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# THE DAILY TIMES

FRIDAY

April 5, 2019

Maryville, TN

thedailytimes.com

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LADY GOVS RALLY AGAINST HERITAGE IN DISTRICT PLAY. 1B



## Blount school board silent on renovation plans; Kirkland says to get the work done

BY AMY BETH MILLER  
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As Blount County Schools prepares to officially deliver a plan for \$98.8 million in high school renovations to county officials today, the county already has sent a message not to expect it to borrow money for the project.

ments Troy Logan, BCS finance director, told the board about the message he received in recent days from the county's budget director, Randy Vineyard.

"The county legislative body does not appear to have any desire to increase the local property tax rate for debt service on a capital renovation project for our high





TOM SHERLIN | THE DAILY TIMES

**VANESSA SPARKS WITH HABITAT** for Humanity hands the keys to Miranda Van Hoy and her daughters Trinity (left) and Autumn to their new Habitat home, located in Alcoa. The dedication ceremony was held Wednesday afternoon.

# The keys to happiness

## Family to move into Habitat for Humanity home in Alcoa

BY MELANIE TUCKER  
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Gathered on the front porch under blue skies Wednesday afternoon were Miranda Van Hoy and her two daughters, Trinity and Autumn — a family that can now claim home ownership thanks to Habitat for Humanity.

A dedication was held to invite all who took part in its construction, including the many Habitat volunteers. The home, on West Newton Street in Alcoa,

is the annual Community Business Build that Habitat undertakes. The businesses that made this happen are DENSO, LeConte Realty, Vanderbilt Mortgage and Clayton Homes, along with Trentham Urquhart Group. All were represented on the momentous occasion.

Van Hoy was standing in the front yard before the ceremony got underway. She shared her feelings of gratitude and how

SEE KEYS, 5A



**WELL-WISHERS ATTEND A HOME** dedication for Habitat for Humanity. The new homeowner, Miranda Van Hoy and her two daughters, will move into the house on West Newton Street soon.

county already has sent a message not to expect it to borrow money for the project.

The school board decided at its meeting Thursday night to forward the renovation plan to the county Budget Committee without a recommendation for how to pay the bill, but board member Robbie Kirkland was vocal at the meeting in urging commissioners to borrow the money and get it done.

“Blount County being completely out of debt is not what makes the wheels turn in this county,” said Kirkland, who has served previous terms on both the commission and school board. “Projects make the wheels turn in this county. It’s not only schools, it’s roads, it’s whatever the Justice Center is talking about doing. It’s moving ahead. It’s progress.”

While William Blount and Heritage are probably better than half the high schools in the state, Kirkland said, “They’re not acceptable for Blount County.

“This project needs to be done,” he said.

### DEBT VS. 177

Before Kirkland’s com-

to have any desire to increase the local property tax rate for debt service on a capital renovation project for our high schools,” Logan said.

Instead, Vineyard advised the board to consider a request to fund the project with an increase in the “Fund 177” portion of the property tax rate, currently at 4 cents. That part of county property taxes goes only to capital projects for county schools and is not split with the two city school districts.

If the board wanted to go that route, Logan said he would recommend a request to raise the tax by a minimum of 26 cents in order to raise \$10 million a year, but even with that Logan said in his opinion, “We would have to reduce the scope of the project in order to complete it in a reasonable amount of time.”

Both the Alcoa and Maryville school boards have passed resolutions against funding the Blount high school project with Fund 177, saying it is unfair to city property owners to pay the tax and not receive a fair share.

SEE DONE, 5A

# Sudden tremors at Sandy Springs continue to shake neighborhood

BY WAYLON CUNNINGHAM  
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It sounded like a sonic boom and felt like a train. Then, quieter, it happened again. And again.

Several residents in the

described a large boom around 1:10 p.m. and then two smaller ones about an hour later. “I’ve never experienced anything like that.”

LaDuke said he and his neighbors started talking about the tremors on July 30

But while the tremors — which go largely unrecorded by the U.S. Geological Survey — are well known in the neighborhood, he said he’s found that only a few outside a half-mile radius of Sandy Springs Park

the intersection of Walker Boulevard and Old Niles Ferry Road, said she heard a “a big, loud boom,” followed by her house shaking. They’ve been happening regularly in the neighborhood, she said.

barking. Having grown up in California, she said the powerful earthquakes out West “felt like a train was going to hit your house,” while Thursday’s events “sounded more like a sonic boom and a shake.”

movements and then a larger one — “a definite, 100 percent spike,” said Benjamin Vanada, who helps man the station.

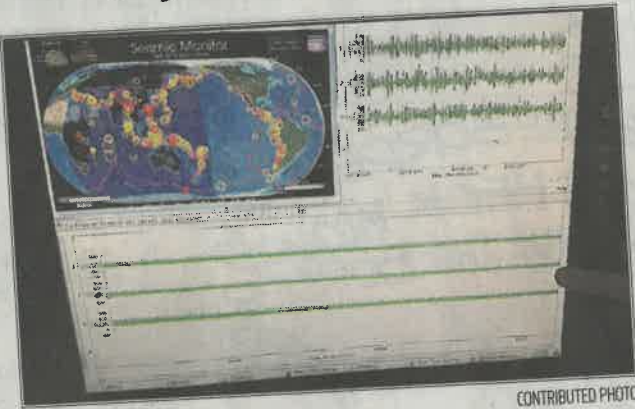
“I can’t tell if it’s an earthquake or a blast,” he explained, “but it was at



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# TAKE: Uptick in activity seen in past decade

discovered in 2017 by geological researchers publishing in the American Geophysical Union's publication. Additional archival research from the U.S. Geological Survey describes the rock strata in the area as relatively stable. But why these acutely pronounced tremors would be felt in Sandy Springs, and little elsewhere, is not clear. "We're all scratching our heads wondering what in the world is going on," LaDuke said. There were no scheduled uses of explosives from nearby excavation crews. Zooming out, the sudden uptick in seismic activity described by LaDuke is borne out by data from the U.S. Geological Survey, which shows a dramatic increase



A MONITOR AT TUCKALEECHEE Caverns shows a series of spikes in seismic activity late Thursday morning and early afternoon.

in recent years across the broader region. Using the USGS's online mapping tool, from 2001-10, there were 70 recorded earthquakes of a 2.0 magnitude or greater in a roughly 50-mile radius from Maryville. Over the next 10 years, there were 198 — with 47 in the last 12 months alone. More likely will come. Shortly after 5 p.m., the newspaper received three more calls describing another two tremors in quick succession. "It happened again," said Sam Kipton, who lives on South Magnolia Street. "It sounded like someone set off a dynamite blast a couple of blocks away."

# KEYS: Home is 160th built by Blount Habitat

FROM 1A  
overwhelming it's been to see this piece of dirt transformed into her new home. She and her daughters have been living in an apartment behind Green Acres Flea Market off Alcoa Highway and said they are so ready to make this giant step forward. "It's very, very exciting and we feel really blessed to have all of these people who have been so kind and giving when they don't even know me," she said. "They didn't have to do this."  
Trinity is 13 and Autumn is 11. They are getting larger rooms, a yard and opportunities to make new friends. Autumn already is talking about painting her room. The two said they knew their mom would be emotional on this day. She cried when she found out she

was getting a washer and dryer, they said. For Van Hoy, that meant she no longer has to do her laundry at a laundromat. "You know you've reached full adulthood when that makes you cry," she said. Van Hoy worked on her own house and another one built in Alcoa as part of the partnership between Habitat and its homeowners. Van Hoy also was mentored by a volunteer financial mentor, Beth Cochran, who was present for the celebration. She met with Van Hoy monthly to create a budget she can follow. Van Hoy, like the rest of the Habitat for Humanity homeowners, will have a mortgage on the home. "She is ready to move in," Cochran said. "She has worked hard." Blount County Habitat for Humanity was represented by Joy Eargle, board chair, and Vanessa Sparks, BCHFH development director. Kathy Jackson, executive director, also was there. "Blount County Habitat is driven by its vision that everybody needs a decent place to live," Eargle said. "We build simple, decent, affordable homes in partnership with our community and sell them to qualified families at no profit." She added this is the 160th home built by this organization in Blount County. After the keys to the home were passed down the line, they ended up in the hands of Van Hoy, who then offered them to one of her daughters. The front door opened and all present were invited inside. Van Hoy said she hopes to move in soon.

# DONE: Kirkland says using Fund 177 would delay starting project for couple of years

FROM 1A  
Kirkland also said that using Fund 177 would delay starting the project for a couple of years while the county begins to collect the revenue. Not only would it then take 10 to 12 years to complete, but the school district would have to the other. If fully funded, one school could be completed in three years, Brooke said. But board Chair Debbie Sudhoff said she wants to ensure both high schools are renovated. "There's no guarantee that they would fund the second high school," she said. "I spent my entire adult life paying Heritage High School off," he said, "and my children and my grandchildren attended that school. That's the way things work in a modern society. "My children that were educated on my tax dollars at Heritage High School will pay this next debt.

needs to be done." The school district already has been working on the proposal for two years, and he said another 10 years to complete the renovations is unacceptable. "I'll be dead and gone in 10 years," Kirkland said. "I would like to see this done in my lifetime and not 10 years and county's aging elementary schools also will need repairs, he said. Although legislation had been introduced in the General Assembly to eliminate Fund 177, stripping counties of the ability to fund capital projects without splitting the property tax revenue among every school district, Director Rob Britt told the board In 2019-20, BCS wants to use \$1.75 million it expects to receive through Fund 177 to replace the roof on the library at William Blount High School's Ninth Grade Academy, as well as heating, ventilation and air conditioning units at the academy, Eagleton Middle School and Middlesettlements Elementary, plus renovate the sewer system at Lanier Elementary