

LOCAL NEWS

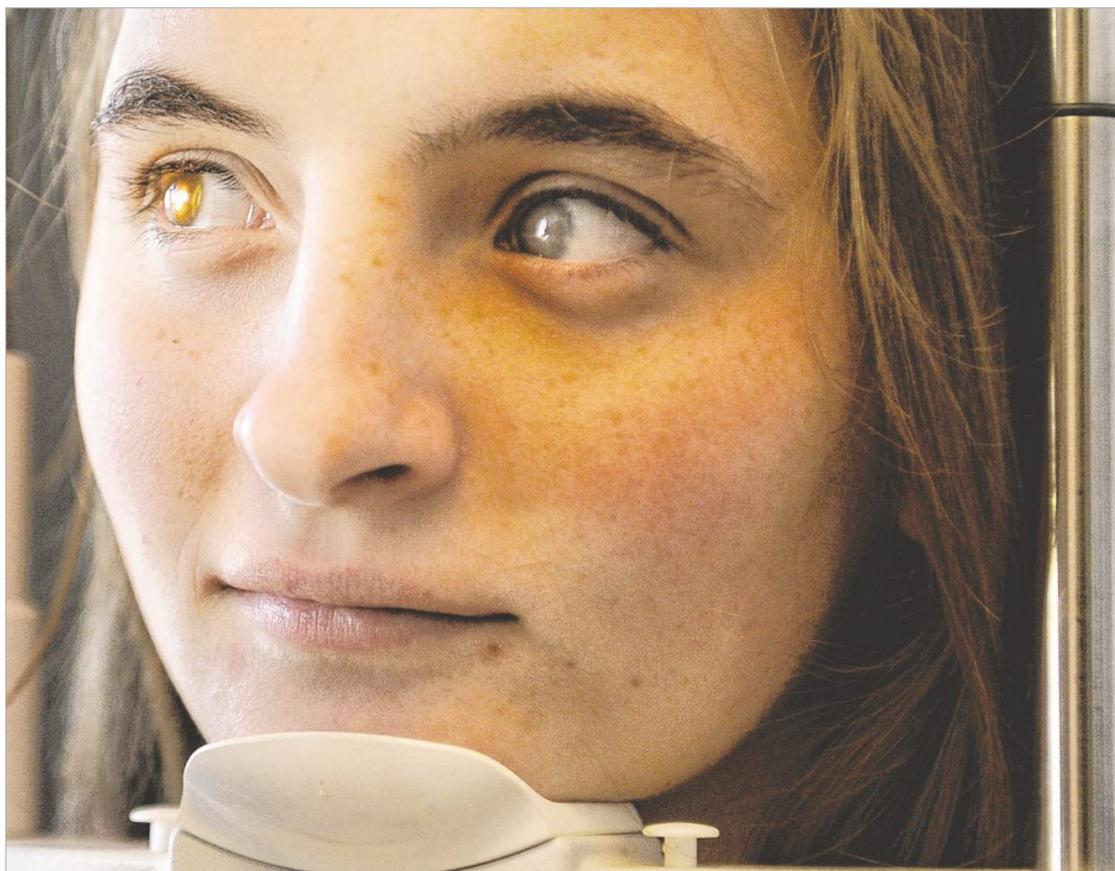
B SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2013
THE TENNESSEAN

HEALTH CARE HELP Upcoming events will help those who need assistance obtaining health coverage under the Affordable Care Act. **On 2B**



NASHVILLE THEN
In November 1963, Nashville, along with the rest of the nation, mourned the death of President Kennedy. For more photos from that month, go to Tennessean.com/nov63.

FAMILY'S PRAYERS BECOME A KEPT PROMISE



Maria Morari, a blind orphan from Moldova, has her right eye examined by Dr. Ming Wang during a pre-op visit to his office Oct. 25. On Thursday, Wang performed complicated surgery on Maria. PHOTOS BY SANFORD MYERS / THE TENNESSEAN

BLIND ORPHAN GETS A CHANCE AT SIGHT

Husband, wife met 14-year-old girl on Moldova mission trip

By Tom Wilemon
The Tennessean

The girl sat alone on the bench. She kept her head cast down, oblivious to the other children laughing and chattering at a summer camp for orphans in Moldova.

Lynn Hendrich wanted to know why. The Nolensville resident, who had taken her family to the country on a church mission, gently cajoled the girl for two days before she showed her face.

Maria Morari turned out to be just as pretty as the other girls.

At 14, she already had the perfectly shaped cheekbones of an Eastern European beauty. The highlights in her hair reflected the sunshine. But her gaze was opaque, her left eye clouded in obvious blindness and her right eye wavering without focus.

"That was on Thursday," Hendrich said. "Then on Friday afternoon, we had to say goodbye to them, all the kids we had met. It was very, very difficult and just heart-wrenching to have to leave her there. She just clung to us. We couldn't make

» BLIND, 4B



Maria Morari, left, a blind orphan from Moldova, sits with Lynn and Steve Hendrich in Dr. Ming Wang's office.

"We couldn't make her any promises, but we said we would be praying for her, that we loved her and we would be trying our very best to come back to see her."

LYNN HENDRICH



A Tesla Model S car caught fire in Smyrna this week. PHOTO PROVIDED BY THP

Third Tesla Model S fire raises concerns

By Tom Krisher
Associated Press

A Tesla Model S electric car caught fire this week after hitting road debris on Interstate 24 in Smyrna, the third fire in a Model S in the past five weeks.

The blaze on Wednesday afternoon engulfed the front of the car. Sgt. Bill Miller with the Tennessee Highway Patrol says the Model S ran over a tow hitch, which hit the undercarriage of the car and caused an electrical fire.

The driver, Juris Shibayama, was able to pull onto an emergency lane and escape, according to the THP's report. The fire

burned the front of the car.

Larry Farley, Rutherford County fire chief, says the blaze was so hot and intense that it melted the front of the car.

"It pretty much just melted to the road," Farley said.

Tesla said it has sent a team to investigate the fire, the second Model S blaze involving road debris. In early October, a driver near Seattle hit debris that pierced a shield and the battery pack, causing a fire. In the other fire, a driver in Mexico crashed into a concrete wall and a tree at a high speed.

The Model S has a large bat-

» ELECTRIC, 4B

Rivera accepts interim post

Prosecutor needs Senate approval for permanent U.S. attorney appointment

By Tony Gonzalez
The Tennessean

Middle Tennessee's newly appointed top federal prosecutor on Friday vowed to carry on with the priorities of his predecessor, aggressively investigating health care fraud and pursuing stiff penalties against gangs.

David Rivera, who had served as "acting" U.S. attorney since the previous prosecutor,



Rivera

Jerry Martin, stepped down in April, was sworn into the position on an interim basis this week. Named by U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to a 120-day stint, he would have to be nominated by President Barack Obama and confirmed by Congress for his appointment

to be made permanent.

He has prosecuted federal crimes and handled civil cases involving the federal government in the Middle District of Tennessee as an assistant since 2004. In his role as first assistant U.S. attorney, Rivera, 53, helped set the office's priorities.

"We're looking to continue with the priorities that we set in the past couple of years," he said. "Those priorities do include health care fraud, financial fraud, drug enforcement, human trafficking, violent crime, gang crime and child exploitation."

Martin made health care fraud a point of emphasis in recent years as federal authorities brought more charges and landed increasingly large settlements.

Asked specifically about health care fraud on Friday, Rivera said "many" cases are still in the works.

"Stay tuned," he said. "We're hoping to announce things in the near future in relation to additional matters in both the criminal and the civil side. We continue to have a targeted approach on the industry."

» RIVERA, 4B

coming sunday

Read these stories & more in Sunday's Tennessean

GET SNEAK PEEK AT NEW RIDES

Check out a 24-page preview of the 2014 models.

ART COLLECTION MAKES MOVE

Fisk University's Stieglitz Collection opens at Crystal Bridges Museum in Bentonville, Ark., after the state of Tennessee fought the move for years.

MUSIC CITY'S LOST INNOCENCE

A look back at the 1973 murder of "Hee Haw" and "Opry" banjo player Stringbean Akeman and his wife, Estelle. **In Portfolio**



Get a preview: Listen to a friend talk about the murders at Tennessean.com/stringbean.

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Bank robber gets 15 years

By Quint Qualls
The Tennessean

A Murfreesboro man was sentenced Friday to 15 years in prison after pleading guilty to charges of bank robbery and felony possession of a firearm.

Jonathan C. Baxter, 23, engaged in what Assistant U.S. Attorney Lee Deneke called a "Bonnie and Clyde-style rampage" with then-girlfriend Mal-lary R. Waldon, 22, also of Murfreesboro.

In late February 2010, Baxter robbed a Bank of America branch in Murfreesboro of \$3,509. He passed a note to a teller threatening to shoot everyone in the bank, according to the lawsuit.

Four days later, Baxter drove the getaway car while Waldon robbed the National Bank of Sallisaw in Roland, Okla., of \$5,703. Waldon passed a note to a teller saying that she had a bomb in her purse.

They were arrested in early March 2010 in Amarillo, Texas. Waldon was sentenced to 40 months by a judge in Oklahoma.

U.S. Middle District Chief Judge William B. Haynes Jr. said Baxter has a significant criminal history, including an incident in which he set a house on fire with people inside. Baxter was ordered to make full restitution to the banks, but he will make joint restitution with Waldon to the National Bank of Sallisaw.

Quint Qualls is with Seigenthaler News Service—MTSU.

Harpeth Middle field trip denied

By Tim Adkins
Gannett Tennessee

Plans for an out-of-state band trip hit a sour note with the Cheatham County School Board, which denied the request after deciding the trip had no educational value.

The Harpeth Middle School band wanted to participate in the Holiday World & Splashin' Safari Music Festival in Santa Claus, Ind., on May 10.

The board approved the same trip last year. At the time, they agreed to develop administrative procedures to address such trips in the future.

Board member Dianne Proffitt questioned the educational value of the trip, saying the band was scheduled to perform for 15-20 minutes and the rest of the time would be spent in the park.

Board member Brian Chase supported the trip, saying it was scheduled for a Saturday and chartered buses were to be used so it wouldn't have cost the district anything.

Street Theatre finds grail with hammy 'Spamalot'

By Amy Stumpf
For The Tennessean

Hold on to your coconuts, Nashville. Street Theatre Company's delightfully dizzy production of "Monty Python's Spamalot" will stop at nothing to upend King Arthur and his legendary Knights of the Round Table.

Based on the 1975 cult classic film "Monty Python and the Holy Grail," "Spamalot" follows the oh-so-silly adventures of King Arthur and his faithful cohorts as they take on everything from politically radical peasants to the Killer Rabbit of Caerbannog.

But when Eric Idle — an original member of the acclaimed British comedy troupe — teamed up with John Du Prez to pen "Spamalot," he decided to go well beyond the standard Arthurian spoof, skewering time-honored show biz clichés and more.

Martha Wilkinson directs an enthusiastic ensemble, which includes a number of familiar faces along with some fresh new talent.

Steven Kraski makes a sensational STC debut, taking on some of Python's most memorable characters, from the



Matt Smith, left, Nancy Allen and Brad Oxnam perform in Street Theatre Company's production of "Monty Python's Spamalot." HEAVENLY PERSPECTIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

IF YOU GO

What: Street Theatre Company presents "Monty Python's Spamalot"

When: Through Nov. 17. Performances are at 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 5 p.m. Sundays

Where: 1933 Elm Hill Pike, Nashville

Tickets: \$16-\$18

Contact: www.streettheatrecompany.org or 615-554-7414

French Taunter and Tim the Enchanter to the Knight who says "Ni!"

Likewise, Brett Myers is terrific as the "not-so-brave" Sir Robin, serving up a cheeky rendition of "You Won't Succeed on Broadway." As Brother Maynard, he offers a spot-on reading of

the "The Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch."

Scott Frazier-Mas-kieil succeeds in multiple roles, hamming it up as Not Dead Fred and the Head Minstrel. But it's his flamboyant Prince Herbert that grabs some of the evening's biggest laughs ("Where Are You?/Here Are You").

Brad Oxnam is ideally cast as King Arthur, serving up a royal blend of dimwitted pomposity with great facial expressions. Oxnam has a strong voice, but it's his ability to savor each delicious lyric that really sets him apart.

And Nancy Allen vamps it up as Lady of the Lake — a demanding

diva with a vocal belt that just won't quit. Her outrageous "The Song That Goes Like This," "Find Your Grail" and "Whatever Happened to My Part?" are just a few highlights.

High-stepping humor

The marvelous Laker Girls (including those in drag) help bump up the glam factor, particularly in overblown, Vegas-style dance numbers. Indeed, "Spamalot" owes much of its success to Rollie Mains' seamless musical direction and Holly Shepherd's excellent choreography — which covers everything from tap to high-kicking chorus lines.

No doubt these big dance numbers pose a challenge in such a cozy space, but Street Theatre's scaled-down production plays up the irreverent brand of Python comedy. Andy Bleiler's set design is quite efficient, and Jeri Elizabeth Meador's creative costumes add to the fun.

Diehard Python fans will certainly rejoice. But even if you don't know your coconut from an African swallow, you're sure to find some laughs in STC's hammy "Spamalot."

Rivera to keep focus on drugs, gangs

» RIVERA FROM 1B

Rivera has been recognized for prosecuting drug traffickers and for his work on public corruption and economic fraud cases. The Department of Justice twice honored him with the Director's Award for Superior Performance, in

2004 and 2009 — the second time for his role in the prosecution of former state Sen. John Ford on corruption charges.

He said his attorneys also will be "laser-focused" on gang violence, to "make sure that federal law enforcement is there to protect these communities that suffer

the most as a result of violent crime."

Rivera will have to contend with tight budgetary times, learning to "do more with less," he said. The office remains under a hiring freeze.

The Middle District of Tennessee, one of the state's three judicial districts, is made up of 32

counties.

Before coming to Tennessee, Rivera worked in federal prosecutors' offices in Puerto Rico, Florida and New York.

The Associated Press contributed to this report. Reach Tony Gonzalez at 615-259-8089 or tgonzalez@tennessean.com.

Teen squeals with joy after surgery

» BLIND FROM 1B

her any promises, but we said we would be praying for her, that we loved her and we would be trying our very best to come back to see her."

The Hendrich family's prayers became a kept promise.

A year later, they opened their home to Maria and arranged for her to have eye surgery in Nashville.

Dr. Ming Wang performed a complicated series of interventions Thursday afternoon to address a deformed pupil, scarring and a rapidly growing cataract. The surgery proved successful, even though Wang, who by nature is a confident optimist, had hedged against a rosy prognosis.

His goal was to bring back 30 percent of the vision in her right eye. He estimated even odds of whether it would work because the girl's eye diseases had gone untreated for so long. And he said it might be days

or weeks before the results could be determined.

But Maria awoke from the surgery able to distinguish that Wang was holding up one finger.

"We had her eyes covered with sunglasses and a patch, but when they took them off you could tell she was trying to process everything that was coming through," Hendrich said by telephone from the recovery room. "It was very successful, very successful. We're very grateful for this."

Maria squealed with joy as she saw herself in a mirror. A Romanian interpreter was in the room to translate.

"I've told her it takes two to tango, and the next step is for her to learn English," Wang said.

'It chokes us up'

He featured Maria's story at the EyeBall, the annual fundraiser for the Wang Foundation for Sight Restoration. That happened because Hen-

drich and her husband, Steve Hendrich, shared the story at their church. A member of the congregation at Rolling Hills Community Church in Franklin knew someone who knew Wang.

The church partners with Franklin-based Justice and Mercy International, which focuses on the needs of orphaned and at-risk children in Moldova, South Africa, Haiti, Brazil, India and the United States.

In Moldova — an economically depressed country situated between Romania and Ukraine that was once part of the Soviet Union — Justice and Mercy runs a transitional living home for girls at risk for human trafficking and boys at risk for suicide or criminal activity.

"Moldova is really sort of ground zero in Eastern Europe for human trafficking," Steve Hendrich said. "What happens with a lot of these kids in the orphanage is at the age of 16, they get pushed out in

the street basically, and they have nowhere to go. The Russian mafia types come in and promise these kids things and they get them into trafficking."

The family had no idea when they traveled to the country in July 2012 that the journey would lead to bringing a blind girl back home.

"We really spent the last 15 months doing a lot of leg work, paperwork to try to get her here," Steve Hendrich said.

Maria is in the United States on a one-year visa. The Hendrichs would like to keep her in the country until she turns 18.

"It chokes us up," he said. "When you see these kids over there, the girls are all beautiful girls. There's not much hope for them. We knew Maria was blind. We knew there was really no hope for her, so we knew we had to do something."

Contact Tom Wilemon at twilemon@tennessean.com or 615-726-5961.

Blaze engulfs front of Tesla Model S vehicle

» ELECTRIC FROM 1B

tery pack under the passenger compartment, protected by a quarter-inch-thick metal shield. Experts say that if debris punctures the shield and damages the battery, it can cause shorts and arcing that can touch off fires.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the U.S. government's auto safety watchdog, says the girl's eye diseases had gone untreated for so long. And he said it might be days

lems that need further action. NHTSA decided last month not to investigate the Seattle-area fire, saying there was no evidence it was caused by a safety defect.

Company spokeswoman Liz Jarvis-Shean says the fire was not spontaneous. She said Tesla contacted Shibayama, who said he believes the car saved his life.

Shibayama could not be reached for comment. Tesla CEO Elon Musk has said that the design of the Model S is safer than that of a car with a con-

ventional fuel tank.

The passenger compartment was in pretty good shape after the flames were extinguished, Farley says. A fire department report estimated the value of the loss from the fire at \$120,000.

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, there are about 194,000 vehicle fires on U.S. roads each year. The vast majority — 61 percent — start in the engine area, while 15 percent start in the passenger area. Approximately 300 people

die and 1,250 are injured in U.S. vehicle fires each year. Most happen in gas-powered cars, which make up the vast majority of cars on U.S. roads. Electric vehicles make up less than 1 percent of the cars sold in the U.S.

General Motors and Nissan make the top-selling electric cars in the nation, the Volt and Leaf. Neither knows of any real-world blazes in those vehicles. A Chevrolet Volt caught fire two years ago after a government crash test, but the government closed an in-

vestigation into the incident after GM agreed to a safety campaign to bolster shielding around the battery.

GM has sold more than 50,000 Volts in the U.S. since late 2010. Nissan has sold almost 38,000 Leafs. Tesla has sold an estimated 16,251 Model S cars in the U.S., according to Autodata Corp. The Model S, which starts at \$70,000, can go up to 265 miles on a single charge.

Tennessean staff writer Brian Wilson contributed to this report.

OBITUARIES

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*When available.

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GERTHA P. "MOLLIE" AKIN

Thompson's Station, TN Service: 11 a.m. Monday, Mt. Hope Cemetery. Visit 4-8 Sunday, at Williamson Memorial, (615) 794-2289.

LESTER ANDREWS

Lawrenceburg, TN Age 100. Visit 4-9 p.m. today, Nov. 9, 2013. Service 2 p.m. Sunday at Neal Funeral Home, (931) 762-9447. www.nealfuneralhome.net

VET A. BANDY

Hurricane Mills, TN Age 90. November 7, 2013. Funeral 1 p.m. Sunday, McDonald F.H., Lobelville. Luff-Bowen, Waverly (931) 296-2437.



BERRY BRIGHT III

Nashville, TN November 7, 2013. Survived by his daughters, Ashley and Kelley Bright; grandchildren, Malcolm, Mariah, Lyric, and 1 girl on the way; brothers, Phil Davis (Coletta), Charles, Randall, and Steven Phillips.

Visitation at Phillips-Robinson Funeral Home, Sunday from 2-8 p.m. and Monday from 10 a.m. until the time of service at 2 p.m. Interment at Mt. Olivet Cemetery.

Phillips-Robinson Funeral Home, 2707 Gallatin Rd., (615) 262-3312.



SEE PAGE 5B