

OFD receives accreditation from international association

BY JAMES MAYSE
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

After five years of work, the Owensboro Fire Department reached a milestone Wednesday when the department received accreditation from the Commission on Fire Accreditation International.

The department was accredited Wednesday after the final step of making a presentation at the Center for Public Safety Excellence conference in Orlando, Florida.

Accreditation isn't just a plaque to hang on the wall; being accredited means OFD officials amended and updated policies to meet current standards, created policies where needed, examined the city to determine where certain resources were needed and how to improve response

times, and implemented those policies so the effect is felt on the street.

"The plaque is nice," Chief James Howard said. "But for us, just the work on accreditation (has) meaning, because accreditation is an experience of growth for us."

Accreditation is rare; in Kentucky, only five fire departments have received accreditation through the CFAI.

The process took longer than expected, Howard said.

"It was all about getting it right, not about doing it fast," Howard said.

Battalion Chief Bobby Grant, the department's accreditation manager, said the department

had to create a strategic plan and use data to create a community risk assessment to determine what was needed to provide service to the community.

"Probably one of the biggest changes is the structure fire response," Grant said.

While previously the department would initially send one fire unit to a structure fire call to assess the situation and call for additional units if needed, the department now sends an additional unit on all calls.

"Now, we can get the units there quicker," to begin performing critical tasks, "and most importantly, rescue," Grant said.

The accreditation process

allowed the department to identify both deficiencies and areas of strength, and to make changes where needed, Grant said.

"The whole premise behind the process is continuous improvement, and the whole time we have improved," Grant said. "The improvement is felt internally, but we will be felt externally as well," through faster response times to calls for service, Grant said.

Accreditation is for five years, and department officials will submit annual reports to the Commission on Fire Accreditation International.

Last fall, a team of fire officials from across the country visited OFD for a lengthy inspection of all its policies and procedures as part of the accreditation process. The

team recommended OFD receive accreditation, but also gave department officials a list of recommendations from their inspection to address.

"They had 30 recommendations," Grant said. "Many of them we had already changed and adjusted." Others "will take time, and we are committed to it."

Howard said the process was a "team effort."

"If we didn't have such a great department, this wouldn't have been possible," Howard said.

"We want to be held to a higher standard," Howard said of accreditation, and said later, "The buzzwords are 'continuous growth,' and we've bought into that, and that is going to be in our bloodstream at OFD."



James Howard

22 distilleries signed up for BBQ & Barrels

More to come by May 9

BY KEITH LAWRENCE
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Twenty-two distilleries — including Buffalo Trace, Maker's Mark and Castle & Key — have already signed up for the tasting event at BBQ & Barrels on May 9 and more will be added soon, the Owensboro-Daviess County Convention & Visitors Bureau said Monday.

Last year's event drew 40 distilleries.

Mark Calitri, CVB president, said the event "continues to grow as a national-caliber celebration of bourbon, barbecue and music."

Seth Thompson, owner and publisher of The Bourbon Review, is assisting the CVB with the bourbon programming for the festival.

He said, "Owensboro is stepping onto the national bourbon scene in a big way. The biggest and most respected distilleries in the country are coming here for this event. When you

combine that level of bourbon with great food and the energy of the community behind it, it becomes something bourbon fans across the country want to experience."

The centerpiece of the bourbon experience will be in the Owensboro Convention Center on May 9.

The afternoon begins at 2 p.m. with a series of bourbon experiences, including educational tastings and curated bourbon and food pairing sessions where guests can learn, experience and interact directly with bourbon experts.

Featured sessions will be announced soon.

The 3 p.m. VIP experience gives guests early "specialty bourbon pours and a curated selection of barbecue-themed cuisine designed to complement the tasting experience," the CVB said.

From 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., the Grand Bourbon Tasting Event opens, where

guests can sample tastings from distilleries from across the country.

Ticket options include VIP tickets at \$120; premium tasting tickets at \$70; and companion tickets at \$20 for those who want to attend but not drink.

RW Baird Private Wealth Management is sponsoring the event.

Daylin Tolgo, the CVB's director of destination marketing and services, "The tastings give people a chance to experience great bourbon in a way you don't normally get. You're tasting unique pours, meeting the people behind the distilleries and experiencing it all as part of a full festival weekend that's drawing attention well beyond Kentucky."

Calitri said bourbon tourism has become one of the key pillars identified by the CVB as part of the community's long-term destination strategy.

He said, "With the presence of Green River Distillery and the continued growth of bourbon

experiences throughout the region, Owensboro is increasingly positioning itself as an important stop for visitors exploring Kentucky's bourbon culture."

Tickets for the bourbon tasting can be purchased at BBQandBarrels.com or by calling Owensboro Tickets at 270-687-2787.

The distilleries that have signed up to far include Bard Distillery, Brothers of the Leaf, Buffalo Trace Distillery, Castle & Key, Chicken Cock Whiskey, Coal Pick Distillery, Copper & Kings Distillery, Field of Dreams Whiskey, Green River Distillery, Hemingway Whiskey, Jephtha Creed Distillery, Leipers Fork Distillery, Limestone Branch Distillery, Maker's Mark, Pursuit Spirits, Rivulet Pecan Liqueur Whiskey, Silk Velvet Whiskey, Starlight Distillery, Ten Day Bourbon, True Story, Wenzel Whiskey and Western KY Distilling Co.

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WATKINS

FROM PAGE A1

After growing bored with running up and down the train station's sidewalks, Watkins said that he and his friend turned their attention to the bus station, each poking their heads inside the doors to see if they could catch a glimpse of a Freedom Rider. And, as a joke, Watkins said that his friend pushed him inside the train station.

"Now, I knew I was in the wrong waiting area...these walls, they're pretty. Back during that time, we played pinball machines — they had a whole wall lined up. And I'm looking, and I'm amazed until I see a sign hanging off the wall that read, 'White's Only.' Now I knew I was in the wrong waiting area, but it didn't hit me until the sign," said Watkins.

But before he could make an exit,

Watkins said that he was confronted by a police officer, who ended up taking him to the back of the bus station, where he was asked two questions — his name and his birthplace. And because he was born in Wisconsin, Watkins said that the officer assumed that he was one of the Freedom Riders.

"I was put into a transport vehicle known as a paddy wagon and was taken to this notorious prison called Parchman, and not only was I taken to Parchman, I was put on the death row camp. Never heard those two words — death row," he said.

While on death row, the civil rights leader said that he was beaten "almost every day."

"Food was taken. It was just a horrible place," Watkins said.

Watkins spent 13 days on death row at Parchman before being released, but he said that, following his arrest, he "just wanted to

do something to change things — make a difference." The desire to make a difference kept him motivated to continue being a Freedom Rider and, subsequently, leading to more than 100 arrests.

Watkins was awarded the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award by President Joe Biden, and received an official public apology from the City of Jackson in January 2026.

He tells his story in "Pushing Forward: The Story of Mississippi's Youngest Freedom Rider," available on pushingforwardbook.com.

KWC's program was sponsored by the Daviess County Public Library, the Owensboro Human Relations Commission, the Coalition for an Inclusive Daviess County, the Hager Foundation, the Owensboro NAACP, Western Academy and the Young Foundation and moderated by Adrian Taylor, president of KWC's chapter of the NAACP.

VIDEO

FROM PAGE A1

from the crash is aiding in the investigation, showing that the truck Subba was allegedly driving at about the same speed as other vehicles. Subba did not move into the adjacent southbound lane to give the stopped tow truck and semi space, Youngman said.

"If he had gotten over, like the law (requires), he likely would not have hit David," Youngman said Thursday. Instead, "he got over too far in one direction," striking Fischer and sideswiping the vehicles, he said.

State law identifies tow trucks and wreckers as "public safety vehicles," and says, "The operator of a vehicle shall yield the right-of-way to any public safety vehicle obviously and actually engaged in work upon a highway whenever such vehicle displays flashing lights..." Sheriff's office reports say

all of Fischer's emergency lights were on and operating.

Subba is also accused of not stopping after the collision until farther down the highway by Ohio County sheriff's deputies. Subba was inspecting the damage to his semitrailer when deputies encountered him.

"They did not indicate to him that he was a suspect," Youngman said.

A Daviess County sheriff's deputy left the accident scene and drove to Subba's location, but he refused to answer questions, Youngman said.

A deputy "attempted to speak with Subba about the crash, at which point (Subba) requested an attorney," Youngman said.

There was enough matching evidence from the crash scene and where Subba was stopped to charge him in the collision, Youngman said.

A sample of Subba's blood has been sent to a lab for testing. Youngman said the blood sample was "more of due diligence, because a person lost his

life." If a deputy sees a motorist driving into the shoulder of the road, that is enough probable cause of impaired driving to make a traffic stop, Youngman said.

The sheriff's office has been increasing patrols on the former U.S. 60 bypass, looking for speeders in particular, for the last few months, Youngman said.

"We will probably increase our presence on the Natcher Parkway," which is now I-165, Youngman said.

A sheriff's office press release Thursday said of Fischer: "David was well known throughout Daviess County and all of western

Kentucky for his courtesy, expertise, and professionalism in the towing and recovery industry. There is no way to know how many people he positively impacted during his 50-plus years of service, but there is no doubt to all that knew him that he was a hero to everyone who counted on him during their time of need."

The state law regarding yielding to emergency and public safety vehicles and workers was amended in recent years to include vehicles such as tow trucks, "because far too many people are getting killed," Youngman said.

Digest

Daviess Fiscal Court

During its meeting Thursday at the Daviess County Courthouse, Daviess County Fiscal Court took the following actions:

- Heard audit report for Daviess County Fiscal Court for Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2025
- Approved minutes of Feb. 26, 2026, Daviess County Fiscal Court meeting
- Approved all claims for all departments
- Approved fund transfers
- Approved salaries of specific elected officials
- Approved grant application for Kentucky Pride Fund composting
- Approved grant application for Kentucky Pride Fund household hazardous waste management
- Approved grant application for Kentucky Pride Fund recycling
- Approved contract with Kenergy for utility service and line extension costs for Stanley Park
- Approved Resolution 06-2026: KY Office of Homeland Security (KOHS) LEPP body armor grant application
- Approved Bid No. 2526-56: Two (2) New SUV police pursuit vehicles (Sheriff)
- Approved RFQ No. 2526-60: Shooting clay targets (Gun Club)
- Approved Release of Surety — Deer Valley Subdivision — Section 1, Unit 1 — public improvements surety
- Approved hiring Montrez Mason as solid waste laborer I effective March 16, 2026
- Approved hiring Koyln Cruz as firefighter effective March 16, 2026
- Accepted the resignation of Ashton Chapman effective March 20, 2026

Lottery Numbers

Thursday's lottery numbers:

- Kentucky**
Midday Pick 3: 6-1-7
Midday Pick 4: 1-5-4-7
Evening Pick 3: 8-4-8
Evening Pick 4: 2-6-2-4
Cash Ball 225: 5-21-28-32;
 The Cash Ball was 6
Millionaire For Life: 10-24-37-49-54
 The Millionaire Ball was 5
- Indiana**
Midday Daily 3: 0-2-1
 Super Ball was 2
Midday Daily 4: 1-6-0-5
 Super Ball was 2
Evening Daily 3: 6-3-6
 Super Ball was 8
Evening Daily 4: 8-6-5-4
 Super Ball was 8
Cash 5: 22-28-30-32-43

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