

Lampasas Dispatch Record

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FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 2021

75 CENTS

Sentence given in murder case

Man who accompanied shooter receives probation after pleading guilty to deadly conduct

BY MADELEINE MILLER
DISPATCH RECORD

Matthew Isaiah Lawson, 19, pleaded guilty Jan. 8 to deadly conduct for his involvement in the September 2019 fatal shooting of Kempner resident Vance Henry Helzer.

27th District Judge John Gauntt sentenced Lawson to six years' probation. The judge also ordered Lawson to pay \$4,845 in restitution and \$310 in court costs.

Lawson originally was charged with murder, but his defense attorneys Eddie Shell and Stacy Burke formed a partial plea agreement with District Attorney

John Greenwood in which Greenwood reduced Lawson's charge to deadly conduct. Shell and Burke agreed to leave Lawson's punishment entirely up to the court.

Lawson rode with Javier Kristian Gutierrez, Kashawn Anton-James Ratliff and Markevious Rayshun Myers from Copperas Cove to Helzer's residence in Kempner, where Gutierrez shot Helzer in front of his house from the vehicle, according to arrest affidavits. Ratliff drove the vehicle used for the



Matthew Isaiah Lawson

drive-by shooting, although the vehicle belonged to Lawson.

After Gutierrez pleaded guilty in June to a murder charge, Gauntt sentenced him to 20 years in prison. In October, the judge ordered an eight-year prison sentence for Ratliff, who had pleaded guilty to a murder charge in July.

Greenwood said he believes Lawson's deadly-conduct charge accurately reflects Lawson's involvement in the incident.

"He had knowledge of and certainly participated in the commission of the offense - but for him the car wouldn't have been there," he said. "But without the two other defendants sentenced to time, I don't

think this young man would have been involved in a murder offense ever."

Lawson's deadly-conduct charge is a third-degree felony, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

Burke said Lawson regrets his part in Helzer's murder.

"He's a young kid," she said. "He did get involved with the wrong people, but he was not one of the main actors - he did not have a very active involvement with the main shooting. He was very remorseful, and I believe he didn't want anybody to die or be murdered."

Myers is set for a plea hearing and presentence investigation report Jan. 15.



CHRIS YBARRA | DISPATCH RECORD

Stock show features variety of competitions

Robert Lamountain, Emma Jones -- second from right -- and Abriana Flores hold Jones' chickens during poultry judging at last week's Lampasas County Youth Livestock Show. More stock show coverage is in pages B1-B10 of today's edition.

Trustees extend superintendent's contract

BY MADELEINE MILLER
DISPATCH RECORD

The Lampasas Independent School District Board of Trustees voted Monday night to extend Superintendent Dr. Chane Rascoe's contract, which now is set to expire in June 2024.

Board President David Millican said the trustees admire the work Rascoe has done for the district, especially during such an unusual year. "We feel that Dr. Rascoe is doing a good job," he said. "We've all had to deal with things we'd never thought we'd have to deal with over the last year. We feel he's taken the leadership role and done a real good job."

The board has extended Rascoe's contract each year since he became the superintendent.

Trustees also granted Rascoe a 7% raise, bringing his salary to \$169,864 as of July 1.

In addition, trustees voted to give all school district employees an additional 10 days of paid leave for "COVID-19-related issues," Millican said.

The policy will replace the Family First Coronavirus Response Act, which allowed employees to take 80 hours of paid leave and expired Dec. 31.

Wes Graham, principal of Kline Whitis Elementary School, updated the board on the school's operations.

Graham thanked the trustees for allowing schools to resume in-person instruction at the start of the school year.

"I can imagine you had a lot to consider, but the return to a sense of normalcy was needed



MADELEINE MILLER | DISPATCH RECORD

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and key to our mission of educating students," he said.

Graham said 25% of students at Kline Whitis started the year remotely. After the first nine weeks, 11% were enrolled in remote instruction, and now 6% of the campus' students study remotely.

The school's theme this year is to "maximize each day," the principal said,

and teachers are working with students to help them develop positive character traits.

Graham said the average independent reading level has improved across the last two cohorts of Kline Whitis Elementary students.

In other reports, Rascoe said as of Dec. 17, the district's enrollment stood

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Health care contract approved for jail

BY MADELEINE MILLER
DISPATCH RECORD

The Lampasas County Commissioners Court voted this week to approve a contract between Turn Key Health Clinics and the Lampasas County Sheriff's Office for the firm to provide medical services to inmates at the county jail.

Under the agreement, Turn Key Health Clinics will provide comprehensive health-care

services, including pharmaceutical administration, on-site laboratory and radiology services, and charting.

The Oklahoma City-based company will provide on-site nursing services at the jail 40 hours per week and a physician or mid-level provider to offer on-site or remote consultations eight hours per week.

Turn Key Health Clinics also will employ an on-call physician to provide

SEE COMMISSIONERS, PAGE A3

WEATHER

Date	High	Low	Rain
Jan. 10	41	32	0.46
Jan. 11	41	30	0.21
Jan. 12	50	27	0
Jan. 13	63	32	0

Total rainfall for 2021: 0.75 in.

Data from the Lower Colorado River Authority (site 11 miles west-northwest of Lampasas, near Nix).

BRIEFLY

UNDERGROUND WATER

The Saratoga Underground Water Conservation District Board of Directors will accept public comments Tuesday about the proposed Desired Future Conditions for underground water. Comments may be presented in written or verbal form at the SUWCD board meeting, which will be at 5:30 p.m. in the county annex building at 409 S. Pecan St.

Written comments also may be submitted before the meeting by email to saratogauwcd@gmail.com or by

postal mail to P.O. Box 168, Lampasas, TX 76550.

COVID-19 VACCINE

The Veterans Affairs facility at 1901 Veterans Memorial Dr. in Temple will host a COVID-19 vaccine clinic Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The clinic is open to veterans 75 and older who are enrolled with the VA.

To schedule an appointment, call 800-423-2111. Walk-ins will be accepted until 2 p.m. Veterans must

provide proper identification.

BURN BAN SUSPENDED TEMPORARILY

County Judge Randy Hoyer has lifted the county's burn ban until Monday at 5 p.m. As a result, controlled outdoor fires are allowed outside Lampasas, Kempner and Lometa city limits.

Officials urge people to use caution when burning -- and to notify the Lampasas County Sheriff's Office of fire plans in advance by calling 512-556-8255.

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