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Three COVID deaths since Friday 150 new cases in three weeks

BY RACHEL DOVE
CITIZEN STAFF

INEZ — Three Martin County residents died from COVID-19 since Friday, marking the county's only casualties

from the coronavirus since December.

Over the past three weeks, the Martin County Health Department has announced close to 150 new COVID-19 cases. The case count reached 1,247

Tuesday, of which 59 were active, while the death toll was a sad 23.

Of cases announced the past week, at least 10 involved fully vaccinated individuals.

As cases seem to be exploding

locally and across the county, medical professionals are to the point of begging people to get vaccinated.

"I've diagnosed and treated more COVID-19 cases in the last two weeks in my clinic

"Anyone over the age of 12 needs to be protected to the highest extent possible, but that cannot happen if they refuse the vaccine." —Dr. Don Chaffin

than I have during this entire pandemic," said Inez physician Don Chaffin, an advocate for the vaccines even before they were available to the public.

"The most important fact everyone needs to remember is

that even though there are cases of individuals who were fully vaccinated contracting the virus, they typically have milder symptoms than those who are

See **THREE**, page 7A

At the mercy of water district

Seven weeks with barely a drop of water in Inez neighborhood

BY RACHEL DOVE
CITIZEN STAFF

INEZ — Six families and a business on Ky. 645 on the east end of Inez have barely had a drop of water through their pipes for the last seven weeks. They are at the mercy of the Martin County Water District that has shown them little mercy.

"I have three kids, one in diapers," said Tyler O'Connor, who lives with his family at Huckleberry Ridge on Ky. 645. "I work second shift and have to go to my sister's house to shower. We bring the boys to my mom's house to bathe. I would never have thought washing your hands after changing a diaper would be something of a luxury."

Jimmy and Cheryl Webb live in the same neighborhood. They also own and operate Cheryl's Florist there — a business in which the goods depend on water to survive. Since mid-July, the Webbs have been forced to buy large quantities of bottled water for the plants in their shop. They're thankful to have relatives who let them bathe and help them out with some water.

"And that's just for the shop," said Jimmy Webb. "That doesn't include what we have to buy for our home so we can cook, wash dishes, brush our teeth, flush toilets and so



Jimmy Webb and Tyler O'Connor talked Monday evening about what it's like to not have water service for about seven weeks in their neighborhood on Ky. 645 in Inez. (Citizen photo by Rachel Dove)

See **MERCY**, page 2A

Commissioners frustrated with utility

"It's high time they pull their big boy underwear up and come up with a plan on how to get these repairs done in a timely manner." —Inez Commissioner Terry Fraley

BY RACHEL DOVE
CITIZEN STAFF

INEZ — Inez Commissioners voiced frustration with Martin County Water and Sanitation during Thursday's council meeting,

telling the mayor the council needs to do what is best for Inez residents, not for the utility companies.

Commissioner Dennis Hall brought up the subject of fines against Martin County Water and Sanitation, noting the 30 days had passed in which the utility company was required to repair sidewalk and street damage that stemmed from line repairs. Hall said the purpose of the sidewalk and street ordinance was to hold utility companies accountable. He also sug-

See **FRUSTRATED**, page 5A

Magistrate arrested on multiple charges

BY RACHEL DOVE
CITIZEN STAFF

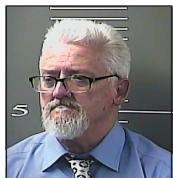
DEBORD — Martin County District 2 Magistrate Roger D. Preece was arrested on six charges Aug. 11 in Debord after reports that he was highly intoxicated and operating a side-by-side on Davella Road.

Kentucky State Police Trooper D. Thompson reported

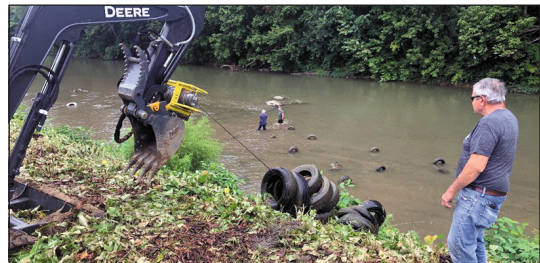


District 2 Magistrate Roger Preece was arrested Aug. 11 on Davella Road.

See **MAGISTRATE**, page 7A



A&E "True Crime" will air an episode Thursday at 10 p.m. that will feature the legal journey of Martin County resident Woody Six.



Clifford Smith of the Appalachian Renewal Project traveled Tuesday to Mingo County, W.Va., to participate in the annual tire removal from the Tug Fork River. About 1,000 tires were pulled from the water in a one-mile stretch. Pete Runyon with "Friends of the Tug Fork River" headed up the project that included volunteers from Kentucky and West Virginia. (Photos/Clifford Smith)



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Cheryl and Jimmy Webb, who own and operate Cheryl's Florist on Ky. 645 next door to their home, have had to purchase and haul water for the plants in their shop the last seven weeks while waiting for Martin County Water District and Alliance Water Resources to restore service to their neighborhood. (Citizen photo by Roger Smith)

MERCY

FROM FRONT PAGE

forth. During the last month, we have received water from the district on two occasions. Once, it was six gallon-jugs, and the last time it was a package of individual water bottles."

Both Webb and O'Connor say explanations and updates from the water district about repairs differ significantly, depending on who they talk with. Webb said he has even been told they have water when he's standing in his home and knows for a fact that nothing is coming out of the faucet.

O'Connor said that out of at least 30 attempts over the last couple of weeks to reach someone after hours at the water plant, he's been successful a couple of times.

"I guess they've learned all our numbers," said O'Connor. "They may answer once, but then when we call back, no luck. It's ridiculous. And when they do give updates, it's not accurate. For instance, I called this evening and was told two workers were at the pumping station trying to get it repaired, while at the same time, Jimmy and his wife ran into them at a local restaurant. When he approached them, they told him the water was on — and it definitely was not."

Webb said the water district had two new workers from West Virginia come and look at the pump to see if they could figure out what was going on, and those guys said the pump was a 2.5 hp and needed to be at least a 5-7 hp to meet the need. When approached with that information

Friday, O'Connor said Alliance employee J.D. Damron told him that a pump had been ordered and was at a location approximately 5 hours away in Ohio but wouldn't arrive until at least Tuesday.

"I told him someone needed to make that drive to pick it up and get it installed — that there's no excuse for a five-hour separation taking five days to resolve," said O'Connor. "J.D. called me back and said since it was my family and me without water, he was going to send a worker to Ohio to pick it up, and by Saturday, we'd be repaired and ready to go. I know the young man he said he was sending, so I reached out to him later to see what time they would begin the repairs. He told me that he had been contacted and told the plans for pickup had been canceled."

O'Connor said he couldn't wrap his head around the fact that the water department has no backup pumps for an issue like this.

"Why would you be so unprepared?" said O'Connor. "I just don't get it."

He and Webb both said they, along with Webb's son Ryan, went to the pump station last week, and Alliance manager Craig Miller was there. They said Miller asked them if they had a better idea of how to fix it.

"My son Ryan, who works at the federal prison, told Miller that would be like asking him to go to the prison and make a repair or to know how to handle or address a situation at the prison," said Webb. "It's crazy

that the question was even asked, but to think he was serious and didn't know the answer himself is what is ridiculous."

Webb said he heard most employees who worked for the water district before Alliance came in January 2020 had either quit or been let go.

"I'm not knocking the guys they have working there now, but the truth is they are young and inexperienced," said Webb. "There's no replacement for experience. We had workers that in the past would respond to an outage in a matter of 15-20 minutes and have our water back on in no time. They knew all the ins and outs of the system and had worked it long enough to know what it took to complete the repairs. Now it seems that everyone is lost, there's no communication and the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing."

"I want to know — where is this great professional service that we're paying for?" said Webb.

O'Connor said he and his neighbors had not been told the same story by any two people at the water department, no matter their title or position.

"If this were their family without water, they'd be doing something. We don't expect any special treatment. We want the same for every home or business in this county — and that's a quality water service that we can depend on. No one should be paranoid about turning on the faucet because they're afraid nothing will come out. We pay our bills. Now supply the water."

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