

PEN CITY CURRENT

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

Thursday, March 3, 2022 | 8 pages | Volume 6 • Issue 50



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GRRWA officials explain rate hikes

Tipping fees, contract fees, scale fees to go up in Lee, Henry, and Van Buren counties

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – You need a lesson in geometry to understand the next 10 years of activity at the Great River Regional Waste Authority landfill.

There's way more to maintaining and expanding a landfill than dumping trash and covering it up. GRRWA director Austin Banks and landfill consultant Tim Buelow, a principal engineer with Evora Consulting out of Des Moines, sat with Pen City Current Wednesday to talk about the future of the landfill.

GRRWA board members recently made a move to increase fees charged at the landfill to start planning for expansion projects over the next seven to 10 years.

Banks told Lee County Supervisors two weeks ago that an increase of 250% or \$1.50 per household in unincorporated



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Officials with the Great River Regional Waste Authority are requesting across-the-board rate increases to help offset upcoming expansion and potential regulatory projects.

homes in the county was needed starting in July as part of the entities' Integrated Waste Services contracts. That fee is currently \$1 per home.

Those contracts are also in place within incorporated communities in the county.

See **LANDFILL**, page 2

IOWA NEWS

Miller joins investigation into TikTok

DES MOINES – Attorney General Tom Miller has joined a nationwide investigation into TikTok for providing and promoting its social media platform to children and young adults while use is associated with physical and mental health harms. Attorneys general nationwide are examining whether the company violated state consumer protection laws that put the public at risk.

AG Miller has long expressed concern about the negative impacts of social media platforms on Iowa's youngest residents.

"TikTok is just the latest social media platform to draw in children, potentially creating a negative effect on their physical, emotional, and mental well-being," Miller said. "As with other social media platforms, like Instagram, we must learn

See **ATTORNEY**, page 3

ALUM

Hawks' Day to take facilities job

DONNELLSON — The Central Lee Community School District has named a 1998 graduate as its next facility director.

Pending Board of Education approval, Jesse Day will serve as the next leader of the district's Facility Department. He will replace Chris Gray, who is retiring at the end of the school year.

"I am excited for Jesse to join our team. He brings a wealth of trades experience and has demonstrated leadership in numerous commercial construction projects," said Dr. Andy Crozier, Superintendent. "We got to see Jesse's skills firsthand during our construction project over the past few years and have been nothing but impressed with what he will bring to our district."

"I am excited to return to my alma mater and serve Central Lee's schools, students, families and community members as the next facility director," said Day. "I

See **HAWKS**, page 4

FEATURE

Central Lee girls plan Nepal trip with Schiller

Fundraisers planned for Friday and in April for scholarships

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

DONNELLSON – With COVID knocking down a lot of intercontinental travel over the past 18 to 24 months, former Central Lee teacher Ernie Schiller hasn't been able to get back to see the youth of Nepal.

But that comes to an end next month when Schiller will head back to the Asian mountains with three groups, including two Central Lee High School students.

Sydney Jones and Paisley

Grafton will join Schiller starting May 24, just one day after Jones graduates.

Schiller said the small country, nestled in the Himalayas between India and Tibet, is in worse shape culturally, then they were after a major 7.8 magnitude earthquake almost leveled the country in 2015.

"Nepal is in worse shape than when we started going in 2016. We were making progress in education. We were making progress in keeping kids in school and progress with the kids we had worked with so long that now they were in



Central Lee students Sydney Jones, left, and Paisley Grafton, right, flank former Hawk teacher Ernie Schiller on Tuesday at Central Lee High School. The two girls will join Schiller on his first trip back to Nepal since 2018.

college," he said.

"But they've had a lot of shut-downs. Worse than here. When the government shuts down

there you don't go anywhere. So kids taking college classes

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WEATHER

THU 03 MarOvercast, 42° F/ 33° F
FRI 04 MarLight Rain, 54° F/ 31° F
SAT 05 MarLight Rain, 70° F/ 51° F

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MEGA MILLIONS 03/01.....18 22 38 39 50, Mega Ball: 18 Megaplier: 2
PICK 3 03/01 MIDDAY.....819
PICK 3 03/01 EVENING.....757
PICK 4 03/01 MIDDAY.....4834
PICK 4 03/01 EVENING.....8195

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From the Front

Landfill capturing revenues for future expansion, regulation efforts

LANDFILL - Continued from Page 1

Most communities charge that fee as a pass through on utility bills. Fort Madison and West Point leaders indicated that increased fee will be added to water and utility bills.

The increase in the IWS contracts will generate about \$90,000 more annually from Lee County, and about \$84,000 each from Keokuk and Fort Madison annually. Figuring in the other smaller communities in the landfill area should generate close to \$325,000 per year in Lee County alone.

The landfill also services Van Buren County and rural Henry County, both of whom will also see similar increases. The board is also increasing tipping fees from \$44 to \$45.50 and will be reducing discounts to contract haulers. Minimum load rates increased in January from \$3.50 for up to 100 lbs. to \$5 for up to 200 lbs. in an attempt to reduce traffic load at the landfill scales, according to Buelow.

The tipping fees at the Great River Regional Waste Authority landfill and transfer stations in Fort Madison and Keokuk will be increasing by \$1.50 and minimum load prices at the scale will also be going up, to go along with a 250% increase in contracted rates with municipal governments. Officials say the increases are due to projected expansion costs and the costs of potential EPA mitigation efforts. Image courtesy of GRRWA.

Banks said the landfill is an attractive option for haulers in Missouri and Illinois because GRRWA rates are better than those states' so there is revenue being derived from that as well. But he said that dynamic can change as the economics of landfill operations change in those states. "Right now it's a good revenue source,"

he said.

Buelow said the landfill needs to keep attracting trash because that is revenue. He said when tonnage decreases, that eats into revenue, because operational costs remain the same even when tonnage goes down.

Currently, according to figures from the landfill, GRRWA has assets and liabilities totaling about \$9 million.

Buelow said the landfill also sets aside \$15,000 each month for equipment and \$15,000 each month for future cell construction. They also, under state mandate, have to deposit funds annually to pay for landfill closure and post-closure, which includes monitoring landfill cells that have been capped for an additional 30 years.

"Ordinarily those set asides would be enough, but the costs of building these cells is increasing. They've been setting aside money, but our projection is that at this point, for this period of time, it's not enough," he said.

"While they have money in the bank now it is expected to go down substantially due to the cell construction."

One of the major costs of building new cells is dirt removal. Banks said that costs about \$4.25 a cubic yard. Buelow said the next cell has about 800,000 cubic yards of dirt that will need to be removed by 2025. That alone would carry a price tag of about \$3.4 million. Other costs would include liners and compacted clay, and gas and leachate infrastructure.

The landfill can offset some of the dirt costs by offering it to private and public partnerships and entities to haul away. The landfill recently donated a large quantity of dirt to the City of Fort Madison for the new marina project. That dirt was hauled away in an agreement that kept costs down not only on the project, but also for the landfill.

Banks said the landfill is planning on adding another

cell in 2025 and a third new cell in addition to one opened in 2022, in 2030. Those three cells will ultimately cost the landfill about \$6.1 million to construct and provide close to two decades of additional space. However, the landfill has additional expansion capabilities to the north of the current cells and that gives GRRWA about 140 more years of landfill space.

The other factor involved in the increase is the projected cost that could come into play with the installation of infrastructure to capture methane. The EPA has recently reduced the levels of methane gas that can be emitted from landfills and Banks said if GRRWA doesn't hit that mark with the 2025 cell addition, they will almost assuredly exceed it in 2030.

Banks said that would require wells to be spaced out all over the landfill cells, not just the new cells.

According to data from Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2019, 15% of U.S. emissions of methane gas from municipal solid waste landfills.

"These would be wells with air powered pumps in them. They remove the leachate so the gas can be extracted. Keep in mind we can't emit any gas from our cap, essentially," he said.

Leachate is water that has percolated through a solid and leached out some of the sediment or particles.

The wells have to be piped together and then the blowers would vacuum the gas out and typically the gas is flared off, but Banks said depending on commodities at that time, there could be opportunities to capitalize on the gas if it made sense.

Buelow said the cost of additional infrastructure to generate power with the methane could be an additional million and then it boils down to what's more cost-effective - consuming it for use, or flaring it off.

Banks said even if the landfill did find a way to use the methane, they would still have to have a flare system in place as a

backup, according to EPA regs.

Buelow, who consults with more than 30 landfills, said there is way more to garbage and landfills than most people realize.

"They put their trash out by the curb and basically forget about it. Landfilling isn't just putting garbage in a hole," he said.

But he said GRRWA takes a 10-year approach to operations and budgets, when many landfills work year-to-year and adjust according to needs.

"Great River looks at a 10-year window and has a financial model that projects out to when cells have to be built, when equipment needs to be purchased, wage increases, and general cost increases," he said.

"Then, financially, they look at what revenue they have and typically the model starts with no changes in revenue," Buelow said.

"You talk about a 250% increase, maybe there could have been smaller increases over the years, but Great River has been able to hold it steady. Really that is a result of forward planning. But looking at the next 10 years, there's quite a few large costs to be covered."

He said every year GRRWA slides that 10-year model out another year. He said the inflation rate projection in GRRWA's current budget model is 2%, which he said may not be sufficient given the current climate.

"In the next few years, it looks pretty good, but if we weren't looking out 10 years we'd have a big surprise coming. We'd have another expensive cell to build and we could hit that new gas regulation and we need a new compactor. But that forward-looking window allows us to do some planning now that's smaller than having to react all at once," Buelow said.

"I commend Great River for looking that far out, because it requires strong planning."

Banks said he will also be explaining the rate increase to county officials who are meeting with him later this week.

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Obituaries/From the Front

VICKI K. DOTY

Vickie Kay Doty, 72, of Fort Madison, IA, passed away on Monday, February 28, 2022 at her home. She was born on April 12, 1949 in Bastrop, TX to Willard & Maxine (Hamilton) Herrmuth. She married Michael Lee Doty on February 21, 1970 in Fort Madison, IA. He preceded her in death on August 6, 2017.



DOTY

Vickie loved Jesus! She was deeply in love with her husband and loved and adored her children and grandchildren. She studied the Bible at her kitchen table each morning and was a witness for the Lord each day. Her passion was ministry and speaking into the lives of those around her, often taking their hands in grocery stores and parking lots to pray with them in their time of need. There was never a request for prayer denied when she was present.

Vickie is survived by: 1-daughter: Shone (Joe) Topham of Minot, ND; 1-son: Jackson (Tracy) Waters of Round Rock, TX; 4-grandchildren: Samantha, Alexis, Evan & Shae; 1-great granddaughter: Rylie; 2-brothers: Mike (Joan) Geers of Yukon, OK & Neal "Bronson" (Angie) Herrmuth of Nashville, TN. She was preceded in death by her parents and husband.

Cremation has been entrusted to the care of King-Lynk Funeral Home & Crematory. Friends may call after 2:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 10, 2022 with the family to receive friends from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. at King-Lynk Funeral Home & Crematory. A "Celebration of Vickie's Life" will be held at 10:00 a.m. on Friday, March 11, 2022 at King-Lynk Funeral Home & Crematory with Pastor Anna Sadler officiating. A memorial has been established for Victory Faith Church. Online condolences to Vickie's family may be left at www.kinglynk.com.

Eight states leading Tik Tok look

ATTORNEY - Continued from Page 1

more about how TikTok engages with children."

The investigation will look into the harms such usage causes to young users and what TikTok knew about those harms.

The investigation focuses, among other things, on the techniques used by TikTok to boost young user engagement, including increasing the duration of time spent on the platform and frequency of

engagement with the platform.

In May 2021, a bipartisan coalition of 44 attorneys general urged Facebook to abandon its plans to launch a version of Instagram for children under 13. In November 2021, attorneys general from across the country announced their investigation into Meta Platforms, Inc., formerly known as Facebook, for providing and promoting its social media platform Instagram to kids.

ROBERT RUIS

Robert "Zip" Ruis, 91, of Fort Madison, IA, passed away on Tuesday, March 1, 2022 at 7:25 PM at his home.

He was born on April 15, 1930 in Ft. Madison to Dario and Eustacia Moreno Ruis. On May 12, 1949 he married Geraldine Enriquez in Leavenworth, KS and she passed away on November 29, 1999. Zip retired from the Santa Fe Railroad and then from Silgan Containers in the shipping department after eighteen years of service. He was a member of Sacred Heart Church. Zip loved music, especially Mexican music and also was an avid dancer.



RUIS

Survivors include one son, Tony Ruis of Torrance, CA; four grandchildren, Renee Ruis, Nicole Ruis, Rachel Stephenson and Chase Stephenson; great grandchildren including Milla Guzman and Evangeline Johnston; one sister, Ophelia Garcia of Ft. Madison; several nieces and nephews, great nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents, wife, one daughter, Cynthia Angel; three brothers, one sister and one grandson.

Per his wishes, cremation has been entrusted to King-Lynk Funeral Home & Crematory. There will be no formal services at this time.

Online condolences may be left at www.kinglynk.com.

FRANKLIN L. EID

Franklin L. Eid, 79, of Fort Madison, IA, passed away at 2:29 p.m. on Tuesday, March 1, 2022 at Southeast Iowa Regional Medical Center in Fort Madison. He was



EID

born on July 15, 1942 in Fort Madison, IA to Leo & Bertha Denning Eid. He was a mechanic at the Scotts Company and enjoyed spending time with his grandchildren and great grandchildren. He loved being outdoors.

Frank is survived by: his wife: Patricia Eid of Fort Madison, IA; 3-daughters: Tracy Eid, Angela Eid & Yvette Eid all of Fort Madison, IA; 7-grandchildren; 13-great grandchildren; 3-sisters: Leora (Charles) Holland of Fort Madison, IA, Norene Eid of Fort Madison, IA & Sherri (Milton) Salladay of Fort Madison, IA and 2-brothers: John Eid of Fort Madison, IA & Walter (Marsha) Eid of Fort Madison, IA. He was preceded in death by: his parents, 1-grandson, Jackson, 3-brothers: Fred, Erv & William and 1-sister: Barbara Kempker.

Cremation has been entrusted to the care of King-Lynk Funeral Home & Crematory and no services are planned. Online condolences to Frank's family may be left at the King-Lynk Funeral Home & Crematory website: www.kinglynk.com.

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Current-Lee/From the Front



Courtesy photo

Sailfish state qualifiers front row left to right: Cohen Kokjohn, Westen Koering, Kian Koering, Connor Fountain and Katelyn Marshall. Back row Cooper Kokjohn, Max Dixon, Olivia Kraus, Brynlee Dixon and Keller Wagner. Below is the full Sailfish team, back row left to right: Max Dixon, Elliot Fountain, Eliza Wagner, Olivia Kraus, Brynlee Dixon, Bella Patton, Brian Hollingsworth, Cooper Kokjohn, Kian Koering, Connor Fountain, Keller Wagner, Westen Koering, Cohen Kokjohn, Laura Bruster and Katelyn Marshall.



CURRENT-LEE

Sam Lozano's FMAAA Art Exhibit – The reception for the March exhibit at Fort Madison Area Arts Association will be held March 4 from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. with viewings open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday throughout the month. The gallery is located at 825 Avenue G.

ISU Extension Gardening workshop – A 2-hour workshop on beginning gardening will take place on March 16 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Lee County Extension Office at 414 N. Main in Donnellson. Contact Whitney Weisinger at 319-835-5116 for more information. Registration required by March 10 and the event is free to Lee County residents, and \$10 for non residents.

United Way of the Great River Region Golf Outing – This year's event is set for Friday, May 6 with a noon shotgun start. Contact the UWGRR at 319-524-5404 or director@unitedwaygrr.org for more information.

Getting Ahead Open House Meet & Greet – Come meet the graduates of Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin' by World. Talk with graduates and learn what the program has done for them, see what Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin' by World can do for you, learn how you can become involved. Thursday, March 3, 6-8pm, First Lutheran Church, 1101 Blondeau, Keokuk. Refreshments will be served.

Gray retiring from CL after 45 years

HAWKS - Continued from Page 1

truly enjoyed my time here as a student and have had the opportunity to work with district staff in a number of ways recently. I look forward to making this transition and moving into this leadership role in Central Lee."

Gray has worked for Central Lee for 45 years and has made numerous positive contributions to the district's facilities. He will work closely with Day for the next three months to help with the transition.

"I am very appreciative of the service Mr. Gray has provided to our school district over the years," Dr. Crozier said. "It is rare to know anyone who has committed 45 years to a single institution. Chris has been such a strong asset to this district, and we will certainly miss him. We are excited for him to enjoy his other interests in life during retirement."

Day will officially begin his duties Friday, April 1. He will assume sole responsibility of the facility director position on July 1.

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JOURNEYMAN LINEMAN

The West Point Municipal Utility System has an immediate opening for a Journeyman Line Mechanic. Applicants must have a strong journeyman rating and must be able to perform all duties with regard to overhead and underground electric line construction.

Must be willing and capable to work on water distribution maintenance and repair and to be or become Grade 1 water distribution certified. Must live or be willing to live within 15 minutes of West Point, comply with on-call requirements and possess and comply with Iowa CDL regulations.

We offer a comprehensive benefit plan including health and dental coverage, plus IPERS retirement. Pre-employment physical and drug screening will be required.

Send a confidential resume to
West Point Utility System
313 5th Street
P.O. Box 69
West Point, IA. 52656
or to
cityofwestpointiowa@gmail.com
No phone calls, please

NOTICE OF JOB OPENING

**Legal Secretary
Lee County
Attorney's Office
Fort Madison, Iowa**

Lee County Attorney's office has an immediate opening for one full-time (40 hours per week) Legal Secretary Position. Secretarial and legal experience is strongly preferred, but not required.

The position's successful applicant is preferred (but not required) to have the following:

1. Completion of some college level administrative support courses or an equivalent combination of training and experience.
2. Knowledge of legal terminology, legal formatting and legal forms.
3. Knowledge of modern office practices, procedures and equipment.
4. Ability to prepare accurate and timely documents, correspondence
5. Knowledge of Electronic Document Management System (EDMS).
6. Ability to learn and/or operate the County Attorney's Office Computer programs.
7. Ability to use computer programs. For example: Microsoft Outlook, Word and Excel.
8. Ability to understand and follow written and oral instructions.
9. Ability to work in a fast-paced environment
10. Ability to multi-task
11. Ability to work well and communicate with others.

The position is represented by the Public Professional & Maintenance Employees Local No. 2003, IUPAT. The starting wage is \$17.17 per hour. The County offers an excellent benefits package.

The deadline for resumes is Wednesday, March 9, 2022, at 4:30 p.m.

Please send resume to
Ross Braden
710 Avenue F
Fort Madison, IA 52627
or by e-mail to
rbraden@leecounty.org

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**PUBLIC NOTICE
MONTROSE CITY
COUNCIL MEETING
MARCH 3, 2022
7:00 P.M.
REGULAR MEETING
& PUBLIC HEARING
MONTROSE CITY HALL
AGENDA**

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC: The Mayor and City Council welcome comments from the public during discussion. If you wish to speak, please step up to the Council table, state your name and address for the record and limit the time used to

HELP WANTED

The Fort Madison Family YMCA Learning Centers are seeking candidates to fill childcare provider positions at our Donnellson, Iowa day-care centers.

Ideal candidates enjoy working with children and have a fun, loving personality.

- Full time Monday through Friday
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- Retirement is available after two consecutive years of full time employment
- 2 years experience in childcare a plus, but not required

WAGES & TEACH compensation is available after 6 months employment with our organization. Required certifications are: CPR/First Aid, Mandatory Reporter, Universal Precautions, and additional training/certifications. *ALL CERTIFICATIONS ARE REIMBURSED

Mandatory background checks are performed prior to hire.

Interested candidates can apply online at fortmadison.org, contact Anna Dobson at 319-835-3256 or email anna.dobson@fortmadison.org.



present your remarks to five minutes in order that others may be given the opportunity to speak. The normal process on any particular agenda item is that the motion is placed on the floor, input is received from the audience, the Council is given an opportunity to comment on the issue or respond to the audience concerns, and the vote is taken. On ordinances, there is time provided for public input at the time of the first reading. In consideration of all, if you have a cell phone, please turn it off or put it on silent ring.

CALL TO ORDER.

HELP WANTED

**LEE COUNTY
SECONDARY ROADS
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ROAD MAINTENANCE
WORKER II**

Lee County is taking applications for a Road Maintenance Worker II, to work at the West Point Maintenance Shop. Duties will include the operation of light and heavy equipment and trucks to perform road maintenance and construction projects, occasionally plowing snow, and the performance of manual labor as required. Requires a high school graduate or G.E.D. equivalent and must possess a valid Class A commercial driver's license with air brake and tanker endorsements. Wage range is \$20.43 to \$24.86.

Lee County provides equal opportunity in employment to all persons regardless of age, race, creed, color, sex, national origin, religion or disability.

For a job description and to apply, download an application from our county website, www.leecounty.org or you can pick an application up at the Engineer's office and return your completed application along with a resume to Lee County Engineer, P.O. Box 158, Fort Madison, Iowa 52627, or email it to bhull@leecounty.org and copy it to shartson@leecounty.org Applications will be accepted until 4 p.m. on March 11, 2022.

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



PUBLIC NOTICES

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.

WELCOME GUESTS.

CONSENT AGENDA: All items listed under the Consent Agenda will be enacted by one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a request is made prior to the time the Council members vote on the motion.

1. Approve Agenda as written.
2. Approve February 3, 2022 Regular Meeting Minutes as submitted.
3. Approve February 2022 Treasurer's Report as presented.
4. Approve Payment of Claims.

PUBLIC FORUM: This is a time set aside for comments from the public on topics of City business other than those listed on this agenda. Please understand that the Council is not likely to take any action on your comments at this meeting due to requirements of the Open Meetings Law, but may do so at a future meetings. The Mayor and City Council welcome comments from

HELP WANTED

**LIBRARY
ASSISTANT
PART-TIME**

Fort Madison Public Library

The Fort Madison Public Library is seeking a part time (26 hours/week) library assistant. Tasks will include assisting library patrons at the circulation desk, managing books by mail and interlibrary loan services, compiling monthly statistics, social media and publicity. Requirements include high school graduate or equivalent and computer skills. Preference will be given to applicants with previous library and/or public relations experience. Applicants are also required to live in the state of Iowa. Working hours include Thursday evenings and every fourth Saturday. Applications are available at the Fort Madison Public Library. Applications will be taken until the job is filled. Call Sarah Clendinning at (319) 372-5721 if you have any questions.



the public; however, at no time is it appropriate to use profane, obscene, or slanderous language. The Mayor may limit each speaker to five minutes.

EMPLOYEE COMMENTS:

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Public Safety, General Government & Enterprise, Culture & Recreation, Public Works – Sewer Treatment Plant Update; Economic & Community Development.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. Open Public Hearing regarding City's Final FY2023 City Budget.
2. Close Public Hearing.
3. Approve Resolution 4-2022, a Resolution approving the FY2023 City Budget. ROLL CALL VOTE.
4. Mayoral Appointment of Ron Dinwiddie to head the Montrose Fireworks Commission.
5. Approve doors for Montrose gym.
6. Discuss and consider ARPA spending.
7. Discuss accepting property from Merschman.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Kevin Merschman, wants to put an RV park on 1st and Water Streets.
2. Approve Two Rivers Insurance, General Liability Insurance renewal.
3. Approve setting date for Spring Cleanup.
4. Discuss permits for special ATV/UTV events.
5. Discuss and consider changing Council meeting time.

MAYOR AND COUNCIL COMMENTS AND FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS.

ADJOURNMENT:

*Please note that this agenda may be changed up to 24 hours before the meeting time as provided by Section 21,4(2). Code of Iowa.

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PEN CITY CURRENT
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From the Front

Girls host trivia night set for Friday in Donnellson

NEPAL - Continued from Page 1

were suspended and the kids that were taking classes in the mountains, it just stopped. They don't have computers and they can't go online."

Schiller had plans to go back in 2019 and 2020 but both got derailed by the pandemic. Jones had planned to go to the country with Schiller two previous times, but couldn't get there because of the cancellations.

Jones said she's very excited to be going and is just looking forward to being part of integrating with the culture and people.

"I've been waiting two years now," she said. "Helping. I think that's the big motivator for me. I've always had the drive to help other people."

The senior will be entering college in the fall where she wants to major in cyber security engineering, again to assist others.

"After seeing (Schiller's) presentation and all he's done to help, it made me want to go, too. The first time I saw one of his presentations was when I was in elementary school," Jones said.

Grafton said being a part of something bigger is the drive for her.

"I'm excited because I know that I'm going to be a part of something. I just want to be there and be a part of it all," she said.

Schiller said both girls have to bring at least 100 lbs. of supplies each. In addition, they are working toward raising funds to provide educational funding for the kids in the country.

"We've been trying to gather a bunch of art materials - markers, crayons, colored pencils, paint brushes. We've



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg

Junior Paisley Grafton, left, and Sydney Jones, center, talk with Ernie Schiller about upcoming plans for a trip to Nepal in southern Asia. Schiller leaves for the trip in April, while the two girls will depart May 24 to help with youth education in the ravaged country.

reached out to art centers and they are sharing our information. And I just reached out to Montrose Health Center and they are getting us some shampoo, conditioner and toiletries," Grafton said.

Jones said The Madison donated some supplies for the trip last year that included toothpaste and deodorant.

Schiller said there are no dentists in the area so toothaches can become major health issues up to and including death. He said the youth there spend 10 minutes brushing their teeth three times a day.

The pandemic took a heavy toll on the Nepalese culture.

Schiller said 70% of the population is engaged in tourism and, when the pandemic shut everything down, there was no income.

"You're either a Sherpa, or a guide, work in a hotel or farm tomatoes or lettuce for tourists, so during that time, 70% were unemployed.

"In early 2020 we found out 10,000 Nepalese committed suicide because they couldn't provide for their families...all within two months."

The two girls leave from Chicago and fly to Abu Dabi and then to Kathmandu, but before they go, they still have some fundraising to do.

On Friday, a music trivia night is being held at the Donnellson Community Room beginning at 7:30 p.m. Central Lee elementary principal Heather Fuger will emcee the event. Tables are \$100 for up to eight people with children and adults alike invited. There will be prizes and adult beverages as part of the night's activities.

On April 1, the girls are hosting an adult prom with the assistance of Kingsley Inn's Chi Eastin.

"She's been really helpful in setting this up and helping us market it," Jones said.

The event includes a formal prom with beverages provided by River Rocks and DJ services from Thin Blue Line Productions. The after-prom will be a dessert auction.

All the funds will be used for scholarships for the Nepalese students.

Schiller's Rebuild Nepal Education Foundation is a non-governmental non-profit with more than 60 volunteers from around the world.

When the pandemic shut operations down, Schiller said the volunteers went to work putting together food packages that included 50 lbs. of rice, 20 lbs. of beans or lentils, sunflower oil, and spices. The packages would feed a family of four for a month - and were assembled at a cost of \$19.88 per package.

"They would throw a garlic clove, or tomato or onion in there and could eat for a month," he said.

Vaccines were donated from China, India, and other countries which allowed the population to get vaccinated quicker than most countries.

Jones said she has no preconceived expectations about the trip.

"It's gotten even crazier in that half of the world, so I honestly don't know what to expect," she said.

Paisley, who made hand-created signs to help raise funds over the holidays, said she's energized about bringing art to the youth there.

"We're going to bring all the arts to Nepal," she said with a smile.

Schiller said that would probably include some dancing on a dusty floor somewhere on the side of a mountain.

"They're going to teach art, which is a good thing, and they will help host Nepal's 2nd art exhibition," Schiller said.

The art exhibit will include prizes for the artists and some will be brought back and displayed locally. Schiller did a similar shared exhibit during a previous visit to the country.

Those looking for additional information can connect with Schiller at the group's Facebook page at by searching Rebuild Nepal Education Foundation.



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