

## Japan ----- From A1

O'Mary said. "This was about solidifying a relationship. And I felt it was important for him to know exactly where Jasper is and know that we want him to be Jasper's friend."

That relationship, he said, has played an important role in Jasper previously landing three Japanese businesses — Yorozu Automotive, HTNA and Nitto Inc.

Having a strong relationship with someone like Jackson "pays tremendous dividends," O'Mary said.

"He's a good one to be friends with," he added.

Jackson told those on hand for Tuesday's reception that in his role as honorary consul general he chooses to be "proactive" in his approach to business.

"It's great to represent Japan to my home state," he said.

Jackson said the three Japanese companies operating in Jasper — Yorozu with 257 employees, HTNA with 118 employ-



Daily Mountain Eagle - Ron Harris

Honorary Consul General of Japan Mark Jackson, at left, talks with Al Moore, dean of workforce solutions and economic development at Bevill State Community College, at a reception held Tuesday in Jasper.

ees and Nitto Inc. with 50 employees — represent a more than \$20 million investment in the city.

"The impact of Japan on Alabama is massive,"

he said. "Nobody really knows what that impact truly is."

Jackson, like O'Mary, said relationships are a key to that success.

"You have done a great job here," he said. "I've talked to mayors and council members in cities across the state who don't have Japanese compa-



Daily Mountain Eagle - Ron Harris

Honorary Consul General of Japan Mark Jackson speaks to those on hand at a reception in Jackson's honor held Tuesday in Jasper.

nies, and they all ask, 'How do we get them, and what is the secret?' The secret is exactly what Mayor O'Mary said. It's those relationships."

And those relationships have Japan looking at investing more in the U.S.,

he added.

"There are Japanese companies that continue to look for locations all throughout the United States," he said. "I like it when they come looking at Alabama. I'm proud to be their diplomat."

## Medical ----- From A1

"Siras Jeremain Theus, 47, of Jasper, was arrested by the Jasper Police Department on April 12, 2024, and was being held at the Walker County Jail," ALEA said in a statement Monday. "It is suspected that Theus suffered a medical emergency at approximately 9:15 p.m. on Friday, April 19, and was pronounced deceased. An autopsy will be conducted by the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences."

Smith held a press conference on Monday afternoon. He did not mention Theus by name but said "our deepest prayers are extended to the family." He said Theus was arrested for drug trafficking and distribution of a controlled substance.

Jasper Police Chief J.C. Poe said Monday Theus was arrested without incident and did not seem to be in distress.

Smith said, "Prior to intake our corrections officer and onsite medical staff conducted a thorough fit-for-confinement assessment, as per standard protocol that has been implemented for over the last year. Upon assessment, it was determined that the inmate exhibited symptoms such as swollen legs, high blood pressure and an elevated heart rate.

"As a result, the corrections officer and onsite medical deemed it neces-

sary for the inmate to be taken to the hospital to receive medical treatment at the hospital before being accepted into custody here at the Walker County Jail."

After receiving clearance from medical professionals, the Jasper Police Department brought the inmate back a few hours later. After (being) admitted to our facility and throughout his time in custody, the inmate received regular monitoring and care by our medical staff."

Smith said when any inmate arrives, a corrections officer goes over a "fit for confinement" checklist of conditions to evaluate before inmates come inside the jail.

Smith said if officers and medical staff deem them a health risk, the arresting officer must have them checked out at the local hospital before the jail accepts them. Theus was deemed a health risk, he said, and was taken to the hospital. Three hours later, he was returned to the jail.

"He was in no life-threatening situation when he came to the facility," Smith said, which Poe later agreed with.

Poe said the inmate was taken by a patrol car and he spent several hours at the hospital being checked out.

Smith said, "On Friday night at 9:15 p.m., our

corrections staff initiated a Code Blue, indicating a medical emergency was in the booking area. Corrections officers promptly administered life-saving measures until (an) onsite nurse assumed care. Upon arrival of Jasper Fire and Rescue, these efforts continued. Unfortunately, despite all attempts, the inmate passed away."

He said, "At this time, there is no foul play suspected in the inmate's death," with pre-autopsy indications pointing currently to natural causes.

Smith brought up to reporters "the challenges we have encountered over the last 6.5 years," noting jail deaths are common nationwide. "Under the previous administration, there were nine such incidents in a four-year period, whereas (during) my tenure, in a six-and-a-half-year span, we have had four," he said.

Smith said since assuming office in 2019, he has "consistently advocated for 24/7 medical services here in our facility. However, despite repeated requests, this issue has yet to be addressed by our county (commission) chairman (Steve Miller). While we have managed to increase medical coverage to 16 hours a day, it is evident that it is insufficient.

"The federal (consent) decree of 1994 mandated the Walker County Jail

required 24/7 medical service, a requirement that to my knowledge in my lifetime has yet to be fulfilled."

Smith endorsed Miller's opponent in recent elections, who lost.

The jail currently has 16-hour medical coverage a day through a contract with QCH and medical staff was on duty at the time of the latest incident, Smith said.

He said the national and county drug crisis has made round-the-clock medical service more critical now.

He said the Sheriff's Office first requested "life-saving monitors in the booking area" in October, facing significant obstacles getting it on the agenda until it was approved in February. The devices monitor heart and respiratory rates and alert officers if breathing stops or rates dramatically change.

Smith said delays in payment for services hindered the progress, with the invoice being settled on March 26, "putting us weeks behind schedule." The check was sent that day. He said it was not until two commissioners put it on the agenda that it was finally approved, while the invoice was sent on Feb. 5.

He said the devices had not been installed and he did not know when they

would be. He said cooperation between his office and the commission is "imperative" to ensuring comprehensive care for inmates.

Under questioning from reporters, Smith said he could not say 24-hour service would have saved the inmates who died "but it would not have hurt."

He was asked in light of other deaths at the jail, such as the death of inmate Tony Mitchell which has sparked protests and media coverage, if there was a problem with perception and trust from the public in the Sheriff's Office.

"I think it is an ongoing problem over the last 20-30 years in regards to the Sheriff's Office," he said. "I don't think it is one incident in particular. I think it is an ongoing problem that persists with the image of the Sheriff's Office." When things happen in Walker County, they seem to be "multiplied and made bigger."

He said medical services have been a priority for him, "and people don't want to tell that story." He said he has pushed for 24/7 coverage "since Day One," and said it has been reported. He noted medical costs have doubled and tripled in the jail, with staff and corrections officers doing the best they can.

Smith also noted prior administrations tried to

investigate such incidents themselves, while he has called outside agencies to maintain integrity in the process.

He said the department would be as transparent as possible.

"A lot of the problems that we have and we face is that I haven't been transparent enough with the public about the problems that I've had trying to get things to make this place better," he said. "It's a one-sided story. My story doesn't get told. The Sheriff's Office and the employees here, their story doesn't get told. It is a one-sided story that gets told, because nobody knows that for six and a half years, we've asked for 24/7 medical that might have made changes."

He said the medical episode happened in booking while under observation. He said the medical sensors would have alerted staff sooner. However, not knowing the cause of death for certain, he said there is not much that can be done in the case of a massive heart attack or blood clot. He said in the early stages of the investigation it appears the correction officers did "an outstanding job in their care," immediately rendering aid until the nurse and firemen arrived.

Smith said he hoped a preliminary autopsy report could be issued soon.

## Donate ----- From A1

day, April 20. Tri-Green is a major sponsor of the group's rodeo, which helps to fund the association's donations.

Odom noted Children's of Alabama referred the teenager to a hospital in Texas to be treated for scoliosis (an abnormal curvature of the spine).

"It's not a cheap surgery at all," said her mother, Krystle Ables Roberts. "And sometimes insurance doesn't even cover it. I didn't know that. With her's not going toward her organs and toward her heart, it is not considered a medical. It is considered a cosmetic. I'm not even sure insurance will cover it."

That could mean a cost of upwards of \$300,000 - and even if the normal 80 percent insurance were to kick in, that could mean upwards of \$60,000 out of pocket.

Even with Children's of Alabama accepting insurance on their visits there, the family had to pay \$2,000 out of pocket.

Roberts noted she has been trying to raise the needed money on her own, but she said it has been "nerve-racking."

The donation is expected to help with the expense at Scottish Rite for Children, a hospital in Dallas, Texas, with the surgery likely near the end of June, Odom said.

"That is part of what we do that rodeo for, is to help the community," Odom said. (The group is also planning to donate \$300 to the Carbon Hill Women's Club's efforts to improve the town's park.)

Bella, who is one of three children, was joined by her stepfather, Donald Roberts, as well as a friend, Ariana Dotson of Carbon Hill, to hear about the donation. Her mother said Bella has dealt with the condition for a couple of years, although she has only been diagnosed since last year.

Her Birmingham doctor was quoted as saying

that when the illness hit, it hit hard.

"The doctor in Birmingham says it can't get worse than it already is. It is already bad," Roberts said. With the surgery, she'll never be 100 percent, but she can be improved. One youth in Dallas was improved by surgery from a 120-degree curve to a 40-degree curve. Bella is at 83 degrees.

"They are looking to get her to a 15 or a 20," she said.

Bella was all smiles that day, although her mother said she emotionally can be up and down with the surgery hanging over her. "It's understandable when you don't know what to expect," Roberts said.

People can donate to Bella Shotts a savings account the family has set up by going to any Lister Hill Credit Union.

A fundraising pre-sale pickup \$10 dinner is also being held in Lynn on June 13, with chick-



Daily Mountain Eagle - Ed Howell

The Walker County Constables Association has donated \$1,500 to a 13-year-old Lynn girl, Bella Shotts, who is facing enormous medical bills for corrective spinal surgery in Texas. The announcement was made at TriGreen, which has helped sponsor the association rodeos that help to fund such donations. Shown on the back row are constables Timothy Reed and Larry Odom; stepfather, Donald Roberts; mother, Krystle Ables Roberts; and constables Steve Aultman, Raymond Pugh, Larry Myers and Allen Astell. In the front row, from left, is Bella's friend, Ariana Dotson of Carbon Hill, and Bella.

en and dressing, green beans, a potato side, a roll and a dessert. Clayton Supply in Winfield suggested the dinner,

as they purchased more than 100 dinners. She can be contacted on Facebook at Krystle Ables Roberts.

A bass tournament will also be held as a fundraiser on Saturday, May 11, in Bear Creek at Twin Forks.