



JOHN A. GILLIS/DNJ FILE PHOTO

Mosque opponent Nancy Cavazos and supporter Hudson Wilkins square off as groups opposed to the building of a mosque on Bradyville Pike and in support of religious freedom held counter rallies at the County Courthouse in July.

Mosque, elections, MTMC dominate the headlines

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From controversy over construction of a new mosque for the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro to the election of the county's first new sheriff in 27 years, there was plenty to talk about in 2010.

The Islamic Center's plans to build a new location on Veals Road off Bradyville Pike southeast of Murfreesboro city limits thrust itself into the county's everyday conversation early and often over the past year, beginning with the apparent vandalism of a sign at the future mosque site.

At its height, the debate captured national attention, as well, from The Washington Post, CNN, Comedy Central, the 700 Club and many other media companies. Even journalists from Germany and Sweden traveled to Murfreesboro to cover the story.

"I am told by the various clerks that my office and the office of Clerk and Master each has received countless telephone calls from around the country, some polite and some vulgar and even obscene, concerning this issue," Chancellor Robert Corlew III stated in making a ruling Nov. 24 to allow work on the site to continue following eight days of testimony and arguments over a three-month period.

"Despite all of the national attention, we appreciate the sincerity of



DNJ FILE PHOTO

Opening of the new Middle Tennessee Medical Center was a highlight in 2010.

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the parties and the attorneys in this town, who have made their voices heard," Corlew stated. "We recognize that the gallery portion of the courtroom has been full during vir-

tually the entirety of the hearing of these matters each day."

Opposition grew when the Ruth-

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rford County Regional Planning Commission approved May 24 the ICM's site plan to build a 52,960-square-foot community center. The new center would replace its cramped 2,250-square-foot location on the back side of offices at 862 Middle Tennessee Blvd.

Defenders of the ICM's First Amendment right to practice religion freely started to emerge, as well, when they held a vigil at the courthouse. Both sides staged rallies, for and against the plan.

GOP wins big

The Republican Party planted its flag firmly in Rutherford County in 2010. The GOP first swept all six of the county's constitutional offices Aug. 5.

Republican Mayor Ernest Burgess won reelection against independent David Limbaugh while Trustee Teb Batey faced no opposition to keep his seat in the GOP's hands.

Three other Republicans knocked off Democratic incumbents: Circuit Court Clerk Laura Bohling defeated Eloise Gaither; Register of Deeds Heather Dawbarn won against Jennifer Gerhart; and Robert Arnold beat longtime sheriff Truman Jones.

The GOP also won an open seat that was vacated by retired Democratic County Clerk Georgia Lynch. New County Clerk Lisa Duke Crowell captured the job in a win over Democrat Lisa Harrell, a 31-year-plus county clerk staff member who continues to work at the office.

Republicans also built on their success in the Nov. 2 election by establishing a GOP sweep of all five seats in play for the county's delegation in the General Assembly.

Republicans also scored a major victory when Diane Black, a former state senator from Gallatin, captured the Sixth District congressional seat being vacated by retiring 26-year Democrat U.S. Rep. Bart Gordon of Murfreesboro.

Election board

The Republican-controlled Rutherford County Election Commission found itself in controversy much of the year because of its efforts to replace Election Administrator Hooper Penuel.

A former Rutherford County Democratic Party chairman before taking his job in 2000, Penuel won a federal injunction to stop the three GOP election commissioners from replacing him for what he described as political reasons rather than job performance.

The controversy boiled over again when former chairman Tom Walker and Penuel admitted to the media in mid-August that the county did not offer early voting on July 17 for the Aug. 5 election as state law required. Walker and fellow Republican election commissioners Doris Jones and Oscar Gardner called for Penuel to be fired.

After getting past the November election, Walker resigned Nov. 16 without notifying the public and then re-emerged as one of 52 applicants competing to succeed Penuel. The election commission offered the job to Walker Dec. 21 over two other Republican finalists, Tim Rudd and Karen Hudson.

New sheriff

One of the most stunning election stories unraveled when Arnold, a Republican, beat out Democratic incumbent Jones in the race for Rutherford County sheriff in August.

Jones had held the office since 1983, when he was appointed to the office, and was first elected in 1984.

The sheriff's race was contentious from its outset, with both campaigns accusing the other of dirty politics at various times throughout. Arnold went so far as to distribute mailers showing a super-imposed image of Jones over a man taking a lie-detector test.

Since his election, Arnold has been at the center of other controversies, starting with his restructuring of top officers within the sheriff's office. Arnold and the county are also in litigation over the Rutherford Wrestling Club's use of a wrestling facility on Blackman High School Grounds.

Killings case

Almost two years after a crash on Bradyville Pike took the life of an 11-year-old girl, former Rutherford County Sheriff's Detective Ron Killings was found not guilty of reckless homicide charges lodged against him by a special prosecutor.

The case was heard by an out of town jury. Evidence that would have showed Killings disposed of at least one liquor bottle at the crash scene was barred from being heard by the jury by Rutherford County Judge David Bragg.

That followed a successful argument by Killings attorney Terry Fann to separate charges of tampering with evidence and filing a false report from the reckless homicide charge.

After hearing the reckless homicide case, Bragg recused himself from the remaining charges. The move came weeks after he was inappropriately introduced at a police memorial event by then sheriff

Jones, who called Bragg "good friend" of his and a friend of law enforcement and made reference to the Killings reckless homicide trial.

Judge Royce Taylor took over the case and eventually dismissed the remaining two charges against Killings, citing the fact that Killings had been acquitted of the reckless homicide charges and therefore the detective's actions after the crash were "not material" because there was "no criminal episode."

May floods

The rain that fell starting May 1 at least seemed to never end and, once it stopped, it took some time for it to go away.

Rutherford County was inundated with water after 13.5 inches of rain fell May 1-2, according to measurements from the air traffic control tower at Smyrna Airport. Residents all over the county were affected, with Smyrna and La Vergne bearing the brunt of the damage. Other areas in outlying parts of the county, including Eagleville, parts of Powell's Chapel Road in Walter Hill and Shores Road in the Blackman community, were adversely affected.

The flood claimed the lives of 22 people across Tennessee, but none in Rutherford County.

More than \$19.5 million damage was done in Rutherford County with an additional infrastructure impact of near \$5 million.

New MTMC opens

Middle Tennessee Medical Center opened its new hospital in the Gateway area of Murfreesboro near Interstate 24 in October.

The event included an impressive move of patients from the Highland Avenue location across

town in a caravan of emergency vehicles to the new location.

In addition to new facilities, the hospital promised a new era of top-level care and service to the community. The \$267 million hospital brings new jobs and opportunities to the city.

MTMC planned to hire 200 more employees to staff the new hospital and will continue to recruit doctors in an effort to boost the physician staff of 350 by nearly 50 percent over the next half decade.

"I see us becoming a regional medical center. I think we'll see a very rapid growth of our medical staff, possibly reaching the 600 range in the next five years," said Dr. Andy Brown, MTMC vice president of medical affairs. "I feel that we will continue to offer more and more services, becoming a regional referral center."

Nissan plugs in

Nissan held a groundbreaking ceremony May 26 for the battery plant for the highly-anticipated fully-electric, zero-emission Leaf model in Smyrna.

Dubbed by the automaker as a Sustainable Mobility plant, the 1.3-million-square-foot battery facility will be built at the rear of the plant where vehicles were once tested. Up to 1,300 "green jobs" will be created once the plant is at maximum capacity for the assembly of the lithium-ion batteries and the vehicle itself. The main plant will be retooled to allow for assembly of the Leaf.

The Smyrna plant will have the ability to create up to 200,000 batteries and 150,000 vehicles.

Jobs coming

It took about two seconds on Sept. 14 to make a snip with some giant scis-

sors at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Department of Veteran Affairs' new Mid-South Consolidated Patient Account Center. But it was something the community had been waiting on for quite some time.

The VA employs more than 400 people at the Smyrna facility with about 60 more spread out among the 19 VA medical centers it serves.

The center was just one sign among several that the local economy is beginning to rebound after a long recession. While unemployment is still high, at over 8 percent, it is much improved over the double-digit unemployment mark seen just a year ago in the county.

Troops home

John White had some words of advice for his son at the beginning of this year when he watched him head off to war for the first time.

The highly decorated Vietnam veteran spoke from experience, but not without emotion, when he instructed Spc. Sean White.

"I just told him to rely on his training," John White said. He paused, fought back tears, and added, "And pray."

The two continued to talk as often as possible via phone calls and e-mail throughout Sean White's deployment. Then they were reunited in July when Sean White made it home.

The 3,400-member Tennessee National Guard's 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment came home six months earlier than expected as the military began to draw down in Iraq this year.

Many of the units came home through the Tennessee Army National Guard training site in Smyrna.