

# PEN CITY CURRENT

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Thursday, April 16, 2020 | 6 pages | Volume 4 • Issue 79



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## Dig may have found part of Fort



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg

Claire Nelson, left, and Peter Hutchison, both of St. Paul and part of Bear Creek Archeology, sift through sediment pulled away from a couple of timbers found under the surface of a highway construction project in Fort Madison Wednesday.

### GUARD HOUSE: Timbers may be part of original Fort's guard house

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – Archeologists digging through the subsurface of the city's Hwy. 61 rehab project have stumbled upon some timbers that have their curiosity.

Lowell Blikre, an assistant director with Bear Creek Archeology, of Cresco, Iowa, said Wednesday that crews were working to unearth two sections of timbers with iron rods protruding from them.

Blikre said he's not sure what they are, but he has to treat them as if they are part of the original fort.

"We haven't absolutely confirmed this is fort stuff, but we have to treat it as though it is because we haven't found anything to indicate it isn't either," Blikre said Wednesday afternoon.

The timbers were discovered in locations where the new sewer line is going to go on the south side of the construction just past the west side of the former Sheaffer building.

Blikre said now his team of 11 scientists are doing a more controlled excavation and are screening the sediment around the timbers.

See FORT, page 2

### COVID-19 UPDATE

## IDPH may help rural areas with contact tracing

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

JOHNSTON – Officials with the Iowa Department of Public Health have indicated rural parts of the state may get help in contact tracing efforts associated with the COVID-19 outbreak.

During Gov. Kim Reynolds daily press conference Wednesday, IDPH Deputy Director Sarah Reisetter told pool reporters that officials realize some areas of the state have limited staffing and resources to do tracing and the state is in the process of trying to provide some help.

"Our local public health partners are

fantastic, but in a lot of cases they have limited resources and staffing," Reisetter said. "We're looking at standing up additional contact tracing teams through the state for rural areas with limited access."

Reynolds said the tracing is a critical

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### UNEMPLOYMENT

## Taylor says jobless claims charges should stay with state

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY – State Sen. Rich Taylor said the state should not start charging unemployment claims back to employers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of a question-and-answer session sponsored by Lee County Economic Development Group on Tuesday afternoon, Taylor, along with Iowa WORKS' Michael Witt, development division administrator for southeast Iowa, fielded questions for about an hour on issues mainly associated with the COVID-19 out-

break.



TAYLOR

Iowa Workforce Development Director Beth Townsend said last week that the state Unemployment Trust Fund had to be protected and officials were going to allow the fund to dip to \$850 million before starting to charge unemployment back to employers.

Taylor said he thinks that's a bad move in light of the current pressure on small businesses in Iowa.

"Originally, as a legislature, we planned on not allowing that to happen. I was in a conversation yesterday with my caucus where we said we are going to continue to support that position, that employers would not be charged for this," Taylor said.

"We did get a lot of extra funding from the federal government to take care of these claims and at this point, I don't see any reason why we would go back on our word on that."

He encouraged residents to write letters to the Senate leadership in support of the state to sticking to their word on that issue.

Witt said the state is obviously

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### WEATHER

THU 16 Apr.....Heavy Snow, 36.1° F / 33.6° F  
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## From the Front

# Find could delay project

**FORT** - Continued from Page 1



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Claire Nelson of St. Paul gently pulls up sediment around several timbers, center, that have an iron rod protruding from one. Lowell Blikre, the leader of the 11-man team, said the timbers could be part of the original fort and will take the pieces for analysis.

“From hand probing I can see there is another set of timbers below these,” he said. “So were taking the associated artifacts back and we’ll analyze it.”

He said the metal rods seem to run through the timbers and may serve as fasteners for the timbers.

“We’ll expose them, go around the sides and find out how low they go, and what they are lying on so we can figure out what their context is,” he said.

He said the subsurface level dropped fairly quickly where the timbers were found and that was curious to him. He said he was surprised to find the timbers.

“This could be the cellar for the guard house, but we just don’t have enough data yet, so we have to treat it as though it’s part of the fort right now.”

He said the firm still has other trenches to dig to the east of where crews are meticulously screening soil. Using hand tools, workers are digging around the timbers and putting the sediment in buckets and then using stand-up screens to sift through for other possible finds.

Blikre said Bear Creek has a five-week window in the contract, which ends at the end of next week.

“That’s our contract, but it will depend on what happens. There are things that could trigger additional searches, but we’re really trying to stick with the contract and the budget for the city.

The city is paying for the work through its contract with HR Green of Cedar Rapids, who subcontracted with Bear Creek to do the archeological work.

“We don’t want to be a cost overrun on this. We want to get the information we need, find out what’s here, and get out of the way,” Blikre said.

Blikre said a lot of familiar corroded metal and glass have been found, but he did find some beef cattle bones in some of the deeper trench digs associated with the sewer line.

City Manager David Varley said he had heard they found a piece of timber earlier but discarded it.

“This is the first I’m hearing about these, so I don’t know. It could be from the fort or it could be from an old house or something from the city. We just don’t know. They have a guy there that will take it back and analyze it,” he said.

Varley said if the finds are of historical value then there could be some delays in the project if archeologists have to expand on the dig to locate any additional structure.

Blikre said he didn’t expect to find anything from the ground surface of the fort, because repeated road projects have scraped that surface away, but the sewer line work is deeper than the other projects have gone and that’s where the timbers were discovered.

“Right now all we’re looking for is subterranean features like cellars, outhouses and things like that.”

Andy Andrews of the North Lee County Historical Society said he wasn’t surprised by the find.

“Not really, we knew there was still a lot of stuff buried under that highway. And there’s more under the highway, it’s just how much time they have to do the work,” Andrews said.

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## From the Front

# Unemployed should see federal benefit soon

**IWD** - Continued from Page 1

looking at protecting its Unemployment Trust Fund.

“I don’t know what the details were of that statement, but obviously they are looking to protect that fund,” he said.

Taylor also said he believes the state is doing a pretty good job and protecting small businesses and employees during this unprecedented time and said we need to get behind Gov. Kim Reynolds and the state’s course of action.

He said the state could probably go a little further in efforts to keep people isolated from one another, but said these are difficult times and he wouldn’t want to be in the Governor’s shoes.

“I actually think we’re doing a pretty good job. I think we could probably go a little further and it seems like daily the governors is going a little further. We’re not going to stop this virus,” Taylor said.

“These shelter-in-places won’t get rid of this virus, but hopefully we can slow it and hopefully we won’t get overwhelmed with it. In my opinion were doing a pretty fair job in Iowa. I would hate to be the governor right now and have to make these life and death decisions. It has to be weighing heavily on her conscience, I know it would be on mine.”

When pressed about defining an essential business, Taylor said it’s his understanding that an essential business is any business needed to sustain life as we know it.

But he said a lot of businesses are connected to those essential businesses behind the scenes and may be required to be open.

“A lot of times it has something to do with food chain or health care and it could be a behind-the-scenes thing. Farms need to take care of the fields and that may require a part store be open. People have emailed me with connections I didn’t even understand,” he said.

Taylor said it’s his understanding that all the school districts in his county with the exception of some Washington County schools are able to complete the school year with online distance learning without going into the summer.

Witt spent a substantial amount of time addressing questions of unemployment and the federal government’s \$600 weekly supplemental unemployment insurance program.

Witt said workforce development officials went to work quickly to get the program rolling, but there were some delays in getting guidance in interpreting the CARES Act benefits.

“Anyone drawing a claim whether an Iowa claim, a pandemic claim or other claim, is eligible,” Witt said. “They don’t have to do anything other than continue to report weekly with any earnings. That \$600 will come to them automatically.”

He said the program got running in just over a week and it’s going to take a little bit of time before everyone starts to see the extra funds, but they will be paid back to the date they were eligi-

ble for the funds, which was the week beginning March 29. Payments currently will stop on the week ending July 25.

“Since we stood this up in just a week, it’s going to take a little bit before everyone starts to see it,” Witt said.

He said payments should start appearing by Thursday or Friday of this week.

Witt also cautioned employees about voluntary self isolation at jobs where they are still required to show up. He said residents concerned with those situations should work with their employers and contact state hotlines for direction.

He said they should not however stay home and risk losing their jobs.

Witt said voluntary separation would likely disqualify individuals from both unemployment and the \$600 federal supplement under the

CARES Act.

Taylor said the legislative session still has 35 to 40 days left in the session and he hopes to get back to work as soon as possible, but said April 30 now seems a bit aggressive.

“I don’t think it will be April 30, I think this will go on longer than that,” he said of the suspended session.

Taylor also said the pandemic has put a light on the poor access to broadband in rural Iowa. The federal government has been reallocating funds to help address some of the issues, but Taylor said the state could be doing more as well.

“I had a bill to add \$15 million to our broadband funding. We did pass a bill in the Senate that added \$5 million which is better than what we had but it’s not near enough,” Taylor said.

“I think we should be investing \$50 million a year. But I do think this will wake a lot of people up. I think it shows how bad our broadband

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# Obituaries/Classifieds

## OBITUARIES

### JAY F. COOK

Jay Frank Cook, 67, of Keokuk, IA died Monday, April 13, 2020 at his home. Jay was born on September 3, 1952 to Frank and Marcia (Weber) Cook. He graduated from Keokuk High School in 1971.

On December 22, 1973 he married Drucilla A. Ricker in Keokuk.

Jay had worked at Midwest Carbide and Pinnacle Foods.



COOK

He was a member of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, Keokuk Lodge #106.

Jay enjoyed life and loved to have a good time. Doug Nickel and Mark Gates were his lifelong friends. Jay was the first bowler at the Arrowhead Bowl to have a perfect 300 game. Besides bowling he enjoyed playing Euchre, watching the St. Louis Cardinals and the Iowa Hawkeyes, collecting baseball cards and spending time with his family. Jay always had a positive look on life and took every moment

to enjoy it

Jay is survived by his wife, Dru, his greatest joys, his son Ryan (Margaret) Cook, his daughter Cara (Brad) Johnson and his grandchildren Jake Cook, Megan Cook, Rylee Johnson and Jaelyn Johnson all of Keokuk. He is also survived by his sister Cindy Hoewing and daughter Gretchen, sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law, Denice (Mike) Samuels, Dawn (Jeff) Marlin, Penny (Craig) Williams, and Patrick Ricker along with several nephews, nieces, aunts, and uncles.

He was preceded in death by his father, mother, and sister-in-law, Diana Hester.

Due to the current COVID-19 situation and the restriction for public gatherings, a Celebration of Jay's life will be held at a later date at The Elks Lodge BPOE #106.

Memorials may be made to the Iowa Chapter of the ALS Association or to Lee County Hospice.

The Vigen Memorial Home in Keokuk is assisting the family with arrangements.

On-line condolences may be sent to the family at [www.vigenmemorialhome.com](http://www.vigenmemorialhome.com).

## OBITUARIES

### MARVIN RICHARDSON

Marvin "Dale" Richardson, 77, of Hamilton passed away Thursday, April 9, 2020 at the Montebello Healthcare Center in Hamilton, IL.

He was born June 15, 1942 in Ida Grove, IA the son of Marvin and Beatrice Richardson. On March 24, 1963 he was united in marriage to Sally Lee Mason in Burlington. She survives.



RICHARDSON

He is also survived by his son, Brad (Jennifer) Richardson of Carthage, five grandchildren, Mya (Grant) Hellenthal, Macy, Wren, Harper and Brilynn Richardson and a cousin, Jim (Pat) Meier of Burlington.

He was preceded in death by his parents, a brother in infancy and a son, Brian Richardson.

Dale worked as an accountant and computer programmer at Burlington Bank and Trust in Burlington, Iowa Ammunition Plant in Middelton, Morse Rubber and Atmos Energy in Keokuk. Dale and Sally's married life took them from West Burlington to Danville then to Hamilton, IL. In 1992, Dale was transferred to Olathe, Kansas where he also worked for Atmos Energy. Six years later he transferred to Tennessee. In 1995, Dale took early retirement and moved back to Hamilton to be closer to family and friends.

After moving back to Hamilton, Dale took a job at Danville Telephone in Danville, IA where he worked for ten years before he retired.

Dale was on the Hamilton City Council for thirty years and a member of the Hamilton United Methodist Church where he was an adult Sunday school teacher.

Dale enjoyed watching football especially the Iowa Hawkeyes, and Kansas City Chiefs. He loved watching golf and basketball. He also enjoyed reading the newspaper especially the Daily Gate City where his son Brian worked. He had a great love of computers. He also enjoyed bird watching and listening to music with his favorite song being "Dust in the Wind."

Due to the current COVID-19 situation and the restriction for public gatherings there will be no public services or visitation at this time.

A Celebration of Dale's life for family and friends will be held at a later date.

Memorials may be made to the United Methodist Church in Hamilton.

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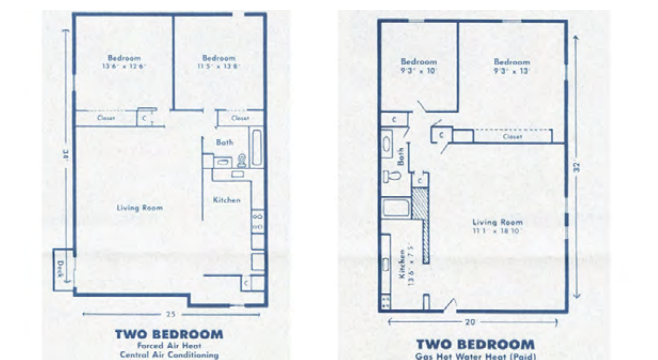
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## From the Front

# State sending 900 more tests to Tyson Foods facility

**UPDATE** - Continued from Page 1

component in helping identify hot spots across the state and target additional mitigation efforts where needed.

Reynolds said she would try to have more information on that on Thursday and would probably be including staffing from the Iowa Department of Human Services in forming some of those tracing teams.

Lee County Health Department Administrator Michele Ross said contact tracing does not currently include tracing a positive persons complete footsteps.

“Our contact tracing does not include determining every place a person has been prior to when they become ill,” Ross said Monday.

“It includes working with a case and identifying that person’s close household contacts and continuing the

investigation and education/instructions for isolation. We will not be notifying the public on any other details.”

Reynolds said an additional 900 tests are being sent to Columbus Junction to test more employees at the Tyson Foods plant located in the Louisa County town. She said despite the 86 positives confirmed in Sunday testing, Region 5 of the state’s Regional Medical Coordination Centers, still has an assessment rating of 8, the same rating it had last week.

Reisetter explained that the number of cases are just one factor in determining the assessment score.

“The other is the rate of hospitalization and we would need to see an increase in that. An increase in cases alone won’t cause that number to go up,” she said.

With Wednesday’s update, the state had 96 new positive cases bringing the state’s total to just under 2,000 at 1,995.

No additional counties reported a first positive so the state still has positive tests in 82 of 99 counties.

The state had 407 negative tests yesterday and claims 908 individuals have recovered. There were four additional deaths in the state bringing the total to 53.

Reynolds said the IDPH has confirmed an additional outbreak at a long-term care facility in Muscatine County. Approximately 10% of all positive cases and 49% of the state’s deaths are associated with long-term care centers.

Lee County currently has two confirmed positives in the 61-80 range and no deaths. Henry County has 22 confirmed cases and one death. Des Moines County has seen seven confirmed cases and no deaths. Van Buren has five confirmed cases and Jefferson has four cases with neither county having a death.

Reynolds said the state is still expecting a peak in the next two to three weeks and the additional testing at meat packing facilities and long-term care centers could show an increase in positives in the near future, the state is still balancing metrics for mitigation, with metrics for reopening the state.

“Everybody should be making plans because at some point as we base decisions on data, we want to open up this economy,” Reynolds said.

“In northwest Iowa right now the numbers are really low and we’ll take a look at what it looks like up there, and what the criteria is, and start to apply that throughout the state.”

Reynolds said the state wants to get things up and going, but he said they have to do it responsibly and be cautious about moving forward.

“We don’t want to just flip the light switch and then have another spike happen in a week. that’s not going to be beneficial to anybody.”

Reisetter said other states are showing a four to six weeks from the time they put aggressive efforts in place.

“Our positive cases are leveling off, but that will change as we do targeted testing,” she said.

“That could increase our case counts, but as we do more testing we’ll find positives. But those might not be cases we would have otherwise found if they hadn’t gone to their doctors.”

Reisetter called that “surveillance-type testing” which is testing people who might not be showing symptoms otherwise, and might not appear ill.

“The reason we haven’t done widespread surveillance testing in our state is because we simply haven’t had the supplies to do that.”

Reisetter’s comments prompted Reynolds to take back the podium to clarify that surveillance testing is a piece of the picture, and the state hopes to do more of that and is anxious to update Iowans. But she said that doesn’t reflect everything.

“It’s an important part of the equation, but doesn’t reflect everything that’s happening.”

Reynolds said statistically 1 in every 160 Iowans has been tested.

“We can do more and we should do more, but I think that’s pretty good,” she said. “We’re making progress and testing more and we have been somewhat limited at the State Hygienic Lab, but we’re opening that up more.”

The lab currently has more than 3,000 tests available as of Tuesday.



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