

Local People. Local Stories.

PCM EXPLORER

MONROE



Fishin' Hole owner Felicia Van Vark cuts the ribbon at her new bar in Monroe. At the former Southside location, the bar and grill will serve food and drinks in the fishing cabin-themed bar. Jamee A. Pierson/PCM Explorer

Drop in to the Fishin' Hole

Monroe's new bar serving up food and drinks

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The bar stools are ready and waiting to be filled at the new bar and grill in Monroe, the Fishin' Hole. Owner Felicia Van Vark is excited to have her bar open after working in the industry for most of her life. "I've been in the industry since I was 14," Van Vark said. "I have worked at bars, restaurants, managing them and working part-time. I've always wanted to have one of my own."

With a nickname like "Fish," Van Vark knew the wood-lined walls in the bar that previously housed the Southside would make a perfect fishing cabin. Fishing poles, nets, bobbers and more hang on the walls while a new sofa makes the perfect place to hang out and have a drink. Along with the drinks being served at the bar, food is also available in the evenings from 4 to 9 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday. "All hand breaded, hand-made burgers,

BAR AND GRILL • 3

JASPER COUNTY

Residents required to notify dispatch before a controlled burn starting July 1

Supervisors waive the remaining readings and adopt the new ordinance

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Jasper County residents who will be holding controlled burns are now required to contact dispatch ahead of time and supervise the fire. The Jasper County Board of Supervisors adopted the new ordinance during its weekly meeting on March 28 at the courthouse.

Nicholas Pietrack, assistant county attorney, said the new ordinance requires residents to provide relevant information about the burn to the dispatch non-emergency line, such as the location of the burn, the anticipated acreage or size of the burn and contact information. The information will then be relayed to first responders in Jasper County communi-

ties in case they get calls of a fire and not respond to the controlled burn. Pietrack said the ordinance will allow first responders to not waste resources on a call that is not an emergency. "For first responders, the two most valuable resources are time and knowledge. Time of responding to something and knowledge of location and things like that," Pietrack said to the board of supervisors. "(The ordinance is) just giving first responders more of those resources." Jasper County Sheriff John Halferty said the ordinance will help the first responders who are already limited on staff. Halferty also commended the ordinance for making the landowners responsible for monitoring the controlled

BURNING • 3

MONROE/PRAIRIE CITY

An Eggcellent Hunt

Kids get Easter Eggs and more at community events



JASPER COUNTY

'We honor you' | Jasper County veterans commemorate the 50th anniversary of the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam War

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There wasn't an empty seat in the house. Every chair in American Legion Post 111 was accounted for during a ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the United States' withdrawal from the Vietnam War; the last of the American troops were shipped off the battlefields and sent home on March 29, 1973. Doug Bishop, chairman of the Jasper County Veterans Alliance and a speaker of the National Vietnam War Veterans Day ceremony, pointed out that the welcome party for those soldiers was neither glamorous nor respectful. But Bishop was happy, on this day, to see every seat filled in the post to honor local veterans. The Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act was officially signed in 2017,

which designated every March 29 as National Vietnam War Veterans Day. In addition to marking the departure of combat troops from Vietnam, it is also the day Hanoi released the last of its acknowledged prisoners of war. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates there are still more than 7 million Vietnam veterans living in America and abroad to this day. In the ceremony commemorating the many veterans who fought and died during the Vietnam War, Bishop shared a number of stories and anecdotes to illustrate why he still honors those who served. On more than a few occasions, Bishop's booming voice tapered to a raspy choke as he was overcome with emotion. When the Honor Flights and Freedom Flights were established in 2019, he said, Jasper County was one of the first counties in the nation to start

sending large planes full of Vietnam veterans to Washington, D.C. Bishop recalled when he started that process and there was small gathering.

"As I looked around the room, it was about half full. I looked at my friend,

VETERANS • 3



Veterans and guests of the National Vietnam War Veterans Day ceremony on March 29 in the American Legion Post 111 bow their heads to respect the soldiers who were killed in action. Christopher Braunschweig/PCM Explorer