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THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY SINCE 1912

Pill popping at school

8 suspended at West Limestone High; 3 of them placed under arrest

By Holly Hollman
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SALEM — Eight West Limestone High School students were suspended after teens at the school passed around pills this week, according to authorities.

Deputies arrested three of the students.
“Two students that we know

of ingested pills, got sick and had to go to the doctor,” Sheriff’s Department Chief Investigator Stanley McNatt said. “I don’t know how sick they got.”

He said two 15-year-old girls and a 17-year-old boy brought Ambien, a prescription sleep aid, Vicoprofen, a prescription pain reliever and anti-inflammatory medication, and Triple C’s to the school Monday.

Triple C’s, such as Coricidin HBP Cough and Cold tablets, have become a common drug of choice for youths because they are cheap. Also, teens can go online to learn how much to take, based on their weight, to get high.

After the two students got sick, school officials and the student resource officer learned about the pills, McNatt said.

Superintendent Barry Carroll said the school suspended eight students for selling, buying or taking the pills.

Five of the eight students will have an expulsion hearing Monday at 4:30. Their parents can request closed hearings.

Carroll said three of the eight came forward Thursday and a hearing date for them is pending.

The Board of Education’s

punishment can range from expulsion to sending them to alternative school.

McNatt said authorities charged one of the 15-year-old girls with distribution of a controlled substance.

Authorities charged the other two teens with reckless endangerment.

The Sheriff’s Department turned the trio over to juvenile authorities.

Missing too many days at school?

Decatur board mulls changes in policy on absences

By Bayne Hughes
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Students would no longer be punished for multiple excused absences if the Decatur school board approves proposed changes to its attendance policy.

Superintendent Sam Houston presented the board with the proposed changes for a first reading Thursday at its monthly meeting.

Houston said some recent issues have led school officials to conclude that the attendance policy needs clarification and to appoint a committee to study the issue. He said the current policy depends too much on the specific number of absences and leaves no gray area or flexibility for why a student was absent.

“We felt there needed to be more a distinction between excused and unexcused absences,” Houston said.

Excused absences, according to Decatur’s Code of Student Conduct, are those for illness, legal requirements, emergencies approved by the principal and special circumstances with the principal’s prior approval. All other absences are classified as unexcused.

Under current policy, a high school student with 10 or more absences, excused or unexcused, in a semester would fail a class, even if the student passed the required class material. Houston proposes changing the policy to one under which a high school student would face possibly failing a class after five unexcused absences.

The 10th absence would require a doctor’s excuse and a parent scheduling a conference with the principal or the principal’s designee within two school days after the student returns. Failure to do so would result in an unexcused absence.

Under current policy, Houston said, there is sometimes a lack of communication between schools and parents. He said parents often assume every absence with a note is excused and that isn’t always the case. Meanwhile, the school sometimes doesn’t know about extenuating circumstances until it is too late.

The proposed new policy makes the student responsible for going to the teacher and arranging to make up missed

Please see **Absences**, page A4

Double duty for Hartselle mascot

High school’s Champ known as Chaos by pro-hockey fans

By Deangelo McDaniel
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HARTSELLE — Even out of uniform, a star quality surrounds Hartselle student Hugheston Slate.

As he walks through the high school halls, some students don’t know his name, but they know he is Champs, the Hartselle High mascot.

“They call me that all the time,” Slate said. “But, I don’t mind.”

He shouldn’t because being the mascot at Hartselle has propelled him to a position with the Huntsville Havoc, a minor league professional hockey team.

The only difference between Champs and Havoc mascot Chaos is Slate gets paid to perform at all Havoc home games at Von Braun Civic Center.

Asked about the pay, he said: “I get a little, but it’s not a full-time job.”

And if you know Slate, his teachers and classmates said, you know he doesn’t do it for the money.

“He probably has more school spirit than any kid I have ever been associated with,” counselor and head basketball coach Johnny Berry said. “He’s not just a mascot. He loves what he is doing and loves our teams.”

It’s that love of team and school that caught the eye of Ashley Balch, a former Hartselle student, now an assistant general manager with the Havoc.

While attending the Tigers’ football game with Austin, Balch paid more attention to Slate than he did to the game. Balch contacted his mother, a counselor at Hartselle High, and she put Slate in contact with the Havoc. “They interviewed him, and the rest is his-



story,” Elaine Balch said. “The fans, especially the kids, love him at the games.”

Slate has always loved athletics and has possessed what he calls a “free-spirited” personality.

When he was a sophomore, his mother encouraged him to get involved with something in high school. To please her, and thinking it wouldn’t be a big deal, he tried out for mascot. He was an immediate hit with the cheerleaders and spectators.

Hartselle senior Shelley Harvel was there the day he walked on the field.

Please see **Mascot**, page A4



Hugheston Slate, above left, performs as Chaos, the mascot of the Huntsville Havoc hockey team, at a game at the Von Braun Civic Center. At left, Hugheston is seen as Champ, mascot for the Hartselle High basketball teams.

Courtesy photo, Daily photo by Jonathan Palmer

Aderholt bill would require TB screening for poultry workers

By Eric Fleischer
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Tuberculosis screening for prospective employees at meat-processing facilities would be required under a bill introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on Thursday.

Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-Ha-



Aderholt

leyville, introduced the bill, which would bar those diagnosed with active TB from employment.

“We’re talking about a place where you are processing food,” Ader-

holt said. “I think that’s a sensitive area, even though TB’s not spread through food.”

In November, after discovering a former Wayne Farms employee had active TB, the state Department of Public Health administered 765 TB tests to employees of the Decatur chicken processing plant.

One of those tested had active

TB, which is contagious. Twenty-eight percent had latent TB infections.

While latent TB is not contagious, it can become contagious if the infected individual’s immune system is later compromised. The airborne bacteria usually is spread through coughing.

TB often is fatal if not treated,

but prompt treatment almost always is effective.

“This issue came out with Wayne Farms,” Aderholt said. “This does affect our district, and we want to be responsive. As it stands now, if someone is found to have active TB, there is nothing that prohibits them from working there.”

Wayne Farms officials did not

immediately return calls Thursday.

State health officials said in November they were not surprised that a high percentage of Wayne Farms employees had latent TB infection.

The majority of the employees tested were immigrants

Please see **TB**, page A4

AREA DEATHS

Cathleen Gearhart, Moulton
William Gibson, Town Creek
Carol Loiry, Florida
Lavelle Pittard, Hartselle
Presence Rogers, Decatur
Ann Watkins, Decatur

Death notices, obituaries, B5.



TODAY’S WEATHER, A2

High: 61 Low: 44

Partly cloudy with light winds. A chance of showers after midnight. Showers Saturday. Colder Saturday night. A chance of rain and a slight chance of snow after midnight.

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Decatur, Alabama 96th year, No. 292, 102 pages

WORLD

A book of fairy tales created, handwritten and illustrated by J.K. Rowling sells for nearly \$4 million. A8



Dec. 14
11 shopping days to Christmas

SPORTS

Woodard in report

Ex-Hartselle standout mentioned in Mitchell Report on steroid use in major league baseball. C1

