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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2008

Bel Air, Maryland 21014

75¢



## TECH'S EWING GETS 1,000TH POINT

Bel Air tops Fallston in Chesapeake Division  
SPORTS A15

## HOLD ON CHARTER SCHOOL

School board gives Imagine School a third chance  
NEWS A4



PHOTO COURTESY OF KEVIN J. PARKS

The weather is perfect as the Bel Air High School Marching Band and band director, Anthony Domenico, left, perform for thousands Friday in the Magic Kingdom at the Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla. The 115-member group performed a rendition of "I Want Candy" as part of an invitation to participate in Disney's Magic Music Days Program. A separate concert by the Bel Air High School Chorus was performed earlier in the morning. The four-day trip also included clinics with professional musicians in a backstage recording studio. The chorus recorded a selection from Disney's animated classic "The Hunchback Of Notre Dame" while the band recorded music from "Aladdin."

# Eaves leading in judge race

The most important race in Harford County - for Harford County Circuit Court judge - was put on ice Tuesday.

At about 11:45 p.m., more than two hours after the polls closed an hour and a half late at 9:30 p.m. because the elections board extended the voting because of bad weather, only 17 of 72 precincts had been counted. (Harford County has 75 total, but two are for absentee ballots and one is for provisional ballots.)

With those precincts reported, sitting judge Angela Eaves had a comfortable lead in the Democratic primary over

challenger Charles Wagner. She had a slim margin - 2,693 or 43.7 percent to Wagner's 2,425 or 39.4 percent - in the Republican primary, but that was way too early and way too close to call. To be elected, a candidate has to win both primaries, or if different candidates win the primaries, they will face off in the November general election.

The other two challengers to Eaves are H. Edward Andrews III, who was running a distant third in both primaries, and Steven J. Scheinin, who was running fourth in both. For election coverage, see Page A2.

Results of the judges race available at [theaegis.com](http://theaegis.com)

# Monkeys injured

BY KRISTEN MELAMED  
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A minor traffic accident on I-95 near Aberdeen over the weekend sent eight monkeys to a regional veterinary hospital.

The two-vehicle accident happened Saturday at 4:36 a.m. between the Riverside and Aberdeen exits, according to Cpl. Ronald Fisher of the Maryland State Police JFK Barrack.

Fisher said the vehicles were driving alongside each other; the first vehicle tried to switch lanes but fishtailed and an attached trailer hit the

vehicle next to it.

Fisher said no people were taken for medical treatment, but the monkeys being carried in one of the vehicles were transported to Falls Road Animal Hospital in Baltimore County.

Dr. Michael Herko at the hospital said eight monkeys were brought to the hospital. They were kept two to a cage.

Seven of the monkeys suffered bumps and minor abrasions; one monkey suffered head trauma and was treated extensively, Fisher said. That

Please see MONKEYS, A6

# Weather's frightful

BY RACHEL SEAWELL  
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BY KRISTEN MELAMED  
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Icy conditions contributed to a mass of minor traffic accidents around Harford County Tuesday night, and also resulted in polls being kept open an extra 90 minutes to give inconvenienced commuters extra time to vote in the presidential primary election.

Polls across the state were open until

9:30 p.m. instead of closing at 8 p.m.

In the most serious of the crashes Tuesday night, 23 people were transported to local hospitals after a Harford County Transit bus crashed on Route 22, according to Sgt. Christina Presberry, public information officer for the Harford County Sheriff's Office.

The accident happened around 4:30 p.m., and Presberry said the patients were taken to either Upper Chesapeake Medical Center in Bel Air or Harford Memorial

Hospital in Havre de Grace. She said she was told the bus hit an icy spot. No further details were available Tuesday.

The Emergency Operations Center in Hickory, which fields all incoming 911 calls, as well as other non-emergency calls, handled 399 calls, most of which were weather-related, between 3 and 6 p.m. Tuesday, according to Sue Collins, public information officer at the 911 Center.

Please see WEATHER, A18

# Well contamination at school lingers

BY RACHEL SEAWELL  
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Despite a state official's assertion he wouldn't hesitate to send his own children to the school, concerned parents of students at Forest Hill Elementary want a better solution to the school's contaminated water problem.

One possible solution would be to extend public water lines to the school, which a county councilman warned would also open a wider area

north of Forest Hill to development.

About 50 people attended a meeting at the school Monday night which was billed as an update on the ongoing MTBE problem with the school's well.

Irate parents and frustrated teachers asked many questions of school officials and of Herbert Meade, a representative of the Maryland Department of the Environment.

One concern is with a granular

activated carbon, or GAC, filtration system which is used to remove MTBE, a gasoline additive, from the well water. The filter was installed in November 2006.

Water from the well must pass through three filter tanks before reaching the school. The school's water is tested once a month. The filters in the tanks are changed as soon as MTBE is detected between the first and second filters, according

to Meade.

"If my children were attending this school, I would be satisfied with the water they would be drinking," Meade told the crowd.

Cost vs. benefit

Costing approximately \$27,000 to install, the filtration system racks up an additional \$4,700 every time a filter must be replaced, according to Joe Licata, assistant superintendent for operations for the school system.

Parents questioned whether the GAC treatment system is the most cost effective solution and inquired about hooking up the school to public water, which Licata said would be a county decision.

"The school system does not have authority to connect to public water, it is a county decision," Licata said. "Harford County Public Schools have been doing everything they can

Please see MTBE, A13

# Bel Air killer won't seek trial

BY AMANDA BRENNER  
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Convicted murderer Michael Simmons decided Friday to abandon his requests to withdraw his earlier guilty plea and seek a new trial.

Simmons pleaded guilty last year to second-degree murder in the stabbing death of Patrick John Walker. He later sought to withdraw the plea, claiming he had received inadequate advice from his lawyer. Had he received a new trial, however, he could have faced more jail time.

The decision to abandon the request for a new trial comes as a relief to members of Mr. Walker's family, who still light a candle every day at a memorial

they erected in the alley behind the Harford County Health Department in Bel Air, where Mr. Walker was murdered by Simmons in May 2006.

Stephanie Walker, the victim's mother, said she expects there will probably be more to come from Simmons but for now, she is happier than she has been the past few months.

"I don't know if I'll ever have closure," Walker said. "I feel better that at least we'll have peace for a little while."

Simmons pleaded guilty in May 2007 to second-degree murder in Mr. Walker's death, which police said stemmed from a road rage incident. Simmons was sentenced to 30 years in prison, which

Please see SIMMONS, A18



MATT BUTTON | AEGIS STAFF

The county has abandoned plans to connect the historic 68.8-acre parcel west of Bel Air known as the Mt. Soma property to the Ma & Pa Trail and instead is trying to establish a winery. Please see story, Page A4.

New recreation complex proposed PAGE A2

## WEDNESDAY

©2007 | 152ND YEAR | NO. 13



MDDC NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

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### pp&t Single in Harford

Harford Singles about more than making a match.  
AA1



## COMING FRIDAY

### FEELING PRESIDENTIAL

With its close proximity to Washington, D.C., Harford County has been touched by several presidential visits over the years.

# Parents concerned about school well contamination

MTBE from A1 possibly do to keep your children safe from MTBE."

**More development**  
County Councilman James V. "Cap'n Jim" McMahan, a Republican representing Bel Air District C, said if a water line is extended to Forest Hill Elementary, the county would be "busting a hole in the development envelope," and residents will begin to see a tremendous amount of development around the school.

The county wants to help, said County Councilman Chad Shrodes, a Republican representing Northern Harford District D, who also attended the session. Shrodes said he and McMahan don't want to

leave a legacy that they "gave your kids cancer."

"We are willing to look at this and work out a creative solution," Shrodes added.

At the conclusion of Monday's meeting, Harford County Board of Education President Thomas L. Fidler Jr. reassured parents and teachers he will look more in depth into the situation and the cost of continuing the filtration system versus the cost of running public water to the school. Fidler said he will touch base with the parents in 30 days.

Present since 1997  
Low levels of methyl tertiary-butyl ether, or MTBE, started showing up in the school's water in 1997, said Herbert Meade, an MDE

representative, who attended Monday's meeting. In August 2006, he said, the MTBE levels "really started coming up."

MTBE is a volatile compound made as a byproduct of petroleum refinery operations by combining methanol derived from natural gas and isobutylene. It is a gasoline additive that has been used as an octane enhancer — to eliminate engine knocking — since the phase out of lead in the late 1970s, after lead in auto exhaust was found to be a serious health and environmental hazard.

MTBE has been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals, but there is debate in the scientific community about its effects on humans.

In the summer of 2004, scores of residential wells in Upper Cross Roads were found to be contaminated by the chemical. The source was a service station at the corner of Routes 152 and 165 that has since been closed and dismantled by its owner, Exxon-Mobil. The oil company also provided filtration systems for the homes whose wells showed the highest MTBE concentrations.

**Phased out**  
According to MDE, refiners began phasing out MTBE and replacing it with ethanol in the summer of 2006. Very small amounts are still found in some high octane gasoline.

The most obvious source of MTBE in the environment

is from leaking underground and aboveground petroleum storage tanks.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, has concluded that there was insufficient data to quantify health risks from low level exposures in drinking water, according to the MDE.

In 1997, the EPA issued an advisory for MTBE of 20 to 40 parts per billion in drinking water based on odor and taste. MDE has adopted an action level of 20 ppb, at which point removal actions are advised.

Routine sampling conducted by the MDE at Forest Hill Elementary in March of 2006 identified MTBE at 13.7 ppb in a supply well.

Two possible sources have

been found which may have contributed to the levels of MTBE found in the school's drinking water: an underground storage tank for heating fuel at the school and a nearby gas station, formerly known as Meller's Sunoco.

In April 2006, the school's 10,000-gallon heating fuel tank failed a tank test because of a cracked vent line, and the school was ordered to repair the tank; however, it was not confirmed that the tank was the source of the MTBE, according to Meade.

Meller's Gas Station on the corner of Route 24 and Jarrettsville Road was also investigated and was required to install three monitoring wells in May of 2006.



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