



ONLINE MONDAY

## Author releases novel inspired by East Texas culture

While author John Yearwood might not have grown up in East Texas, he fell in love with it after moving here — so much so that his novel, “Jar of Pennies,” is set in East Texas in the 1970s.



ONLINE SUNDAY

## Auld lang syne time

We’ll be hitting the scene Saturday night to provide coverage of East Texans as they ring in the new year.



INSIDE TODAY

## Mental health crisis plagues rural jails

As 2023 approaches, the mental health crisis in rural jails continues, perhaps as bad as it’s ever been, and the expansion at Rusk State Hospital is months away from completion. Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick says he has a plan to ease the crisis.

PAGE 6A

# THE LUFKIN DAILY NEWS

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JOEL ANDREWS/The Lufkin Daily News

Genesis Gonzalez, 8, left, and Torrence Bia, 4, check out a forest firefighter’s gear and equipment Friday at the Texas Forestry Museum.

EAST TEXAS

## Texas Forestry Museum introduces new exhibits to entertain, educate families

By KAYLEY FRAZE  
The Lufkin Daily News

With winter break still going strong for a few more days, parents of stir-crazy students can make their way to the Texas Forestry Museum for numerous new fun and educational activities.

### Sawmill Town Board Game

The Sawmill Town Board Game is a temporary installation for the winter

break. This life-size game incorporates large dice and trivia to take players through a week of life in a sawmill town. The first person to finish the week wins, museum director Kendall Gay said.

“Visitors can learn more about East Texas forest history as they move around the game board and experience a week in the life of sawmill town residents,” she said. “This is a fun adventure for the whole family.”

The game is available until Jan. 7.

### It’s Tegu Time

It’s Tegu Time features colored magnetic wood blocks called “Tegu,” which are great for engaging fine motor skills, imaginative play, engineering and problem solving skills, Gay said.

“These brightly colored wood blocks are perfect for our littlest visitors and

SEE MUSEUM, PAGE 5A

ANALYSIS

## Series shines light on dark truths in our community

Editor’s note: Newsroom staff of The Lufkin Daily News voted this as the No. 1 local story of 2022.

By JESS HUFF  
The Lufkin Daily News

In a year marked by brutal murders, dramatic county politics and a heat I believe we were all ready to be rid of, there is one constant that month-to-month, week-to-week and sometimes day-to-day we could count on: The number of our fellow community members who were raped, beaten and otherwise degraded rose and continued to rise.

**#1**  
story of the year

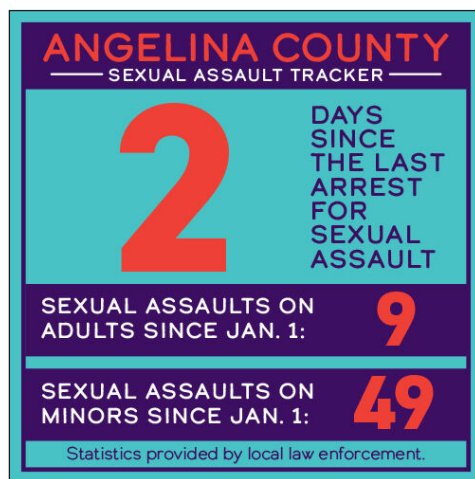
I realize now, with another 12 months of experience under my belt, just how inadequate the sexual assault tracker graphic we ran on the front page of our paper each day was to truly quantify the problems in our community.

The RAINN Institute says the number of reported sexual assaults are just the “tip of the iceberg.” I would agree, adding the havoc it would wreak on our world if we knew the true extent of the crime would put the Titanic’s little mishap to shame.

Someone is raped every 68 seconds, and every nine minutes, that person is a child.

Angelina County’s largest law enforcement agencies, the Lufkin Police Department and the Angelina County Sheriff’s Office, received a combined 138 reports of sex-related offenses in 2022. Officers made arrests in 21 of the cases. Countywide, law enforcement agencies arrested 59 people accused of some form of sex crime based on reports made over the last few years, including 2022.

And while I’m sure I have nowhere near the full number of people who reported sexual assault in the last year, I cannot help but be surprised by the 138 I do know about. These



■ Related editorial Page 6A

are 138 community members brave enough to report a crime that, due to its sensitive nature, typically goes unreported.

Few will see any type of justice and even fewer still will have their day in court.

Verdicts were rendered in 45 cases related to some form of sexual offense this year, according to data provided by the Angelina County District Clerk’s office and analyzed by The Lufkin Daily News. These cases were related to 25 men.

As a whole, verdicts were rendered in 846 criminal cases with charges ranging from

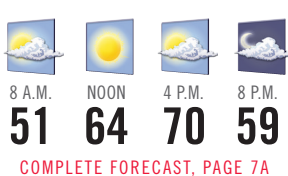


JOEL ANDREWS/The Lufkin Daily News

SANE nurse Kim Riddle keeps clean, warm gowns folded neatly for sexual assault victims in this March file photo.

SEE SEX ASSAULTS, PAGE 3A

TODAY’S WEATHER



COMPLETE FORECAST, PAGE 7A

INDEX

Birth announcements.....4A	Entertainment/TV.....1-16E	Outdoors.....5B
Classified.....8B	Janice Ann Rowe.....4A	Sports.....1-5B
Crossword.....4E	On the Record.....2A	Weather.....7B
Dear Abby.....4E	Opinion.....6A	

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WE RECYCLE



ONLINE MONDAY

## Biz roundup

A breakdown of what businesses are opening, closing and moving in Lufkin and Nacogdoches.

NEWSROOM 631-2618 DELIVERY 637-NEWS or 637-6397 CLASSIFIED ADS 637-7355 RETAIL ADS 631-2630





Kim Riddle, a SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) nurse, discusses the care sexual assault victims will receive in this March file photo.



Norma Smith poses in a photo she provided to The Lufkin Daily News in July. Smith spoke out about years of abuse she endured at the hands of her stepfather, who recently accepted 35 years in prison for those acts.

## Assaults

Continued from Page 1A murder, arson and possession of controlled substances to theft and all different types of assaults.

In 45 cases, accused offenders pleaded guilty to 31 of the charges, and three went to trial, according to District

### Top 10 stories of 2022

1. Sexual assault series shines light on dark corner of community
2. From a blistering summer to a subfreezing Christmas holiday, 2022 brought weather misery to East Texas
3. Variety of issues, lawsuits dog commissioners court throughout the year
4. Murders, manslaughter and homicides continue to dominate headlines in 2022
5. Local schools move into new facilities
6. Business picking back up despite some closures
7. Lufkin Forward, Lufkin Creative and Visit Lufkin eye roles of downtown, arts and tourism in city's future
8. Animal issues attract attention during 2022
9. Diboll's state run among area's sports highlights
10. Community loses key members

Attorney Janet Cassels and county records.

Of those who pleaded guilty, the average sentence was 22.75 years in prison. Ira Cartwright received the longest sentence doled out after he brutally raped a woman and degraded her with her own feces. He accepted a plea deal on the third day of his trial and was sentenced to 45 years in prison.

Six accepted plea deals landing them with 10 years of probation.

Thirteen of the 45 cases were dismissed.

More than 300 registered sex offenders walk our streets, free of the confines of an overcrowded prison system if they were sent to it at all. And while I may sound paranoid saying there are still more out there, I know I am not.

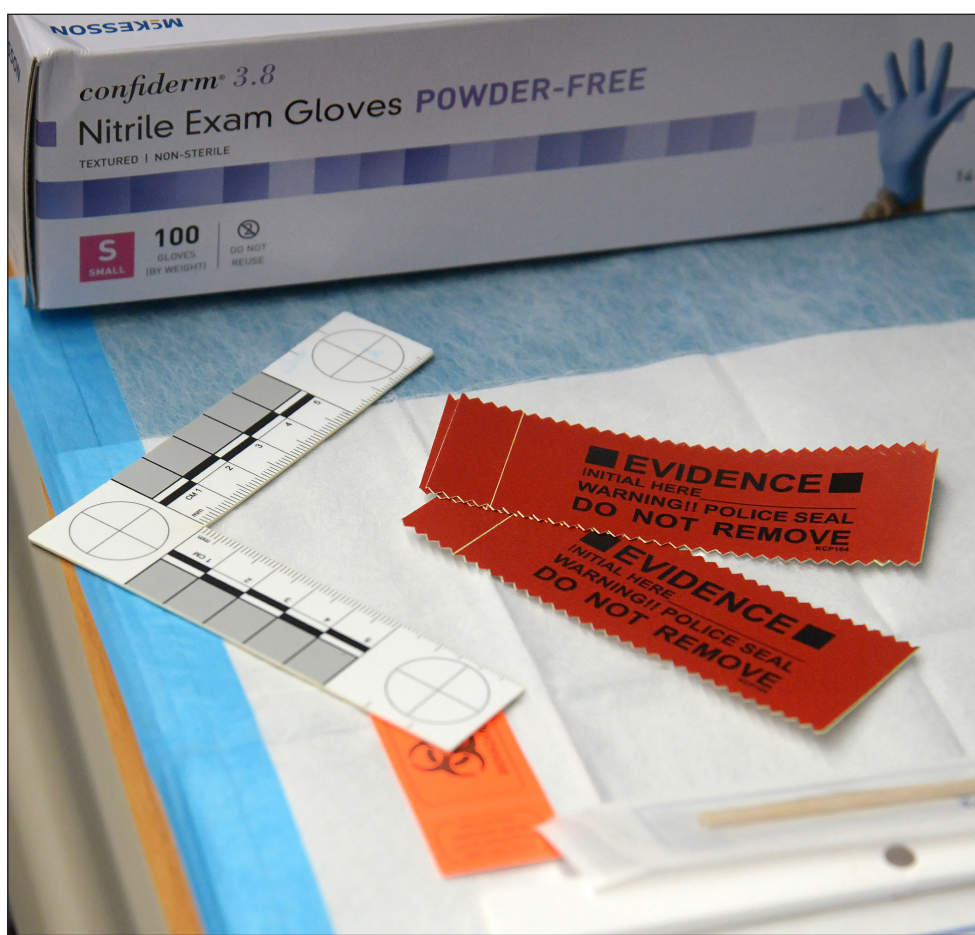
I went into this year hoping that by the time I wrote this, we would have seen some significant shift in our community. I couldn't tell you what the shift would be, though.

A drop in the number of reported assaults would indicate people were scared to speak up, not that incidents ceased to happen.

The number of arrests dropping would suggest law enforcement officers were doing a poor job, not that my work was having an impact.

More money donated to organizations like the Family Crisis Center or Harold's House (just to name a few) would have been cool. But in a community that eagerly steps up to help its fellow man, I can't really consider that a "shift."

What does success mean in regard to a crime humans have committed against each other for eons? A crime that until the last century or so wasn't really considered a crime. A crime that, until 1994, was still legal in Texas for a man or woman to perpetrate against their spouse. A crime that, in some countries,



Components of an evidence collection kit sit on a table.



Backpacks are provided by Project Beloved, a service created by a woman whose daughter was sexually assaulted. The woman, in memoriam of her daughter, put together care bags for victims that come with some clothes, a journal and a toy.

is considered the fault of the victims, not the perpetrators.

I've sat here at my desk for three days now typing and deleting the words for this story only to realize that quantifying the success of our community in holding accountable those who would commit egregious crimes against our friends and neighbors is nearly impossible.

And instead of writing some groundbreaking report of how one Texas county managed to do away with all the rapists and abusers in the world, I see a broken system in which justice is hard won — and more often than not, it's a battle we lose.

While acknowledging this as the truth, I do not, however, believe we as a community should stand for it as the status quo.

"At times the world may seem an unfriendly and sinister place," said Lemony Snicket, one of my favorite childhood authors. "But believe that there is much more good in it than bad. All you have to do is look hard enough, and what might seem to be a series of unfortunate events may in fact be the first steps of a journey."

This year, as exhausting and frustrating as it has been, also has provided us an opportunity to shine a light into some of the darker corners of our community. And with the knowledge we've gained, I have faith we can begin to fix it together.

This year we learned there are barriers women face in trying to leave terrible

domestic situations. Even if they weren't reliant upon their abusers financially or emotionally, or even if their children did not call those abusers dad, they still face a lack of access to resources that could show them another way.

The importance of broadband connectivity cannot be understated in its role in helping our most vulnerable neighbors learn what else there is out there for them. And neither can public transportation, as far as leaving a bad situation goes.

We learned how closely related sexual assault is to domestic violence. In fact, one rarely happens without the other in our community. More than 200 cases of domestic violence were reported in 2021. And in 2022, I do not believe a day went by without a report of assault/family violence.

"It is evident that domestic violence and sexual violence are connected, as are other forms of violence," Mary McDonnell, a member of Women's Advocates, a non-profit for women dedicated to breaking the cycle of domestic violence, wrote about the intersection of sexual assault and family violence in an April 2021 article.

"It is clear that more violence perpetuates greater violence, and bringing awareness to those connections allows us to educate and further prevent the cycles of both forms of assault."

We found a gap in our criminal justice system that

leaves those victims with thousands in medical bills because they are afraid to report their crimes to police. And we know many women avoid even medical intervention when it is necessary out of fear.

We learned there are programs not just for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence but for their batterers. And if the lessons taught in those courses became a part of the fabric of our community — something we would teach each and every one of our 12- to 13-year-old boys — we may actually make a dent in the problem.

Violence in relationships is often perpetrated by men raised to believe they're stronger and better, said Kathryn Johnson, the center's special projects and compliance director and director of the Batterers Intervention and Prevention Program.

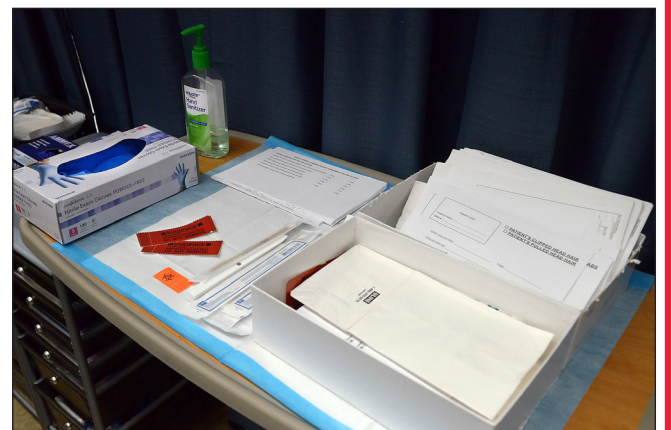
"We have to address the offenders," she said. "We have to address them and the society they're growing up in that's allowing them to continue these behaviors."

We learned that men who are accused of strangling are more likely to escalate to more deadly acts of violence — they are more likely to be cop killers, mass shooters and murderers. And we have a few dozen of them in our county.

"I truly believe that men who strangle are the most dangerous men on the planet and I will tell you why I think that: It's because one,



Sandra, their little sister Joanna and Bobby Walker pose for a photo around 1979. Sandra's husband, Christopher Marriott, has been charged with murder in her brutal slaying last spring at their home near Hanks Creek. The case is one that highlights the barriers and challenges victims of abuse can face while living in rural areas.



An evidence collection kit sits on a table.

they are the ones who kill police officers and they are our mass shooters," said Dr. William Smock, a police surgeon for the Louisville Metro Police Department in Kentucky.

We learned that perpetrators often have longstanding histories of abuse and sexual assault affecting generations of people for years.

"I learned that before the offender gets caught the first time, on an average they've done it 66 other times," Angelina County Sheriff's Office investigator Serena Holland said.

Even for those who are caught, we learned repeat offenders account for a disproportionate amount of crimes and are arrested at rates 30- to 45-times higher than the general population, according to the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering and Tracking.

And, in reviewing the case lodged against Christopher Marriott, the man accused of slitting his wife's throat before attempting to take his own life this year, we learned just how far domestic violence situations can go. Christopher has not been found guilty, but those near the case were not surprised by Sandra Marriott's death, they said.

If Christopher is proven guilty, Sandra will join the ranks of the tens of thousands of women globally killed by their intimate partners or other family members. More than 47,000 women and girls in 2020

were killed by their partner or family — making an average of one every 11 minutes, according to a November 2021 report prepared by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

This world is unfriendly. There are sinister people.

There also are strong people such as 19-year-old Norma Smith, who used her win against her stepfather McKinley Teal III to tell her story. He raped her for years and began his 35-year prison sentence in May.

"Dealing with it for so long, it just became a part of my life," Smith said. "More than enough people thought I would be breaking down or have this trauma-induced state. Basically, not stable."

"I know, right now, I'm not mentally all there. But I'd say, enduring that for five years, you kind of, like, learn to grow with it and to defend yourself in more ways than one."

And there are people like Cassels, Holland, SANE nurse Kim Riddle, Family Crisis Center director Whitney Burran and so many others who put themselves out in this world. Every. Single. Day.

They, in their years and years of service, have seen far more egregious things than I did in the last 12 months. And still they wake up every morning and get at it.

We have an opportunity now to build on their work.

"I would want a survivor to know, really, there is help for you," Riddle said.

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