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Photo by Charles Mattox

Magistrate Mike Webb, left, joins County Attorney Dawn Letcher at attorney Clifton Clark explains the desires of the hospital and nursing home during a meeting last week geared to separate the Nicholas County Hospital and the Johnson Mathers Nursing Home.

Hospital and nursing home seek separation

By Charles Mattox
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Members of the Nicholas County Fiscal Court met Tuesday Oct. 22 with administrators of the Nicholas County Hospital and Johnson Mathers Nursing Home last week to move forward with the separation of those two health care facilities.

The hospital and nursing home want to separate from one another due to Medicare billing restraints that are depriving them of several hundreds of thousands of dollars, according to dialogue at the meeting.

Veteran attorney Ray Bogucki, acting at no charge at the request of County Attorney Dawn Letcher, who wanted to ensure there was no conflict of interest on her part, met with Johnson Mathers attorney Clifton Clark, who is representing the hospital and nursing home.

The meeting took place inside the county judge's office and lasted approximately two hours.

A hinge point in the meeting was the number of appointees the court could have on the two boards that will oversee operations of the hospital and nursing home upon separation.

"I'd like to see the fiscal court have as many representatives as we legally can," said Magistrate Steve Hamilton.

"I don't see that as being a problem," said Hospital Director Doris Ecton.

Ecton said that the hospital and nursing home currently provide several services under one billing department, like dietary, housekeeping and laundry, and combined those and other services cannot capture federal dollars unless they are separated.

"We're not looking to duplicate services," Ecton said. "The whole concept is to get cost reimbursement from Medicare and Medicaid."

Discussion among members of the court and hospital corporation indicated the nursing home was profitable, but the hospital was losing money in the emer-

gency room services and elsewhere.

The court owns the property and the hospital and nursing home lease the property from the court.

Hamilton and Magistrate Daryl Stacy led discussion to ensure the move was what was best for taxpayers of Nicholas County.

All agreed in the end that it would be, with Ecton estimated conservatively that the entities should see an increase of revenue of about \$200,000 a year following the separation.

"We'll look to split the accounts receivable as best as we can," Ecton said on questioning from Hamilton.

"Our goal is to work together for the benefit of the community," Judge-Executive Larry Timcher said during the meeting.

"The success of the hospital depends entirely on the community," Ecton said and Hamilton quickly replied "there were many things the hospital could do to make it self more attractive."

"We're working on that," Ecton said.

Arson investigation continues

By Charles Mattox
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Officials have questioned one person and continue to gather evidence in relation to several fires that were started earlier this month along Old Mexico Road.

"There are no significant new developments with the arson investigation at this point," said Nicholas County Fire Chief Mark Hughes. Hughes and his team of dedicated firefighters have been called out on fires this month alone. They battled five separate fires in the evening hours of Oct. 19 when an arsonist set five fires, which destroyed two unoccupied buildings on Old Mexico Road. The firemen battled the blaze for over 4 hours and were successful in containing the destruction.

A barn was destroyed the next week, but the investigation has not ruled out the possibility of the fire being

started accidentally due to electricity.

One roll bale of hay has since been set ablaze and another roll bale was shoved into Lake Carnico.

"I believe those two incidents with the hay bales were the actions of youngsters and is not related to the Old Mexico Road acts of arson," Hughes said. Members of the Ewing Volunteer Fire Department joined Hughes and his fire department members with containing the fire on Old Mexico Road. Hughes said he was grateful for the help. He said he was also grateful for the recent rains that have moistened the dry woods.

"The rain has made a difference for us and helped ease our minds. It was dangerously dry before," he said. Hughes complimented members of the community who help the fire department in many ways.

"They help in so many big ways and in the small ways too," Hughes said. Often after a run, members of the community will call or stop some of us on the street the next day to ask about the fire and let us know they were praying for us while we were on call. That means so much to all of us. Our fire fighters are extremely dedicated and well trained. They know what they need to do at the scene and they do it. We always try to leave our homes safely and return the same way. I just wish people who set these fires could understand how dangerous it is. Fire departments are a family and we don't want to lose any members of our family to any fire, especially one that has been deliberately set.

There are currently no burn bans in effect, but Hughes reminds everyone that fires are only to be ignited from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., and he reminds everyone to never leave a fire unattended.

Congressman Davis meets with student leaders

By Charles Mattox
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Congressman Geoff Davis was at the Nicholas County High School Thursday to speak with student leaders and hear their concerns.

Davis was not alone. John Stanton, who is the deputy chief of staff for the congressman, and field representative J.R. Reed, joined him as he visited with members of the NCHS Student Council for a casual meeting Oct. 23 at the school.

Davis was elected to the 4th District in 2004. The 4th Congressional District contains 24 of Kentucky's northernmost counties, including Nicholas County.

"I like to meet with the students," he said later. "I



Photo by Charles Mattox

Congressman Geoff Davis met with NCHS Student Council members last week at the school for a discussion on current affairs.

do it as often as I can." Davis served in the Middle East as a former assault helicopter flight commander with the 82nd Airborne Division and he spoke easily to

the students about his personal views of the current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and how his personal experiences guided his philosophy of the war. He fielded questions about the war during his visit and also discussed the current economic crisis.

"A lot of mistakes were made early on," he said in response to a question on Iraq, and later said "The war is not going to be won by us (members of congress). It will be won by the young officers and sergeants on the ground."

And though not specifying strategies to achieve victory, he said at one point, "You can't kill your way to victory."

See DAVIS Page 2



Photo submitted

100 percent achievement

Every first grade Nicholas County elementary student received 100 percent on a math assessment test about doubles. First grade teachers include Melissa Miller, Sarah Henson, Jenna Smoot and Lori Kenney. Students were tested on their knowledge of doubling numbers.



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