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# Kentucky New Era.

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## Report: Preschool attendance down

Dip in County birth rate discussed at League of Women Voters forum

BY SAM MORGEN  
NEW ERA STAFF WRITER

Preschool attendance across Christian County is below capacity, a panel of experts reported to a small crowd at a League of Women Voters forum, Monday night.

Audubon Area Head Start and local daycare providers said attendance at their facilities saw a slight decrease two years ago, which has gotten worse since.

Michelle Ladd, Director of Preschool and Education for the Christian County School District, said the attendance dip could be caused by a lower birth rate the county experienced a few years ago. The children born three to four years ago would be entering preschool now. With less babies born in recent years, there are less eligible toddlers for preschool now.

Nevertheless, "We know they are out there," Ladd said. "It is just a means of finding where they are and getting

them to the services they need."

Dana Myers, the Manager of the local Head Start said her program also experienced a decrease in attendance.

Both programs are now operating below capacity. Studies have shown that attendance at preschool can positively impact a child's performance at school in later grades. Local educators have noted a difference in school readiness in children who attend preschool and those who don't.

To attend public preschool, young students must be from families who live at or below 150 percent of the poverty level or they must be developmentally delayed.

SEE PRESCHOOL, PAGE A2

### A REAL HOOT FOR STUDENTS



PHOTOS BY MEREDITH WILLSE | KENTUCKY NEW ERA

Kristin Allen releases the recently recovered Owen the owl back into the wild Tuesday. He was found at the end of last month by a Pembroke Elementary teacher's home. He had gotten caught in some barbed wire before the teacher's family saved him and brought him to the Nurture to Nature Wildlife Rehabilitation Center.

## Owen the Owl gets to go home

BY MEREDITH WILLSE  
NEW ERA STAFF WRITER

PEMBROKE, Ky. — A Pembroke Elementary School teacher said she was tickled to have him home Tuesday morning on her farm.

Nancy DeCoursey was talking about Owen, an owl that her family saved recently. DeCoursey's daughter, Rachel, said a bird got tangled up on the evening of Jan. 23 on her way home from work. She and her father, Ray, went to investigate and found an owl caught on barbed wire.

"He was wrapped up in there good," Ray DeCoursey said, adding he has a real soft spot for birds of prey.

DeCoursey set about freeing the owl. He

cut the wings loose on either side and covered the creature with a blanket to help him calm down.

DeCoursey called a non-emergency line for the Emergency Communications Center, but they had no suggestions on where to take the owl.

In the meantime, Nancy DeCoursey posted on Facebook she needed a place to take the injured bird. That's when she was told about the Nurture to Nature Wildlife Rehabilitation Center.

The DeCourseys finally found someone to help with the owl, and her name was Kristin Allen. She volunteered to meet them halfway, but the DeCourseys decided



Allen holds a barred owl on Tuesday while teaching some Pembroke Elementary students about the birds.

SEE OWL, PAGE A5

## County health director resigns

NEW ERA STAFF REPORTS

Mark Pyle, Director of the Christian County Public Health Department will resign from his position to become the Deputy Commissioner for the Kentucky Department for Public Health in Frankfort, effective Feb. 27, the department announced Monday.



In his place Amanda Bassingthwaite, Health Education Manager, will serve as the interim director until a new director is chosen. The Christian County Board of Health will post the position to job boards once Pyle has left for Frankfort.

"I am proud of what the Christian County Health Department has achieved over the past nine years," Pyle said in a news release. "Although national accreditation was a crowning achievement, it was not the most important. The most important achievements were the development of community partnerships, implementing evidence based/population based health programs and forming a culture of above-the-line performance."

Pyle commended the health department staff for their efforts under his leadership.

Bob Pickerill, Chairman of the Christian County Board of Health, said in the release that Pyle told him of his appointment weeks in advance of the public disclosure.

"While we are sad to see Mark leave the Christian County Health Department," Pickerill said, "we know that he has left the department in a good position moving forward, and he will still be in a position to assist Christian County in the future. We wish Mark nothing but the best in his new position in Frankfort."

Pyle, in his new position, will serve as a liaison to Kentucky's 63 county, district and independent health departments, according to the release.

## Bill filed intending to help felons get hired

BY TONYA S. GRACE  
NEW ERA STAFF WRITER

Sen. Whitney Westerfield joined Gov. Matt Bevin on Tuesday morning to announce the filing of legislation that Westerfield said will enhance the administration of criminal justice while also improving public safety.

"The important thing to note is that every one of the policies in this bill is aimed at (public safety)," the senator said.

"They make Kentucky safe."

The legislation is Senate Bill 120, sponsored by Westerfield.

The senator described the bill as a product of seven months of work involving the Criminal Justice Policy Assessment Council, the group created by the governor last June with its focus on rehabilitation and workforce development for the state's convicted felons.

Westerfield said the group has met several times to discuss ideas, and Senate Bill 120 represents several of those policy goals suggested by the council.

The bill offers a number of initiatives intended to give felons "a chance for a successful re-entry into society," Westerfield

said.

He highlighted three of those initiatives during Tuesday's press conference including licensing reform, private industry enhancement and a drug re-entry supervision program. The licensing reform initiative creates a due process for people who have felonies and have been automatically barred in the past from getting a license from any one of the 60



Westerfield

SEE BILL, PAGE A6

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