

Feds issue ratings on 3,662 hospitals, 82 in Kentucky

Marcum & Wallace Hospital Is Among Highest Ranked Kentucky Hospitals

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CMS planned to release the ratings April 21, but delayed them so Medicare officials could respond to criticism, which included a letter from 60 of the 100 U.S. senators and 225 of the 438 representatives calling for a delay, plus pressure from some of the nation's largest hospital organizations.

Two days before the release, Reps. James Renacci (R-Ohio) and Kathleen Rice (D-New York) introduced a bill that would have forced its delay until at least July 2017.

"I still have real concerns that this system could unfairly penalize teaching hospitals and hospitals that serve poor communities, and that patients will ultimately pay the price," Rice told Eliza-

beth Whitman of Modern Healthcare.

That may have been reflected in the Kentucky rankings. The hospitals at the University of Louisville and University of Kentucky got one star and two stars, respectively.

The agency chose to go ahead with the release, Godrich said in the CMS blog, because officials "have received numerous letters from national patient and consumer advocacy groups supporting the release of these ratings." She said the ratings improve transparency and accessibility of information about hospital quality.

Of the 94 Kentucky hospitals that CMS evaluated, 82 were rated, and 12 did not have enough data to generate a rating.

No Kentucky hospital earned a five-star rating. Sixteen hospitals got four stars: Baptist Health Lexington, Baptist Health Louisville, Casey County Hospital in Liberty, Clark Regional Medical Center in Winchester, Flaget Memorial Hospital in Bardstown, Greenview Regional Hospital in Bowling Green, Hardin Memorial Hospital in Elizabethtown, Harrison Memorial Hospital in Cynthiana, Marcum and Wallace Memorial Hospital in Irvine, Methodist Hospital in Henderson, Pineville Community Hospital, St. Joseph Martin, St. Elizabeth Medical Center North in Edgewood, TJ Health Columbia (now only a behavioral-health facility) and Twin Lakes Regional Medi-

cal Center in Leitchfield.

The majority of the Kentucky hospitals rated, 52, earned three stars. A complete list of those hospitals can be found here.

Twelve hospitals got two stars: Ephraim McDowell Regional Medical Center in Danville, Harlan Appalachian Regional Healthcare Hospital, Hazard ARH Regional Medical Center, Jennie Stuart Medical Center in Hopkinsville, Jewish Hospital & St. Mary's Healthcare in Louisville, Kentucky River Medical Center in Jackson, Lourdes Hospital in Paducah, Monroe County Medical Center in Tompkinsville, St. Joseph Hospital in Lexington, St. Joseph East in Lexington, St. Claire Regional Medical Center in Morehead and the Univer-

sity of Kentucky Hospital.

Two hospitals earned just one star: University of Louisville Hospital, where a recent state inspection found problems with nursing; and Lake Cumberland Regional Hospital in Somerset, which ranked very poorly in the 2014 ratings by Consumer Reports magazine. It got two stars last year, one of only six Kentucky hospitals to do so.

Rick Pollack, president and CEO of the American Hospital Association, said he fears the ratings could mislead patients.

"The new CMS star ratings program is confusing for patients and families trying to choose the best hospital to meet their health care needs," Pollack said in a news release. "Health care consumers making critical

decisions about their care cannot be expected to rely on a rating system that raises far more questions than answers."

A comprehensive list of Kentucky hospital CMS ratings can be found here. Nationally, Medicare gave five stars to 102 hospitals, four to 934 hospitals, three stars to 1,770 and one star to 133. Many hospitals did not produce enough data in the measured areas to warrant a rating.

Kentucky Health News is an independent news service of the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, based in the School of Journalism and Media at the University of Kentucky, with support from the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky.

Sheriff's Activity

- Amber Nicole Hail, 37, of Irvine was arrested July 20 by the Estill County Sheriff's Department. She was charged with driving under the influence, prescription medicine not in proper container, possession of a controlled substance third degree, and failure of owner to maintain insurance.

A deputy was dispatched on July 20 to the Tobacco Shedd on Richmond Road because a female was passed out in the drive-thru.

The citation states the woman failed field sobriety tests. She reportedly told the deputy that she had taken suboxone. The report says that Hail had two gabapentin and two aprazolom in her pocket.

- Teresa Bishop, 37, was arrested July 18 by Deputy Doc Morris. She had three warrants of arrests from Estill District Court. The warrants were for a misdemeanor and traffic offenses.

- Dustin Willis, 29, of Pea Ridge Road, Irvine was served a warrant on July 25 from Estill District Court by Bailiff Glenn Carroll.

- Ashley Kirby, 32, of Riddell Clem Road, Irvine, was served a warrant for two misdemeanors by Deputy Morris on July 25.

School board approves drug & alcohol testing policy for athletes and drivers

by TRACY R. PATRICK
The Estill County Tribune

The Estill County Board of Education met on Thursday, July 28, 2016, with all members present, and two items that are very important to Estill County students and to the public were presented, a drug and alcohol testing procedure for students and seeking funding from the Kentucky Work Ready Skills Initiative.

A first and final reading was approved for a new student drug and alcohol testing procedure which includes a "Consent to Test" form that must be completed for any student participating in any extracurricular activity and for students who drive to school or park on school property. Additional students may participate as well with parental approval. Superintendent Jeffrey Saylor said random testing would be done every month once the program starts and he expects first testing to be done in late September or early October. Saylor emphasized that students would not be tested for over-the-counter medicines.

The superintendent presented copies of the Kentucky Work Ready Skills Initiative, a funding program for employers, educators and communities to come together to create cutting edge programs for students and adults to meet skills demanded by Kentucky employers.

He suggested that the old Irvine High School building might be used for this purpose rather than building one. "We don't have to go out and buy a piece of property," he said. "We own one."

School begins Wednesday, August 3rd and Saylor reported that only two positions were still unfilled, that of a teacher at West Irvine and for a district

school nurse, which led to a discussion of who should pay for a school nurse. He suggested that the health department could supply the district's school nurse needs and get reimbursed for the cost. "We're going to be spending \$100,000 when through the health department; not be spending \$25."

The superintendent reported that the Estill County High School construction contract was complete and the system would actually be paying less than the original bid price. A total of \$21,400 was left over which he said could be used for further construction at that school. Two projects mentioned were, finishing the lobby and replacing the gym floor before basketball season starts.

The issue of fund raising was discussed by the board. Saylor said the internet and fund raisers such as "GoFundMe" create something new for the board. He mentioned issues with Federal title matching as well as other problems.

Road block fund raisers were discussed by the board where money is collected at busy intersections. "I don't like how it's done," said member Patty Hood. Saylor later added, "There shouldn't be any students out there." There were also issues with how money was distributed. Saylor added, "We've got to have a paper trail."

All such solicitations must be approved in advance and should be included in the list of fund raisers sent to the Board.

The extra service salary schedule was approved and three new titles were added for color guard, percussion and brass instructors. Saylor said the band boosters wanted to fund four new positions. He mentioned the work

that band director Jason Bowles has done with the band and said, "I feel good in granting him those four positions."

The 2015-2016 Energy Management Report was presented and showed the year to date cost change for energy was down \$46,407. The largest savings was \$14,979 at Estill County High School, and \$11,237 was saved at ECMS.

The Energy Management Avoided Costs Summary showed \$67,744 in total avoided costs.

South Irvine was reported to be 99.9% complete with the exception of the kindergarten awning not up yet and issues with drainage in the kitchen.

Personnel Actions

Regular employment included teachers: Shayla Carroll, Leah Elliott, Sarah Hood and Amanda Owens at ECMS; Rebecca Ernest and Tiffany Sowers at West Irvine; Stephanie Floyd, Bethany Freeman, Jenni Spicer and Graceland Williams at South Irvine; and Ruth Hughes and Andrea Kirby at ECHS.

Also hired were Angie Bowman, Paraeducator, South Irvine; Teresa Miller-Ruiz, district novice reduction specialist; Deborah Samples, .8 paraeducator, South Irvine; Vickie Puckett, secretary, South Irvine; Shelly Sparks, .5 cafeteria clerk & .5 office assistant at ECHS, and Margaret Wood, interventionist teacher, ECHS.

McKinley Meek and Abby Winkle were hired as coop students.

Resignations were accepted from Jennifer Cvitkovic, teacher, Estill Springs; Lori Isaacs, bus assistant; Jordan Whitehead, teacher, ECMS; and Andrea Woolery, secretary, South Irvine.

"Death Do Us Part" man tells his wife

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Sturniolo said that Epperson also texted Tiffany's parents and said, "I won't hit her. I will kill her. It's death do us part."

On the second citation, Epperson was charged with fourth degree assault (domestic violence), wanton endangerment first, disorderly conduct 2nd, resisting arrest, possession of marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia, illegal possession of a legend drug, unlawful imprisonment, first degree, trafficking in marijuana, and harassing communications.

Epperson's bail has been set at \$50,000 cash. He was arraigned Monday, August 1 in Estill District Court. He plead not-guilty to all 11 charges made against him.

His preliminary hearing is scheduled for August 10.

Another Scammer Behind Bars

VETERANS POST
by Freddy Groves

A former Marine in Nevada has been sentenced to 25 years in prison for a nationwide scam involving millions of dollars taken from the pockets of trusting people.

The scam involved Nigerian oil wherein the perp claimed to be a Shell Oil heir, an oil expert who'd already sunk \$500 million of his trust fund into the venture. Investors' dollars would go toward the purchase of an oil refinery in the Bahamas, where the crude oil would be shipped. Among the charges were conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud, passing a fictitious financial instrument, lying to the feds and failure to file income-tax returns. Oh, and he also submitted false claims to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The good: He's going away for a very long time.

The bad: While the case dragged on, he was a free man. For over two years his attorneys filed repeated objections or requests for delay. It was the tenth one where

the judge drew the line: DENIED, it said on the court documents, when an attorney claimed he hadn't had enough time to review the case.

Why, one wonders, if he was raking in all that dough, did he also insist on defrauding the VA? Part of the multi-agency suit against him was for claiming service-related injury, which got him "decades" worth of disability benefits totaling thousands of dollars per month.

How was he injured? He hurt his knee playing basketball in 1970 and was given a medical discharge. Apparently he claimed benefits for his knee all these years, saying he couldn't work.

Which begs the question: How is it that he could claim benefits for so many years without anyone checking? Without even being brought in for an examination or X-rays? Wouldn't it be reasonable to assume that a basketball injury might get better in a few years?

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Birding BITS BY Cindy Brook

Songbirds
If you're just getting started on attracting songbirds into your backyard, and you can't decide which seed to start with, try black oil sunflower seed. Most birds love this oily delight, and since the shell is soft, tiny birds like finches can crack it open easily.

E-mail: birdingbits@efl.rr.com
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Extension hires new FCS Agent

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She sees the senior citizen center next door to the extension service as an opportunity to have programs with the seniors there.

Her plans are to work with a wide variety of people in different age groups.

She stresses, "Teamwork."

After her father retired from the Army, her parents and two sisters are now living in Florida. The youngest sister will be a high school sophomore, and the other sister is beginning at Florida State University.

Her grandparents and other relatives still live in Panama.

Flores said her family lived in Panama City, the capital of Panama. It has a population of over a million people.

After the United States built the Panama Canal, it also built military bases in Panama. The canal connected the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Flores said her father was allowed to join the U.S. Army because there was a military base in Panama. He was stationed there about four years until the base closed.

When Jimmy Carter was president, he signed a treaty which required the U.S. to pull out of Panama by 2000. The military bases and other properties were given to Panama's government.

When the base closed where Flores' father was stationed, he was transferred to other U.S. Army bases until his retirement.

Flores can be contacted at the Estill County Extension Office at 723-4557.

Out on a Limb

