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Blake O'Brien and Mason Morris with Clarence Brangers

Stephen Thomas

Boys honored for helping to save neighbor

STEPHEN THOMAS
THE PIONEER NEWS

MOUNT WASHINGTON — Clarence Brangers is a typical American hero, having served four years with the United States Air Force and retiring from Naval Ordnance. The 84-year-old Mount Washington resident has his own set of heroes in the form of two boys, 11-year-old Mason Morris and 9-year-old Blake O'Brien. The boys are neighbors living in the Woods section of the city and were both at the right place at the right time, according to Clarence and his wife of 57 years, Linda. Clarence was outside working on his

front lawn the evening of July 13, which had been a very hot afternoon. He said he came in and ate dinner, took insulin for his diabetes, and returned outside. “The insulin was fast-acting,” he said. “I was digging in the yard, sitting on a stool. I was working and it was hot. I just sort of leaned over in the stool. My insulin was low.” That was all Clarence recalled. And that’s when the boys fortunately rode by the Brangers’ residence on their bicycles. “We were just riding by and then we noticed him laying on the ground,” Blake said. “I said if he doesn’t get up in a few minutes we’ll go check on him,” said Mason.

Soon after, Blake went up and knocked on the front door while Mason tended to Clarence. “(Blake) came up and asked if it was my husband,” Linda said. “He said he thought there was something wrong. I went down there as fast as I could. (Clarence) was passed out and soaking wet. I asked what was wrong but he was still out of sorts.” Another neighbor, Brandon Wiseheart, was jogging by and stopped to assist. Meanwhile, Linda called 9-1-1 and her daughter’s fiancée who was in the area. “We rubbed (Clarence) with ice and water, but he kept passing out,” said

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James appointed to fill Shepherdsville vacancy

THOMAS J. BARR
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SHEPHERDSVILLE – Without drama, the newest member of the Shepherdsville City Council was selected on Monday night. But, it was still a bit of an awkward situation for the councilmembers. With the passing of Mike Hibbard recently, a vacancy existed on the town board. At its July 13 meeting, tempers were raised when a motion to appoint Hibbard’s spouse, Karen, to fill out the remaining five months of the term did not receive a second.

A motion was then approved appointing former councilman Kenny Newton to the seat. He is not running on the Nov. 3 ballot. But, after the meeting, Newton declined the appointment. On Monday night, the council floor was open to nominations. Jennifer Mendez recommended Dana Bischoff James, who had previously served on the city council but will not be on the November ballot. Brad Whittaker nominated Marissa Bell, an

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Individuals indicted for various burglaries

SHEPHERDSVILLE – Four individuals have been indicted on separate burglary charges by the Bullitt County Grand Jury. Recently, the 12-member grand jury panel indicted the following individuals: *Richard Lee Clark – charged with burglary, strangulation, assault/domestic violence and being a persistent felony offender. According to the indictment, Clark allegedly went into a building on June 9, 2026, with the intent to commit a crime. While at the scene, he placed his hands around the neck of a woman. The most serious offense is a Class B felony, which is punishable by 5-10 years in prison. However, with four prior burglary-related felony con-

victions, any new sentence could be enhanced. Shepherdsville officer Timothy O’Keefe investigated while assistant commonwealth attorney Charles VanSickle presented the case. *Rodney T. Howard – charged with burglary, assault, strangulation and four counts of wanton endangerment. According to the indictment, on Jan. 19, 2025, Howard was inside a dwelling owned by another person. While inside, he struck a victim and tried to place his hands around her neck. He allegedly caused a woman to go unconscious while she was holding a nine-month-old infant and two others minors were left

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Back-to-School season begins in Hillview

HILLVIEW — It was still July, but the kids in Hillview were ready to go back to school on August 12. The City of Hillview, in association with Hillview Community Christian Church and Bullitt County Public Schools, hosted the annual Back-to-School Bash at the Hillview Recreation Center. HCCC and the city supplied 300 new back-

packs and school supplies to area students, while the BCPS Family Resource and Youth Services Centers from the North Bullitt High School area provided important information to families. Other vendors providing free supplies and information included Bullitt County Public Libraries, Girl Scouts of

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Stephen Thomas



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