

PEN CITY CURRENT

It's **Black & White** and **Read** all over

Monday, January 31, 2022 | 7 pages | Volume 6 • Issue 29



www.pencitycurrent.com

Board to talk county wages

SPECIAL MEETING: Supervisors to meet on 5th Monday to address wage pressures

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY – Lee County Supervisors will hold a special fifth monthly meeting Monday to discuss proposed county wage increases. The board typically doesn't meet on fifth Mondays but board chair Matt Pflug called the meeting due to the pressing wage concerns in the county.

The Lee County Compensation Board has recommended a 10% across the board wage increase for county elected officials, and a 45% increase for the Lee County Sheriff's Department administrators including Sheriff Stacy Weber, Chief Deputy Will Conlee, Captain Craig Burch and Jail Administrator John Canida.

The recommendations are based on a formula approved in the Back the Blue bill the legislature approved and Gov. Kim Reynolds signed during the the 2021 session.

That bill set the sheriff's salary's across the state at a median average based on comparable community, county and state law enforcement administrators salaries.

Iowa Code says the board of supervisors can reduce the Compensation Board's recommendation, but has to reduce it equally across the county. If the board reduces the sheriff's recommendation by 50% they have to also reduce the remaining county officials salaries by the same percentage.

See **WAGES**, page 7



Fans suffer at hands of poor programming

You're getting a super fresh Beside the Point today. As you were making your coffee this morning, this week's topic was literally unfolding in front of me.

I was awoken this morning to the repeated buzzing of my cellphone. It was like my phone's alarm was going off, but it was repeated texting between my wife and daughter who just watched Rafael Nadal win his 21st major tennis championship.

Now that's not much to most, other than maybe Dean Hogan, but my wife is a tennis freak. A rubber bouncing, fuzzy ball, no-talking-in-the-point, everybody's-got-a-nickname, head swinging tennis guru. In her former life she could have been Suzanne Lenglen... look it up.

But here's where things got off the rails After close to six hours of tennis, and if you're a fan of true, TRUE athleticism and endurance and will-of-heart and spirit, and you don't watch tennis – you do not get it, ESPN cut the program for a replay of the BYU-Pacific basketball game.

Tennis is a game where there is no coaching during competition, very brief breaks, it's one-on-one, simply are you better than the person across from you.

Rafael Nadal has won 21 grand slam titles. He stands alone with the largest number of grand slams, and earned that this morning in Australia. Only slightly arguably the best men's tennis player ever.

Lee says he joins Andre Agassi as the only men to have a Golden Slam. Yeah, that's a thing, where you win all the Grand Slams, French Open, Australian Open, U.S. Open and Wimbledon...and an Olympic gold medal in singles competition.

There you go. You learned something from Beside the Point.

See **FANS**, page 7

SPORTS

Still No. 1

Burlington Notre Dame's Hunter Lillie tries to go baseline on Fort Madison's Phillip Goldie and Miles Dear in the first quarter of Saturday's 58-49 win by the now 15-0 Bloodhounds. The Hounds are currently the top-ranked Class 3A team in the state. See the full story in today's **SPORTS**.

Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC



Brothers forever - Empty Nest, by Curt Swarm

The call came while Ginnie and I were eating supper. It was from a lady who lives in the same senior apartment complex as my brother, Mike, in Ashland, Wisconsin. "Your brother's in the hospital. He didn't want me to call you, but I thought you should know."

Yes, I wanted to know. My 80-year old brother lives alone, and has no spouse or children to care for him. He had driven himself to a doctor's appointment, slipped on the ice, fell, and came to in the hospital. He was confused, and didn't want to bother me.

I was able to talk to the doctor. There

EMPTY NEST

By Curt Swarm



were multiple issues—heart, urinary infection, high blood pressure, poor kidney functions, possible dementia, double vision, hallucinations—you name it. I made a snap decision. If I wanted to see my brother alive, I'd better get up there. It's winter obviously. I threw some things together and headed out in the four-wheel drive pick-up.

Ginnie stayed behind to take care of Buddy and Stormy.

It's about a 10-hour drive to Ashland, which is right on Lake Superior. It wasn't until I was halfway there that I learned I wouldn't be able to see Mike in the hospital because of COVID. Drat! I should have thought of that. Do I turn around and go home, or push on? Push on. If he passes away, at least I'll be there to take care of things. My sister and I are Powers of Attorney for my brother.

I could hole up in a motel. I'm a writer. I'm working on a book. I have my laptop. I

See **SWARM**, page 7

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WEATHER

MON 31 Jan.....Overcast, 38° F/16° F
TUE 01 Feb.....Rain and Snow, 41° F/23° F
WED 02 Feb.....Snow, 22° F/14° F

IOWA LOTTERY

LOTTO AMERICA 01/29.....5 19 23 30 31, Star Ball: 3, All Star Bonus: 3
LUCKY FOR LIFE 01/29.....3 28 31 35 46, Lucky Ball: 6
MEGA MILLIONS 01/28.....3 16 25 44 55, Mega Ball: 13 Megaplier: 3
PICK 3 01/27, 01/28, 01/29 MIDDAY.....7 2 2, 6 0 0, 3 8 5
PICK 3 01/27, 01/28, 01/29 EVENING.....5 1 2, 9 5 0, 1 4 3
PICK 4 01/27, 01/28, 01/29 MIDDAY.....2 4 5 2, 9 2 6 0, 3 7 8 0
PICK 4 01/27, 01/28, 01/29 EVENING.....13 0 3, 2 1 4 4, 9 3 8 1
POWERBALL 01/29.....2 15 38 54 65, Powerball: 11, Power Play: 4

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Obituaries

OBITUARIES

PATRICIA A. DUNSTAN

Patricia "Patty" Arlene Dunstan, 61 of Keokuk, IA died Sunday, January 23, 2022 at her home.

She was born December 29, 1960 in Quincy, IL the daughter of Earl and Sharon Beckett Bryant.



DUNSTAN

On September 11, 1997, Patty was united in marriage to Greg Dunstan in Seligman, MO. He survives.

Other survivors include one daughter, Deborah Silver (Gary) of Arkansas, three sons, Larry Bryant (Crystal Patterson) of Keokuk, A.J. Stroup of Arkansas, and Kenneth Stroup (Jennifer) of Arkansas, fifteen grandchildren, two that are currently serving in the military, thirteen great-grandchildren, her mother, Sharon Sadler of Canton, MO, two brothers, Ronnie Rossiter of Texas and Earl Bryant of Arkansas, and one sister, Josie Bryant (Carl Dawson) of Texas.

She was preceded in death by her father and one brother, Gregory Paul Bryant.

Patty had been employed by Riverfront Café in Keokuk.

She was a faithful member of Calvary Baptist Church in Keokuk.

Patty enjoyed knitting, crocheting and reading romance novels. She loved all varieties of flowers, fishing and she especially loved a cup of coffee with a bowl of popcorn while enjoying her Starbucks coffee scented candle. Patty also enjoyed music, dancing and won several dancing contests. Most of all, she loved spending time with her family and snuggling with Greg.

A funeral service will be held at 1:00 p.m., Monday, at the Vigen Memorial Home in Keokuk, IA with Pastor John Heath officiating. Burial will be in the Evergreen Cemetery in Camp Point, IL. The service will be live-streamed on Patty's obituary page (tribute wall) at www.vigenmemorialhome.com.

Visitation will be held prior to the service from 12 noon-1:00 p.m. Monday, at the funeral home with family meeting with friends at that time.

Memorials may be made to the family.

Online condolences may be sent to the family at www.vigenmemorialhome.com.

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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OBITUARIES

KENNETH L. HOWELL, JR

Kenneth "Louie" Louis Howell, Jr., 59, of Keokuk, Iowa, passed away on Sunday, January 23, 2022.

Louie was born on March 4, 1962, in Keokuk, Iowa, the son of Kenneth Louis Howell, Sr. and Carolyn Mae Mann.



HOWELL, JR

Louie was quite the jokester with a wonderful sense of humor. He could be found riding anything with a motor and had an impressive marble collection. Louie was a well-liked, family man and protector with a generous heart. His family meant the world to him – especially his children and grandchildren.

Louie is survived by four sons: Kenny Howell, Kolten (Riki) Howell, Keaten Howell and Keagen Howell all of Keokuk; two daughters: Katelyn Howell of Keokuk and Karlie Howell of Hamilton, Illinois; five grandchildren: Kayne, Kannon and Krey Howell, Koralline Howell and Daniel Wrieden; six sisters: Lisa (Steve) Rairden of Keokuk, Sandy (Bruce) Marmion of Hamilton, Illinois, Cindy Howell of Keokuk, Robin (Richard) Kitzman of Donnellson, Iowa, Susan Howell of Keokuk and Candy (James) Dupuy of Indiana; one brother: Brian Howell of Keokuk; favorite cousins: Andy Carson of Burlington, Iowa, Carman Prundy of Davenport, Iowa, and Pam Howell of Austin, Texas; and many nieces, nephews and cousins.

Louie is preceded in death by his parents, sister Kimberly Howell, granddaughter Kymberly and niece Lindsay Dupuy.

A celebration of life will be held at a later date.

Tributes and condolences may be left at www.dejongsfuneralhome.com.

DeJong-Greaves-Printy Funeral Home of Keokuk is in charge of arrangements.

ROBERTA K. HARDIN

Roberta K. Hardin (Pettigrew), 76, of Burlington, IA passed away at 1:10pm on Sunday, January 23, 2022 at Mercy Hospitals in Iowa City, IA. She was born on June 24, 1945 in Burlington, IA to Bert and Freida Pettigrew.



HARDIN

Roberta is survived by 5-children: Lynette Mason, Jeremy (Stacie) Gordon, Felice (Chris) Cline, Talinda Pettigrew (Ben Slife), Demarko Pettigrew (Bobbie Degner), 16 grandchildren, 1 great granddaughter, and 4 sisters.

She was preceded in death by her parents and 1-sister.

No services are planned at this time. A celebration of life will be held at a later date.

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PEN CITY CURRENT

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Bloodhounds stay perfect atop Class 3A

Notre Dame boys hang around, but can't unseat 15-0 Fort Madison

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – Burlington Notre Dame was looking to come in and give the No. 1 Class 3A Fort Madison Bloodhounds' 14-0 record a black eye in a Saturday tussle in the Hound Dome.

And despite leaving senior Miles Dear in a heap on the floor at halftime after taking a blow to his eye, the Nikes couldn't catch up to Fort Madison as the Hounds took a 58-49 win over the upset-minded Nikes.

But, in reality, everyone is upset-minded when the now 15-0 Hounds come into the building. Burlington will have the same mindset, and a hostile environment, on Monday night when Fort Madison comes calling in a critical Southeast Conference matchup.

"We gotta come in tomorrow and practice. We've got Burlington on Monday and there are some things we need work on and talk about," Head Coach Ryan Wilson said.

Fort Madison's Miles Dear slips to the basket in front of Notre Dame's Owen Gulick in the first half of Saturday's win over the Nikes. Dear finished with 21 points on the night. Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

The Bloodhounds, who have an average margin of victory of 27 points on the year, with wins by as much as 69, have been atop the Class 3A Associated Press rankings for close to three weeks. This past week they were the unanimous choice at No. 1, something that has never happened in the program's history.

But Wilson said the Hounds didn't play their best Saturday, or Thursday against Fairfield for that matter. But, he said, they are playing good enough.

"For two weeks in a row we haven't been our best. But we've been good enough," he said.

"I told the guys tonight, we can't just be good enough in the post season."

Fort Madison will play in Substate 5 this year with games kicking off Feb. 21, giving them about two more weeks of regular season play – to get good enough.

The Hounds, despite having leads as big as 10 in the first half, could never really shake off the Nikes until there was about a minute left in the game.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Fort Madison's Miles Dear slips to the basket in front of Notre Dame's Owen Gulick in the first half of Saturday's win over the Nikes. Dear finished with 21 points on the night.

Notre Dame jumped out to a 4-0 lead on a Carson Jones move inside, but Fort Madison would tie things up on a Dear breakaway layup. Jackson Brent would answer on the next possession for the Nikes, but senior Reiburn Turnbull would bury a three in front of the Hounds' stands to give Fort Madison a 7-6 lead.

The two teams would exchange buckets until Fort Madison would go on a 6-2 run to open a 15-12 first quarter lead. Fort Madison would go 8 of 16 from the field in the second quarter, including one donnybrook in the lane where Matt Hopper would miss underneath, Dayton Davis would miss a putback, get his own rebound, miss again, try to tap in another rebound, and miss before Notre Dame could muscle the ball out of the paint.

The Nikes wouldn't score in transition and Tate Johnson would score on the next trip for Fort Madison to open the largest lead for Fort Madison at 34-24 with about a minute left in the half. The Hounds would get a defensive stop and then, with just seconds left in the half, Dear went streaking down the floor trying to convert in transition before the buzzer and missed. After the shot he laid crouched on the floor for several minutes after taking a shot to the eye.

Notre Dame would get right back in it after the half, outscoring the Hounds 17-11 in the 3rd quarter with six different Nikes scoring in the run, cutting the lead to four 45-41.

A breakaway dunk by Davis pushed the lead back to six and brought an already rowdy home crowd back into the game. Davis would score the next five unanswered for the Hounds, but would pick up his fourth foul with 3:47 left in the game.

Wilson made the decision to leave Davis in and the move paid off as the senior didn't foul out, but was able to draw some attention in the middle, leaving Dear to put a cap on the game with the Hounds' final eight points for the win.

Fort Madison committed 10 turnovers in the game and had several instances of not being able to convert despite three and four offensive chances in one possession.

Wilson said it wasn't a matter of fatigue, but decision making.

"I don't think it's fatigue, they play so hard defensively it's hard not to turn that switch off – slow things down and not get crazy offensively," he said.

"We talked about that. We gotta go hard on defense, but then we have to slow it down on offense. We're rushing shots and layups and we're not taking care of the ball. If we want to have any postseason run we've gotta be more efficient offensively, slow things down, and play at the same level offensively as we do defensively.

Davis had 23 points on the night and went a much better 7-8 from the free-throw line after converting just over 54% of his freebies Thursday at Fairfield. Dear had 21 for Fort Madison. Turnbull had seven points for the Bloodhounds.

Jones led Notre Dame (5-11) with 15 points.

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Sports/Classifieds

Lady Hounds nip at No. 7 Nikes heels; fall in 4th

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – It wasn't the game Fort Madison Head Coach Tony Sargent wanted to play Saturday, but it almost ended up being the result he wanted.

The Lady Hounds made a bid to knock of Class 1A No. 7 Burlington Notre Dame Saturday in the Hound Dome carrying a 44-40 lead into the 4th quarter, with junior Camille Kruse, the Hounds' second highest scorer riding the bench with four fouls.

But the Nikes got hot down the stretch and the Hounds went cold as Notre Dame went on a 13-2 run to end the game and roll to a 53-46 win in a non-conference matchup.

"I don't want to take anything away from them, I really don't, but I think that was our game," Sargent said, "If Camille wouldn't have got that hustle foul in the 3rd quarter – if we could have kept her in the game we were ahead by six. Then it just seemed like 'Man, I can't win without her.'"

With Kruse playing sparingly through the second and third periods and Fort Madison trailing 26-19 at the half Junior Irelynd Sargent, who was 0-11 from the 3-point arc, went a little crazy from about 20 feet burying two 3-balls from the left side in front of the Fort Madison student section, to spark a 9-4 Hound rally,

Senior Malarie Ross, who finished with a game-high 24, got a little breather with Sargent finding the range. Ross got free on the right side for a 3-ball, too, and then after a Hound stop at the Nike end, Ross converted inside in transition to tie the game at 30.

The lead would go back and forth for a few pos-



Fort Madison senior Malarie Ross tries a scoop shot after driving the lane early in Fort Madison's 53-46 loss Saturday to Class 1A No. 7 Burlington Notre Dame.

sessions with the Nikes' Megan Harrell and Abby Korschgen adding three freethrows and Ross connecting on another 3-ball to tie things at 33. Notre Dame's Lauren Krieger laced a three-pointer in the next possession and Ross countered with a drive in the lane.

Gabby Deery would score in the paint for Notre Dame on the ensuing trip down the floor and then, with :10 left in the third, Sargent hit her third 3-point-er of the quarter to tie things again at 38.

Taylor Johnson opened the fourth with a three from the left wing, only her second of the season, and Ross would add a 3 of her own after a Hound defensive stop to put Fort Madison up by six 44-38.

Fort Madison wouldn't be able to hold onto the momentum, however, and missed nine of their next 10 shots allowing Notre Dame to fight back, keyed by

back-to-back three balls from Reagan Engberg and Krieger to take a 45-44 lead.

Kruse would come back in carrying four fouls with 3:23 left in the game and couldn't get back into rhythm as she and Ross missed back-to-back while Krieger and Deery added a bucket each.

The Hounds then went into foul mode and couldn't keep the ball from the Nikes' Harrell who cleaned things up with four straight from the freethrow line. Harrell was 9-of-10 on the night from the line.

"No. 1, you don't want to foul her. I said don't guard the ball and double up Megan and let somebody else get the ball, well, guess what," Sargent said.

He said the Hounds kept getting caught with the ball in the corners and got out of balance.

"The biggest problem, other than foul trouble, was we kept trying to take the ball to the corners and penetrate from there, and then were just losing it all the time," he said.

"I wanted to keep the ball out of the corners, and we just kept throwing it there and that's the way it went," he said.

But he said he got quality production from the bench including Taylor Johnson and Molly Knipe.

"I got great minutes from Taylor and Molly. I thought they played well. And I thought Aija Jenkins did a great job rebounding tonight. She's getting more confidence and being more aggressive."

Ross led Fort Madison with 24 points on the night. Sargent had nine.

Fort Madison (10-4) is off until Thursday when they travel to Centerville and then play back-to-back on Friday and Saturday hosting Washington and then Davenport West.

PEN CITY CURRENT CLASSIFIEDS

PUBLIC NOTICES

PUBLIC NOTICE ORDINANCE NO. D-083

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING TITLE 7, CHAPTER 5, DOGS AND CATS AND CHAPTER 6, ANIMALS; FOWL, TO SET FEES BY RESOLUTION

The Purpose of this Ordinance is to amend Title 7, Chapters 7; Dogs and Cats, and Chapter 6, Animals; Fowl, of the City Code of the City of Fort Madison.

Section 1. The following is a brief summary of Ordinance Number D-083:

Adding a phone number and microchip number to the animal license application form.

Setting license, penalty and impoundment fees and fines to by resolution.

Removes all reference to the term "Animal Control Officer".

Allows the Police Department or such person or entity as designated by the Chief of Police to impound an animal, provide notice of such impound, euthanize, seize an abused animal, use a tranquilizer gun.

Allows Chief of Police

to designate an animal impound facility.

Removes collection of adoption fees.

A complete copy of Ordinance D-083 is available for review at City Hall, 811 Avenue E, Monday through Friday (with the exception of scheduled holidays) from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Section 2. All ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict with the provisions of this ordinance are hereby repealed.

Section 3. If any section, provision, or part of this ordinance shall be adjudged invalid or unconstitutional, such adjudication shall not affect the validity of the ordinance as a whole or any section, provision, or part thereof not adjudged invalid or unconstitutional.

Section 4. This ordinance shall be in effect after it's final passage, approval, and publication as provided by law.

PASSED AND APPROVED this 4th day of January, 2022.

/s/ Rusty Andrews,
Mayor Pro Tem

ATTEST:

/s/Melinda L. Blind, City Clerk

PUBLIC NOTICE Lee County, Iowa Board of Supervisors Agenda

DATE: Monday,
January 31, 2022
MEETING
CONVENING TIME:
10:00 A.M. - 11:00 A.M.
(CDT)

LOCATION:
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Pledge of Allegiance
Approve Agenda
Public Input
Discussion and Possible Action on Employee Wages

Consider Approval for Lee County Treasurer to Accept ACH Deposits on Behalf of Lee County Auditor DBA Lee County EMS

Consider Approval of Updated EMS Handbook
Consider Approval of Class B Beer Permit for Tri State Gun Club, Montrose

Consider Approval of Tax Abatement Resolutions (9)

Consider Approval of January 24, 2022 Board Minutes

Consider Approval of Claims
Personnel Actions:
A. Step Increase-Jail
B. Transfer from Full-time to Part-time-EMS
C. New hires (2)-EMS Reports:
A. Commission of Veteran Affairs Minutes of Meeting
B. Commission of Veteran Affairs Quarterly Report
C. Manure Management Update for Pieper Pork Plantation in Cedar

Township
D. Recorder's Report of Fees Collected
Commission or Committee Reports
Adjourn

Workshop to Follow

PUBLIC MEETING
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From the Front

Road trip to visit brother proves worthwhile

SWARM - Continued from Page 1

can use the time to isolate and write. Perfect.

When I pulled into the motel, which is right on Lake Superior (beautiful view), I noticed the Mexican restaurant next door. Check. At the front desk, I let them know the circumstances and that I might be staying awhile. No problem. Check Check. I noted the exercise room, the morning breakfast, and the coffee pot, microwave and refrigerator in the room. Check Check Check. I settled in for the long haul and watched the two NFL kings get knocked off: Rogers and Brady.

The laptop computer opened easily. Writers love to isolate. I was very productive and got a major chunk of the book written.

In the meantime, my brother's strength improved, and many of his health issues cleared up. It was determined he could be released to a nursing home. He wanted me to pick up some things for him from his apartment. I accommodated. I also stopped at Walmart and purchased my brother a track phone so that he could communicate with us easier. An old duffer in Walmart mentioned he didn't like the short, dark, cold days. I told him I did. That I'm a writer and writers love to isolate. He shook his head and mumbled something about strange people. BTW, it got down to -22 degrees below zero with a windchill off the lake of you-don't-want-to-know. The truck still started, praise God.

At the nursing home, they allowed visitors with mask and face shield. Ah, at least I could see Mike. Oops, I forgot, he wants to be called Michael. Whatever. He couldn't use the track phone because of his hearing. Tsk tsk. Looks like I have a track phone I don't need.

The drive home was nondescript. I sang at the top of my voice to sixties music, and made myself hoarse. "Now it's Judy's turn to cry." I had been gone six days (six chapters). Ginnie and Buddy were glad to see me. Stormy, "my" cat, looked at me like, "Oh, you been gone?"

Out of a family of eight children, there are just four of us left. I'm the youngest, and now taking care of siblings who took care of me. I already lost one brother in July. I don't want to lose another. I'm thinking Mike, I mean Michael, will regain his strength and return to his apartment. Families take care of family. Mine may be stronger for it. Brothers forever

County to take up wage bumps

WAGES - Continued from Page 1

Most of the county department heads have approached the board with a proposed 10% increase in wages for their staff during January budget hearings.

The move prompted Lee County Budget Director Cindy Renstrom to propose a \$1 million increase in the county's general supplemental funding, which would result in a 11% increase in the supplemental portion of the county's general mil levy.

That increase would require a supermajority vote of the supervisors, which amounts to 4 of 5 supervisors in favor of the increase.

Both chairman Pflug and board member Ron Fedler hedged at last week's meeting about the increase saying the county has to be fiscally responsible.

Even with the increase to the supplemental levy, Renstrom told the board last Monday that the county total levy will actually go down due to the state taking over mental health operations which eliminated that portion of property taxes and expenses from county budgets.

Lee County Sheriff Stacy Weber has said publicly on numerous occasions that he is troubled by the optics of the increase. Although he told supervisors the increase puts Lee County on par with other law enforcement agencies, he's concerned that the state-mandated increase will hurt the chances for other county employees to also see a raise proportional to the market.

"This is the year of the employee," Weber told the board last week. "We have to take care of our people and those deputies deserve that raise."

Lee County Auditor Denise Fraise mirrored Weber's comments in her remarks to the board last week saying the 10% increase goes a ways in wiping out past year's small increases that have Lee County officials behind comparable officers in other counties in terms of pay.

We should be packing stands for Hounds

FANS - Continued from Page 1

And I can guarantee you this. People say they can't watch tennis, it's too boring. If you were to sit and watch that epic grand slam championship, you would be hooked. You have to consider contributions from Chris Fowler and the wonderful, wonderful commentary of Patrick and John McEnroe, who are one of the very few sports broadcasters that I can say are 100% objective analysts despite their connections to American tennis development efforts.

These guys just want great tennis. Wherever and whomever. And if a match is getting one-sided they want the underdog to regroup, refocus because "we want more tennis".

But here's where dollars get in the way of substance and integrity of product.

ESPN dumped coverage of the title match right as Nadal was taking the podium. So people with your regular basic cable or worse couldn't watch this champion's remarks to the tennis world.

They switched to a REPLAY of a college basketball game.

I didn't stay up for the match, my wife and daughter did. I came down in the morning right after the match was over. But even I was blown away sitting waiting for Rafa to have a chance to address fans only to watch them jump coverage and Lee about to start crying.

We have ESPN+ streaming so she quickly flipped over and caught the comments which were brief, poignant, and typical to Rafa's persona, emotional and humble. This man who came from being two sets down to win in five sets, had to take a chair as the Australian Open heads took up all the remaining coverage moments.

Kia, a corporate sponsor of the Australian Open and a sponsor of Rafa Nadal, should be furious that Nadal, who thanks KIA personally in his speech, was cut off from ESPN viewers. If I had a corporate seat at KIA, that would hit ESPN in the wallet. I'd pressure the ATP, ESPN, the USTA and other influential advocates to make sure the players' comments at least are carried to completion.

To me this says, and it's not a theme regulated to tennis coverage, but the product and services we pay for. Customers have taken a back seat to profit margins. ESPN just sent a message to all its tennis fans, that its commitment to them and their sport is limited to a clock.

I get that they just offered six hours of unbroken coverage, but they probably made a crap ton of cash with the sponsorships of the program. And then to cut it off liter-

ally eight minutes before it wrapped so they could get to a replay of a second-tier NCAA men's game is atrocious.

Now..it's not about the sport that's created this trillion dollar mega-network. It's totally about the money - unabashed, literally in your face. Sorry folks, we gotta go.

Yes, there are contract obligations, I get it, but sometimes you just make a decision. I think the NCAA or the West Coast Conference would understand and more importantly forgive, an eight minute delay in replaying the Saturday game. They are, after all, sports fans.

Let's not forget we are fans first. We choose to purchase a ticket or watch a game or buy a blanket or a new Vikings outfit for your stuffed bear for Christmas.

They market to us and they should, but sometimes integrity has to overcome the cha-ching. It's not even a cha-ching anymore, but a transition of digital 1s and 0s from one computer to another. It's silent. The fleecing of the consumer has no sound.

But on this Sunday morning from Melbourne, Rafa Nadal had sound to give. A message from one of the greatest champions of any sport. And in one quick moment ESPN silenced this freak of nature and told all tennis fans giving eyeballs to ESPN's produce - it's about us first, and about you when it's convenient.

For the first time in a long time I took a seat at a Bloodhound basketball game instead of roaming one baseline or another. I sat next to Kent and Wendy Bailey for the second half of the No. 1 Bloodhound boys basketball game and took notes.

"Is that your own system for notes," Wendy asked watching my scribbling as the game progressed.

"Necessity is the mother of invention," I said.

But about 1/3 of the stands on the other side of the gym were empty and this is the No. 1 team in the state and unanimous at that. No other team in FMHS history has held that lofty status. It's time to pack the gym. This is an exciting team to watch. Dayton Davis is a freak under the basket and brings excitement to almost every play. Miles Dear is a floor general, lives on a dime, is clutch, and as tough as they come.

Reiburn Turnbull can get hot at any time and is extremely creative with the ball. Landes Williams is an unheralded lockdown defender on the perimeter, All S-Tate Johnson never gives up on a play and can hit the 3. Phillip Goldie plays four inches bigger than he is and is a rip on a fast-break. Matt Hopper is a bench threat from deep.

Get out and see this squad. This really could be something special, but that's Beside the Point.

Chuck Vandenberg is editor and co-owner of Pen City Current and can be reached at editor@pencitycurrent.com.

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