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DAILY JOURNAL FILE PHOTO
 An RPT Painting truck is engulfed in flames after exploding on Interstate 465 in July 2003 in this image taken from TV. The fire killed two painters and critically injured 11 others. Indianapolis resident Tommy McElroy received an eight-year sentence for starting the fire.

February

Feb. 1

Former county attorney Joe Pitcher was hired as chief of the Greenwood Police Department, replacing Albert Hessman who resigned at the end of the year. Pitcher was one of three finalists selected by Mayor Charles Henderson. He left the marshal position in Whiteland, which he had started a month earlier.

Feb. 2

The Greenwood City Council and mayor disagreed about hiring Joe Pitcher as police chief since he was not an officer within the department. A state law from 1996 stated that the mayor could hire a chief from outside the department, while a city ordinance stated that the council must give final approval on the choice.

Indianapolis developer Mann Properties decided to scrap plans for a 291-home subdivision on Franklin's east side. The developer cited frustration with the city council, which postponed new zoning rules and decided to review the ordinance.

The county commissioners hired Indianapolis law firm Barnes & Thornburg for \$20,000 to lobby federal lawmakers for money to pay for an east-west corridor through the county.

Feb. 3

A suspect in a White River Township shooting was released from jail after 10 months when federal prosecutors dismissed an unrelated charge against him. Allen Arnett of Greenwood was arrested for unlawfully carrying a firearm, but the federal prosecutor was unable to prove he possessed or sold a shotgun in February 2004 when White River Township resident John Richards was shot and killed in his home.

About 2,500 students in Johnson County were enrolled in gifted and talented education programs in 2003-04 in either elementary school or middle and high school honors classes.

Feb. 4

Parents were preparing for a new law that would require children 8 and younger to be placed in car seats. The county's law enforcement agencies conducted a car-seat clinic to instruct parents about the new rules.

The White River Fire Department announced plans to build a new fire station at State Road 135 and Olive Branch Road. The department wanted a four-bay fire station on 1 acre to give firefighters quick access to the southern portion of the fire district, where new homes and businesses were being built.

Ivy Tech State College teamed up with Johnson Memorial Hospital to start offering daytime classes in the hospital's main office building. The two-year community college discussed the possibility of starting a nursing program.

Feb. 5 and 6

Indianapolis man Tommy McElroy received an eight-year sentence for starting a paint truck fire in July 2003. The Franklin-based RPT Painting truck erupted in flames on Interstate 465 near Indianapolis International Airport, killing two and critically burning 11 painters.

Schools changed methods for judging teachers after state and federal laws put increased pressure on schools to improve students' test scores on exams such as the ISTEP.

Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson asked that local income taxes be raised for the first time in 16 years to pay for a new downtown Colts stadium and expansion of the Indiana Convention Center.

Feb. 7

Bargersville was the closest it had been in 10 years to getting a new fire station. State finance officials gave the fire department permission to sell a \$1.36 million bond to pay for a new station and equipment. The bond was expected to create a tax increase of 1 cent per \$100 assessed valuation for taxpayers.

A developer proposed building as many as 43 upscale homes near Hickory Stick subdivision and golf course in White River Township. The homes, ranging in price from \$300,000 to \$400,000, were targeted at empty-nesters.

Feb. 8

Plans for a proposed White River Township shopping center were put on hold so county commissioners could get more information from planners. Developers were asking to rezone about 33 acres north of Stones Crossing Road on State Road 135 to build retail shops, offices and free-standing buildings that could house a bank, restaurant or assisted living center.

Bargersville businesses were struggling as State Road 135 drew customers north instead of south to shop. Bargersville officials were trying to make the town more attractive, hoping better roads and nicer buildings would bring more businesses and customers.

Feb. 9

Franklin College graduate Susan Williams was named to lead Indiana Sports Corp., a nonprofit organization that attracts national and international sporting events to central Indiana.

Some Center Grove school board members discussed using land the district owns near Whiteland Road that is used by the community football league for new schools.

Joe Pitcher decided to stick with his law practice part time, despite his new job as Greenwood's police chief. He said a limited practice would allow him to continue looking over contracts and lease agreements for municipalities and occasionally answer budget questions for officials.

Feb. 10

City leaders in Franklin planned upgrades for downtown, including antique-style streetlights, sidewalk benches and crosswalks. The city applied for a \$500,000 grant from the state to start revitalizing the area by 2006.

Local schools lost \$26,000 to pay for students who qualify for free textbooks or reduced-price meals because the state would only reimburse 69.5 percent of the cost of textbooks.

Feb. 11

County commissioners discussed imposing a wheel tax that could raise \$2.7 million that the county and local communities could use for road repairs.

Greenwood park officials discussed how to deal with arsenic levels on land at Averitt Road where they want to build a city water park. The options included containment, pouring cement around contaminated soil or washing the dirt to remove arsenic.

Feb. 12 and 13

Heartland Community Bank in Franklin decided not to merge with Shelby County Bank because of a delay in review from federal and state agencies.

Indiana Pacer Reggie Miller formally announced his end-of-season retirement following the game against the Houston Rockets at Conseco Fieldhouse. He was one of the team's most recognized players and spent his entire 18-season career with Indiana.

Feb. 14

A Greenwood man was fatally stabbed in his apartment, and police were searching for the suspect. Artemio Lopez, 33, died from multiple stab wounds in the torso, and his throat was slashed.

Center Grove freshman Michelle McKeehan became the school's first-ever girls state swimming champion in multiple individual events. She came within a half-second of breaking a state record in the 200-yard individual medley.

The Greenwood City Council proposed hiring an attorney to investigate who has power when hiring a police chief from outside the department.

Feb. 15

Charges were to be filed against Pedro Marcelino of Greenwood in the slaying of his roommate, Artemio Lopez.

Feb. 16

Franklin school board voted to replace Webb Elementary at an undetermined date after hearing from a consultant that it would cost only \$2 million more to build a new building than to renovate the nearly 40-year-old school.

Greenwood Police Chief Joe Pitcher wanted the public's feedback on how the city's residents feel about the department.

Feb. 17

Wal-Mart withdrew its plans for a store in White River Township after a thumbs down from the plan commission two months earlier. It was considering a smaller store on the same property, located southwest of Smith Valley Road and State Road 135.

An Indiana Department of Transportation project would bring improvements to State Road 44 between Franklin and Shelbyville but would encroach on some private property along the state highway. The Franklin-to-Shelbyville project would include wider lanes and shoulders.

Clark-Pleasant taxpayers were going to borrow \$43.7 million during the next three years for two new schools and land in a rapidly growing school district. It was estimated that the 4,300-student district will see at least 2,000 more new students during the next eight years.

Feb. 18

Indian Creek senior Daniel McClain, 18, died from injuries he suffered in a car accident in Greenwood. He was a passenger in a car that smashed into a tree after swerving off the road on Feb. 12. His family remembered him for his creative sense of humor.

The 11-member newly appointed animal shelter task force met for the first time and planned to ask the Johnson County commissioners who appointed them for a clearer picture of their mission. One of the panel's first goals was to get youth volunteers back into the shelter.

Feb. 19 and 20

Four Franklin teenagers staged a drug deal to beat and rob a 21-year-old Franklin man who is gay, police said. The teenagers, all juveniles, planned to rob the man after he called to set up a purchase of 2 ounces of marijuana, Franklin police Detective Bryan Burton said.

Johnson County Sheriff Terry McLaughlin sought ways to cut costs for health care for jail inmates. Property taxpayers help foot the bills for their hospital visits and medical treatment.

Feb. 21

Greenwood Mayor Charles Henderson wrote a request for a legal opinion from the state attorney general's office, sent via his nephew, Sen. Brent Waltz, R-Greenwood. The mayor was seeking an answer as to who had control to hire the police chief and his assistant. Greenwood Police Merit Commission attorney Linda Meier disagreed with the mayor's action, saying it was inappropriate to involve his nephew, and that the request was too one-sided in the mayor's favor.

Franklin planned to spend almost \$6 million during the next five years to update the community's parks and recreation system. Officials were almost ready to give the state its first draft of a new five-year parks master plan.

Feb. 22

Police investigated a car accident that left Blair J. Parsley, 19, of rural Franklin in critical condition, while another injured occupant left the scene. Hours after the accident, Franklin police located the other occupant, who was taken to Johnson Memorial Hospital to be treated. Parsley was outside the vehicle when police arrived. The car was on fire, and electric lines were down, said Capt. Joe Gruss.

Alexa "Lexi" Shank, 9, of Franklin, who had battled leukemia for two years before being cancer free, was told the cancer had come back at a checkup. She was to receive a stem cell transplant using her brother Connor as a donor in May.

Feb. 23

The Greenwood City Council voted to hire an attorney in the matter of who had the authority to hire the city's police chief. A local ordinance said the council had final approval, while state law said the mayor made the final decision.

The Johnson County Board of Commissioners appointed a 13-member panel in January to assess the condition of county roads and figure out how to pay for repairs. The group was discussing the possibility of imposing a wheel tax.

Feb. 24

Our Lady of the Greenwood Catholic Church member Pam Leffler founded an interdenominational community referral service for the poor and homeless in Johnson County. The organization was awarded a \$25,000 grant from Indiana Youth Institute.

Feb. 25

Army Capt. Todd Schmidt, a Center Grove High School graduate, headed an effort to bring school supplies and clothing to needy Afghan children. Schmidt started Operation Dreamseed after being deployed to Afghanistan and seeing impoverished children suffer through a cold winter.

Feb. 26

Blair Parsley, a senior at Franklin Community High School, died from injuries suffered in a car accident. Tests determined Parsley had been drinking alcohol prior to the crash.

Feb. 28

More than 200 friends and family members gathered for a candlelight vigil in honor of Kelly McPeak. The vigil was conducted in the cornfield where McPeak, a Whiteland Community High School junior, died in a car accident the night before.

Center Grove junior Chris Oleksiak became the school's first individual male state champion at the IHSAA Boys Swimming and Diving State Finals. He won the 500 freestyle with a school-record time of 4 minutes, 31.69 seconds.

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