

Arkansas editorial roundup

The Associated Press

El Dorado News-Times, Jan. 22: What a difference a few years can make.

On Jan. 22, 2007, the El Dorado Promise scholarship program was announced and a \$50 million contribution from Murphy Oil Corp. made a college education more attainable for graduates of El Dorado High School.

In some ways, it seems like yesterday that we were all packed into the EHS gym for the announcement. In others, it seems like the scholarship has been here for eons. Perhaps it is the impact of the El Dorado Promise in such a short time that makes it feel like longer than three years.

Let's take a look at what has happened in our community since the program was announced. There are some definite measurable results.

— Ninety-five percent — 95 PERCENT — of 2009 El Dorado High School graduates signed letters of intent to attend college. That number compared to 63 percent statewide and 66 percent nationwide.

— Enrollment in the El Dorado School District was up 149 students for the 2007-2008 school year. It was up another 49 students for the 2008-2009 year and held steady for the 2009-2010 year, even with the closing of Pilgrim's Pride and other job losses in the community. So the district is up 200 students with an enrollment of 4,577 since the El Dorado Promise was announced.

— South Arkansas Community College said Tuesday that enrollment for the spring semester is up 13 percent from last year. As of Tuesday afternoon, 1,755 students had registered for classes at SouthArk, compared to last spring, when 1,534 students were registered.

— While not all of the students at SouthArk are EHS graduates, a good number of them are and enrollment figures for the local college have risen steadily since the announcement of the El Dorado Promise.

— A free college education. That's the ultimate graduation gift and one that merits a perpetual "thank you" card to Murphy Oil for its generosity.

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Southwest Times Record, Jan. 25: It was nice to have Gov. Mike Beebe in town on Friday. He's a good speaker: intelligent, witty, inspiring but with a healthy dose of Arkie to let you know that he's one of you.

The governor was the guest speaker at the annual banquet of the Fort Smith

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Regional Chamber of Commerce. It was cool and damp when the be-suited were making their way to the Holiday Inn City Center, but there was still a packed house.

Roger Meek, immediate past chairman of the chamber board of directors, highlighted the industry that has or will come to town and the jobs created at some of the industry already in place, saying much of the progress wouldn't have been possible without the cooperation of the chamber, the city of Fort Smith, the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith and the Fort Chaffee Redevelopment Authority. Meek also welcomed John McFarland as the chamber's chairman of the board for 2010. (Thank you, Mr. Meek, and good luck, Mr. McFarland!)

Beebe took both a micro- and macro-view of the state and local economy. As for the big picture, the state and communities like Fort Smith's should have two goals — improved economic development and education, both of which he said Fort Smith was doing. There are other public policy issues, of course, but if there is strong economic development and a solid educational system, everything else falls into place. And those things are in place, again, both here and elsewhere around the state, because of the state's commitment to education as well as because of some powerful tools Beebe was given by the state Legislature and the cooperation among the state's leaders.

Early next year, Mitsubishi Power Systems, for example, is scheduled to start construction on a new plant here to build wind-power turbines. The company expects that it will eventually need 400 workers. Getting the company here to Fort Smith was quite a coup, given all the competition there is for such industry. But, as Beebe said, one of the factors that came into play was how company officials were received here.

"Mitsubishi was blown away by Fort Smith's people," Beebe said. "They liked the way you responded to them. You don't realize how important that is." His point was that the big-picture successes don't happen without such small-picture face-to-face successes taking place as well.

The governor said competition among cities is healthy and to be expected, but he said a regional approach to economic development — even a statewide approach — is the way he has to look at getting companies to locate here because a new job anywhere in the state is a plus for every city in the state.

Along those lines, Beebe was proud to say that in the competition to get Hewlett-Packard Co. to locate in Arkansas, Benton, Conway (the eventual winner) and Little Rock never disparaged the other competitors as they tried to woo the company.

As for education, Beebe cited a recent report (which was covered by our Arkansas News Bureau and carried in the Times Record on Jan. 15) that had Arkansas ranked 10th in the nation in public education.

The 14th annual Quality Counts report gave Arkansas a B-minus for overall quality in education based on a variety of factors including educational policies, spending, student achievement and students' chances of success. Arkansas was the only state

west of the Mississippi that got a

B-minus or better. And this was the second year in a row that Arkansas had been ranked 10th.

Beebe said the state can stop using the tired phrase "Thank God for Mississippi" because Arkansas isn't dragging the bottom of the barrel now in many categories involving education and is moving up the ladder in one of the hardest categories in which to make progress: per capita income. On the contrary, he said, the state is making big improvements and the rest of the country is taking notice.

Certainly, the whole state has been struggling with the economy, what with higher unemployment and the need for cutbacks in state spending, not to mention the private sector's woes. But the governor's words mirror some of the things heard locally and that is that the economy is picking up and the systems in place are strong and getting stronger. It may have been gray and chilly outside Friday morning, but the sun was shining inside by the time Beebe sat down.

Pine Bluff Commercial, Jan. 26: Clark Terry of Pine Bluff, the man with a velvet touch on a trumpet, has received his share of honors over a career in jazz that spans more than six decades. This weekend he will be honored with the Recording Academy's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Known for encouraging young students, he has conducted countless jazz camps and was welcomed as an adjunct professor in the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff's Music Department in 2006.

A world-class trumpeter and flugelhornist, educator and recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts' Jazz Master Award in 1991, Clark has performed for seven U.S. presidents, and served as a jazz ambassador for U.S. State Department tours in the Middle East and Africa.

Featured at more than 50 jazz festivals around the world, he has received a Grammy Award, two Grammy certificates, three Grammy nominations, more than a dozen honorary doctorates, was knighted in Germany and is a recipient of the French Order of Arts and Letters.

St. Louis honored Clark with a star on its Walk of Fame, and his life-sized wax figure is on display at the Black World History Museum in his hometown.

Clark has composed more than 200 jazz songs, written a number of well-received books, recorded with the London Symphony Orchestra, Dutch Metropole Orchestra, Duke Ellington Orchestra and Chicago Jazz Orchestra, dozens of college ensembles, his own duos, trios, quartets, quintets, sextets, octets, and two big bands Clark Terry's Big Bad Band and Clark Terry's Young Titans of Jazz.

His career as both leader and sideman with more than 300 recordings

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demonstrated his place in jazz. He has performed with jazz greats Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Oscar Peterson, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Barnet, Doc Severinsen, Ray Charles, Billy Strayhorn, Dexter Gordon, Thelonious Monk, Billie Holiday and Sarah Vaughn.

He broke racial barriers when NBC asked him to become the network's first black staff musician and was a featured player in the "Tonight Show" band for more than a decade.

Between global performances, Clark continues to share his jazz expertise and encourage students. UAPB hosted successful Clark Terry Jazz Festivals here in 2007 and 2008, with performances to sold-out audiences.

His latest Grammy honor will be presented Saturday during a ceremony in Los Angeles and will be acknowledged Sunday evening during the 52nd annual Grammy Awards show to be broadcast live on CBS.

The NEA Jazz Masters Fellowships are the highest honors that the nation bestows upon jazz musicians and is usually given late in a performer's career. We are thankful no one told Clark Terry in 1991 that he was considered late in his career.

Texarkana Gazette, Jan. 26: The U.S. Supreme Court decided Monday that a Virginia criminal's stupidity should not keep him from the death chamber.

In 1999, Paul Warner Powell, now 31, went to the Yorkshire, Va., home of a girl he knew, Stacie Reed, 16.

He was armed with two knives, a box cutter and a pistol.

He stabbed Stacie to death and then waited for her 14-year-old sister to arrive home. When she did, he took her to the basement and raped her. Then he tied her up, tried to strangle her with her own shoelaces, stabbed her and slashed her wrists and throat.

Miraculously, she survived.

Powell was convicted in 2000 of Stacie's murder and the attempted murder and rape of her sister. He was sentenced to death for killing Stacie.

But the Virginia Supreme Court overturned the verdict, saying there was no aggravating offense in Stacie's slaying, such as rape or robbery. The court ordered Powell be retried on a charge of first-degree murder.

This is where the "stupid" part comes in.

Powell got cocky. He figured he was off the hook for the death penalty. And so he wrote a letter to the prosecuting attorney in the case bragging in graphic and

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profane detail everything that occurred that day in 1999.

Bad move.

In the letter, Powell said he went to Stacie's home for sex. She refused because she had a boyfriend. He told the prosecutor that he held Stacie down and threatened to rape her. She struggled.

He then berated the prosecutor for making mistakes that allowed him to avoid the death penalty.

"Do you just hate yourself for being so stupid and for (expletive) up and saving me?" Powell wrote the prosecutor.

It wasn't the prosecutor who was stupid. Attempted rape is an aggravating offense. And Powell had confessed.

The prosecutor filed a new indictment charging capital murder and in 2003 Powell was again convicted and sentenced to die.

Since then, Powell's lawyers have fought to keep him alive, claiming the second death penalty trial constituted double jeopardy.

But the High Court wasn't buying the argument they were selling. The justices refused to hear Powell's appeal.

Now the Commonwealth of Virginia is free to set a new execution date. And Powell can thank himself for that.

Harrison Daily Times, Jan. 26: Last week the unthinkable happened. The state of Massachusetts elected a Republican to fill the U.S. Senate seat left open by the death of longtime powerful Democrat Ted Kennedy. The Democrats have held sway there for decades. No one thought it would be any different.

Yet, with only a three-week push, Republican Scott Brown handily defeated his Democratic opponent, Martha Coakley, the Massachusetts State Attorney General. Coakley was considered by many to be a shoo in.

Brown's victory in the staunchly Democratic, liberal state has sent shockwaves all the way to the White House. The President and other politicians are still trying to figure out what happened and why.

One thing is certain — the Democrats' health care bill is in the dumper.

The real message is that the American public is fed up with the way Washington does business. It's been one trillion dollar bill after another and a narrow focus on the health care issue while the national economy continues to falter.

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Voters are tired of the disconnect between Main Street and Washington, and the Republican victory should have every incumbent worried, whether they are Democrat or Republican.

Closer to home, Arkansas Congressman Vic Snyder announced he wouldn't seek another term in Washington.

Then Monday, Arkansas Congressman Marion Berry announced he was returning to the farm.

That opens two of Arkansas' congressional seats, and a growing field of Republicans have announced they're running for Sen. Blanche Lincoln's position ... and she hasn't said she's retiring.

Some rumors say even our congressman, John Boozman, could look for a bigger arena and run against Lincoln, which would throw open his seat to friends and foes alike.

While the politicians in Washington have ignored the outcries of the public, anger has reached a zenith and the coming mid-term elections will exact a pound of flesh not seen in many years.

The concern now is — are our governmental leaders finally listening, or are they only giving lip service?

Time will tell, and so will the voters!

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