

FRIDAY
October 7, 2011

The Sentinel-Record

Three sections,
28 pages
Number 280, Volume 134
50 cents

www.hotstr.com

Published daily in Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas, since 1877

Suspect in '09 Percy murder pleads guilty

STEVEN MROSS
The Sentinel-Record

The second of two suspects in the brutal 2009 murders of five people in Percy pleaded guilty Thursday to heavily reduced charges in the case and was sentenced to a total of 50 years in prison.

Jeremy Pickney, 25, appeared before Garland County Circuit Court Judge John Homer Wright and pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit aggravated residential burglary, receiving a 30-year sentence, and one count of theft by receiving more than \$2,500, receiving a 20-year sentence. Wright said the sentences would run consecutively.

After a four-day trial, his accomplice, Samuel Lee Conway, 25, was convicted June 18 of five counts of capital murder and sentenced to life in prison without parole on each count, to run consecutively, and also received two life sentences for two counts of aggravated residential burglary and additional prison time for four theft charges.

Both Pickney and Conway were arrested Nov. 20, 2009, for the Nov. 12 deaths of Edward Gentry Sr., 80, Edward Gentry Jr., 55, his wife, Pamela Fern Gentry, 52, their son, Jeremy Gentry, 24, and the younger Gentry's girlfriend, Kathryn

Warnecke, 19, at 3450 and 3458-A Old Airport Road.

A third alleged accomplice, Marvin Stringer, 22, was shot and killed the night before when authorities attempted to arrest him at a local motel.

Prosecuting Attorney Steve Oliver said after Pickney's sentencing that "under the circumstances we were forced to take a plea," noting, "It was a weak case to begin with."

He said the biggest evidence they had against Pickney involved two recovered cellphone videos showing Pickney, Conway and Stringer practicing the robbery - one from two weeks before the killings and one from just two days before - displaying the same types of guns used in the crime.

Oliver said they filed a motion to have the videos admitted at Conway's trial, but it was denied.

In Conway's case, he said they had a lot of other evidence against him including text messages, cellphone records, witnesses he confessed to, and evidence placing his vehicle at the scene.

For Pickney's trial, which had been set to begin Tuesday, Oliver said he filed a motion to reconsider allowing the videos, but once again the motion was denied. **MURDER, PAGE 5A**



The Sentinel-Record/Richard Rasmussen

MURDER SUSPECT: The second of two suspects arrested for the 2009 homicides of five people in Percy, Jeremy Pickney, 25, center, is escorted to Garland County Circuit Court Thursday where he pleaded guilty to two reduced counts and was sentenced to a total of 50 years in prison.

County burn ban reimposed

JIM NEWSOM
The Sentinel-Record

Citing a lack of recent rainfall and dry weather conditions, County Judge Rick Davis on Thursday reimposed a county-wide burn ban.

"We're in a drought. I hope this doesn't continue. We're going to be like Texas next year," Davis said referring to lingering drought conditions there.

The ban prohibits all outside burning without a permit with the exception of backyard and campground barbecue grills. He said outdoor grills can be used "as long as you don't have any embers flying out in the air."

Davis reimposed the ban based on information provided by the Arkansas Forestry Commission and county volunteer fire departments.

"They were pretty adamant about putting it on," he said. "With that and with the conditions that the (U.S.) Forest Service has put out, I think it's time to do it."

Davis imposed and lifted burn bans throughout the summer because of hot, dry conditions.

With deer hunting seasons under way **BURN BAN, PAGE 7A**

VEHICLE BLAZE



The Sentinel-Record/Richard Rasmussen

Members of the Lake Hamilton Volunteer Fire Department douse a fire in a 2006 Scion XB that occurred around 8 a.m. Thursday in the 400 block of Burchwood Bay Road. The driver, Brian Hughes, of Hot Springs, said he was traveling west when he smelled smoke and was able to pull the vehicle into the parking lot of Sam's Pizza Pub and exit the vehicle unharmed. He said the car was quickly engulfed in flames and, while burning, rolled backward about 50 feet, coming to rest next to a tree in a yard across the street. The cause of the blaze is unknown, but Hughes said he thought it originated in the rear of the vehicle.

'Comprehensive process' used to project jail cost

JIM NEWSOM
The Sentinel-Record

The \$41.4 million projected cost of a new Garland County Detention Center results from a "very comprehensive cost analysis process," Voorhis & Associates President John Milosovich said.

According to Voorhis & Associates, the jail's estimated price tag includes the following:

- Site acquisition costs - \$1,334,000.
- Construction costs - \$34,616,270.
- Project support - \$2,938,921.
- Criminal justice consultant - \$650,000.
- Project contingency fund - \$1,944,460.

Garland County retained Voorhis & Associates, of Lafayette, Colo. in 2010 to study the county's jail needs and how to remedy them. The consulting firm has recommended that the county build a new, 153,000-square-foot detention

center to quell escalating criminal activity in Hot Springs and Garland County.

"We feel like we've done a very comprehensive job working with the Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee, the county and the sheriff's office to clearly define the county's needs and to define the scope of the project," Milosovich said.

Voters are determining through early voting, which ends Monday, and regular voting on Tuesday, the fate of a proposed \$42 million bond issue to build, maintain and operate a new jail.

The single ballot, which will be voted on countywide, will contain two measures. One measure is a vote "for" or "against" issuing \$42 million in capital improvement bonds and levying a 0.625 percent sales and use tax to fund the bonds' repayment, to commence on April 1, 2012, and expiring once the bonds are repaid.

JAIL, PAGE 7A

Lt. Gov. Darr tours ASMSA

JENN BALLARD
The Sentinel-Record

Arkansas Lt. Gov. Mark Darr visited the Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences, and the Arts Thursday to learn more about the school's development with the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics program.

Mia Anderson, ASMSA's public relations specialist, said Darr visited the school because "we are the leader in STEM education in the state."

"We've been trying to find out more about this STEM initiative, and we've heard this school is very advanced. We wanted to learn a bit more about it," Darr said.

Darr was given a guided tour of 13 classes in the math, science, English and arts departments by Janet Hugo, ASMSA direc-

tor, and Brian Monson, science department chair.

Sarah Beth Lowe, communications director for Darr, said Hugo "did a great job of giving us a tour and meeting with the lieutenant governor and with the students that were there from Paris, Ark., to Mayflower, to Little Rock."

She said the STEM Works initiative was launched by Gov. Mike Beebe about a month ago to build the education of high schools and universities in the science, technology, engineering and math fields to meet the escalating demands of the job market.

"The lieutenant governor has been traveling the state, visiting charter schools, public schools, private schools to meet with **ASMSA, PAGE 7A**



The Sentinel-Record/Richard Rasmussen

ASMSA VISITOR: Arkansas Lt. Gov. Mark Darr, right, talks with Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences and the Arts teacher Nicholas Seward Thursday during a tour of the facility.

Arkansas lottery fires VP hired by ex-director

NOMAAN MERCHANT
The Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK — The Arkansas Lottery has fired the last of three top officials brought in to launch the games two years ago, and the lottery commission's chairwoman called the move an opportunity for change.

Ernestine Middleton, the lottery vice president for administration, was fired Wednesday — two days after the resignations of embattled director Ernie Passailaigue and another vice president, David Barden. Passailaigue announced last month he would be leaving, but Barden and Middleton had said they wanted to keep their jobs.

Passailaigue, the former director of South Carolina's lottery, brought Middleton and Barden with him to start the Arkansas games, which have **LOTTERY, PAGE 9A**

Rankin, Cotton claim strong start in US House bid

NOMAAN MERCHANT
The Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK — Two Republicans who announced during the summer they want to replace Democratic U.S. Rep. Mike Ross in a southern Arkansas district next year said Thursday their fundraising was off to a strong start.

Tom Cotton, a Dardanelle manage-

ment consultant and Army veteran, said he raised more than \$343,000 in the third quarter. Beth Anne Rankin, a former Miss Arkansas from Magnolia who worked for former Gov. Mike Huckabee, said she raised more than \$170,000 in the period ending Sept. 30.

Cotton and Rankin released their totals for the third quarter in advance of an Oct. 15 federal deadline.

The two other candidates who have declared their intention to run in the 4th Congressional District, which covers Hot Springs, Pine Bluff and Texarkana, said they hadn't started fundraising in earnest yet.

The other Republican in the race, Waldron businessman and Marine veteran Marcus Richmond, said he raised about \$10,000 last quarter. And state

Sen. Gene Jeffress, the lone Democrat so far, said he hasn't raised any money at all.

Ross, the only Democrat among Arkansas' four U.S. House members, announced in July he would not seek re-election next year. He's expected to run for governor in 2014; Democratic **HOUSE, PAGE 4A**

Weather

SUNNY. HIGHS IN THE MID 80S. LOWS IN THE MID 50S.
SUNRISE: 7:11 A.M.
SUNSET: 6:50 P.M.



MORE ON PAGE 2A

SATURDAY:
HIGH 84° LOW 62°
SUNDAY:
HIGH 80° LOW 59°

Index

Arts, movies	6-8B	FYI	2A
Classified	1-5C	Lifestyles	6C
Sports	1-5B	Obituaries	9A
HSV News	7C	Stocks	9B
Features, etc.	8C	Viewpoints	8A

Quote of the day

Being right half the time beats being half-right all the time.
- Malcolm Forbes, American publisher (1919-1990).

