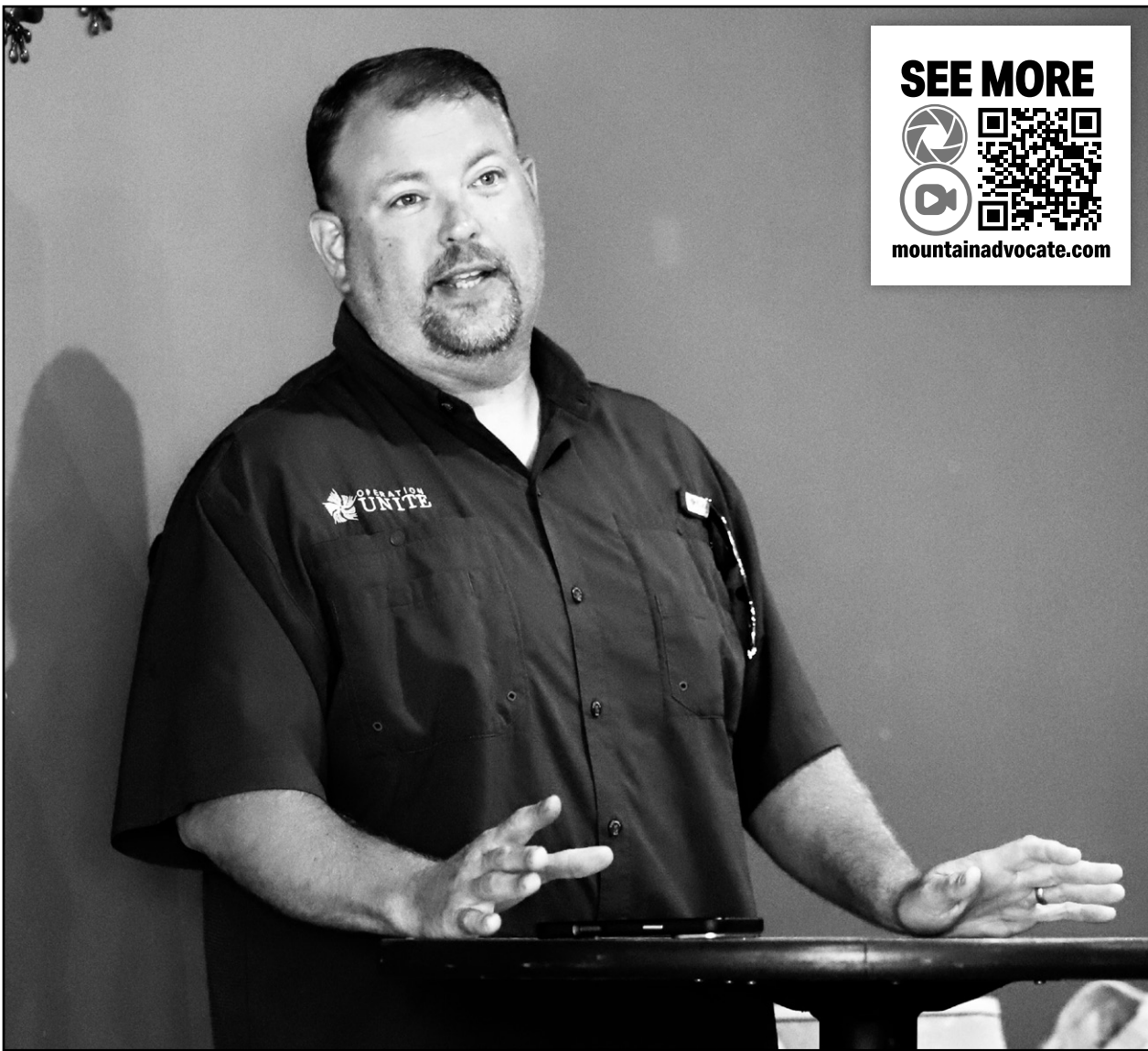


Varney Shares Journey, Work at Knox County UNITE Luncheon



Carl Varney presents on his work with Operation UNITE's school programs at the Knox County UNITE August meeting. Varney shared his journey with addiction recovery and how he began working with Operation UNITE. See mountainadvocate.com for a full video of Varney's talk. Photo by Kaylie Farmer

Knox and Laurel Drug Courts Attain Certification

MEDIA REPORT

FRANKFORT, Ky., Aug. 4, 2026 – Kentucky Specialty Courts announced today that the Circuit Drug Court serving Knox and Laurel counties achieved certification for its use of best practices that create optimal conditions for participant success.

“The Knox and Laurel Circuit Drug Court has been providing supervision, therapy and support services focused on addressing the root causes of substance use and, in turn, reduce recidivism rates in our community for over 20 years,” said Knox/Laurel Family Court Judge Lucas M. Joyner, who serves as Drug Court judge. “Receiving certification at this juncture is confirmation of the hard work and dedication of our past and current drug court teams, as well as its support service providers.

“Our Drug Court team is committed to continued accountability and promotion of evidence-based practices to help our participants with substance use disorders find long-term care and stability.”

Knox and Laurel Drug Courts, which handle felony criminal offenses, were evaluated in 2026 and certified this year with the standards set out in Kentucky Supreme Court Administrative Order 2022-50. The certification is for three years.

Kentucky Specialty Courts certification efforts started in 2023 with the Supreme Court’s adoption of amended rules in the Supreme Court order. The Certification Advisory Committee that oversees the certification process is headed by the chief justice and made up of 11 members.

Kentucky Drug Courts in these counties have achieved certification: Ballard, Bourbon, Boyle, Breathitt, Caldwell, Calloway, Campbell, Carlisle, Christian, Clark, Daviess, Fayette, Fulton, Hardin, Henderson, Henry, Hickman, Hopkins, Jefferson, Johnson, Livingston, Lyon, Madison, Marshall, Martin, McCracken, McLean, Mercer, Muhlenberg, Oldham, Perry, Pike, Powell, Pulaski, Scott, Trigg, Trimble, Warren, Wolfe and Woodford counties.

Specialty Courts staff work with Drug Courts across the commonwealth that are seeking certification, providing improvement plans to programs that don’t meet benchmarks for certification so they can attain it.

“The certification process is a cornerstone of our commitment to excellence. Through continuous quality improvement and adherence to evidence-based practices, we are strengthening the effectiveness, consistency and integrity of Kentucky Drug Courts while improving outcomes for the individuals and communities we serve,” said Elizabeth Nichols, acting executive officer of the Department of Specialty Courts at the Administrative Office of the Courts.

New Report Sounds Alarm on Homelessness in the Tri-County Region

BY KAYLIE FARMER
NEWS@MOUNTAINADVOCATE.COM

A new report to be presented to the Homeless and Housing Coalition of Kentucky (HHCK) with findings from HHCK board member Derek Douglas focuses on homelessness in the tri-county area.

The report is an assessment with data from community listening sessions that help to bring the specific issues within Laurel, Whitley, and Knox counties to the forefront of the homelessness conversation.

The report describes each county’s available resources and the bandwidth of those resources. Laurel County is described as the regional hub for services and is overburdened, as its housing and resources are at capacity.

Whitley County and Corbin don’t have as many resources, and homeless encampments have been forced to migrate to search for shelter from weather and other factors. Knox County lacks a dedicated emergency homeless shelter, as KCEOC is usually full and people are forced to travel to Laurel County for resources.

The homelessness crisis is said to be driven by several factors in the assessment. One factor is described as the mismatch between wages and housing prices, as many units require around two to three thousand dollars upfront with strict income verification that can block independent contractors and “gig” workers.

Another factor in the assessment is the criminalization of poverty, as unhoused people can face punitive measures and charges that make

employment and housing harder to get. There is also a tie to generational addiction and unstable living conditions as people grow up that can also affect the outcome of whether someone can access housing and employment.

The report calls for the tri-county region to unify and work to solve or mitigate the factors that contribute to the homelessness crisis.

Some of the recommendations for the region include: the formation of a Regional Housing Trust or Coalition with members who have experienced being unhoused, investments into new permanent affordable housing, implementation of street outreach with trained social workers to offer resources and build trust with unhoused people, and increased awareness and advocacy for homelessness as a systemic housing and public health crisis instead of a criminal issue.

Douglas has 35 years of background in rural community action and has focused on rural wealth and poverty mechanisms.

Douglas calls attention to a quote given to him by a participant in the report’s listening sessions: “Stop treating the poor persons experiencing addiction and homelessness like they are less of a human because they have no place to call home.”

If community members and leaders are interested in getting involved in helping with the homelessness crisis, they can contact Douglas to share their knowledge and skills or to be involved with any future gatherings.

You can contact Derek Douglas through his email, durisdeer@gmail.com.

NOTICE TO KNOX COUNTY TAXPAYERS

Mike Corey, Knox County Clerk and the Knox County Fiscal Court, pursuant to KRS 424.330, announce that the 2025 Delinquent Real Property Tax Bills (Certificates of Delinquency) will be published in the Mountain Advocate on Wednesday, August 12, 2026.

The list of Certificates of Delinquency is also available for public inspection during the hours of 8:30-4:00 Monday-Friday at the County Clerk’s office located at 401 Court Square Ste 102, Barbourville, KY 40906. The list may also be inspected on Software Management website. The Uniform Resource Locator (URL) of the website is: kydtx.smlc.us/dtaxlist.htm.

The tax sale will be held on Thursday, September 24, 2026, beginning at 10:00 a.m. All interested participants must register with the County Clerk’s office by the close of business on SEPTEMBER 14, 2026. Please contact the County Clerk’s office if you need additional information about the tax sale registration process, the required registration fee or the deposit amounts that will be needed.

Taxpayers can continue to pay their delinquent tax bills to the County Clerk’s office any time prior to the tax sale.

PLEASE NOTE: ALL PAYMENTS MUST BE RECEIVED IN THE COUNTY CLERK’S OFFICE PRIOR TO THE TAX SALE DATE LISTED IN THIS ADVERTISEMENT. PAYMENTS RECEIVED AFTER THE TAX SALE HAS BEEN CONDUCTED WILL BE RETURNED WITHOUT EXCEPTION.

Some delinquencies (although they have been advertised) will be excluded from the tax sale in accordance with the provisions of KRS 134.504(10)(b).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the County Clerk’s office at 606-546-3568.

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