

PEN CITY CURRENT

It's Black & White and Read all over

Wednesday, March 17, 2021 | 9 pages | Volume 5 • Issue 62



www.pencitycurrent.com

Not so tiny bubbles



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg

Kristen Brookhiser, of rural Wever gets up close for a photo of the frothy bubbles that were blown into her neighborhood and surrounding area from the Iowa Fertilizer plant early Tuesday morning.

"HARMLESS": IFC officials, DNR say sudsy drops are harmless byproducts of cleaner

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

WEVER – Residents southwest of Wever in rural Lee County woke up Tuesday morning to what looks like a visit from Mr. Bubble, but they're not joking about wanting answers.

Suds that resemble what you would see in a bubble bath were laying lightly in the fields and yards southwest of the Iowa Fertilizer plant. The bubbles could be seen along Hwy. 61 south of the plant almost to first Fort Madison exit, but not beyond that.

Resident Kristen Brookhiser said she noticed the bubbles at about 6:25 a.m. when she started her morning getting her children ready for the day.

She then made a call to the fertilizer plant to report the incident and was told by assistant manager Zach Adamson at the facility that everything was safe and there was no cause for alarm.

"He reassured me it was safe and there was no danger, but I requested that evidence," Brookhiser said. "He's

See BUBBLES, page 5

OPINION

Visibility needed in law enforcement discipline

The actions of journalists and police officers were in the spotlight last week in a Des Moines courtroom.

The scrutiny came at the trial of Andrea Sahouri, a Des Moines Register reporter. She was arrested while covering a chaotic protest last May 31, six days after George Floyd died under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer.

The jury sorted through questions and al-

legations about the actions of Sahouri, who has worked for the Register since 2019, and Officer Luke Wilson, a Des Moines Police Department employee for 18 years.

In the end, jurors believed Sahouri, not Wilson. Polk County Attorney John Sarcone made an interesting comment in defending his decision to charge Sahouri: "No one is above the law," he said.

The jurors who decided Sahouri did not overstep her rights as a journalist an-

nounced their decision in open court. But when police officers are accused of violating a statute or departmental policy, the public rarely learns how these complaints end.

This needs to change. Keeping the outcome of citizen complaints and internal police investigations secret only erodes public trust and confidence in law enforcement.

Here's how this problem developed.

See RANDY EVANS, page 9

COUNCIL MEETING

City could see \$1.43M in federal aid

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – The city of Fort Madison will be receiving close to \$1.4 million in federal aid as part of the recently passed federal stimulus package.

City Manager David Varley updated the council on the breakdown of the federal aid at Tuesday's regular meeting of the Fort Madison City Council.

The American Rescue Plan Act includes \$65 billion for local governments across the country. The Lee County Board of Supervisors just announced they will be getting an estimated \$6.5 million in aid.

One of the caveats of the aid payments is that it cannot be used for debt or property tax relief.

Varley said a change that occurred in the U.S. Senate, opened up Fort Madison to see funds from the new law.

He said the U.S. Treasury had 60 days from passage of the law to get the money to the states, who in turn have 30 days to get the money to the cities. The bill was signed by President Joe Biden on Thursday, March 11.

Varley said there is also a requirement that the city make regular reports to the federal government on what they are using the money for.

"When they first came out with the bill out of the House, there were four requirements that governed the use of the funds and we really didn't meet any of those requirements," Varley said.

"But the Senate changed it, bless their hearts, and they changed the fourth requirement and now it says it can include water, sewer or broadband infrastructure. So now we will have the legal authority to spend the money we get on water, sewer or broadband."

Councilwoman Rebecca Bowker asked then if the city wouldn't need to raise water and sewer rates again. Varley said they wouldn't need to raise the rates if the city didn't want to complete required sanitary and storm water sewer separation requirements, called CSO (combined sewer overflow) projects currently mandated by the EPA. The city is currently looking for extension to current federal deadlines on those projects.

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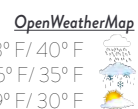
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WEATHER

WED 17 Mar.....Heavy Rain, 43° F/ 40° F
THU 18 Mar.....Wintery Mix, 45° F/ 35° F
FRI 19 Mar.....Partly Cloudy, 49° F/ 30° F



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Obituaries

DONALD R. VAUGHN

Donald R. Vaughn, 89, of rural Lomax, Illinois, passed away at 1:00 p.m., Saturday, March 13, 2021, at his home.

Don was born on October 9, 1931, in Terre Haute, Illinois, the son of Dean and Helen (Pence) Vaughn. On April 3, 1955, he married Norma Jeanne Clark at the Dallas City Christian Church in Dallas City, Illinois. She preceded him in death on February 21, 2020.

Don graduated from Terre Haute High School in 1949 as Valedictorian. Shortly after high school he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, proudly serving his country from 1951 through 1954. Don spent the majority of his military service stationed in Greenland and achieved the rank of Staff Sergeant. Following his service, he returned home to begin a lifelong career as a farmer on the Vaughn family farm. Don also worked as a Pioneer Seed salesman for many years.

He was a member of the American Legion and the Lomax Christian Church, where he served as a Trustee as well as on the Church Board. Don served as a Henderson County ASCS Committeeman, was a member of the Terre Haute High School Alumni Committee, and was elected to the Dallas City Unit 336 School Board in 1964 and then again in 1978. Don was an avid hunter and award-winning trap shooter in his early life, and he enjoyed fishing and watching the Chicago Cubs later in life.

Survivors include four children, Donna (Brian) Anderson of Fishers, Indiana, Diana (Dale) Helling of Iowa City, Iowa, Denise (Chris) Hanley of Peoria, Illinois, and Lance (Danielle) Vaughn of Altoona, Iowa, and five grandchildren, Drew Helling, Meagan and Erin Hanley, and Katie and Lauren Vaughn. Also surviving is his sister-in-law, Betty Vaughn, and several nieces and nephews.

Don was preceded in death by his wife, two brothers, Hubert and Haven Vaughn, and sister-in-law, Sydney Vaughn Hosford.

A memorial service will be held at 2:00 p.m., Saturday, April 3, 2021, at Banks and Beals Funeral Home in Dallas City with Pastor Maxine Dennison officiating. Military Rites will follow at the funeral home. Inurnment will be held at a later date in Crane Cemetery, near Lomax.

Friends may call from 11:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. April 3rd at Banks and Beals where the family will be present from noon until 2:00 p.m. Due to COVID -19, the family asks that masks be worn.

A memorial fund has been established for the Lomax Christian Church and Beacon of Hope Hospice. To leave a condolence for the family, please visit Don's obituary at banksandbeals.com.



VAUGHN



PATRICIA A. BEAIRD

Patricia "Patty" Ann Beard, 74, of Keokuk, passed away on Sunday, March 14, 2021, at Blessing Hospital in Quincy, Illinois.

Patty was born on September 4, 1946, in West Point, Iowa, the daughter of Harry and Louise (Buechel) Vorwaldt. She graduated from high school in 1964 and later earned her associate's degree. Patty married David Patrick Beard on August 26, 1967, in West Point. She was a medical lab technician at Keokuk Area Hospital for 45 years and a member of the American Society for Clinical Pathology.

Patty thoroughly enjoyed flower gardening as well as her indoor flowers, going to antique and second-hand stores and especially treasured time spent with her family and grandchildren.

She served on the State of Iowa Victim's Impact Panel and was a foster parent for several years.

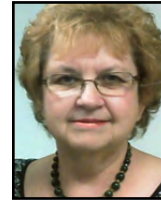
Patty is survived by two sons: Patrick (Becky) Beard and Jason (Jenny) Beard; granddaughters Alaina (Nabih) Beard and Abbey Beard; grandson Jacob Beard; brother Melvin (Ruth) Vorwaldt; two nephews, Leroy (Peggy) Vorwaldt and John (Melissa) Vorwaldt and two great-nephews, Dustin (Amber) Vorwaldt and Joshua Vorwaldt.

Patty is preceded in death by her parents and her daughter Rebecca Lynn Beard.

Patty's life will be celebrated with a funeral service at 2:30 pm on Friday, March 19, 2021, at DeJong-Greaves-Printy Funeral Home in Keokuk with burial to follow in the Catholic section of Oakland Cemetery in Keokuk. For those unable to attend, the funeral will be livestreamed on Patty's obituary page at www.dejongsfuneralhome.com. Visitation will be held on Thursday, March 18, from 2-7 pm, with family meeting friends from 5-7 pm at the funeral home.

Memorials may be directed to the Multiple Sclerosis Foundation or donor's choice.

Tributes and condolences may be left at www.dejongsfuneralhome.com. DeJong-Greaves-Printy Funeral Home of Keokuk is in charge of arrangements.



BEAIRD

Pen City Current obituary policy

Pen City Current runs obituaries one time at no charge to funeral homes and they run the day they are submitted in most cases. They are also run as submitted by the funeral homes. Reposting of obituaries due to changes can only be requested by the submitting funeral home and will be assessed a \$15 reposting fee.

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From the Front

Froth was byproduct of sugar-based detergent, according to DNR

BUBBLES - Continued from Page 1

sending me the safety data sheets on the particular detergent that was used.

“He made it sound like it was a mistake and they were working on the problem.”

Jesse Harris, a spokesperson for Iowa Fertilizer Company, released a statement Tuesday morning, stating the substance was harmless.

“As part of our normal manufacturing process, we occasionally use a cleaning element that allows us to continue producing high-quality fertilizer products, while also enhancing the safety of our overall operations. The cleaning element does produce foam bubbles and recent high winds unexpectedly blew those outside the perimeter of our facility.

“While we have been and will continue to work to minimize this from happening any further, it is important to underscore that this substance is harmless. We apologize for any concerns this may have caused among our neighbors and encourage anyone who has questions or would like additional information to contact us at 515-422-9296.

Iowa Department of Resources Field 6 Supervisor Kurt Levetsov said initial reports from residents and fertilizer plant leadership lead him to believe the substance is harmless.

“You were the first to contact us, but since that time we’ve had three other reports,” Levetsov said. “It’s not harmful is what we’re hearing from the facility.”

Levetsov said he was informed the suds are coming from a sugar-based surfactant that was used in the cooling towers. That product generally produces the suds that got caught up in some high winds overnight. He said he also requested the Material Safety Sheets from the plant and expected to have them in his hands Tuesday morning to review.

Brookhiser said she has never seen anything like that from the fertilizer plant. She said she could see the wind blowing the stack smoke toward her neighborhood as she was driving back from Burlington that morning.

“(Adamson) said it was a kind of a unique situation that was not supposed to happen and they were doing everything that can to correct it.

Camalla Briggs, also a neighbor in the area said seeing the bubbles in her yard and trees took her back to the original community meeting that was held where residents were given a “survival pack” including duct tape and a flashlight.

Briggs is concerned about the makeup of the bubbles that were strewn about her yard and trees. One

dropping was more than a foot tall and wide.

“Yeah, it’s weird. About a quarter to seven we were looking at the window and saw these things that looked like snowballs” Briggs said, and then pointed to another group of suds floating over her yard.

“And look – see?, there’s one floating over the tree see it?”

“We don’t know during the night when it happened. It’s odd because if it’s just suds you’d think it would be gone by now. If you put suds in your yard it isn’t going to be there for four hours. It’s on the plants. We hear it came out of their pipes,” Briggs said.

“Something’s faltered.”

Brookhiser said she was concerned about the residual effects of the bubbles being on trees and plants and the watershed effect. She used a stick to pick up some of the suds and put them in a gallon sealed bag.

“We have a bee hive and a garden and things that chemicals can effect. We’re also in the Lost Creek Watershed. It runs through our property on the bottom of the hill and then into the river. You’ve gotta watershed issue. Maybe it’s not toxic when its released into the air, but what happens when it’s condensed into the ground and runs off in the water.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

This is one of the large bubbles found in the yard of Wayne and Camalla Briggs of rural Wever Tuesday morning.

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If you have any questions please contact Lee County Engineer, Ben Hull, at (319) 372-2541 or email him at engineer@leecounty.org.



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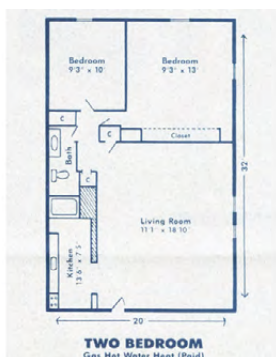
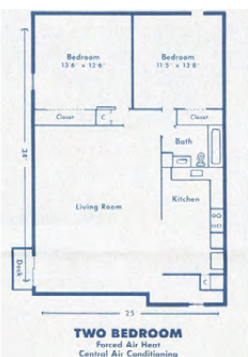
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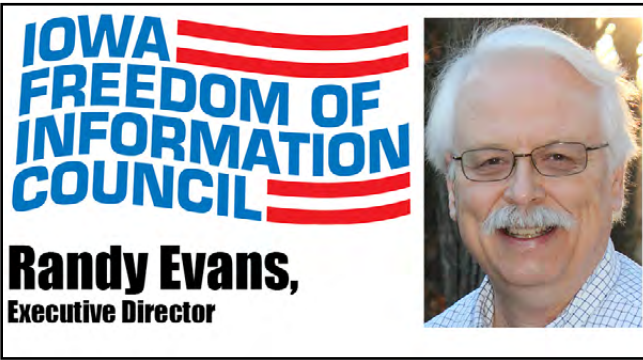
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From the Front

Police, sheriff discipline needs more light

RANDY EVANS - Continued from Page 1

In 2017, the Legislature amended Iowa law to require information from the personnel files of government employees to be made public if certain disciplinary action is taken. With the change, the law says the “documented reasons and rationale” for firing or demoting an employee, or for the employee resigning in lieu of termination, must be made public.



But if the employee is not demoted to a lower job classification, then the public typically remains in the dark — although police chiefs, sheriffs and top officials of other law enforcement agencies have authority, but no obligation, to share the disciplinary action they take against employees.

Some recent cases show the need for more transparency:

- **KATIE AKIN:** One day after Andrea Sahouri’s arrest, another Register reporter, Katie Akin, covered a Black Lives Matter protest on the grounds of the Iowa Capitol. She was standing well away from the demonstrators, recording video and narrating the events.

As police officers and Iowa State Patrol troopers started moving in a line to clear demonstrators from the Capitol grounds, Akin began retreating to get farther away. You can hear her repeatedly telling officers, “I’m press! I’m press! I’m with the Register! “I’m going! I’m going! I’m press!”

Suddenly, you see a Des Moines police officer rush up and pepper-spray her in the face. She shrieks in pain.

The newspaper asked the police department to conduct an internal review of the officer’s actions. Officials agreed. But nine months later, the newspaper has been told nothing about that investigation — or even if it occurred. There has been no announcement of whether the officer was reprimanded or cleared of any misconduct.

- **STEPHANIE SWARTZ:** Des Moines police officer Stephanie Swartz exited Interstate Highway 235 at 42nd Street on a December night in 2019. There was a red light at the intersection, and a sign warned, “No Right Turn on Red.”

Swartz was on her cellphone and made the turn anyway. Her police car struck Shirley Streiber, 70, who was crossing the intersection on a “Walk” light with her dog. Streiber suffered a concussion.

Swartz did not receive a ticket for her improper turn. Instead, police said she was disciplined — although officials refused to say what that punishment was.

- **TRAFFIC STOP:** On the evening of July 15, 2018, officers Kyle Thies and Natalie Heine-mann pulled over a car near a Des Moines city park after it supposedly rolled through a stop sign after being in the park after hours.

For the next 15 minutes, Thies grilled the driver, Montray Little, and his passenger, Jared Clinton. The men were compliant and polite as Thies repeatedly told them he suspected they had marijuana and a gun — accusations they denied.

Thies ordered Little out of the car and threatened to take him to jail if he didn’t comply. Little was handcuffed, but no gun or marijuana was found in the car. The men finally were released without any tickets.

The men filed a civil rights lawsuit against the city, alleging they were victims of racial profiling. The city paid \$75,000 to settle, but taxpayers do not know whether Thies and Heine-mann faced any discipline.

Law officers have much more authority over the lives of Iowans than other government employees have. Officers can deprive people of their liberty by arresting them, and officers have the ultimate power, the use of deadly force.

It’s time for lawmakers to require state and local governments to make public the outcome of citizen complaints and internal investigations of job-performance allegations against officers. It’s good government — and common sense.

Randy Evans is executive director of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council and can be reached at DMRevs2810@gmail.com. Pen City Current is a member of the IFOIC.

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