

New program for troubled youth gets boost

By Frank Boyett

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Local officials, the school system and the state Department of Juvenile Justice are teaming up to keep kids out of jail.

DJJ Deputy Commissioner Sherre Smith-Jones presented Henderson Fiscal Court with a check for \$15,000 Tuesday to help with the project. "I wish the check were a lot larger," she said.

Lashana Harris of the DJJ told fiscal court that in working with the Henderson County School District, which generates the majority of juvenile petitions, they came up with the Henderson County Center for Youth Justice Services, a process allowing intervention so kids don't end up in detention. "We are very excited about the future of this model and we are very hopeful it will address the needs of the county.

"When this project works in Henderson County ... it'll be a project that could easily be replicated through the state. We need the community. We need for everyone in Henderson County to support this endeavor."

County Attorney Steve Gold said the project is an outgrowth of efforts first begun by District Judge Rob Wiederstein, although other judges and a wide array of other officials got involved later. "At one point a few years ago we had the highest number of (juvenile court cases) per capita in the state," Gold said.

"Even though this is designed to give children the services they need, it's not a soft on crime measure. It's a smart on crime measure. The juveniles that are dangerous are going to be going to court."

The majority of troubled kids, however, those who don't pose a danger, will be getting counseling or other services, Gold said. "They're going to get the help they need before they end up in court." He described the program as a type of "triage nurse ... to help get that child to the right destination."

Other matters before the court Tuesday included:

Park ordinance: The court delayed first reading of a proposed park ordinance because Judge-executive Hugh McCormick said county officials want "to try to work on it a little longer" to better address such things as special events in county parks.

Foundation money: The court passed a resolution providing \$100,000 in coal severance tax funds to act as seed money for the Community Foundation of Henderson County. "A lot of communities are doing this because grants are drying up,"

McCormick said.

Track-hoe: The court agreed to spend \$19,950 to buy a used track-hoe from Keith Berry to be used in "tight places that the Gradall can't get in," McCormick said.

Constitution Week: The court passed a proclamation naming this as Constitution Week, marking the 225th anniversary of adoption of the U.S. Constitution, for members of the Gen. Samuels Hopkins Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. A special program about the Constitution will be presented at 10 a.m. today in the fiscal court meeting room.



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