

MORNING NEWS

SERVING NORTHWEST ARKANSAS SINCE 1886

TODAY IN WHAT'S UP
**ARTS CENTER
 TAKES VISITORS
 TO A SPOOKY
 CASTLE**



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COOL CLASS



STAFF PHOTO ANDY SHUPE

Benjamin Long, 7, of Bentonville receives skating instruction from Katt Parsons of Springdale, a representative of the Arkansas Figure Skating Association, at the Jones Center in Springdale. Benjamin is a hockey player who plays for the Northwest Arkansas Hockey Association and is working to improve his skating skills.

UNNAMED ALLEGATIONS

Fire Chief Placed On Leave

ATHA REMAINS ON PAYROLL DURING INVESTIGATION

By Steve Caraway
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SPRINGDALE — Fire Chief Duane Atha has been placed on administrative leave.

Mayor Doug Sprouse placed Atha on leave with pay Wednesday. Atha will be on leave while allegations are investigated by the Police Department, Sprouse said. He declined to say what the allegations are.

“We have to let it go through the process,” Sprouse said.

Atha did not return phone calls Thursday. Atha started working for the Fire Department on June 1, 1986, and was named chief March 2, 2003, according to city records.

“We would like to complete the investigation as quickly and thoroughly as possible,” Sprouse said. “That would be the best for all concerned.”

Kevin McDonald, assistant fire chief, will be in charge of the department while Atha is on leave, Sprouse said.

An employee may be placed on administrative leave when

the nature of the allegation compromises the ability of the employee to perform their duties, according to the city personnel and procedures manual. If the charges are found to be true, disciplinary action will be taken according to the nature of the offense. If the allegations are false, the employee will be returned to duty, according to the manual.

Fire chiefs are civil service employees of the city, according to Jeff Harper, city attorney.

Sprouse is the supervisor for Springdale’s fire and police chiefs but he does not hire or fire them. The Civil Service Board oversees the hiring and firing of those chiefs.

The section on administrative leave in the city’s civil service manual is similar, stating the leave is not considered a disciplinary action.



Atha

GETTING STARTED

IN THE NEWS

Dennis A Playmaker For Springdale High

SPRINGDALE — Jordan Dennis crouched down at the line of scrimmage last week and focused his eyes on Fort Smith Northside receiver Shaquille Jones.

FULL STORY, 7A



Opposing Lines Can't Lock Up Gates

SPRINGDALE — Seth Gates set one personal goal this season — to lead Springdale Har-Ber in quarterback sacks. Seven games in, the senior defensive end has nine quarterback takedowns.

FULL STORY, 7A



Proposed County Budget Includes Raises

STUDY FINDS SALARIES SKEWED COMPARED WITH OTHER ENTITIES

By Tom Sissom
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BENTONVILLE — Raises of about 5 percent for Benton County employees and most elected officials will be part of the proposed 2012 budget to be considered by the Finance Committee beginning Tuesday.

The Personnel Committee heard a report Thursday on the county’s pay structure that included recommendations for a 2.2 percent across-the-board increase for employees and additional merit increases ranging from 1.5 percent to 3.3 percent.

County officials salaries also were considered in the study by the Johanson Group of Fayetteville. Blair Johanson, company president, presented the findings along with Barb Ludwig, the county’s human resources director.

Johanson told the committee the county’s salary structure has become skewed in recent years when compared with both other governmental entities and private businesses. He said the county needs to consider the 2.2 percent cost-of-living raises and the merit

WHAT'S NEXT
BUDGET WORK
 Work on Benton County’s 2012 budget will continue with a special meeting of the county Finance Committee at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday at the County Administration Building at 215. E. Central Ave. in Bentonville.
 SOURCE: STAFF REPORT

raises and adjusting the pay grades at the upper levels to bring the pay structure in line with comparable organizations.

Elected officials’ pay also should be reviewed, according to Johanson, in part because the county has grown and is considered a Class 7 county, along with Pulaski and Washington counties. Before the 2010 Census, Pulaski County had been the state’s only Class 7 county.

According to the information presented, Benton County’s elected officials are now paid at 74 percent or 75 percent of the maximum allowed by state law. The county judge and sheriff are at 75 percent and receive salaries of \$86,278. The county clerk, assessor, collector, and treasurer are at 74 percent

of the state maximum and receive \$73,586.

The exception to the pay rate among elected officials is the coroner Daniel Oxford, who is paid just \$45,600, which is 46 percent of the maximum.

The coroner’s office had been a part-time position in the past and the level of pay has not been raised to that of the other full-time offices. The justices of the peace agreed Thursday to begin addressing that discrepancy. Justice of the Peace Tom Allen made a motion, which was approved and sent on to the Finance Committee, that the coroner’s salary be raised \$16,000 in 2012 with additional increases to be considered in 2013. That increase

SEE COUNTY PAGE 2A

School District To Save Millions With Buyout

By Amye Buckley
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ROGERS — The ripple effect from the June 30 buyout of 89 district employees is expected to save money in the long run for Rogers School District.

A report released to the School Board on Tuesday indicated officials expect to save at least \$4.1 million over eight years. That estimate comes from limited data. The savings will be much greater,

said Kathy Hanlon, district treasurer.

“It’s not scientific, but from what I’m looking at with the numbers, I think it’s closer to \$7 million,” Hanlon said.

Additional savings are possible when a district promotes from within, said Katy Rose, senior vice president Educators Preferred Corp., the company that oversaw the buyout plan and study.

SEE BUYOUT PAGE 2A



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