

Community News

Getting the STEM treatment

The city of Jal is partnering with New Mexico Department of Health to provide COVID-19 TESTING. Testing will take place starting at 8:30 a.m. today at the big pavilion at Jal Lake. Anyone who would like to be tested is welcome to come out and be tested during that time. There is no charge for the test, and the goal is to have as many people in the county tested for the virus as possible.

Devon Energy, Ripken Foundation, give 220 STEM kits to Hobbs kids

TODD BAILEY
NEWS-SUN

Baseball Hall of Famer Cal Ripken Jr., said he was a fan of math. Makes sense, his father Cal Sr., his brother, Billy and he, each had nice careers in a sport that thrives on statistics.

"But science bored me to tears," Ripken Jr., told the News-Sun with a laugh on Wednesday. "I think a lot of it had to do with how the subject was presented

to me. I never got into it."

It's one of the reasons the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation is involved in providing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education to children throughout the nation.

Last year, the Ripken Foundation and Devon Energy presented a STEM center to College Lane and Broadmoor Elementary. On Wednesday, Devon Energy representatives helped deliver STEM equipment to the Hobbs Boys and Girls Club.

As part of the club's after-school program, local third, fourth and fifth graders are available to receive a special STEM kit to keep at home. The kit, Snap Circuits, teaches the principles

of electronics by helping kids build exciting projects like AM radios, burglar alarms, doorbells and more. The organizations donated around 220 kits.

The home kits are a temporary substitute for the STEM center the club was scheduled to receive earlier this month. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the proposed installation and dedication of the club's STEM center has been postponed.

"It will happen, we just don't know when," said Mike Clampitt, club executive director.

Clampitt said Shannon Johnson, senior community relations specialist

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Hobbs 8-year-old Kirk Jupp shows off the STEM kit donated by the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation and Devon Energy, Wednesday at the Hobbs Boy's and Girls Club.

TODD BAILEY/
NEWS-SUN

EARLY VOTING for the June Primary Election continues through May 30. Early voting can take place in the basement conference room of the Lea County Courthouse in Lovington, 100 N. Main. Voting is Monday-Friday from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. and Saturday, May 30, from 9 a.m.-6 p.m.

EARLY VOTING for the June Primary Election at the Lea County Annex Office Complex, 1019 E. Bender and the Lea County Event Center, 5101 N. Lovington Hwy., is Tuesday-Saturday, through May 30, from 9 a.m.-6 p.m.

EARLY VOTING for the June Primary Election at the Jal City Hall, 309 S. Main, in Jal, is Friday and Saturday, May-29-30 from 9 a.m.-6 p.m.



BLAKE OVARD/NEWS-SUN

Hobbsans and New Mexicans around the state took advantage of the governor's slight relaxation of restrictions on being able to eat at the outdoor seating areas of restaurants Wednesday. It marked the first time since March the governor has allowed restaurants to serve guests at tables of any kind instead of drive-thru. New Mexico is still one of the lowest-affected states by the COVID-19 virus, but has had some of the harshest governor-imposed restrictions, and compares equally in population and COVID-19 numbers with states like South Dakota, which did not have a governor mandated shutdown.

SIDEWALK AND CURB CONSTRUCTION continues at the Dal Paso and Texas intersection, and Dal Paso and Sunset Dr./Highland Dr. intersection. Work will continue until 5 p.m. tomorrow. Closures during this time will be made as needed. For questions regarding the project, call 575-397-9232.

County budget cut by one third

BLAKE OVARD
NEWS-SUN

With the governor's unprecedented business restrictions still being felt, coupled with the downturn in the oil and gas markets occurring at about the same time, the last few months have seen Lea County officials scrambling and doing everything but looking into a crystal ball for a forecast of the new fiscal year.

County manager Mike Gallagher, and finance director Chip Lowe crunched numbers based on various possible scenarios and presented commissioners with the preliminary budget that has about 34% decrease in revenue for the upcoming year. The oil and gas industry plays a huge part in those numbers, so the price of a barrel of oil is almost always what the budget is based on. They also made some other fiscally conservative assumptions, due to the volatile nature of current financial markets, and presented the budget to county commissioners during last week's regular meeting.



Gallagher

"We're basing it on \$15.43 (per barrel of oil), and our budget assumes that we won't have any rigs operating in Lea County, and we're assuming a 25% reduction in oil production," Gallagher said.

And, those assumptions don't come lightly, as Lea County was the number one county in the nation in oil production in December, and again in January, and has been a top three county in the nation in the number of operating rigs for most of the last year and a half. Gallagher says he's hopeful the predictions are overly cautious.

"We're hopeful we will (have some active rigs)," he said. "That's really important because a strong correlation

Lujan Grisham slammed for buying jewelry amid closures

SANTA FE (AP) — Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham is facing criticism for a jewelry purchase from a store in Albuquerque after she ordered the closure of all non-essential businesses.

The governor's office said the transaction was done remotely and didn't violate the order. But Republicans are calling the behavior hypocritical and dishonorable, saying it exemplifies recent weeks of inequi-

"This was really disgraceful, especially since so many people have been hurting for so long," said Steve Pearce, chairman of the state Republican Party.



Lujan Grisham

has skyrocketed with more than 150,000 claims for jobless benefits.

The state has levied fines against some businesses and set up a hotline for people to report potential violators.

The jewelry purchase was first reported by Albuquerque television station KRQE. It said Lujan Grisham called an employee at Lilly Barrack in April and bought jewelry over the phone. Management said

picked it up.

While curbside delivery wasn't allowed until earlier this month, the governor's office claims no rules were broken.

"The store was never 'opened' and a good safe process was followed," spokeswoman Nora Meyers Sackett said. "An employee of the store left the merchandise outside her home and a personal friend of the governor's went there to pick it up."



Oil Prices

West Texas Intermediate
Posted.....\$32.81...-1.54
Sour\$29.25...-1.50
N. Gas\$1.722...-0.71



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for Devon, felt really bad about the postponement and thought the home kits were a good, temporary replacement until the center can be built and open.

"She wanted to give to the kids," Clampitt said of Johnson. "So they gathered up these kits from their other STEM sites all over the country. She said these kits are something the kids can do while they are at home during the quarantine. She has been more excited than anyone else about this. I just think it is cool to see her give the effort. She doesn't have a dog in this fight, but it is what she does for Devon and she put a lot of work into this to make it happen."

Johnson, a handful of other local Devon employees, and some club board members spent Wednesday under a canopy in 100-degree weather in front of the club handing out the kits.

"Devon is committed to providing educational opportunities for kids in our operating areas, even during a pandemic," said Johnson. "These interactive STEM sets provide an exciting supplemental activity for students, and we hope it's a great addition to their at-home learning."

Clampitt said club personnel notified the after-school program members of the kit's availability.

Including the two Hobbs school STEM centers, Devon and the Ripken Foundation

have installed more than a dozen STEM centers in Oklahoma and New Mexico. Nationally, the Ripken Foundation installed 64 STEM centers as part of its STEM initiative, which aims to increase opportunities for at-risk youth pursuing higher education and careers in STEM-related fields.

Given his one-time lack of love for science, Ripken said he wasn't too keen on creating a STEM initiative within the foundation. The foundation was created to implement youth development programs and create parks to directly address the problems facing at-risk youth. The foundation uses sports-themed activities to bring police officers, youth partners and underserved kids ages 9-14 together on a level playing field to learn invaluable life skills.

Once the foundation had the children's attention, Ripken Jr. and its board of directors looked at other things they can do to enrich the children's lives.

"We kept thinking how can we reach the kids in a deeper way," Ripken Jr. said. "One of our board members had some experience in STEM centers a started a pilot center in Pennsylvania."

Ripken Jr., went to that STEM center and was amazed at the children's response. It was a completely different introduction into science he had received at their age.

"I watched how (the kids) just took it in," Ripken Jr. said. "They are quick and fast. There is a logic. There is a sequence. There is a creativity in these

kids where they just took off."

Ripken Jr., admitted he was a bit slower than the kids using the STEM equipment, but he eventually programmed a map to have a car turn left, right, stop and go forward.

"I messed with it for about an hour," Ripken said. "But to me, (the kids) were playing and having fun, but they were learning and getting exposed to things that would be positive to them."

Ripken Jr. described the kids' excitement in the STEM center to a plethora of individual moments during his 21-year baseball career with the Baltimore Orioles.

"When a kid asks me for my autograph and you sign it and the kid is overjoyed. He's running around and showing it to everyone. It makes you feel good that you were able to make someone feel happy. In the simplest way, that's how it felt in those STEM centers," Ripken Jr. said. "When you experience that with a kid and you see the joy on their face, whether they are learning baseball or learning in the classroom with a STEM kit, I can immediately bring up the face of the kid with the autograph. Even if you don't get to experience it first-hand, you have had enough of those experiences of signing your autograph for a kid, and you see the honest enthusiasm. That honest enthusiasm is worth it right there and that's what I always think about."

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