

LOCAL NEWS

■ Get ready for coach Gene Chizik and the "taste-off" at AU's Heritage Park. **7A**

■ The Auburn University Autism Center talks about its plans for the future. **8A**

OPELIKA-AUBURN NEWS

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75 CENTS



CITYFEST 2009: The annual arts and crafts festival begins at 9 a.m. Saturday at Kiesel Park in Auburn. See **Page 7A**.

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A MEDIA GENERAL NEWSPAPER



WILLIAM WHITE | OPELIKA-AUBURN NEWS

Auburn Councilman Arthur L. Dowdell poses with flags he removed Thursday from Confederate graves in Pine Hill Cemetery. He said the flags won't be back. "I'm going on the record that this will never happen again," Dowdell said. "This will never happen again as long as I'm on the city council."

Dowdell removes flags from Confederate graves

KATIE STALLCUP
STAFF WRITER

Mary Norman was shocked Thursday afternoon when Auburn Councilman Arthur L. Dowdell pulled up a Confederate flag placed on her great-grandfather's grave and snapped it in half, she said.

Dowdell, who denies snapping the flag, said Thursday he was picking up his daughter from Auburn Junior High School near the cemetery when several people told him they "had a problem" with the flags. He drove to the cemetery and started pulling up

flags, he said.

"It's offensive to me," he said. "To me, it represents the Ku Klux Klan and racism."

The United Daughters of the Confederacy placed the flags earlier this week, as they have done for 50 years, in preparation for a celebration Sunday of Confederate Memorial Day, Norman said.

Confederate Memorial Day will be celebrated as a state holiday in Alabama Monday. "I really didn't know exactly how to respond to him," she said. "I happen to be a

SEE DOWDELL, PAGE 8A

OPELIKA SPORTSPLEX AND AQUATIC CENTER

THEY'RE No. 1!

Opelika couple first to buy membership

BEVERLY HARVEY
STAFF WRITER

Carrie Sibert Tolbert seemed giddy as she began to swing her arms and walk briskly along the indoor walking track at the Opelika Sportsplex & Aquatic Center Tuesday morning.

She and husband, Lonnie Tolbert, were given a personal tour of the facility's construction site on Andrews Road by Opelika Parks and Recreation Department Director Bill Harrelson.

The Opelika couple were the first to purchase an annual membership for the Sportsplex, which is slated to open in July. The indoor track was the main reason they made the investment, Carrie Tolbert said.

When the tour stopped at the indoor track on the second floor, Carrie Tolbert had to know one thing. "How many laps will make a mile?"

Harrelson said he gets



VASHA HUNT | OPELIKA-AUBURN NEWS

Carrie and Lonnie Tolbert are anxiously awaiting the opening of the new athletic complex in July. For information on memberships, contact the Opelika Parks and Recreation Department. For more pictures of the complex, go to the photo gallery at oanow.com.

that question a lot. Although it is still uncertain, one lap around the indoor track, which circles above the lobby and the gym, will probably be one-eighth of a mile, he said.

The Tolberts also seemed interested in the Adult Activity Center that will provide activities, programs and entertainment for senior citizens. The center will in-

clude a stage and a game room with a pool table and a Wii video game system.

It will also have a computer room where computer classes, including digital photography, will be offered to senior citizens, Harrelson said.

Carrie Tolbert asked about the outdoor track at the Sportsplex, too. "I'm used to walking

outside during the summer," she said.

The outdoor track will eventually encircle the entire complex and cover about 2 miles in one lap, Harrelson said.

Carrie Tolbert kept a smile on her face throughout the one-hour tour. At the end of the visit, she told her husband, "I wish they were saying it will be opening next week."

Plant expansion means 20 jobs

KATIE STALLCUP
STAFF WRITER

A German-based company specializing in high-end textiles for cars will expand operations to Auburn Technology Park North, creating 20 jobs, the city announced Thursday.

Straehle + Hess USA, Inc., will move from Auburn's business incubation center to an existing building in the technology park.

The company was founded more than 80 years ago, said Kirsten Schoenharting, managing director of the parent company of Straehle + Hess.

Its Auburn facility currently employs six people and will increase that by 20.

They expect to begin hiring in the fourth quarter of 2009.

The company will start preproduction at the end of this year and will ramp up production by the middle of 2010, Schoenharting said.

Straehle + Hess was recently awarded a large contract for vehi-

cles that will be produced at the Mercedes-Benz plant in Vance, according to a statement released by the City of Auburn.

Schoenharting said her company had studied trends, looked ahead and decided there was a market for the high-end textile products, even taking into account the current economic climate.

"Of course, the situation is not easy at the moment," she said. "In my opinion, this is only to strengthen the company. If you have a difficult situation, I think you should take it as a chance."

Auburn Workforce Development Director Cary Cox said with Auburn University's expertise and the available work force, the area provided an ideal location for the company's facility.

"There's literally thousands of people with textile experience available," Cox said.

Schoenharting declined to comment on what the average worker income would be.

Paper may have recalled some copies because of predator story

DONATHAN PRATER
AND AMY WEAVER
STAFF WRITERS

Copies of the weekly Auburn Villager may have been recalled from five news racks Thursday because a story was offensive to a business partner of one of the newspa-

per's owners.

The story concerned Jonathan Wryn Vance, 24, who was sentenced in federal court last week to 18 years in prison on extortion and sex-related Internet charges.

Vance is the grandson and adopted son of Victor Vance, a local business-

man and partner of Charles Whatley, one of the owners of the Villager.

Whatley said he was unaware of any newspapers being picked up.

However, Vance said Whatley told him he had the paper removed from five racks.

"I love him for it. He thought he was doing me a favor," Vance said.

Vance and Whatley are partners in the USA Town Center development at Exit 62 off Interstate 85.

Vance said he considered the story to be "mean, self-serving and

vindictive."

"We are acutely aware of what our son has done," he said.

Jacque Kochak, who wrote the story, could not be reached for comment on Vance's characterization of the story, which quoted extensively from the federal indictment.

Don Eddins, who said he and his wife each own a 25 percent share of the paper, said he did not have any papers recalled.

"We've promised our advertisers and subscribers a certain amount of papers and that's what we're going to deliver," he said.

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COMICS EVENTS LET'S EAT 6C 3A 1C
LOTTERIES OBITUARIES OPINION 3B 2A 4A
POLICE SCOREBOARD TV LISTINGS 2A 3B 7C

WEATHER

Sunny and warmer

High: 85 Low: 57
Complete forecast, 2A



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