

3 injured in Westwood wreck

STAFF REPORT

WESTWOOD The Boyd County Sheriff's Office responded to a two-vehicle collision near the intersection of Roberts Drive and New Buckley Road in Westwood on Monday evening.

Based on preliminary investigation, Michell Jude, 51, of Ashland was traveling north on Roberts Drive going toward Blackburn Avenue when her vehicle, a 2007 BMW SUV, crossed the center line and collided with a 2022 Jeep Compass operated by Amy Williamson, 55, of Ashland. Williamson was traveling toward Summit, according to a sheriff's office press release.

The Westwood Fire Department extracted Jude from her vehicle. Williamson's vehicle was on its passenger side in the ditch beside the railroad tracks with occupants outside the vehicle, according to the release.

Both vehicles had severe damage to the front driver's side tire area, the press release stated.

Both Williamson and Jude, and a passenger, were transported to UK King's Daughters with suspected injuries. The press release did not indicate the severity of injuries. Social media posts indicate the injuries were minor.

The Westwood Fire Department and Boyd County EMS assisted at the scene.

The wreck occurred at around 5:30 p.m. Monday.

New Year's Eve events in area

STAFF REPORT

Several area New Year's Eve events are planned for today.

Visit Ashland shared a few ways to ring in 2026, starting at 10 a.m. today.

The Highlands Do!Zeum is scheduled for 10 a.m. The Highlands Museum & Discovery Center announced the event will begin in the Clark Family Discovery Center dance party at 10. A New Year's toast will take place on the main floor at 11:45 a.m. A balloon drop is slated for noon. Pajama attire is encouraged. Cost is \$5 for museum guests. Members can participate for free.

Tuscan Prime will have live music by Veezy Coffman at 8 p.m. Three Piece Suit will perform at Jerk Riley's Irish Pub at 9 p.m.

Garden Roller Rink is having a skate party from 7 p.m. until 1 a.m.

Sandy's Racing and Gaming will host The Neighborhood's Wine & Bourbon Ball, an annual event since 2014. The New Year's Eve Celebration, which begins at 8 p.m., includes food, beverages, music and free play from Sandy's. The Neighborhood Director Jeremy Holbrook announced Monday the limited number of reserved seating was almost full.

'New Leash on Life' to help animal shelter

STAFF REPORT

HUNTINGTON A local dental practice is sponsoring adoption fees to help with an overcrowded animal shelter, according to a news release.

Mountain State Oral & Facial Surgery in Huntington is covering fees to encourage adoption of dogs and cats from the Huntington Cabell Wayne Animal Shelter.

The "New Leash on Life"

event had a goal of emptying the shelter for at least one night.

As of late last week, the shelter had more than 150 dogs and 60 cats at the shelter — more than 200% capacity — on James River Road in Huntington.

Starting on Dec. 26, and through Thursday, Jan. 1, adoption fees up to \$125 will be covered by Mountain State.

The shelter is open for adoptions today from noon until 3 p.m.

and Thursday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. It was open on Friday, Saturday and Sunday for a few hours each day, and six hours each day Monday and Tuesday.

All dogs and cats adopted from the shelter are vaccinated and will be spayed or neutered to complete the adoption process.

According to a press release Tuesday morning, community response has been strong, with 72 dogs and cats adopted through the special event.

Kentucky Ag. commissioner shares why he'll run again

BY SARAH LADD
KENTUCKY LANTERN

In 2026, Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner Jonathan Shell hopes to work with the General Assembly on improving school nutrition, retaining Kentucky Department of Agriculture employees and economic development in the agricultural sector.

In an end-of-year interview with the Kentucky Lantern, Shell said his "number one priority in the budget cycle" is keeping his department's employees. His team is still finalizing details on a request to the legislature to improve the department's salaries, he said.

"We continue to lose employees to other state government entities. They're doing the same job here, and they're leaving and going somewhere else and making more money doing that same job somewhere



AUSTIN ANTHONY | KY. LANTERN
Agriculture Commissioner Jonathan Shell speaks during the St. Jerome Picnic in Fancy Farm, on Aug. 2.

else — in state government," Shell said. "Helping retain those employees that do an amazing job for us here at the department, not having to retrain is really important in these jobs, and consistencies for the people that we represent, the partners that we have."

During the 60-day legislative session that begins Jan. 6, Kentucky lawmakers will draft and pass the next state budget. Shell is working on other budget proposals around his Food is Medicine initiative with the Kentucky Hospital Association, which aims to get more nutritious food in the hands of medical facilities for patients and staff.

"What we're looking at is nutrition as a health intervention," Shell said. "Getting people healthy fresh food on the front end of their problem, post patient care, ... looking at chronic illnesses around diabetes, hypertension, blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, and seeing those lifestyle changes that we can make through local, healthy, fresh food."

One Big Beautiful Bill

Shell said it "remains to be seen" what impact the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, passed by Congress this summer, could have on Kentucky farmers.

Congress cut the the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as food stamps, by \$187 billion through 2034

"I think that looking at SNAP from a local purchasing standpoint of local foods is extremely important — finding a way to get more of our products in agriculture that qualify (and) are available in places where they are able to put into that system," he said.

In Kentucky, the Double Dollars program allows SNAP recipients to shop at farmers markets or other eligible shops and double the purchasing power of that benefit, incentivizing farm-fresh food.

He wants the state to "maximize those dollars for our local farm community" while simultaneously supporting more nutritious food for vulnerable people.

"Looking around SNAP reforms and ways in which to get local fresh food more available for them, is something that we're always interested in doing. But I think the impact from ... changes that would happen on the federal level,

with Medicaid and also with SNAP, is yet to be seen until we get out of this legislative session to see how our state government kind of handles some of that."

Congress cut Medicaid spending over 10 years by \$880 billion.

Foster kids, other youth

Two of Shell's children are adopted and he sits on the board of CASA of Lexington. (CASA stands for Court-Appointed Special Advocates.)

"We've got somewhere between 8-9,000 kids in the state of Kentucky that are in the system that ... don't need superheroes. They just need somebody," Shell said. "They just need someone to show up for them and care about them and really pour into them."

As of Dec. 7, the Cabinet for Health and Family Services reported 8,692 children were in out of home placements.

Because of his passion for child advocacy, Shell is working to connect children with food education in his role as commissioner, he said.

Last year, the department held its first All in Ag Week, which focused on bringing various agricultural experts into schools to teach youth about food, the business of farming and much more.

While it's important to teach kids where food comes from and how food affects the human body, he said, schools also need ways to embed agriculture concepts into normal learning routines to show students the importance of agriculture, both as a career and as a source of sustenance.

"If they're teaching math, we want it to be ag math," Shell said of teachers. "If they're teaching science, it's ag science. With reading, it's ag reading."

The department's two Ag Weeks in 2026 will be March 16-20 and Sept. 21-25.

On his political future

Shell, a Republican, was elected agriculture commissioner in 2023. He was previously a state representative.

"If there was a commissioner of foster and adoption, I'd have probably ran for that instead of commissioner of ag," Shell joked. "It's really my first love, but there's not."

Shell said he is "definitely running for reelection" in 2027 and "wishes we didn't have term limits."

"I wish I could do this for the rest of my life."

HOW TO REACH US

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