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The Kentucky Standard


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Abell, former judge-exec passes away at 75

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A former Nelson County judge-executive whose life impacted all areas of the county through his various forms of public service has died at the age of 75.

Mike Abell is best known for his three terms as county judge at a time when his progressive vision resulted in the passage of the occupational tax that put the county on strong financial foot-



Mike Abell

ing.

He served in that role from 1982 through 1993, a time when the judge's seat was transforming into more of a legislative role rather than having judicial powers. That began during the term of former

judge Charlie Roberts after the state amended the constitution. Abell defeated Roberts to become judge-executive.

Abell also was county judge when the Nelson County Jail was moved from the downtown area to the present facility in the Maple Hill neighborhood in 1987.

Those bold moves were necessary for the county's future, but played a role in Abell's loss to Dean Watts in a contentious and expensive campaign in 1993 that

saw Watts unseat the incumbent.

"Mike Abell was a great guy to work with," said longtime magistrate Bernard Ice, the only living member of the Fiscal Court who served with Abell. "He was always cooperating with us and kept us informed."

The loss to Watts did not keep Abell from working in the public sector, something he had done since he joined the Peace Corps after graduating from Bellarmine College (now University) in 1968.

"Mike was student government president at Bellarmine, so he was very much in a leadership role and being an activist," said Sheila Abell, his wife of more than 50 years. "He and a large group of his friends were very much interested in the political theme at that time, during the McGovern years and the Vietnam War, and wanting to making this world a better place."

She was still in college at the

See **ABELL**, page A6

KDA study shows bourbon's growth is a boon for Ky. and Nelson Co.


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The bourbon boom continues unabated in the commonwealth, according to a study commissioned by the Kentucky Distiller's Association released Wednesday, and with Nelson County standing at the epicenter of the distilling industry, bourbon's economic impact on the state also has had a profound affect here locally as well.

"It's phenomenal," KDA president Eric Gregory said. "You look back 12 years ago when we did the first report, you only had a couple of operating distilleries in Nelson County."

The current study is the sixth that the KDA has commissioned over the past 12 years, and it found that the bourbon industry is now contributing \$9 billion a year into the state's economy, employing more than 22,500 people and generating \$1.23 billion in payroll. Gregory said localized numbers by county will be released in a few weeks, but given Bardstown's status as Bourbon Capitol of the World, Nelson County is reaping an outsized benefit from the industry's presence comparative to other counties.

"Lexington-Louisville-Bardstown is 'The Amber Triangle,'" Gregory said.



NACOGDOCHES MILLER/The Kentucky Standard

Heaven Hill Distillery opened its newly redesigned Bourbon Heritage Center to the public in recent weeks. The massive growth in the bourbon industry and bourbon tourism over the past decade-plus has led to distilleries in Nelson County and all across the state reinvesting tax incentives into their properties to make their visitors centers even more tourist-friendly than ever before.

"Bardstown is definitely living up to its status. You've always had the heritage and history there, but it's amazing to see what Kim Huston and local leaders" have done to help the industry grow in Nelson

County. Currently there are 11 distilleries in and around the Bardstown area, and several others are just a short drive away.

See **STUDY**, page A6

Filing deadline is Tuesday

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The state legislature gave local residents an extra 18 days to file for office for the May 17 primary, but as of press time, only four Republicans have taken advantage of the additional time.

Because of uncertainty over statewide redistricting, the original Jan. 7 deadline was moved to 4 p.m. on Tuesday. Republican Tim Hutchins was going to file Jan. 7, but when the office closed because of inclement weather, he filed the following day.

The extra days gave Ann Marie Williams time to decide to challenge Jon Snow in the Republican primary for magistrate in District 5. Toni Wiley filed papers on Jan. 18 and M. T. Harned did the same two days later. They join Philip

Bischoff and Jeff Cassel in the race for their party's nomination for magistrate in District 3.

There could eventually be even more days to file as a result of lawsuits contesting the redistricting maps passed by the General Assembly. Legislation has been filed to move the primary date to Aug. 2 if the courts have not ruled on the legality of the maps. If that happens, candidates will have until May 31 to file.

Four Democrats have yet to garner opposition from anyone in either party.

That group includes incumbents Clerk Jeanette Hall Sidebottom, Sheriff Ramon Pineiroa and Coroner Field Houghlin. Arch (Chip) McKay is the only candidate on the ballot in his quest to replace Matthew Hite as county attorney.

See **FILING**, page A6

County redistricting may be delayed

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There could be a delay in the process of redrawing lines for magisterial districts in Nelson County if House Bill 212 is approved by the Kentucky General Assembly.

A local committee would typically review the census numbers just a few months after they are received, and have the new districts drawn to ensure each district had an equal number of residents.

However, according to state Rep. Chad McCoy (R-Bardstown), it was not

done in 2021 because the census was not completed as early as usual because of the pandemic.

"This is actually a fix to a fix," he said. "We changed it from being done in 2021 to 2022 because we didn't get the numbers in time. But if it is done now, someone could win their primary and they might not be eligible to run in the general election. Under this bill, the redistricting would be moved to 2023."

He said once a person is elected, and the lines change in 2023, they would serve because the

election was held under the current law.

Judge-Executive Dean Watts recently asked the current magistrates for recommendations for people to review the district lines.

The district seats for county school board members match up with the magisterial districts. However, the school board races are non-partisan.

The population in Nelson County increased by 3,301 people from 2010 to 2020. If there was no major shift in where people live, the lines may not change.

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