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Economy, year-end fire head list of 2002 top local news events

Things going up - both good and bad - make up much of the list of this year's top local stories.

Taxes and surcharges went up, as did a library expansion, hospital renovations, snow and flood waters in Hoopeston.

The top 10 stories of 2002 include:

1.) **The economy:** lagging economics caught up with Hoopeston this year, causing city leaders to hike garbage, phone and water rates in an effort to balance a predicted deficit budget. City employees were hit hardest because on top of increased costs, city workers got no raises this year and late in the year, had to choose between higher deductibles or co-payments on their health insurance.

Also on the economic front, Schumacher Electric announced lay-offs in January and more in December, leaving only distribution and warehousing at the Hoopeston plant.

The economy affected many businesses, none more than Hoopeston Fertilizer. After more than 50 years in business, the company announced in March that it was closing its doors, a victim of the local farm economy.

2.) **The weather:** 2002 started with major snows of five or more inches on Feb. 25-26 and again on March 25-26 and Dec. 24-25.

While snow-free, the middle of the year had worse weather problems when 6.24 inches of rain fell on Aug. 19, causing major flooding throughout the city. Some Front St. residents were evacuated from their homes and residents in many parts of the city pumped water from their homes.

As if that weren't enough, summer sizzled with temperatures in the mid- to upper-90s, pushing heat indices



File photo
Andy Braden owner of BJ's Pump, mixes a drink on Feb. 24, the first Sunday alcohol sales became legal in Hoopeston. Sunday sales was one of the year's top 10 stories.

to 110 degrees.

3.) **Trailer fire:** A mobile home fire took the lives of two children on Dec. 1. The boys, two-year-old Jose Villarreal and four-year-old Michael Escamilla, died of carbon monoxide poisoning as they slept. The fire was blamed on a space heater and drop cord.

4.) **Sunday sales:** In February, the Hoopeston City Council tied on a vote to allow Sunday alcohol sales in Hoopeston. Mayor Chalmers Flint cast the deciding vote which allows bars to sell liquor from noon to 10 p.m. Sundays.

5.) **Library expansion:** After more than a year as a work in progress, renovations and an expansion to the Hoopeston Public Library were officially celebrated

See 2002 on other side

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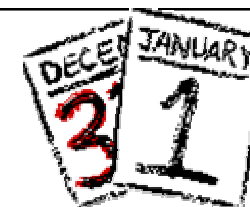
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2003

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\$7⁰⁰

11 a.m.-8 p.m.

includes cole slaw & baked beans



2002 continued from other side

in November. The first phase, which included making the library handicapped-accessible, cost nearly \$1 million. Funds for the project came from an Illinois Live and Learn grant and the Charlotte Ann Russell and Wilson Besselieu trusts.

6.) Hospital expansion: An Illinois First grant of \$205,000 was just what the doctor ordered to help Hoopeston Community Memorial Hospital fund its expansion and renovation. The project, estimated at \$1.2-\$1.4 million, is also funded by unused funds from the Charlotte Ann Russell Medical Center project and a 1999 bond issue.

Plans include a new outpatient entrance, radiology suite, lab area, expanded therapy services and a revamped emergency room area, allowing more privacy.

While the grant was a boost, in November, hospital officials were pondering whether to return the money after an anonymous complaint was filed with the Illinois Department of Labor charging the hospital with not paying prevailing wage on the project. The wage, higher than what was anticipated for the project, would hike it significantly over-budget, said hospital CEO Frank Caruso.

7.) Two men found dead: Two men were found slain near Henning in February and county police officials sought help from the public in identifying them.

An arrest was made in March when a Lafayette, Ind., man was arrested in California and charged with the

murders.

8.) Miss America visits: For the first time, a reigning Miss America visited Hoopeston during the National Sweetcorn Festival.

Katie Marie Harmon, Miss America 2002, competed in the National Sweetheart Pageant as Miss Oregon in 2000. While she did not win the crown, the competition gave her valuable experience and she returned to Hoopeston to thank pageant staff.

9.) Rossville-Alvin contract: After nine months of negotiating, Rossville-Alvin teachers and the school board agreed on a one-year contract giving certified staff raises of 3 to 5.2 percent and about 3 percent for support staff. The two sides began negotiating in May

Retirements, hirings, other people activities mark 2002

Area residents were busy living their lives in 2002. In some instances, they made headlines doing it.

In January, weather watcher Audrey Mushrush received the Edward H. Stoll Award from the National Weather Service and Hank Hornbeck was named winner of the Distinguished Service Award by the Hoopeston Jaycees.

- Paul Ziemnisky announced in March that he was retiring after 22 years as Hoopeston's postmaster. Connie Drake was appointed to the position and was sworn in in October.

- Sgt. Joe Gaffney of the Hoopeston Police Department, retired in April after having served for 30 years. Patrolman Jim DeWitt was promoted to sergeant.

- Also in April, former Hoopeston Fire Chief James "Hoppy" Hopkins died. He had served as fire chief for 33 years.

- 24-year-old Adam Watson was hired as a new police officer in May. An officer of another kind, Maggie the canine officer, joined the force in September.

Weather

Mostly cloudy today and tonight. High 40, low 22. Tomorrow, mostly cloudy, chance of snow late. High 38, low 25. Thursday, chance of snow, High 35, low 28.

For current weather conditions, call the **Hoopeston Weather Line** at (217) 283-6221.

2001, finally reaching a tentative agreement in February. Raises were retroactive to August 2001, when the previous contract expired.

10.) Wellington park: Resident Bill Warner and the village board squared off in July over who owns Barry Voyles Memorial Park in Wellington. The land was inadvertently included when Warner purchased the former high school property nine years ago. Although the village has maintained the property since then, Warner laid claim to it earlier this year. In July, village trustees voted not to pay to get the park back from him.

The disagreement stems from differences between Mayor Grover "Bud" Wise and Warner and was not expected to be settled while Wise is mayor.

- Maurice and Martha Leigh were honored in June as recipients of the Orval Kaag Citizen of the Year Award, presented by the Hoopeston Police Department and Isobel Loreda was honored for 30 years with the Summer Migrant Program.

- Hoopeston lost four prominent citizens in 2002, including James "Hoppy" Hopkins, who served as fire chief for 33 years; Dennis Jerome, former Grant Township road commissioner and steam engine enthusiast; former mayor and attorney Joe Moore; and Bowling Hall of Fame member Robert Chesnut.

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