

PEN CITY CURRENT

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Sunday, March 22, 2020 | 5 pages | Volume 4 • Issue 61



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Ambulance crisis

SATURDAY MEETING: City fire chiefs looking at operating under cities' licenses

BY **CHUCK VANDENBERG**
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY – Officials throughout Lee County met in an emergency joint teleconference on Saturday afternoon to discuss the dire situation of the Lee County Emergency Medical Services.

The ambulance service is facing disabling financial pressure highlighted by a \$36,000 infusion from the county on Friday just to meet payroll through March. (See story below.)

The meeting was attended by representatives of the ambulance service, two Lee County Board of Supervisors, Keokuk and Fort Madison mayors, Lee County Sheriff Stacy Weber, the fire chiefs of both city's and other elected officials.

"This has become a crisis and this industry has reached a crisis," said Fort Madison Mayor Matt Mohrfeld.

"Fort Madison and Keokuk have offered some resources of personnel to look into options to keep this going, and some of the smaller cities have had helpful participation."

Mohrfeld said no city has offered to contribute funds to the operation at this point. He said the efforts are focusing on determining what the service will look like going forward.

Lee County Supervisor Gary Folluo said Fort Madison Fire Chief Joey Herren and Keokuk Fire Chief Gabe Rose are both looking into whether the service can be operated under those respective

See **AMBULANCE**, page 5

CORONAVIRUS

Henry County man among 23 new Iowa positives

DES MOINES – A Henry County man is one of 23 newly identified positive cases of COVID-19 in Iowa, according to a release Saturday from the Iowa Department of Public Health.

According to the release, there have been a total of 68 positive cases in Iowa. To date, there have been 1,049 negative tests conducted at the State Hygienic Lab. The locations and age ranges of the 23 individuals include:

- Allamakee County, 1 middle age adult (41-60 years), 1 older adult (61-80 years)
- Black Hawk County, 1 middle age adult (41-60 years), 1 elderly (81 years or older)
- Dubuque County, 1 older adult (61-80 years)
- Fayette County, 1 adult (18-40 years)
- Henry County, 1 adult (18-40 years)
- Johnson County, 3 adults (18-40 years), 1 middle age adult (41-60 years), 1 older adult (61-80 years)
- Linn County, 2 adults (18-40 years), 1 middle age adult (41-60 years)
- Muscatine County, 1 middle age adult (41-60 years)
- Polk County, 2 middle age adults (41-60 years), 2 older adults (61-80 years)
- Pottawattamie County, 1 middle age adult (41-60 years)
- Story County, 1 adult (18-40 years)
- Washington County, 1 middle age adult (41-60 years)

A status report of monitoring and testing of COVID19 in Iowa is provided by IDPH and can be found here. In addition, a public hotline has been established for Iowans with questions about COVID-19. The line is available 24/7 by calling 2-1-1 or 1-800-244-7431

Iowans who have traveled recently for business or spring break vacations, whether internationally or domestically outside of Iowa, should strongly consider self-isolating for 14 days. This will support Iowa's ongoing efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, and limit the introduction of the virus from other points of travel.

Iowa has implemented many provisions to emphasize social distancing, and self-isolation after travel is another measure we can take to slow the spread of the virus and avoid quickly overburdening our healthcare system.

Gov. Reynolds will hold a press conference on Sun., March 22 at 2:30 p.m. The press conference will be livestreamed and posted in full on Governor Reynolds' Facebook Page.

AMBULANCE

Supervisors give \$36K to cover EMS payroll

BY **CHUCK VANDENBERG**
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY – Lee County Emergency Medical Services got a payroll infusion from the county on Friday after an emergency teleconference of the Lee County Board of Supervisors.

Lee County Auditor Denise Fraise said the county received a letter from the ambulance service indicating they were short \$38,539 in payroll and health benefit payments for March, and according to their contract with the county, needed to inform the county of that situation.

By a unanimous vote, the board approved that

See **PAYROLL**, page 2



Thumbs up, dude

Students at the Creative Edge Child Care made cards for the residents at The Kensington, Sunnybrook, and The Madison after owner Amy Hawthorne read on Facebook that residents were having Cabin Fever and wanted cards, photos, etc. So she had all her students make a card for the residents this week.

Courtesy photo

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WEATHER

SUN 22 Mar.....Snow, 35.0° F/ 33.0° F
 MON 23 Mar.....Overcast, 47.4° F/ 45.4° F
 TUE 24 Mar.....Heavy Rain, 46.7° F/ 41.0° F

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 PICK 3 03/20 EVENING.....8 2 2
 PICK 4 03/20 MIDDAY5 3 2 5
 PICK 4 03/20 EVENING.....1 4 3 1

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Obituaries/From the Front

More talks expected on future of Lee County EMS

PAYROLL - Continued from Page 1

amount, but Fraise said that would only get the ambulance service caught up for the next week.

Board Chairman Ron Fedler said he wants the city's of Keokuk and Fort Madison involved in the conversation, and said both mayors Tom Richardson and Matt Mohrfeld have indicated they are willing to sit on a committee immediately to look at how to keep the service going until the new contract kicks in July 1.

The county has already committed an additional \$50,000 to the ambulance service in the next budget.

Supervisor Gary Folluo said the letter indicated the ambulance service had writeoffs that

surpassed more than half a million in medicaid services in 2019.

"We have to have some really firm conversations and a game plan in place by Monday. Next Friday they will have another payroll due," Folluo said.

"We've got a lot of work to do, but it's our obligation to keep an ambulance service for our citizens. Keep in mind that we do have a contract with LCEMS until June 30."

Folluo also said the state doesn't consider ambulance services as essential services under state code.

Lee County Emergency Management Agency coordinator Steve Cirinna said he's been told if

the services were considered essential they would have to be funded and that could be what's holding legislation up.

Because the state doesn't consider the services essential, the county can't tax for the service as a separate line item, and the supplemental funding has to come from the county's general fund

"If it's an essential service its a separate tax line that would allows us to get more money. We're putting quite a bit in, but the ambulance service needs a lot of money," Larkin said.

Supervisor Matt Pflug asked how long the county can continue to offset the shortfalls.

"How long can we continue this, (money) isn't falling out of the sky by any means. We're not talking about small money here, but I understand we have to have an ambulance service, too," he said.

There was some discussion with Lee County Sheriff Stacy Weber about having some of the staff come in under LeeComm services. Weber said it's a possibility, but additional training would be required.

Fedler said despite not being considered an essential service, the county has to step in and make sure there is an ambulance service for the county.

"This is an emergency and we can't wait."

Folluo said it was imperative that talks for the next week and going forward begin immediately. Fedler said there may have to be another teleconference next week when more additional payroll comes due for staff at Lee County EMS.

"We have to buy some time and keep the safety of Lee County residents in our minds. It's a crucial time and we need to keep those employees we have right now."

Fraise said State Sen. Rich Taylor has been working with state and federal legislators to see if some funding could be obtained through the response to the Coronavirus, since this would be for medical services, but she said those conversations are still taking place.



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OBITUARIES

MARY BAILEY

Mary "Lucille" Bailey, 90, of Fort Madison, IA, passed away at 8:43 p.m. on Friday, March 20, 2020 at the Donnellson Health Center. She was born on



BAILEY

February 6, 1930 in Bentonsport, IA to Clarence & Mary Jane Gibbs Holmes. She married Carrol "Carp" Bailey on September 21, 1945 in Fort Madison, IA. He preceded her in death on December 13, 1989. She was a homemaker and enjoyed playing bingo, crocheting and baking.

Lucille is survived by: 2-sons: Dan (Sandy) Bailey of Land O'Lakes, FL & Phillip Bailey of Denmark, IA; 3-daughters: Kimberly Bailey of Fort Madison, IA, Barbara (Kevin Beach) Bailey of Fort Madison, IA & Karen (Lyndon) Decker of Fort Madison, IA; 1-son in law: Dennis DeKraai of Fort Madison, IA; 1-daughter in law: Carolyn Bailey of Keosauqua, IA; 20-grandchildren; several great grandchildren & great great grandchildren. She was preceded in death by: her parents, husband, 1-son: Mike Bailey, 1-daughter: Paula DeKraai, 2-brothers & 6-sisters.

Due to the Coronavirus restrictions, a private family burial will take place at Oakland Cemetery in Fort Madison. Cards & memorials may be sent to Barb Bailey, 3211 Avenue L, Fort Madison, IA 52627. Online condolences to the Bailey family may be left at the King-Lynk Funeral Home & Crematory website: www.kinglynk.com. King-Lynk Funeral Home & Crematory is assisting the family.

Opinion/Local News

Iowa bucks the trend in coronavirus testing

It's been a week full of press conferences, press releases and literally a minute-by-minute news cycle.

I've said many times it's scary but a bit fascinating to watch how this virus, which Lee County Supervisor Rich Harlow suggested may have been started by Chinese people eating a contaminated bat, has changed the world as we know it.

R.E.M wrote those very words in 1987 and people took it to mean the world was ending, but that's not meaning the grammar intends. Whatever the intentions of Michael Stipe's lyrics...I do feel fine...today anyway.

The world "as we know it" has been changed, and to what extend those changes hang on after this virus subsides is to be determined by the world's seven billion people.

Will hand sanitizer and the myriad of disinfectants become the norm? Will the world be a more sanitized place? Will 'self-distancing' become an accepted word in the Webster world? Maybe. But what effect will that have on our health? Don't we have good bacteria on our hands as well. What about great-grandma's theory that being around people who are sick, builds our immunity?

Who knows. I just don't want this cold to be here. We've hunkered down pretty good here at Pen City Current. I'm actually enjoying the telemeetings. I can write as they talk and it saves me time. I can also dress in Minnesota Vikings gear and work subliminally on their sports-deprived minds.

But for each one of these I participate in I see a group of people whose concern for 'self-distancing' is only outweighed by their passion for protecting their county, communities, schools, businesses and cities.

There's a wide range of benefits being extended to public and private employees through the level-headed thought processes of those in charge. But those in charge of Iowa's health care, are taking a different approach than others in the crosshairs of the national media.

This week officials with the Iowa Department of Public Health said the state has currently on hand 400 tests, not daily tests, but 400 tests TOTAL as of Friday.

We've had calls here at Pen City Current from people who say that can't get tested for the virus and are being sent home. We called both the Lee County Health Department and Fort Madison Community Hospital, who both said that isn't true.

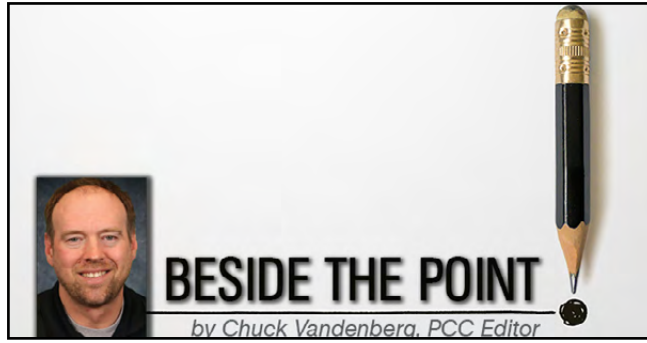
However, the state, through press conference held from the State Emergency Operations Center in Johnston, is being very clear that you will only be tested if you require hospitalization, and those with mild symptoms should basically stay home and ride it out.

With more than 3 million people in the state, 400 tests is a scary, scary position to take when more tests are clearly available. So we believe its a safe assumption that the state is mandating serious screening measures before

Cemetery clean up starts Monday

FORT MADISON – The Fort Madison Cemetery Department will begin Spring Clean Up at Sacred Heart, Elmwood, Oakland & City Cemeteries on Monday, March 23 through Friday, March 27, 2020. All items must be removed from the gravesites before Monday, March 23. Any items left will be disposed of during cemetery cleanup. No items are to be placed on the graves until Monday, March 30, 2020.

For further information, call (319) 372-7700, ext. 206 or email mblind@fortmadison-ia.com.



swabbing a person who genuinely is sick. But with what illness?

The Des Moines Register ran a story this week on this very issue and interviewed three or four people and families who couldn't get tested. What the report failed to mention, in my opinion as I read the article twice – I don't think one of those interviewed for the story actually tested positive for the virus at any point in their struggle with health clinicians.

So does that empower the state to believe they are doing the right thing by almost completely relying on the standard talking points of washing hands, not touching the face, and staying home if your sick? Maybe.

But the risk they run is alienating the public in general...and more importantly an election looming in November.

So, after listening to all of these press conferences a couple things are very clear as of Saturday at 10:30 a.m.. If you are sick, you will not get a test until health clinicians believe you need to be hospitalized...or if your private physician authorizes a test. But with medical facilities under an unprecedented change of focus and severely strained resources, it may be difficult to get in to see your physician. And if you do, that cost will be on you and your insurance company, not on the state.

The other thing is that Iowa is conducting itself independent of other state and federal moves, including the statewide shutdown just to the east of us.

But will Iowa come out as the state that didn't overreact and came out better than most? That could be the case, but most federal epidemiology experts are saying at this point it's better, in this particular situation, to overtest, to aid in isolation efforts and stem the tide.

Iowa's chief epidemiologist, also the state medical director, Dr. Caitlin Pedati is saying self-distancing, hand washing, not touching your face, staying home if your sick, and calling-before-going medical advice, is sufficient...at this point.

The state has obviously taken unprecedented steps to help its residents from unemployment, to paid sick leave, to small business incentives, and extending deadlines in every single aspect of our regulated lives. Yet the optics are that we are pushing our resident away when it comes specifically to this virus.

The result of that remains to be seen, but it's no stretch to say this tactic is high risk at what reward? We look smarter than everyone else? Are the tests extremely expensive and causing the state of Iowa to not want to purchase more as a cost savings measure? What's the reason?

If state health officials don't think that most people actually have the virus, isn't it better to be able to provide that data, or are we afraid of the other side of that scenario, where more people have it than we want to admit?

All important questions, but for the time being we're at the state's mercy of these tests. All I have to say to that is....

Wash your hands, don't touch your face, stay home if your sick, try to self distance, and call before you seek medical care if you think you have the virus.

This virus has obviously created some home time for most of us. Personally, we've turned to Euchre and cooking just to get away from the television, but I think I've found the best show we weren't watching. Miracle Workers on TBS. The show features a very funny – and so-not Harry Potter – Daniel Radcliffe, and Steve Buscemi. Don't watch with the kids. It's a bit rough. But that's Beside The Point.

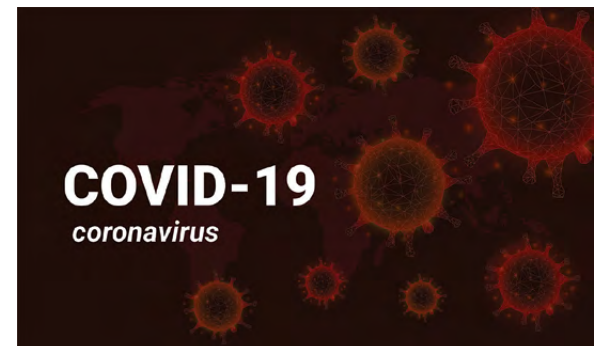
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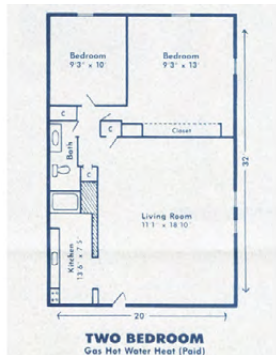
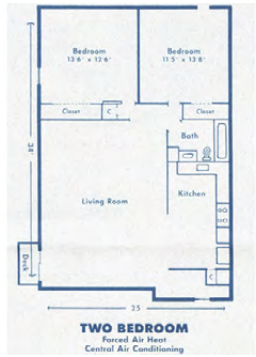
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Youngs may not sign contract extension

AMBULANCE - Continued from Page 1

city's licenses to provide emergency services.

Folluo also said the Young family is making some inquiries through the IRS to release some incoming funds that are tied to a lien on the company.

"That phone call on Monday between Richard Young and the IRS will be very important. If we can get that to be the case, the fire departments are going to start talking to the state about operate off their licenses as emergency service providers, and then we go from there," he said.

Folluo said the current contract between the county and the ambulance service expires on June 30, 2020. He said a new contract is in the Young's hands, but he hasn't heard confirmation they are going to sign it.

Mohrfeld said he doesn't believe the Youngs will renew the contract.

"We do know that Lee County EMS has zero intention of renewing the contract at this point," he said. "The more immediate concern now is can they provide services between now and then."

Mohrfeld said its not so much a matter of money, which is the pressing issue at the moment, but the willingness and capacity to continue providing the service to Lee County residents.

"At this point it's a bigger issue than just money. It's more about if Lee County EMS can, and will, move forward. That has to be determined," Mohrfeld said.

"If they can't and won't then it's gotta be somebody else - a new private enterprise and based on the environment that's damn thin. If that's the case, the county recreates the wheel or it becomes some kind of blended (service).

"Basically, everyone got together and said can this move forward or does it transition into something else in a different form with different players."

Mohrfeld said he called all seven Fort Madison City Council members to inform them of the meeting and update them on the situation.

Folluo said he feels better today knowing that the cities are instrumental in helping craft a program.

"We need to find a way so we can guarantee the safety of Lee County citizens," he said.

The current agenda for the Lee County Board meeting on Tuesday does not include any additional action pertaining to the ambulance service.

Lee County Health Dept. suspends immunization, TB clinics

LEE COUNTY - Lee County Health Department (LCHD) has temporarily suspended TB (Tuberculosis) Clinics and Immunization Clinics due to staff duties shifted because of the COVID-19 response, and our county office building being closed to the public. Staff will reevaluate clinic times and dates at the end of April. In the meantime, if you have questions regarding your child's immunizations or have specific needs to discuss, please call the LCHD office at (319)372-5225 or (800)458-6672.

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