

The Journal Times®

Mount Pleasant

Village committee recommends the purchase of four AEDs **LOCAL, PAGE B1**



Boys basketball

St. Catherine's clinches at least a share of MCC championship **SPORTS, PAGE C1**



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Jordyn Brown holds her daughter Saryah Brown while her mother Iesha Clerk looks on Tuesday at their Racine home on Harbridge Avenue. Brown gave birth to Saryah on Jan. 19, the morning after receiving her diploma from Park High School.

Newborn adventure

Park student gives birth day after graduation

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RACINE — Jordyn Brown bounced in her seat to deal with the pain. Her name would soon be called, but something else was on her mind.

Brown wanted to receive her diploma, but she worried her water would break while walking across the Park High School stage. Even though Brown wasn't due to give birth for a week, she started having contractions the day of graduation.

Seated in the Park auditorium, Iesha Clerk, Brown's mother, felt proud but had the same concern.

"I was just sitting back there so nervous, and then when they called her name I'm clapping and clapping and I'm like, 'OK, hurry up so we can go,'" Clerk said.

Brown took her diploma, whispered to a teacher that she was having contractions and left.

Brown went to the hospital shortly after the Jan. 18 graduation ceremony. The next morning, her daughter Saryah was born.

The time from diploma to birth was a strenuous 14 hours, and two significant life moments so close together was an agonizing memorable experience for Brown.

"I was in pain, but I was still happy," Brown said.

Brown's daily activities are built around her daughter's sleeping and feeding schedule.

Saryah is healthy and wakes up every day at 4 a.m.



Park High School teacher Hailey Keeran holds Saryah Brown Tuesday at Brown's Racine home on Harbridge Avenue. Brown was born Jan. 19, the morning after her mother Jordyn Brown received her diploma from Park High School. Keeran was one of Brown's instructors.

Brown lives with her mother, and they both care for Saryah, who is Clerk's first grandchild.

Clerk enjoys looking at and taking care of her granddaughter, who she often watches for a few hours in the evening after work.

"I just want to go home and hold her," Clerk often thinks.

Clerk strongly encouraged Brown to earn her high school diploma, and Park's competency-based graduation program was a good fit that allowed her to graduate a few months early.

"Get your diploma for me and for you,"

Clerk told Brown. "What you do after that — that's your choice."

Brown's future plans include becoming a veterinarian and being a member of the Army National Guard.

She became interested in the military after taking a Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps class as a freshman, which she greatly enjoyed.

Hailey Keeran, a competency-based teacher at Park, taught Brown in two classes the past several months and said she was an excellent student.

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Ruling to shed light on 'dark store' taxes

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BURLINGTON — A longstanding dispute about property taxes on retail stores in Wisconsin could be nearing an end with a ruling from the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

State officials have announced that the Supreme Court is scheduled Thursday to unveil its decision in a case aimed at resolving the so-called "dark store" taxation issue.

Burlington city officials are among those watching for the court ruling, as Burlington currently is engaged in a dark-store court fight with retail giant Walmart.

The ruling will have statewide implications, too, as evidenced by the interest of the Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce business group and the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, both of which have submitted briefs to the Supreme Court.

At issue is whether tax collectors can assign a higher value to retail stores that are active and successful, or whether such properties should be taxed the same as stores that are "dark," which means vacant and dormant.

Business groups contend that the basic property value remains the same, but cities and other tax collectors contend that dark-store taxation gives businesses an unfair break — and forces higher taxes on homeowners and others in a community.

The dispute has manifested itself in numerous local court fights throughout Wisconsin between Target, Menards and other big-box retailers, and their local tax collectors.

In Racine County, Walmart is suing the City of Burlington, arguing that the taxable value of its store at 1901 Milwaukee Ave. should be reduced from \$8.6 million to \$4.5 million. Both sides in that case have agreed to postpone any action until after the Supreme Court issues its ruling.

Burlington City Administrator Carina Walters said she likely will not have any immediate comment on Thursday's court ruling, because the city's case with Walmart is still pending as active litigation.

"At the appropriate time our legal counsel determines the city can make a statement, we will," Walters said via email.

The Supreme Court agreed to examine the dark store issue by taking up a case from Walworth County.

Lowe's Home Centers filed suit against the City of Delavan over the taxable value of its store at 2015 E. Geneva St.

After city tax collectors set the store's value at \$8.9 million, Lowe's filed suit to have the taxable value reduced to \$4.6 million.

The City of Delavan prevailed in circuit court and appellate court, and Lowe's appealed the case to the Supreme Court.

The issue first arose in Wisconsin after a different ruling from the Supreme Court in 2008, which allowed for setting a retail store's taxable value based on similar properties that are vacant.

Please see **RULING**, Page A3

New bar facing several challenges

Owner wants extended hours, help from off-duty officers

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RACINE — The shortage of police officers is now being felt by at least one of the community's bar owners.

The Public Safety & Licensing Committee had some outstanding issues to discuss with Shikela Buckley, the agent for The

Fifteen-Eighteen, 1518 Washington Ave., on Monday.

Buckley opened the business about a month ago and told the committee about her inability to get off-duty assistance from Racine Police Department officers to help with security issues.

Off-duty officers often provide security for area bars.

Tyrone Buckley, who helps his



Peterson



Coe

daughter with her business, said the advantage of using off-duty officers is that they discourage troublemakers and reduce a lot of problems.

Buckley has applied to have off-duty officers help with security, but none have responded.

Buckley said she has paid about \$8,000 for private security for the month.

Alderman Jeffrey Peterson said

that the Racine Police Department is short 30 officers, so those who remain are working mandatory overtime.

"They're in a tough situation right now, and I don't know that everybody realizes that," he said. "If you're working 16 hours already, why would you go work a part-time job?"

Changes

Buckley was at the meeting to discuss a proposed change to her business hours.

In the month since the bar

opened, she has learned that the business could make more money with later hours.

However, the committee wanted to discuss issues brought up by the RPD, which claims The Fifteen-Eighteen has been open after midnight on at least two occasions.

The bar's license allows it to operate from 8 a.m. to midnight.

The issues raised by the police department included:

■ On Feb. 4, RPD was

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FAA HEAD DEFENDS TRAVEL SAFETY, WILL INVESTIGATE INCIDENTS

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, center, flanked by Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., left, and Chair Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., questions acting administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration Billy Nolen on Wednesday at the Capitol in Washington. Nolen defended the safety of airline travel in the United States after recent incidents at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York, in Austin, Texas, and off the coast of Hawaii. Still, Nolen said, he will assemble a team of experts to review airline safety. Separately, he said the agency has taken steps to avoid a repeat of the technology failure last month that briefly halted all flights nationwide, but he said he couldn't promise there won't be another breakdown.

Judge sentences mass shooter

Victim's relative tells white supremacist he was 'brainwashed'

CAROLYN THOMPSON
AND JENNIFER PELTZ
Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — A white supremacist who killed 10 Black people at a Buffalo supermarket last year was sentenced to life in prison without parole Wednesday after relatives of his victims confronted him with pain and rage caused by his racist attack.

Anger briefly turned physical at Payton Gendron's sentencing when a man in the audience rushed at him. The man was quickly restrained; prosecutors later said he wouldn't be charged. The proceed-

ing then resumed with more emotional outpouring from people who lost loved ones or were themselves wounded in the attack.

Gendron, whose hatred was fueled by racist conspiracy theories he encountered online, cried during some of the testimony and apologized to victims and their families in a brief statement.

Some angrily condemned him; others quoted from the Bible or said they were praying for him. Several pointed out that he deliberately attacked a Black community far from his nearly all-white hometown.

"You've been brainwashed," Wayne Jones Sr., the only child of victim Celestine Chaney, said as sobs rose from the audience. "You don't even know Black people that much to hate them. You learned

this on the internet, and it was a big mistake."

"I hope you find it in your heart to apologize to these people, man. You did wrong for no reason," Jones said.

Gendron pleaded guilty in November to crimes including murder and domestic terrorism motivated by hate, a charge that carried an automatic life sentence.

"There can be no mercy for you, no understanding, no second chances," Judge Susan Eagan said as she sentenced him.

Gendron, 19, also faces separate federal charges that could carry a death sentence if the U.S. Justice Department chooses to seek it. His defense attorney said in December that Gendron is prepared to plead guilty in federal court as well to avoid execution.

DIGEST

Retail sales jump despite inflation

WASHINGTON — America's consumers rebounded last month from a weak holiday shopping season by boosting their spending at stores and restaurants at the fastest pace in nearly two years, underscoring the economy's resilience in the face of higher prices and the Federal Reserve's interest rate hikes.

The government said Wednesday that retail sales jumped 3% in January, after sinking the previous two months. It was the largest one-month increase since March 2021, when stimulus checks gave a big boost to spending. Excluding the COVID-19 pandemic era, January's rise was the largest in more than two decades. Driving the gain was a jump in auto sales and healthy spending at restaurants, electronics stores and furniture outlets.

Wednesday's robust retail sales figures and a strong January jobs report suggest the economy remains durable and at little risk of succumbing to a recession anytime soon. Brisk consumer spending, though, can intensify upward pressure on inflation.

Russia claims some progress in Ukraine

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian forces claimed some battlefield success Wednesday as Moscow's invasion of Ukraine labored to gain momentum almost a year after it began.

The Russian Defense Ministry said its troops broke through two Ukrainian defensive lines in the eastern Luhansk region and pushed back Ukrainian troops about two miles, forcing them to leave behind equipment and the bodies of those killed. It was not possible to independently verify Moscow's claim.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said his country's forces need "a few months" to learn how to use new Western weapons before they can try to push out the Russians.

BRIEFLY

CHINA TENSIONS: China said Wednesday it will take measures against United States entities related to the downing of a suspected Chinese spy balloon off the American East Coast. At a daily briefing, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin gave no details and did not identify the targets of the measures.

DEFENSE SPENDING: NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on Wednesday urged the 30 member countries to commit to spending at least 2% of their gross domestic product on defense by a set date, as Russia's war on Ukraine and other threats eat into military spending.

IRS NOMINEE: Republican and Democratic senators, who have been arguing over how much money to give the IRS and how it should be spent, found at least one point of unanimity Wednesday as they considered President Joe Biden's nominee to lead the agency: Both sides wished Danny Werfel good luck with the worst job in Washington.

HAZARDOUS SPILL: A portion of the main freeway that runs through the southern Arizona desert and links the state's two largest cities remained closed outside Tucson on Wednesday morning, after a deadly crash caused a hazardous material leak Tuesday and forced evacuations nearby.

GAETZ: Rep. Matt Gaetz, a Republican firebrand known for his strong support of former President Donald Trump, said Wednesday that the Justice Department ended a sex trafficking case with no charges against him.

POLICE: Amid a renewed nationwide focus on police qualifications following the fatal beating of Tyre Nichols in Memphis, an Oregon lawmaker introduced a bill that would require officers to complete at least two years of higher education.

— Associated Press

Bar

From A1

dispatched to the bar after a report of people fighting. When officers arrived, the people fighting were gone, but pepper spray had been used inside. The bar was cited for being open after hours.

■ On Sunday, an RPD sergeant drove through the parking lot at 1 a.m. and claimed there were at least 50 cars and people coming and going from the bar.

Buckley said it has been a challenge to close the bar at midnight because people order drinks and want to stay and finish them.

She said that even after the bar closes, people bang on the door and want to be let in to order off the menu.

Buckley also said that she was at the bar Sunday after she got off work at 10 p.m. and there were not 50 people there.

Her father said that the lot is public parking and there is no way for RPD to know where the people who arrived in those vehicles went.

He also said they can kick the patrons out, but they can't make them leave the area.

Deferred

The committee deferred making a decision about a change in hours and recommended that Buckley wait until licenses come due in the summer to adjust hours.

Alderman Jeff Coe said it has only been a month since the business opened and there have been numerous calls to the police.

"At this point I'm not ready to extend the hours because you can't control what you have," he said.

Peterson said calling the police because there is a problem is not an issue.

The problem, he said, is the bar was supposed to be closed at midnight.

Birth

From A1

Keeran had her first child about six months ago, so she and Brown talked daily about pregnancy.

Keeran makes it a point to "commend my students that are pregnant," including Brown, who walked a half-mile to school every day.

Brown does not sleep as much as before, but she said that being a mother has so far gone about how she expected.

"It was like an adventure, waking up, feeding her and changing her diapers," Brown said.

Clerk said her daughter becoming a mother has led her to view Brown differently.

"Some days I'll catch myself looking at her,

and to me she's starting to look different," Clerk said. "What is it about her? It's probably just that caring, to see her caring for someone else. She always would watch her little cousins and stuff like that, but to actually watch her get up every morning and change diapers and everything — she's growing into a young lady."

After the pain and remarkable timing of her daughter's birth, Brown said the best part of motherhood is that Saryah is the first thing she sees every morning.

"It's a whole new life," Brown said. "It's different when it's your kid, something you created for nine months and have an attachment to. She's like happiness in human form."



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Jordyn Brown holds her daughter Saryah Brown on Tuesday at their Racine home on Harbridge Avenue. Jordyn gave birth to Saryah on Jan. 19, the morning after receiving her diploma from Park High School.

Ruling

From A1

Local government officials contend that operating retail stores are inherently more valuable to their owners and, therefore, should have a higher value for tax purposes. Businesses say the value of the land and building has nothing to do with whether a store is open for business.

After trying unsuccessfully for years to persuade state lawmakers to close the dark-store loophole, critics decided to push the issue in the courts and hope for a resolution that way.

Supreme Court officials said the high court's ruling would be posted Thursday morning on its website.



SCOTT WILLIAMS, JOURNAL TIMES FILE PHOTO

Walmart is suing the City of Burlington over the taxable value of this store at 1901 Milwaukee Ave., but both sides have agreed to wait for a Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling on the issue.