



Knox Central grabs win over Harlan in opener.  
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# Harlan Enterprise

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## Man faces rape, sexual abuse charges

By **JOE ASHER**  
*Harlan Enterprise*

A Harlan County man is facing charges including rape and sexual abuse after allegedly participating in sexual activity with a 15-year-old juvenile.

Jacob Blas, 22, of Evarts, was arrested by officers from the Kentucky State Police on Thursday.

According to the citation, officers at the Kentucky State

Police, Post 10, Harlan, began an investigation into a juvenile sexual abuse complaint on Nov. 25. The juvenile had videos on a phone showing sexual activity with an adult male on or about Oct. 4. Investigation determined Blas subjected the juvenile to sexual contact and sexual intercourse. Blas told police he met the juvenile in November of 2023 when he was 20 years old and the juvenile was 13 years of age. Blas advised the sexual



activity began approximately in June, 2024, when he was 21 years old and the juvenile was 14, continuing until October of 2025.

Blas told police of seven or eight incidents of sexual intercourse with the juvenile had occurred at multiple locations in Harlan County.

Blas was charged with third-

degree rape, first-degree sexual abuse, and third-degree sodomy. He was lodged in the Harlan County Detention Center on a \$50,000 full cash bond.

In other police activity:

- Ernest Curry, 55, of Ages, was arrested by officers from the Cumberland City Police Department on Dec. 4. He was charged with first-degree possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia. Curry was lodged in

the Harlan County Detention Center;

- Ellevina Cottrell, 43, of Evarts, was arrested by officers from the Evarts City Police Department on Dec. 3. She was charged with probation violation. Cottrell was lodged in the Harlan County Detention Center;
- Herman Smith, 41, of Evarts, was arrested by officers from

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## Former Hall school gymnasium destroyed in a late-night blaze

By **JENNIFER MCDANIELS**  
*Harlan Enterprise*

A fire destroyed the old Hall High School/Hall Elementary School gymnasium Thursday morning. There had been reports that two individuals had been living in the gym when the massive blaze erupted, but Sunshine Volunteer Fire Department Chief Steven Hatfield said later that the individuals staying there were found walking down U.S. 119.

“Flames were already shooting through the roof when we got there,” Hatfield said. “It was fully engulfed end to end. While we were on scene extinguishing the fire, we had some neighbors come down and told us there were two people living in the old gym and staying there at night, We contacted Harlan County Emergency Management and the Harlan County Rescue Squad and got them started looking to see if we could locate the two individuals who were there.”

Hatfield provided an update at Sunshine’s station headquarters around 3 p.m. on Thursday after being on scene of the gym fire well over eight



Intense flames shoot through the old Hall High School gym in an early morning fire on Thursday in Grays Knob.

hours. The gym fire had been reported a little after 6 a.m. Thursday and resulted in a three-alarm response from not only his department, but Harlan

City and West Clover Fork fire departments as well.

“It was a big fire,” Hatfield said. “It was a large building and it was old with lots of wood. We

ended up using 128,000 gallons of water on that fire. That’s the most we’ve ever used on a fire

See **FORMER**, 2A

## Harlan County School Board hears assessments

By **JOE ASHER**  
*Harlan Enterprise*

The Harlan County School Board heard the results of the Kentucky Summative Assessment during the board’s meeting for December.

Board Chairman Gary Farmer called the meeting to order and soon turned the floor over to Superintendent Brett Johnson to update the board members concerning the district’s performance on the state assessments.

“The KSA results – the year end testing – was finally release last Wednesday,” Johnson said. “There are a lot of things to be excited about. I’m super proud of the efforts of all nine schools. We’ve got a lot of bright spots at each school, and we’ve got some things that we need to work on.”

A press release explains the state’s accountability system features a color-coded rating for all schools instead of the previous five-star rating system. The codes include red (lowest), orange, yellow, green and blue (highest).

A previous report states

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## Christmas Concert part of planned revitalization of arts programming at college

By **JENNIFER MCDANIELS**  
*Harlan Enterprise*

The curtains of the Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College’s (KCTCS) Black Box Theater rose Friday night after years of being mainly closed after COVID and administration transitions to once again present dynamic arts programming to the community. And what better time to knock the dust off the spotlights and roll the college’s prized old grand piano back on stage than at Christmas time?

The doors of the Godbey Appalachian Center’s Nicey and Alice Hazen Theater opened Friday night on the SKCTC Cumberland campus for the

first time in a long time to herald in the Christmas season and to bring back arts and cultural programming to the community. Fine choral music, a recorder consort, theatrical reading and other special music were featured in the inaugural college Christmas concert. A big announcement was also made by SKCTC President Dr. Lee Harrison concerning the future of arts and cultural programming at the college, as well as the Godbey Appalachian Center, which houses the theater.

Before Friday night’s show began, Harrison talked about Southeast’s proud tradition of honoring Appalachian arts and culture, and she proclaimed the

college was renewing that commitment by working to transform the Cumberland campus back into “a regional hub for creativity and innovation.”

“It starts right here in the Hazen Theater,” Harrison said during her Christmas concert welcome. “This fall, we began a feasibility study to renovate this space — new lighting, sound, and seating — to once again make it a vibrant venue for performances, education and training, and community events.”

Harrison said the college’s vision to revitalize arts and cultural programming will go

See **SOUTHEAST**, 2A



A recorder consort performed selections as a prelude to Friday night’s Southeast Christmas Concert. Pictured are (from left) Ann Schertz, Stephanie Broersma, and Clara Adkins-Pope.