

# Pen City Current

Friday, January 3, 2020 | 14 pages | Volume 4 • Issue 12

## 2019 - A Year in Review

March & April

### Local teen dies of gunshot wound

### Looking back on 2019

28,662 views, 11,532 engagements - March 25, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

MONTROSE – A 15-year-old Fort Madison girl was killed Sunday in a tragic shooting accident at the Tri-State Gun Club.

According to a release from Lee County Sheriff Stace Weber, at approximately 10:41 a.m., deputies and first responders of Montrose Fire and Rescue were dispatched to the Tri-State Gun Club at 2308 280th Street, Montrose for a reported gunshot victim.

When deputies arrived at the scene, they found a 15-year-old female who suffered a single gunshot wound. The victim was immediately transported to the Fort Madison Community Hospital by Lee County Ambulance Service.

The victim, identified as Haley Elizabeth McManus, 15, was later transported to the University of Iowa Hospitals & Clinics where she later succumbed to her injuries.

The cause of the incident is being treated as an accidental self-inflicted gunshot wound. No foul play or negligence is suspected. The incident is still under investigation pending an autopsy scheduled for

Tuesday.

Deputies were assisted at the scene by Montrose Fire and Rescue, Lee County EMS and LeeComm dispatchers.

“The Lee County Sheriff’s Office wishes to extend our sincere condolences to the family and friends of Haley during this traumatic time,” Weber said.

Fort Madison High School Principal Greg Smith said the incident was not related to any school function of the trap shooting team.

“It’s our understanding, that this was kind of a regular thing for her and her dad to go out to the range,” Smith said Monday morning.

*Editor’s Note:*

As the year comes to a close, it is customary to look back at the stories that affected us throughout the year. Being an all-digital newspaper with multiple social media channels, we have many avenues to consider when deciding to review the year behind us.

We chose to feature the best read news articles from our website [pencitycurrent.com](http://pencitycurrent.com), the top social media posts, and the photos that impressed the most readers from each month.

Each issue of 2019 – A Year in Review will feature two months of these stories & photos as they originally appeared.

These stories touched thousands of lives this year, whether they were heartbreaking or heartwarming, good news or bad.

We hope you enjoy looking back on the year with us as we usher in a new year filled with new stories. You can rest assured Pen City Current will be reporting those stories in a factual, unbiased way in the manner you’ve become accustomed to – whether you’re reading them on our website, on our mobile app, in our e-Edition, or in any of our social media channels.

We thank you for your patronage and wish you a peaceful new year.

### State K9s drill at former ISP warehouse

21,446 views, 1,781 engagements - March 12, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – The John Bennett Center at the old Iowa State Penitentiary converted from outdated prison space to testing grounds on Monday and Tuesday.

Handlers and K9 officers from around the state descended on Fort Madison for two days of training at the former prison site.

The two-day training was part of the United States Police Canine Association’s Region 21 annual Detection

Dog Certification Trials.

Melinda Ruopp, a 31-year veteran of the Marshalltown Police Department, was the Region 21 national certifying official and judge. The event was for narcotics dogs only.

Ruopp was a K9 handler in Marshalltown and, for more than 20 years, worked with two dogs before shifting to training and certifying.

There were 63 dogs and handlers at the competition and all 63 went through the same search scenarios. The judging is done by certified law enforcement handlers.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Lee County K9 “Gunner” lets deputy Uriah Wheatley know narcotics are in the table against the wall in March at the former Iowa State Penitentiary.

### Baxter Foundation pulls youth funding over board decision

25,997 views, 7,592 engagements - March 19, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – A local foundation that donates thousands of dollars every year to local youth sports activities is pulling its funding in a protest of sorts against the proposed school bond issue.

A letter released Monday night from The Baxter Foundation alerted past and present recipients of funding from the Foundation that it will not be funding any further requests in 2019 due to the Fort Madison Community School District’s decision to spend unnecessary amounts with an out-of-town construction

firm for a new elementary school.

“Unfortunately, the School District elected to use an out-of-town firm to represent it in this year’s bond election with little history of supporting local youth athletics or the Sports Complex....Since the School District has opted to disregard the plans presented by Baxter Construction, unnecessarily spend additional

taxpayer money, and implement a program that does not benefit young athletes in the fashion proposed by Baxter Construction, the Foundation cannot continue to supplement the School District’s efforts to grow its youth sports programs; especially, when the District itself chose to ignore the presented plans and waste available financial resources.

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2019 - A Year in Review: March & April

County ramps up patrols for 4/20 holiday

25,989 views, 3,103 engagements - April 17, 2019

LEE COUNTY – The Fort Madison Police Department and Lee County Sheriff’s Office are informing motorists that Iowa law enforcement officials have announced they will conduct a Drug Impaired Driving specialized enforcement campaign throughout the state April 19-20.

“Drive High, Get an OWI” is an intensified effort to fight drug-impaired driving in correlation with the 4/20 ‘holiday.’

Similar efforts are occurring across the region in Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. Up and down the highways of these states, officers will be arresting anyone caught driving impaired.

During the Drive High, Get an OWI effort in Iowa, officers will intensify enforcement of the state’s drug impaired-driving laws. Like drunk driving, drug-impaired driving is illegal in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington DC. Law enforcement will stop and arrest anyone caught driving drug-impaired.

It is never safe to drive impaired. This not only means refraining from drunk driving, but also from drug impaired driving. Many people wrongly believe that driving while high won’t affect them. It has been proven that THC- the chemical responsible for most of marijuana’s psychological effects – slows reaction times, impairs cognitive performance and makes it more difficult for drivers to keep a steady position in their lane.

The bottom line is this: It doesn’t matter what term is used, if a person is high, stoned, wasted or drunk, he or she is impaired. Driving while impaired by any substance is illegal and can be deadly to the driver and other road users.

PAW brings in dogs from flooded areas

19,484 views, 1,824 engagements - March 18, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – Once again weather is throwing the PAW animal shelter a curve ball.

Less than a month after the Fort Madison animal rescue found homes from close to 30 dogs on the heels of an arctic freeze fostering program, the shelter agreed Monday to take in 15 more dogs that were threatened by flooding in western Iowa.

A horse trailer from Hedrick, Iowa backed up to the shelter on the western side of Fort Madison at about 11 a.m. Monday morning and unloaded the dogs in front of shelter. Workers put up a makeshift corral of fencing and styrofoam to funnel the dogs back to the kennels. Some went willingly to their new temporary homes, some not so much.

Pam Evans, of Ottumwa, who contacted PAW



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Fort Madison PAW Animal Shelter Director Sandy Brown helps guide one of 15 dogs rescued from western Iowa flooding, into the kennels back in March.

Director Sandy Brown to see if they could take the animals, said she was on her way home from Des Moines when she got the call about the animals in the western part of the state. She met up with Aimee Crow of Hedrick’s Paws ‘N Claws foster home, and the two teamed up to go and rescue the animals in Pacific Junction, Iowa along the Missouri River.

Evans said the two had to take backroads

to get to high ground on the Iowa border in the Missouri River valley to a house that was on top of a hill where the river was cresting.

The dogs were part of a backyard breeder or “horder” who was told by law enforcement to either give up the animals, which included goats, mini pigs, ponies and other animals, or face being fined per animal. The animals were contained on land that was flooded and the owners

gave the animals over to rescue.

“Some of these dogs were actually swimming,” said an emotional Evans. “About 30 of the dogs had already been released, and we’re just praying they can get to someone.”

But she said she knew Brown wouldn’t let her down.

“Sandy said she would be able to take 10, so we knew 15 or 16 would be ok,” Evans said laughing while wiping away tears.

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2019 - A Year in Review: March & April

# Ray, Moore, and Lawrence headline 2019 Tri-State Rodeo

21,253 views, 1,906 engagements - April 13, 2019

FORT MADISON –The Tri-State Rodeo is proud to announce that Michael Ray, Tracy Lawrence, and Justin Moore are set to headline the 2019 Rodeo.

Tickets for the rodeo will go on sale Monday April 15 at 8 a.m at [www.TriStateRodeo.org](http://www.TriStateRodeo.org). Bleacher tickets will be \$5.00 (five dollars) off through April 30.

In 2010, Ray’s independently released debut caught the ear of veteran music industry manager Tony Conway, who began helping Ray take his career to a national audience.

In 2012, Ray appeared on the CW talent competition The Next, where he was mentored by Big & Rich’s John Rich. Ray was an audience favorite on the show and ultimately took home the top prize. After the show, Ray signed a

publishing deal with Warner/Chappell, and in 2014 released the hit single “Kiss You in the Morning.”

His full-length major-label debut, Michael Ray, followed in 2015 on Warner Music Nashville. Well-received, the album made it to number four on the Country Albums chart, and spawned two more singles with “Real Men Love Jesus” and “Think a Little Less.”

Over the next several years, Ray toured extensively before returning to the studio alongside producer Scott Hendricks (Blake Shelton, Brooks & Dunn, Trace Adkins). In 2018, he delivered his sophomore album, Amos, which included the Top 20 country single “Get to You.” Amos debuted at five on Billboard’s Country Albums charts upon its June release.

Tracy Lawrence’s most recent studio album GOOD OLE DAYS, released on November 10, 2017, is an album of duets, pairing a selection of his most iconic hits with some of Country and Rock’s contemporary superstars and newcomers. It includes guest appearances by Jason Aldean, Brad Arnold, Big & Rich, Luke Bryan, Luke Combs, Easton Corbin, Dustin Lynch, Tim McGraw, Justin Moore, Craig Morgan, Kellie Pickler and Chris Young.

Upon its release, the album appreciated impressive sales history: #1 position on iTunes Country Chart, debuted at #10 on the Billboard Top Country Albums Chart, #25 on Billboard’s Top Current Albums, #87 on the Billboard 200 Chart, #11 on Billboard’s Digital Album’s Chart and #2 on the country portion of that chart.

Tracy has sold 13 million albums, has had 22 songs on the Billboard Top 10 charts and 18 No. 1 songs. He has also garnered numerous CMA and ACM awards and nominations, as well as a Grammy nomination.



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# New building would require .16 bump in school levy

20,091 views, 1,791 engagements - April 13, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – Just two weeks ago, Fort Madison school board officials were looking at a .30 increase in its annual property tax levy rate that would include costs of building a new elementary school. But favorable data from the state of Iowa has cut that increase in half.

According to Fort Madison Community School District Business Manager Sandy Elmore, the district is currently looking at a levy of \$14.60 per \$1,000 of taxable value for the next fiscal year. The district’s current levy is \$14.44/\$1,000 and the extra 16 cents would be enough to pay for the proposed new PreK-3rd grade elementary school if approved by voters next month.

The district has set a bond election date for April 2 for district voters to vote on the \$30 million new facility on property the district already owns south of Bluff Road near 48th Street in Fort Madison.

Construction costs on the building hover near \$24.2 million, while site preparation and furnishings make up the additional \$5.8 million.

“Once we received the revised budget file from the Department of Management with the impacts related to what the Governor signed and the new income numbers from the DOM as well, the estimated tax rate impact with the bond included is \$0.16 cents per \$1,000 EAV (equalized assessed valuation),” Elmore wrote in an email Friday.

“The current year, FY18-19 rate is \$14.44 per \$1,000 EAV. Our new estimated rate is \$14.60 with a debt service levy rate of \$2.70 per \$1,000.”

Residential homes in the district have a taxable value of about 55% of their assessed value, due to a 2013 state mandated rollback and homestead credits. So someone with a home assessed at \$100,000 would pay tax on approximately \$55,000 each year.


If the April 2 bond passes, the person with a \$100,000 home would pay \$8.33/year toward the construction of the new building. Agriculture land is estimated at just 18 cents per year per \$2,000 in assessed land value.

## Fa..la..la..la...ling


Here are some winter weather tips to prevent falls:

- ◆ Wear shoes with good traction.
- ◆ Dress warm, if you are warm, your muscles will stay relaxed.
- ◆ Be careful getting out of your car – watch for icy patches and black ice.
- ◆ Take extra time and pay attention.
- ◆ Keep your driveway and walkways clear.
- ◆ Ask for help if needed!


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2019 - A Year in Review: March & April

# We Remember Our Loved Ones Lost in 2019

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2019 - A Year in Review: March & April

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| Eustolia T. Sanchez              | Duane "Toby" Eugene Stigall                 | Patricia L. VerDught               |
| Austin R. Sandrock M.D.          | Vicki L. Stinson                            | Donald J. VerKruyse Sr.            |
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| Cornelius Herman (Dutch) Schakel | Linda S. Storms                             | Hunter Anthony Vorwaldt            |
| Sandra "Sandi" Schmidt           | Cecilia Rose Catherine Stotts               | James Henry Wagner                 |
| Julia Norreene Schmitt           | Margaret "Peggy" Jean Stroder Swartzbaugh   | Avis E. Wallett                    |
| Sue Ann Schmitz                  | Mary Elizabeth Sweezer                      | David L. Wallingford               |
| Dorothy I. Schock                | Louise Marie (Walkowiak) Listebarger Shultz | Leroy Joseph Walljasper            |
| Gary O. Scholl                   | Iona Marie Siegrist                         | Pamela Ann Waterman                |
| Margaret "June" Schroeder        | Mary Maxine Simon                           | William "Bill" E. Waterman         |
| Dr. Melanie Joan Schulte         | Carol Sue Simpson                           | Danne Q. Weiler                    |
| Rae Ann Schwartz                 | Thomas "Jack" Tate                          | George Bernard Welding             |
| Kathryn Scott                    | Michael Edward Taylor                       | Jean Lucille Wenke                 |
| Ralph D. Seager                  | Pamela June Taylor                          | Julie Ann Wessel                   |
| David Stewart "Dave" Seeley      | Clinton Andrew Tebbs                        | Richard Allen Whaley               |
| Stephen L. Seyb                  | Melba A. Therme-Steinhilber                 | Wanda Jane Wilken                  |
| James "Jim" Shelton              | Olive Lorene Thorn                          | Paul Joseph Wilkens                |
| Lloyd William "Bill" Shriver     | Stephen Tibbitts                            | Raymond William Watznauer          |
| Sherry M. Simpson                | Harriet Ann Timmerman                       | Max Clair Westercamp               |
| Gene Oveston Sisk                | Lisa Kathleen Tolmosoff                     | Jack R. Whisenand                  |
| Nancy Skiles                     | Robert Dean Toops                           | Julian Thomas White                |
| Alberta Rosina Smith             | Gary Burl Townsley                          | David Merle Wilson                 |
| Bryan Lee Smith                  | Elaine Kay Traman                           | Sue Winnike                        |
| James Lewis Smith                | Helen M. Turtle                             | Erma R. Wolgemuth                  |
| Joe Thomas Smith                 | Larry "Shane" Tuttle                        | Suzanne Marie Wood                 |
| John Dale Smith                  | Daniel "Dan" Tweedy                         | Rebecca Jo "Becky" Worster         |
| Fr. Mark P. Spring               | Mary Kathleen Ullrich                       | Allen Wayne Wright                 |
| Saraphina Nicole Stark           | Eric "Giz" Vajentic                         | Carol A. Wyatt                     |
| John E. Stauffer                 | Ronald D. Van Niewaal                       | Robert L. Young                    |
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Pick 3 - Midday	Daily	Noon	12:20 pm
Pick 3 - Evening	Daily	9:40 pm	10:00 pm
Pick 4 - Midday	Daily	Noon	12:20 pm
Pick 4 - Evening	Daily	9:40 pm	10:00 pm

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2019 - A Year in Review: March & April

# FM man arrested in accidental death

16,037 views, 5,490 engagements - April 13, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – A Fort Madison man has been arrested in connection with the accidental death of a 14-year-old Keokuk boy on April 1.

According to Lee County Attorney Ross Braden, Jeremy Gillette, 18, of Fort Madison, was arrested Friday evening and charged with vehicular homicide as a result of reckless driving.

The charge is a Class C felony punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

Braden said the complaint filed in South Lee County court alleges that the boy was riding his bicycle while holding onto an open window on the 2012 Chevy Impala that Gillette was driving.

The boy, who was identified in earlier reports as Brandon Scott Fitzgerald, lost control of his bicycle and struck his head on the pavement on South 7th Street in Keokuk near the intersection of K Street.

He was taken by Lee County EMS to Unity Point Hospital in Keokuk where he died from injuries sustained in the accident.

Braden said 1st Assistant Lee County Attorney Jonathan Stensvaag filed the complaint Friday.

“This is just a terrible situation – we’re talking about kids. The driver himself was still a kid,” Braden said.

“We didn’t take this charge lightly. We had a pretty good idea what happened, but this is one of those things we wanted to approach cautiously. This wasn’t a charge we wanted to throw around lightly because of the young people involved in this accident.”

# Elementary bond vote fails another time

17,601 views, 3,261 engagements - April 2, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – For the fourth time in almost as many years, Fort Madison School district voters have shot down an attempt to build a new elementary school.

Results from the Tuesday night special election on the issue of building a \$30 million Prek-3rd grade elementary building near the current middle school on Bluff Road failed to meet the state-mandated 60% + 1 supermajority.

Voters cast 58.13% of the votes in favor of the new construction. It’s the third time in as many years a majority of voters in the district did want the new school built.

Fort Madison School Board President Tim Wondra said he doesn’t see the current school board putting the issue back in front of voters.

“Yeah, I don’t foresee it coming back on the ballot anytime in the near future,”

Wondra said Tuesday night. “We tried to listen to the community. They didn’t want ball fields and we took that off. They wanted more focus on traffic and we addressed that. No matter what we did it didn’t change anything.”

Fort Madison Superintendent Dr. Erin Slater agreed with Wondra’s assessment.

“I would agree with that statement. Like I’ve said, the board made as many changes as possible with the ball fields, traffic, and its impact to the site for access and egress which the community was vocal about,” she said.

“We changed architecture firms, hired a construction manager so we had added expertise. No other adjustments we could have made and the current board doesn’t see any additional changes they could make.”

Votes totaled 3,296 on the issue with 1,916 in favor of the new school and 1,380 voted against it for a 58.13% approval.

The numbers are strikingly similar to the fall



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Voters lined up April 1 to cast ballots for a proposed bond referendum to build a new elementary school in Fort Madison.

election that failed with just over 59% of the vote in favor of the new building. Voter turnout was about 250 heavier than the April 2018 bond election.

“It’s pretty close,” Wondra said. “It’s the same numbers for such an important thing for our kids and community.”

Wondra also put out a statement after the results came in.

“I’m very saddened by the results. I want to thank all the people who worked so hard behind the scenes and those who recognized the need for a new elementary school and continued to vote yes,” he said.



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2019 - A Year in Review: March & April

Former BHS alum Gibbs named new ISP warden

14,205 views, 3,280 engagements - April 5, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – The Iowa Board of Corrections voted unanimously today in support of the appointment of Randy Gibbs as the next warden of the Iowa State Penitentiary (ISP). This appointment was recommended to the board by Interim Director Dan Craig. Gibbs will replace retiring warden Patti Wachtendorf on May 23, 2019.



GIBBS

Gibbs, a graduate of Burlington High School, and currently the warden of the Clarinda Correctional Facility (CCF), has served in his current capacity since May of 2017. He started his career with Iowa

Corrections as a Correctional Officer at the Anamosa State Penitentiary in 1991. Throughout his career he has held such positions as: Lieutenant, Captain, Training Officer, Treatment Services Director, Associate Warden of Security, and Assistant Deputy Director of Institutional Operations.

Cord Overton, the communications director for the Iowa Department of Corrections, said Wachtendorf's announcement wasn't a surprise to the DOC.

"Patti's been planning her retirement for a while," Overton said this morning.

"Warden Gibbs has a track record of providing outstanding leadership and dedication throughout his long career with Corrections," Craig said.

Montrose man arrested after county chase

15,146 views, 3,084 engagements - March 29, 2019

PCC STAFF

MONTROSE – A man who led southeast Iowa law enforcement on chase from Des Moines County into Lee County on March 14, has been arrested after a second chase through the area today.

The Lee County Sheriff's Office reports the arrest of Travis W. Peterson, 39 of Raritan, Ill.

Peterson had eight warrants for his arrest stemming from a pursuit involving the Des Moines County Sheriff's Office that ended in Wever

on March 14, 2019.

Peterson was located today by Des Moines County authorities, and he led them to Henry County in a pursuit. Henry County Sheriff's Office and the Iowa Department of Transportation took the lead on the pursuit into Lee County where deputies of Lee County assisted the Iowa State Patrol in the pursuit.

Peterson lost control of the car he was driving, then abandoned it and allegedly took another vehicle on 130th Avenue, just inside the Lee County jurisdiction.

Peterson then continued to lead Lee County Deputies and Iowa State Patrolmen into Van Buren County where

he was taken into custody after STOP STICKS were deployed, disabling the stolen vehicle he was driving.

Assisting in this arrest were LeeComm Dispatchers, West Point Police Department, Iowa State Patrol, Iowa Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Enforcement, Van Buren County Sheriff's Office, Henry County Sheriff's Office, and the Des Moines County Sheriff's Office.

Additional charges will follow from the March 14th incident, including Eluding, and multiple traffic offenses. Peterson is merely charged with these crimes, and he should be considered innocent until proven guilty in a Court of Law.

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2019 - A Year in Review: March & April

# Letter to the Editor - Sheriff does more than Protect and Serve

16,233 views, 3,499 engagements - April 11, 2019

Dear Editor:

The Fort Madison High School family had a tough week recently. We lost one of our own. It wasn't the first time this has happened in my tenure at the High School, unfortunately.

But it is always difficult to navigate the myriad of emotions that completely take over the culture of the building when a student dies. Great Prairie AEA, Central Office and High School staff and the Fort Madison Community all supported our students as we grieved our loss. We can't thank all of them enough.

But I was overwhelmed by the actions of one individual in our community most of all.

Sheriff Stacy Weber's actions during this time were supportive and compassionate; over and above the "call of duty". I spoke with him first on Sunday trying desperately to get the facts, so that I could prepare for the days ahead.

Once Sheriff Weber verified who I was and what I knew, he was able to share just enough to help me ready our support system on Monday morning. He was always professional, but it was obvious that he was truly concerned about our students and their grief.

We spoke several times over the next couple of days as more information became public. Sheriff Weber offered his personal support on several occasions and provided me with his cell phone number so that I could reach him when I needed to do so. Every conversation began or ended with "how are you doing?"

My phone rang on Monday afternoon. I had just arrived home, beat up, rung out and empty. Not a Principal's best day. It was Sheriff Weber. "Hi Mr. Smith. I just wanted to call and see how you were and how the day went." It was just what I needed. A kind, caring friend who just wanted to remind me that he was there.

We talked a while, I unloaded and immediately felt better. Our conversation ended with, "I don't know how you do what you do. I could never do it." I was a Military Police Officer and a Reserve Deputy with the Monterey County Sheriff's Office many years ago.

Greg Smith



# County officials confirm second measles case

12,913 views, 1,578 engagements - April 18, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY – With a second confirmed case of measles in Iowa, Lee County Health Department officials are reminding local residents of the symptoms of the rare disease.

According to a release from the Iowa Department of Public Health, the two cases in Iowa are both a result of unvaccinated residents from northeast Iowa.

The second case is a resident who is a household contact of the first confirmed measles case. The initial case is believed to have come from the resident after traveling to Israel, where measles transmission is occurring.

Health officials also said the initial person is under a public health voluntary confinement in order to prevent further exposures. Because the second measles case has been isolated at home during the incubation period, there is no current threat to the general public.

Emily Biddenstadt, LCHD Community Health Special Projects Manager, said measles symptoms are specific.

"We want to remind the public to be aware of the symptoms of measles – cough, runny nose, red/watery eyes, nasal congestion, high fever, a rash of flat red areas all over the body with raised bumps, and Koplik spots, which are small spots with white or bluish-white centers on the inside of the cheek," she said

The LCHD offers two immunization clinics every month, including the second Thursday of the month in Keokuk from noon-4:30pm at Trinity Methodist Church, and the fourth Thursday of the month in Fort Madison from noon-5:30pm at the LCHD office in the old John Bennett #3 Building.

# March fire sends man to hospital

12,313 views, 3,946 engagements - March 28, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – A fire that broke out in a Fort Madison home early Thursday evening has

sent one man to the hospital with life threatening injuries.

Fort Madison firefighters were called to the scene of 1121 Avenue E at 6:28 p.m., according to Fort Madison Police

Chief Tim Sittig.

Firefighters pulled a man from the smoke-filled home and he was transported to Fort Madison Community Hospital escorted by city police. Sittig said the man's condition was unknown.

A witness at the scene said medical crews were performing CPR on the man as he was transported to the ambulance.

The cause of the fire is unknown and LeeComm paged an "all call" with the home being in close proximity to another home. No damage was reported to the other structure and flames were only seen coming from the corner of the roof of the structure's porch.

All three FMFD vehicles were on the scene as were Fort Madison Police, Lee County EMS, and Lee County Sheriff's Department.

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2019 - A Year in Review: March & April

# Council votes to allow councilman to sever property

9,946 views, 2,157 engagements - March 5, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – A sitting Fort Madison City Councilman will be allowed to sever his property from city limits after he requested it be annexed into the city just over a decade ago.

In a close 4-2 vote, with 1st Ward Councilman Chris Greenwald removing himself from the meeting, the city council agreed to sever the property in the 3000 block of Timberlane Drive from city limits.

Greenwald had requested the property be annexed into the city in 2007 so he could continue to serve as a first ward councilman. He said after the meeting the move was also to help encourage other property owners to possibly do the same and increase the city's tax base.

Councilmen Bob Morawitz and Chad

Cangas voted against the measure.

Cangas said there was a serious concern about precedent, regardless of how the city found itself in this situation.

"I feel this puts us in a real precarious situation as far as precedent. If we get 500 people request to be removed from city limits, we're going to have to give every single one of those consideration once we open the door and I don't know how we tell one no and not everybody," Cangas said.

City Manager David Varley said Greenwald's property is the only property in the subdivision in city limits.

"Council faces a decision of opening a door for people to come and request to leave the city because they don't want to pay the taxes vs. having one subdivision where it doesn't make a lot of sense to have one home there in the city and not have the others," he said.



GREENWALD

"I certainly wouldn't want us to see other requests, especially from businesses to leave the city so we need to think carefully about it as we don't want to set a precedent," Varley said.

Cangas said he had serious ethical questions as well and said he couldn't support it. He said approving the measure validates residents' opinions that this is cronyism and "good ol' boys club". Mayor Brad Randolph said at the time the city was "hot" on looking at ways to increase the boundaries of the city of Fort Madison through annexation.

"We were looking at annexing bypasses and interchanges. And part of the thought was having that person voluntarily annexing in could or would be the beginning of more annexation in that area," he said.

"In doing that, the city would try to run sewer either from Happy Hollow, which is already there, and back down to catch that road to offer some incentive. We never did that, of course, and so that

left that property owner not having that come to fruition. Take that for what's it worth, but there was a method to the madness."

Fort Madison attorney Rich Fehseke was at the meeting representing Greenwald and said the annexation, which he said he helped prepare in 2007, wasn't done properly.

"It does not appear that property was properly annexed and services that were discussed at the time have not been extended out there," he said.

Fehseke said Cangas' concerns were real, that if the city let one out, then how could they stop others from wanting out. He said this particular annexation could be challenged because others wouldn't have that challenge.

"I think the city has the ability to distinguish between this request and the requests that may just walk in off the street to help guard yourself against everyone and their brother from asking something similar be done," Fehseke said.

## Motorcycle chase ends in arrest

9,843 views, 3,77 engagements - April 18, 2019

FORT MADISON – A Sunday afternoon chase has resulted in the arrest of Montrose man who allegedly reached speeds of 150 mph on Hwy. 61.

Fort Madison Police attempted to pull over Timothy Richardson, 18, of Montrose on Avenue L where was clocked doing 50 in a 35.

According to Fort Madison Police Chief Tim Sittig, Richardson began eluding police headed west bound and got out on Hwy 61 where Lee County Sheriff's deputies joined the pursuit.

Sittig said Richardson then raced down Hwy 61 south where deputies clocked him at 150 mph.

Lee County Sheriff Department Chief Deputy Will Conlee said Richardson led officers past the Linger Longer store on 303rd Avenue and Hwy. 61 in Montrose where he lost control of the bike laying it down on the pavement and was taken into custody.

## Keokuk boy killed in bicycle, vehicle accident

11,165 views, 2,996 engagements - April 2, 2019

PCC STAFF

KEOKUK – A 14-year old from Keokuk has been killed as a result of an accident involving a motor-vehicle and a bicycle Monday evening.

According to the Keokuk Police Department, Brandon Scott Fitzgerald of Keokuk was killed when he hit the pavement after he was riding his bicycle and holding on to a 2012 Chevy Impala driven by an adult male, who has not been identified.

As Fitzgerald was being pulled by the bicycle, he fell off the bike and landed on the concrete.

First responders administered aid at the scene and then Fitzgerald was taken by Lee County EMS ambulance to Unity Point Hospital where he was pro-

nounced dead.

According to an Iowa State Patrol accident report, which has Fitzgerald's age listed at 15, the Impala and Fitzgerald were southbound on South 7th Street near the intersection of K Street. The two made contact resulting in the bicyclist falling from the bike.

Grief counselors have been made available to students and staff in the Keokuk School system.

The Impala was discovered in Fort Madison Monday and the driver has been identified, but no arrests were included in the press release this morning.

Assisting in the investigation was the Keokuk Fire Department, Lee County EMS, Lee County Medical Examiner, Lee County Attorney's Office, Fort Madison Police, Lee County Sheriff's Department, and the Iowa State Patrol.

## Psychologist, C.O. assaulted at ISP

14,657 views, 3,082 engagements - March 30, 2019

PCC STAFF

FORT MADISON – Two staff members were assaulted by an inmate at the Iowa State Penitentiary on Friday, March 29, 2019 at approximately 4:30 p.m.

While a staff psychologist was meeting with an inmate in her office located in one of the housing units, the inmate began to physically assault her. A nearby correctional officer heard the assault

taking place, and quickly responded to the assault.

The inmate resisted the attempts by the officer to restrain him, and struck the officer several times in the struggle. The officer was able to deploy oleoresin capsicum (pepper spray) to gain control of the inmate until additional officers arrived to restrain the inmate.

The staff and the inmate that were involved in the assault were assessed by institution medical professionals and found to have not suffered any major injuries.

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## 2019 - A Year in Review: March & April

# Letter to the Editor - District stands by project manager decision

10,656 views, 2,244 engagements - March 20, 2019

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

As members of the Fort Madison Community School Board, we are continually humbled by the generosity of the volunteers, donations, and philanthropic work that make the community of Fort Madison so great. The opportunities that have been offered to our youth, with support from all of our community partners, is admirable.

Our district has many community partners and these partners will always be important to us. As a school board, it is our duty and mission to prepare all students for success through advanced curriculum and proper learning environments. That need is what drives us!

As elected officials, our obligation is to the taxpayers and to our students. Our board was encouraged to pursue a construction manager to help facilitate the process for a successful bond referendum. We interviewed two Southeast Iowa contractors. Our decision included the following criteria: construction management experience, knowledge of the public school construction and bidding process (as there are unique laws and regulations), references from prior public project performance, and fees. We believe it is our ethical responsibility to perform a qualifications-based selection process in order to identify the most qualified team members.

The construction management agency hiring decision was made based on the following:

- Carl A. Nelson & Company's proposal was significantly less than the Baxter Construction proposal.
- Carl A. Nelson & Company reported that they had completed 32 Construction Management as Agent projects for public entities and Baxter Construction provided no references for public projects completed as Construction Management as Agents.
- At the time of the selection, Carl A. Nelson & Company had worked for 15 public school districts all with positive references and within the local tri-state area.
- Carl A. Nelson & Company reported they had completed 96 major projects in Fort Madison.
- Carl A. Nelson & Company gave real examples of cost-saving recommendations they made on three projects that saved their clients over \$800,000 showing the value of their services by example.

The mission of the Fort Madison Community School District is "to ensure all students learn the academic and life skills necessary for personal success and responsible living." Our end goal in establishing a new, unified elementary school is to better enable us to fulfill that mission. We believe that by providing our students with modern educational environments, it will ensure academic excellence during their years with Fort Madison Community School District and the years to follow.

Sincerely,

**Tim Wondra & Dianne Hope**  
President & Vice President  
Fort Madison Community School District School Board

# Editorial - Emotions running high as Baxter Foundation pulls funding

8,517 views, 2,244 engagements - March 20, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

Tony Baxter told me he doesn't seek out the media. He said he got burned a couple years back and tries to stay away from the press. After a couple different times of trying to reach him for one article or another, I had no trouble believing that when I finally had a chance to talk with him on Tuesday.

We've all heard by now that he pulled the Baxter Foundation's funding for 2019 and possibly further into the future because of the Fort Madison Community School District's decision last fall to go with Carl A. Nelson out of Burlington as construction manager if the April 2 bond vote passes to build a new PreK-3rd grade elementary school next to the middle school on Bluff Road.

The district needs 60 percent plus one vote to break ground on the new school that Superintendent Erin Slater said would be operational by 2021.

I asked Tony what he would say to the people that say this is sour grapes.

"What do I say...? Am I upset that I didn't get the project...Yep."

Baxter called the decision a let down and wasteful spending. He said he offered a program that would have cost less and resulted in tax dollars staying in the community, not to mention potential donations to upgrade fields at the Sports Complex to be high school compliant to solve some of the athletic facility issues at FMHS.

To hinder the youth in order to upset the voting booth is a move probably only Baxter could make. When you've given for decades to a school that goes outside the area for a large project, for whatever reasons, your consternation is outside our judgment.

But it leaves a bad taste in our mouth for sure. Not unlike the one Baxter probably had last fall when hearing his company didn't win the project.

We don't know what dollar value would have been attached to the Foundation donations in 2019. We don't have the right to assume any. We don't know what programs are going to be hurt. Inevitably, something, and more importantly someone, is going to suffer.

We're not entitled to be upset with Baxter because he was funding the Foundation out of his own pocket, yet we find ourselves fighting that instinct. That's goofy behavior modification, but no one's entitled to someone else's philanthropy. Or is that how far we've come?

There are many families in Fort Madison that give... and give... and give. Names like Baxter, Pothitakis, Denning, Scoville, Mohrfeld, Rashid come quickly to mind. But many...many others do as well, and some don't even want their name out there.

It's our experience from being around these people that they give because they feel a greater purpose and sense of community... and they've cultivated resources to be able to give back. We think the district erred in not seeing that same sense of community. It was a tight vote 4-3. And the current board probably would have voted 4-3 the other way.

Did Baxter's pull the right arrow from the quiver? From the reaction to our story, it certainly hit its target.

Baxter said he sincerely hopes a new school gets built, but wants this referendum to fail because there are better programs out there that can benefit the community and possibly cost less than the one in front of the board.

# There's Snow Place Like Home for the Holidays.



Pen City Current will not publish an e-Edition Tuesday, December 24 through Wednesday, January 1. Our special 2019 Year In Review editions will publish Thursday, January 2 through Wednesday, January 8. Breaking news will continue to be published on our website 24/7.

*As we enjoy the holidays with family and friends,  
we thank you for your support and patronage and  
wish you all a very Merry Christmas & a Happy New Year!*

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## Cyberhounds



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2019 - A Year in Review: March & April

# Schmidt does it her way - just with one arm

12,522 views, 1,692 engagements - April 22, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – For the past 12 years, Fort Madison’s Alyse Schmidt has walked the halls of Denmark and Fort Madison schools, laughing in the quick pace of the hallways going from classroom to classroom.

She followed her sister Lexi to youth ballgames and neighborhood games of tag, like little sisters do. She wanted to be like her sister, and do the things she, and other kids in the neighborhood, did. And she did.

But Alyse did it missing her right arm from the elbow down. No right forearm. No right hand.

Meromelia is the medical description of being born without part of a limb. Alyse didn’t recall what the medical condition was labeled, but she doesn’t really care either.

The FMHS senior plays tennis on the Fort Madison Bloodhound girls tennis team. She didn’t pick up a racquet until she was a freshman and quickly became fond of the game.

“It’s turned out to be really fun. I didn’t know what to expect going into it, but I’ve really enjoyed it and I think I’ll take my racquet with me to college and play,” she said. “It’s a life-long sport.”

Schmidt plays at Nos. 5 and 6 singles depending on the team and format of the matches.

While most players toss the ball with their weak-hand then either spring into the serve with their legs and hips, or hit more of a badminton-type serve, Alyse

has to add a twist to hers.

To serve, she lays the ball on the face of the racket and holds it parallel to the ground with her left hand, and then flips the ball into the air and strikes it on the way down all in one smooth motion.

Once the ball is in play, Schmidt can hit ground strokes with good pace and then has to flick at one-handed back hands, where most girls play a two-handed backhand.

“I still struggle with my backhand. It’s not the prettiest. Most high school girls don’t do a one-hand backhand, but I don’t have that choice,” Schmidt said.

Head Coach Jeremy Swink, who’s in his first-year with the team, said he had heard there was a one-armed girl on the team, but he didn’t really get how unique it was until he saw her play.

“She came to me early on and asked how she could be more competitive with her serve,” Swink said

“I told her, ‘Alyse, just don’t double fault and get those serves in. You’ll be ahead of the game and don’t give up points on the serve and I think she does that very well,’” Swink said.

She said her game requires a little more practice getting timing on her backhand and working on her serve. As a freshman she was the No. 11 player on the team and moved into the top 10 as a sophomore. As a junior she played at No. 8 singles and as a senior she’s now playing at No. 6.

She said she regularly has opponents ask her what happened to her arm, but said she welcomes the conversations.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Senior Alyse Schmidt played for the varsity FMHS tennis team in 2019 at No. 6 singles with just one arm.

## ISP looked into substance

12,490 views, 2,658 engagements - April 2, 2019

PCC STAFF

FORT MADISON – Iowa State Penitentiary officials are looking into an incident Friday that caused a staff member to be taken to the hospital

The staff member became extremely ill after coming into contact with an unknown substance that is believed to have come from a bottle of eye drops.

Other staff at the institution quickly quarantined the substance, and the staff member was taken to the local hospital. Her condition has stabilized, and she has been released to recover at home.

## Fort Madison man dies from fire injuries

12,006 views, 3,084 engagements - April 2, 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – The man pulled from a burning building by Fort Madison firefighters early Thursday evening has died as a result of injuries.

According to a release from the Fort Madison Police Department Tuesday morning, 32-year-old Hamilton Parker, of Fort Madison died at University of Iowa Hos-

pitals and Clinics Saturday.

The cause of the fire that broke out at about 6:30 p.m. Thursday at 1121 Avenue E, is still under investigation by the State Fire Marshall.

Firefighters and emergency responders began performing CPR on Parker after being pulled from the home. He was taken to Fort Madison Community Hospital and then transferred to Iowa City.

An autopsy has been ordered to determine the cause of Parker’s death.

## 5-DAY WEATHER FORECAST

FRI 03 Jan



Light Snow  
High– 38.3° F | Low – 34.8° F

SAT 04 Jan



Light Snow  
High– 31.8° F | Low – 31.4° F

SUN 05 Jan



Clear  
High– 42.1° F | Low – 33.0° F

MON 06 Jan



Overcast  
High– 42.0° F | Low – 33.6° F

TUE 07 Jan



Overcast  
High– 29.4° F | Low – 20.3° F

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2019 - *A Year in Review: March & April*

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-Chuck & Lee

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