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The Tuscaloosa News

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Midway booked for fair

Jaycees advertise annual event despite money questions



Patrons enjoy the sights and sounds of the West Alabama State Fair at the Jaycee Fairgrounds in Alberta in 2004. The Tuscaloosa City Council is considering not issuing the Jaycees a special event permit this year.

By Robert DeWitt
Staff Writer

TUSCALOOSA | Will there be a West Alabama State Fair?

Obviously the Tuscaloosa Jaycees are planning one. They requested a paid advertisement in The Tuscaloosa News for a fair that runs Oct. 2-7.

And the midway operator, Wade Shows Inc., has booked a date to be here.

But the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service and Tuscaloosa County 4H program, long important parts of the fair, will have nothing to do with it this year. And at least one Tuscaloosa City Council member believes issuing the Jaycees a special event permit is a bad idea.

"How can you justify giving them permit?" Councilman Lee Garrison said. "They haven't been responsible. They owe vendors in town. They owe back taxes. They owe people who won contests. They've made no effort to remedy their problems."

Tuscaloosa Jaycees President James Constant referred all questions to the Alabama Jaycees President Stacy Powers. She said the club is making a good faith effort to pay its debts.

"Their plan is to make money this year so they can pay back their bad debts and have money to operate," Powers said.

Councilman Kip Tyner, who represents

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Tuscaloosa City Councilman Lee Garrison

the Alberta area where the fair is held, said he would like to work with the Jaycees if possible. But he needs some questions answered before he will vote to issue the club a permit for the fair.

"I need to know how they plan on paying people back," Tyner said. "I don't think it will go over very well with the people they owe to let them have another fair without them being paid first."

Tyner said he'd like to give the Jaycees the benefit of the doubt. But he has an obligation to the people who weren't paid last year.

Tyner notes that the Jaycees proceeded with their annual Christmas Shopping Tour for needy children. Tyner said people have questioned why the club didn't pay its back debts instead.

Powers said she could not yet offer assurances that the club could pay off its back debts because she hasn't yet looked at their budget.

But the city is negotiating with the club to purchase about 9 acres of land the Jaycees

own in Jaycee Park. If the fair doesn't pay the debt, the property could be sold and the proceeds could be used to pay the debts and find more property for the Jaycees to operate out of.

"But that's nothing that's going to happen immediately," Powers said.

Garrison said the club should forget the fair and sell the land.

"They can take the proceeds and clean up the issues that need to be cleaned up," Garrison said.

Mayor Walt Maddox is not yet ready to scrap the fair. But he said things have to change.

"The fair has always be part of the fabric of the community," Maddox said. "But there are serious issues that have to be resolved in the next few weeks. This office cannot continue to receive complaints about unpaid bills."

He believes negotiations with the club are the proper course of action and that the fair should be salvaged if possible. But the

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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tuscaloosa native Charles Steele Jr., president & CEO of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, speaks at the LaSalle Parish Courthouse on Wednesday, a day ahead of a planned march in support of six black teenagers jailed on charges related to the beating of a white classmate.

Stillman, UA students rally for Jena Six

By Mary Foster
The Associated Press

JENA, LA. | Students from Stillman College and schools across the country were en route to Jena on Wednesday, a day ahead of a planned march in support of six black teenagers jailed in the December beating of a white classmate.

Today's march was expected to draw thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of people, dwarfing Jena's population of about 3,500. Black participants said they hoped to rekindle the spirit of the civil rights movement.

At the center of the protests is a group of black teenagers who have come to be called the Jena Six.

Months after declining to charge three white high school students who were briefly suspended for hanging

MARCH FOR JENA SIX

■ **Who:** Students and activists
■ **When:** 7 a.m. today
■ **Where:** LaSalle Parish Courthouse, Jena, La.

SEE JENA | 2A

Forever Wild might purchase state prison land

By Desiree Hunter
The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY | The state cattle ranch at the center of the prison system's contentious plan to sell off land could be acquired by a state conservation group instead of a private party, officials said Wednesday.

Corrections spokesman Brian Corbett said a sale to the Alabama Forever Wild Land Trust would be positive all around because the department can generate money for much-needed improvements while keeping the land in the public arena. But some critics aren't convinced.

Prisons Commissioner Richard Allen and Gov. Bob Riley announced in July that five parcels of corrections property would be sold to help pay for \$90 million worth of capital improvements.

Corbett said the Alabama Forever Wild Land Trust started expressing interest "within the last month or two" since the sale was announced.

"It would be a win-win situation," he said of the trust acquiring the land. If the sale goes through, the property would essentially be transferred to one state agency to another.

The possible acquisition by Forever Wild was reported Wednesday by The Demopolis Times.

Rep. Ralph Howard, D-Greensboro, who has been among the most vocal opponents of shuttering the prison system's ranch, said conservation is a good thing but he and others are still worried about the economic impact on the Black Belt community.

"I'm opposed to the sale of it period — not only because of the impact from this district, but also that this is a form of rehabilitation for the inmates," he said. "I think places like that are the last that should be closed."

The public trust was established in 1992 by a constitutional amendment and acquires land with money that's

SEE LAND | 2A

Silver anniversary elusive for many U.S. couples

By Sam Roberts
N.Y. Times News Service

Don't stock up on silver anniversary cards. More than half the Americans who might have celebrated their 25th wedding anniversaries since 2000 were divorced, separated or widowed before reaching that milestone, according to the latest census survey released Wednesday.

For the first time at least since World War

II, women and men who married in the late 1970s had a less than even chance of still being married 25 years later.

"We know that somewhere between 40 percent and 50 percent of marriages dissolve," said Barbara Risman, executive officer of the Council on Contemporary Families, a research group. "Now, when people marry, everyone wonders, 'Is this one of those marriages that will be around for awhile?'"

But David Blankenhorn, president of the

Institute for American Values, a marriage research and advocacy group, said he was struck that the percentage of people who celebrated their 15th anniversary had declined. "This seems to be saying more recent marriages are more fragile," Blankenhorn said.

About 80 percent of first marriages that took place in the late 1950s lasted at least 15 years. Among people who married in the late 1980s for the first time, however, only 61 percent of

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RAPES REPORTED

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