

Pen City Current

Wednesday, Jan. 2, 2019 | 21 pages | Volume 3 • Issue 15

2018 - A Year in Review

January & February

BREAKING NEWS

Pen City Current has confirmed through an employee who asked not to be named that Siemens in Fort Madison has permanently laid off 203 employees with severance packages. We'll post more on the story to our website when additional information is available and verified.

This social media post was read 113,717 times and was engaged with 20,889 times.

Looking back on 2018

Editors 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, the top social media posts, and the photos that impressed the most readers from each month.

Each issue of 2018 - 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.

ISP reports third officer assault since July

Inmate sent to UIHC for medical treatment after attack

BY PCC STAFF

FORT MADISON - According to a statement released Thursday night by the Iowa State Penitentiary, the prison is currently on restricted movement following an assault on an officer this afternoon.

The statement, released by Curt Overton of the Iowa Dept. of Corrections, indicated a staff member was assaulted by an inmate at the Iowa State Penitentiary in Fort Madison at approximately 2:45 p.m. Thursday after-

noon.

The staff member, a correctional officer, was conducting a search of an inmate's cell when the inmate attempted to strike the officer with closed fists. The officer that was attacked, as well as another officer that was in the area, quickly took control of the situation.

The staff member was assessed by institution medical professionals for scratches and bruises that occurred from the incident. He returned to his post after his medical evaluation.

The inmate that attacked the staff member was transported to University of Iowa Hospital and Clinics for further medical assistance.

This incident remains under investigation,

and the penitentiary has been placed on "restricted movement" for the time being.

The assault is the third reported at the prison since July.

The attack comes just days before a fundraiser for officer Jesse Burgher who was stabbed multiple times by an inmate at ISP with two homemade weapons on Oct. 18, 2017. That fundraiser is set for Saturday from 11 a.m. to midnight at the LULAC Club in Fort Madison.

Another incident involving close to 50 inmates broke out on July 1 that resulted in a prolonged lockdown at the facility.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 39,946 times and was engaged with 8,541 times.

Lee County K9 sniffs out meth on traffic stop

KEOKUK - The Lee County Narcotics Task Force reports the arrests of two Keokuk, Iowa men on felony and misdemeanor drug charges.

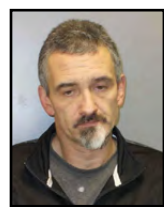
Michael Lee Hawkins, age 64, of the 1500 block of Des Moines Street, Keokuk, Iowa was arrested on Jan. 6, at his residence on two outstanding felony drug warrants. Hawkins

is charged with delivery of less than five grams of methamphetamine second or subsequent offense, a class C felony with an enhancement. If convicted, Hawkins faces up to 60 years in a state correctional facility.

The arrest of Hawkins stems from an investigation by the Lee County Narcotics Task Force into allegations that he was involved in the distribution of illegal drugs in the Lee County area.

In an unrelated matter,

Todd Michael Spurgeon, age 43, of the 2400 block of Johnson Street, Keokuk, Iowa was arrested on Jan. 6 in the 200 block of Highway 61 in Keokuk



SPURGEON

following a traffic stop. Spurgeon is charged with possession with intent to deliver less than five grams of methamphetamine, a class C felony. If convicted, Spurgeon faces up to 10

years and 30 days in a state correctional facility.

The arrest of Spurgeon stems from a traffic stop by a Lee County deputy in which a K9 unit alerted on the vehicle being driven by Spurgeon. Items that support the charges were discovered during a search of the vehicle.

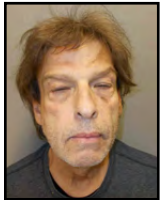
The Lee County Attorney's Office, Lee County Sheriff's Office, Iowa Division of Narcotics Enforcement, and the Keokuk Police Department assisted the Lee County

Narcotics Task Force in this investigation.

The defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

The Lee County Narcotics Task Force is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Justice and the funds administered by the Iowa Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 20,385 times and was engaged with 7,756 times.



HAWKINS

Advertiser Index

Boulders Inn & Suites	P.6	Holy Trinity Catholic Schools	P.12
Dodd Printing & Stationery	P.4	Hope Associates Real Estate	P.7
Dr. Mark C. Pothitakis Family Dentistry	P.3	Kempker's True Value Rental	Ps.14-21
Farm Bureau Financial Services - Larry Holtkamp	P.6	Lee County Health Department	P.5
Fort Madison Community Hospital	P.10	Pilot Grove Savings Bank	P.9
Fort Madison Family YMCA	P.11	State Farm Insurance - Thomas Klann	P.11
Fort Madison Neighborhood Watch Groups	P.7	Test Kitchen Education Foundation	P.11
Great River Regional Waste Authority	P.2	The Kensington	P.7
Griffin Muffler & Brake Center	P.4	The Madison	P.6
Hill Side Inn	P.4	UnitedWay.org	P.8

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Siemens cuts 202

Local elected, economic officials hope area can absorb skilled workforce

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG

PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - Local economic and elected officials are wrestling today with news of more than 200 permanent layoffs at the Siemens wind blade facility in

Fort Madison.

Employees at the plant were notified in meetings late Tuesday and early Wednesday about the company's decision to offer permanent severance packages to 202 employees.

Kaile Gurney, a Siemens Gamesa spokesperson, said the company informed employees today about efforts to position the Fort Madison plant for the future.

"Siemens Gamesa Renewable Energy informed employees today about efforts to position the Fort Madison plant for future competitiveness," she wrote in an email to Pen City Current.

"Business volume at this location through the 2018

fiscal year does not support the existing workforce level. While we remain strongly committed to the long-term viability of the U.S. wind market, a difficult decision has been made to adjust the Fort Madison workforce by about 200 employees. As a reflection of the importance of Fort Madison to our business strategy moving forward, we are making a significant capital investment at the plant to install additional blade molds for new wind turbine models."

Gurney said all affected employees will receive 60 days pay in lieu of notice and approximately 330 employees remain on staff. She said future staffing will depend on the market and product lines.

"Headcount is always based on the needs of the business. We are currently retooling the factories to accommodate additional product lines. With these capital investments and expected increased delivery schedules, we do anticipate some employee recalls later this year," she said.

An email addressed to Fort Madison Mayor Brad Randolph, Keokuk Mayor Tom Marion, and other local and county officials was sent this morning by Siemens Plant Manager Tony McDowell.

"Dear Mayors Randolph and Marion, Cities of

Fort Madison and Keokuk, and Lee County Officials,

I regret to inform you that effective today, January 24, the Siemens Gamesa management team must share a difficult decision with our employees. Unfortunately, our business volume through FY2018 does not support our existing workforce level,

requiring a temporary workforce reduction of 202 employees. While decisions that impact our employees and communities are never easy, this decision is necessary to properly size our workforce. All affected employees will be provided a comprehensive package appropriate to their years of service. Naturally, positive changes in the business situation will result in the call back of those employees according to company policy.

I want to reassure you that Siemens Gamesa is making significant capital investments in Fort Madison to reconfigure and retool our factory as we update a product line and install new blade molds. With these capital improvements, we are positioning ourselves for long-term growth. Siemens Gamesa remains strongly committed to wind power in the United States and Canada, and our plants in Iowa and Kansas are critical to our business strategy."

Randolph said the news was disappointing and hopefully the retooling the plant will allow some of the jobs to return.

"I guess I would just say I'm deeply disappointed. While I don't understand the business model and changes with the merger, they have to do what's right for the company," Randolph said. "It ends up being at

See **SIEMENS**, page 3

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RANDOLPH

"I guess I would have to say I'm deeply disappointed. While I don't understand the business model and changes with the merger, they have to do what's right for the company."

-Brad Randolph, Fort Madison Mayor



KEARNS

"It's unfortunate that it's occurring and 200 people will be losing their jobs. We can hope it's a blip."

-Jerry Kearns, State Representative (D)

2018 - A Year in Review: January & February

Local officials react to news of layoffs

Optimism in market rebound leads to hope of rehiring

SIEMENS - Continued from Page 2

the expense of our community in terms of workforce and families and those 202 people that are greatly affected by the layoff. I can only hope that, with what I'm being told in terms of retooling the plant for long-term success, that the layoffs would be relatively short-lived and they can recapture some of those people."

State Representative Jerry Kearns said he just heard the news this morning.

"It's unfortunate that it's occurring and 200 people will be losing their jobs. We can hope it's a blip," Kearns said.

"I don't know...the demand is down and I assume competition is up. They're aren't the only makers of blades, but it's too bad. They're one of the bright spots of Lee County."

Joe Steil, Lee County Economic Development



STEIL

"I had conversations with them when there were some rumors flying around in 2017 when at that point they had announced closing a sister facility in Canada."

-Joe Steil, LCEDG Executive Director

said this morning. "I do know even at that point in time sales were in a slump affecting the Fort Madison plant because of reduction in hours. That was a fact and we all knew about that. Speaking for myself, all the coverage on renewable energy and what our federal



LOEBSACK

"...I'll do everything I can to accommodate and provide information to those workers and I just want everyone to know that my office is open to anyone affected there."

-Dave Loeb sack, U.S. Representative

legislators have to decide is very important and has an effect on Iowa's investment in renewable energy." Steil said he sees the plant talking about retooling the facility as a reason to think the plant will not be issuing further layoffs or even closure. "Being an optimistic person that is not the direction I see it going," he said. "I think there's a certain amount that needs to be said about when production isn't there industries need to staff accordingly. I see that as probably being the situation here. The other thing is that Siemens numbers have historically gone up and down and I look to the future when sales get back where they need to be to drive production and get those workers back that have been displaced."



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Employees of the Siemens wind blade facility were notified late Tuesday and early Wednesday that the company was eliminating 202 jobs, or 38% of its workforce. The employees were offered 60 days pay as part of the company's severance package.

Randolph said he was hopeful that there was enough demand in the area to pick up workers.

"Hopefully we have enough of a demand in the area that those dislocated can pick up employment quickly and we don't have to experience and don't have to go through people finding another community to work in because of the job climate. With recent federal action with tax reform and corporate taxes we see some responses from local industry in terms of taking some of that tax relief and applying it back into local resources."

U.S. Rep. Dave Loeb sack said the Siemens production has had its ups and downs, but has provided great jobs in Lee County.

"Siemens, as you know, has provided a lot of really great jobs in Fort Madison and southeast Iowa. I recall

going to the plant when it first opened when I was first elected. It's had its ups and downs just like the wind industry itself. Unfortunately in the past, it's had a lot to do with the inability to extend the wind tax credits in a timely fashion, but now that's set for the next couple years," Loeb sack said this morning.

"There's no question its difficult at the moment to make plans given the political instability in Washington, D.C. But I'll do everything I can to accommodate and provide information to those workers and I just want everyone to know that my office is open to anyone affected there."

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We Remember Our Loved Ones Lost in 2018

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Elmer Dean Aldridge	Janet Elaine Cunningham	Shirley A. Hauck	Lawrence "Larry" Lowary	Sherian K. Privia	Jean Starr
Donald G. Alexander	Oscar Edward Davids	Gearldine Faye "Gerry" Hawk	Gary S. Lowenberg	Evonne Ileen Pruett	Michael J. Stayline
Jackie Allen	Dorothy Ann Dawson	Robert Dana Heagy	Alexandria D. "Hando" Lozano	McKinney	Jake Anthony Stewart
Anna Mae Allen Lowry	Robin L. Decker	Vera I. Hellweg	Paula Lozano	Karleen W. Pumphrey	Leonard "Len" Stewart
Ethel Irene Ames	Jack Martin Delph	Randy Joe Helmick	Shirley E. Lozano	Jeremy Lee Ranck	David S. Stiffler
Lloyd D. Apple	George D. Demetral	Joe Glenn Henson	Donald Joseph Lynch	Russel Lee Randolph	Floyd Earl Stout
Mary Ester Arpino	Patricia Ruth Denning	Timothy Lee Henson	Susan Marie Marshall	Caesar J. Rashid	Mary Jo Swallow
Charlene Auwaerter	Margie Fern Dent	Aaron Dewayne Hentzel	Betty Joyce Martin	Basil "Red" Reed	Marion O. Swearingen
Linda Barker	Wendy Lou Denton	Richard L. "Rick" Hill	Patrick George Martin	George Sheridan Reeder	Nikki Lee Tanner
Elizabeth Jane Barry	Alan Dale DeWitt	Mary L. Hitch	Aurelia "Wally" Martinez	Darlene Lucille Reinartz	Vaughan
Paul J. "Bart"	Terri Anita DeWitt	Joseph R. Hnat	Jared John "Jed" Matlock	Donald L. Reu	Orvetta A. Taylor
Bartholomew	Wilson	Ernest L. Hobbs, Jr.	Doris McCane	Emma Grace Reynolds	Michael John Tebbs
Rose Cornelia Beecham	Jose "Joe" S. Diaz, Jr.	Beverly Ann Hofmann	John E. McCollum	Verna N. Richards	Marjorie Kathryn Templeton
Cartmill	Garry M. Dinwiddie	Richard William "Rip" Hogan	Junior Harold McKinney	Sharolyn A. Richers	Wendell Lee Thompson
Stephen Henry Beimer	Daniel "Dan" Diveley	Floyd Edward Hohl	Regina H. McKoon	Elsie M. Ricker	Shirley Thornton
Susan M. Beimer Nelson	Daniel C. Dorn	Earlaine Evelyn Hoover	Nellie Ruth McVay	Richardson	Patty Lee Thrush
Brian Lee Bell	William "Bill" I. Duncan	Bessie Helen Loretta Horton	Jeoffrey G. Meister	Victor F. Riddle	Charles "Buddy" Frank Tillman
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Janet Marie Bethurem	Frank M. Ellington	Shirley Hulboy	Bernice E. Merschman	Marjorie Rippenkroeger	Arlen Trelstad
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Karen Kay Bonta	Donald D. Farrington	Connie Kay Jobe	Phyllis Rosamond Miller	Robert Frank Samuels	Anita Mae Wagner
Robert Lee Bonta	Zula Nadine Feather	John B. Jobe	James Ray Mitchell	Adela Sandoval	Nancy Jane Wagner
William Earl Boon	Roger Featheringill	Warren Brent Jobe	Larry Joseph Moeller	Ronald R. Sanford	Betty Frances Walker
John William Brockman	Lucille R. Fedler	Larry C. Johnson	Marcella Elizabeth Moore	Virginia M. Savage	Billy Dean "Bill" Walker
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2018 - A Year in Review: January & February



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

George Gaudette looks at the inventory in one of the refrigerators at the Fort Madison Food Pantry. Gaudette said during his 12-year tenure the food pantry has seen growth and change.



Photos by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Above, Ethan Huffman, 10, weaves a yarn Wednesday, about a big fish caught by one of the students at the Elliott Test Kitchen while the student was in Florida. Huffman was the volunteer cook for the study session on fractions. He made baked Mahi Mahi, cilantro chicken quesadillas with spanish rice and a strawberry cake for dessert.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Hound freshman Maddie Rashid drives in the first quarter of the Hounds' 48-34 win over Davis County Wednesday night. It was FMHS' first girls win of the year.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Fort Madison firefighters enter the door of a smoke-filled house in the 2600 block of Avenue O Monday evening at about 9:30. Witnesses say the house was vacant and was being used for storage. Flames fully engulfed the building, but firefighters had flames under control quickly.



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2018 - A Year in Review: January & February



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

FMHS Activities Director Andy Mitchell presented Holy Trinity Catholic's Brett Schneider, left, who ran cross country in the shared girls program with FMHS and the Hounds' Caleb Gehle with their plaques as 2017 Class 3A state track meet participants. Schneider placed 8th in the 800 meter run and Gehle placed 3rd in the Wheel Chair shotput and 6th in the 100- and 200-meter wheelchair races.

Above, Steffensmeier stands atop the podium for the Class 3A 152 lb wrestlers and gives a look up to his family in the stand. At top, Head Coach Ryan Smith gets to present all 152 lb wrestlers with their medals and then gets to drape the first-place medal over the head of Harlan Steffensmeier; left, Harlan celebrates in a bear hug with Smith and assistant Coach Derek Doherty after downing Cayd Lara, in a 5-4 decision.

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Pen City current



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

A worker from Seither and Cherry works on the iron framing of the new 12,000 square foot addition at Huffman Welding and Machine that will hold a new Lucas CNC mill that can turn out projects weighing close to 20 tons. Below is a photo of the incoming mill.

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FM police looking for more reserves

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - A depleted police reserve program has the Fort Madison Police department looking at adding to the reserve officer corps.

Jamie Carle and Brent Gibbs, the co-coordinators of the local police reserve program, are looking for residents who are interested in joining the program to give back to the community or as a springboard into a career in law enforcement.

Carle said currently the department has just three officers in the reserve corp and would like to add seven to nine officers. The police department is planning on having a testing session on Sunday, April 8. All applications would need to be returned by April 1.

Those interested in applying for the reserve program can do so by picking up a packet at city hall, filling it out, and returning it by April 1.

Testing for the program would include a background check and some basic testing as well as a physical test that involves the same physical testing as the regular officers working through the academy.

Fort Madison Police Chief Tim Sittig said reservists aren't subjected to the same performance levels of what's called the Cooper Institute Standards which include sit-ups, push-ups, sit-and-reach, and a 1.5 mile run.

"Those applying should know that we don't have the same expectations of, say, a 20-year-old out of an academy. But we do need to know that they can do a push or sit-up. There are different standards for gender and age and we look at those," Sittig said.

"If they are riding with us and we have a pursuit or a fight, our expectation is for them to participate as well. So we want to make sure they can cover our back. We think of the police reserves the same way as a national guard...citizen officers who train once a month and, if



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Fort Madison Police reservist Rachel Sugars is one of just three remaining on the staff and police officials are looking to increase that number to about 10 with an April application and testing period.

something bad happens, we can activate them."

Gibbs said the reserve officers fill in with special events, traffic control, and requested security in the city. There is no pay other than the \$1 per year to keep them on workers' compensation if something were to happen. Reservists can also make money manning security for events like sporting events, the rodeo or other events.

"We tend to give those jobs to the reservists so they can get some experience and also to make a little money. Aside from the tazers and firearms, they have to pay for most of their gear. We hold some fundraisers for them

like the dunk tank at RiverFest and we'll do some Pizza Hut fundraisers for them. We try to help where we can."

Rachel Sugars is one of the three current reservists and said it's helped her along her career path. She said the state law requires reservists work a minimum 12 hours per month.

"This is something that I've been working for and I enjoy it," she said. "It's got my foot in the door for a full-time job."

See **RESERVES**, page 11



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Photo by Ava Peitz/PCC

Fort Madison resident Gary Pilkington gets a "chili" reception from Fort Madison Police and Lee County Sheriff's deputies and reserves as part of Hy-Vee's annual Chili fundraiser for the Lee County Crime Stoppers. The event was held at both Keokuk and Fort Madison-Hy-Vees as a contest to see which store could raise the most money.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Canadian gaggle

A gaggle of geese found an stretch of open water on the Mississippi River Tuesday evening. The recent cold snap accompanied by about four inches of snow crusted the river over. Snow is expected in light amounts each day for the rest of the week.

2018 - A Year in Review: January & February

Siemens firms up new FM blade plans for 2019

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - Just three weeks after announcing more than 200 layoffs, Siemens Gamesa has announced today that a new line of wind blades is targeted to begin production at the Fort Madison facility beginning in early 2019.

A release this morning from the company indicated production on a new SG 2.7-129 state-of-the-art wind turbine will begin in the United States next year, with the blades for the new turbine being produced at the Fort Madison manufacturing facility. The nacelles, or cover housings of the turbines internal gears and drives, and hubs will be produced in Hutchinson, Kansas.

On Jan. 23-24 the company announced more than 200 layoffs at the facility and said some employees may be recalled if market trends show a need.

“Headcount is always based on the needs of the business. We are currently retooling the factories to accommodate additional product lines. With these capital investments and expected increased delivery schedules, we do anticipate some employee recalls later this year,” Gurney said in January.

A spokesperson for the company reiterated Monday afternoon the company does expect to some rehiring, but declined to give any specifics on when or how many employees would be recalled, or at what status they would be rehired.

“With these capital investments and expected increased delivery schedules, we do anticipate some employee recalls later this year. Headcount is always based on the needs of the business and will be adjusted accordingly. At this time, we cannot provide any numbers.”

“We are very excited to introduce the new SG 2.7-129 to our portfolio – the next generation in a fleet of

turbines with a proven track record and high availability. With an increase of more than 8% in annual energy production compared to its predecessor, this turbine will deliver greater returns and is another important step in reducing the levelized cost of energy,” says José Antonio Miranda, Onshore Americas CEO, Siemens Gamesa Renewable Energy. “This product is also unique in that it was co-designed to include best practices from both former companies, making it a best-in-class wind turbine for the U.S.”

According to the release this morning, the SG 2.7-129 was developed with an eye toward increasing energy production for sites with medium to low wind conditions in the U.S. It features modularized components for increased flexibility and reliability. It also employs advanced technology with a 129-meter rotor,

boasting an increased swept area of 16% compared to its predecessor, the SG 2.6-120. Additionally, the SG 2.7-129 features a state-of-the-art drive train that has been optimized to deliver maximum energy capture.

The product design also incorporates several added safety and operational benefits related to the service and maintenance of the turbines, including increased accessibility of key components and access to the weather station from inside the nacelle. The SG 2.7-129 is the latest addition to the Siemens Gamesa 2.X product platform. Combined with the SG 3.4-132 and the SG 4.2-145 wind turbines, these products can address all of the diverse needs of the U.S. market.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 16,291 times and was engaged with 5,390 times.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Hound senior Treavor-James Kokjohn finishes off a dunk in Saturday’s game with Holy Trinity. James-Kokjohn was called for a technical on the play for hanging on the rim and the basket was waived off.

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2018 - A Year in Review: January & February

Nelson killer gets 50 years for murder

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – A Burlington man told a Lee County judge how, almost one year ago, he shot a Fairfield man in the eye and dumped his body at Indian Path Park along the Skunk River.

Joseph Mayorga, Jr., 35, Burlington, was accused of murdering 47-year-old James Merlin Nelson of Fairfield on or about Feb. 11, 2017. As part of a plea agreement with the Lee County Attorney's office and Asst. County Attorney Bruce McDonald, Mayorga pleaded guilty on Tuesday in front of Judge Mark Kruse at the North Lee County Courthouse to a charge of 2nd degree murder.

Mayorga then waived all pre-sentencing procedures and requested immediate sentencing, to which Kruse, after a lengthy procedural discussion with Mayorga on his decision to waive his rights prior to sentencing, sent him to prison for 50 years.

Mayorga must serve at least 35 years of the sentence before he can be considered for any type of release. He was also ordered to pay \$150,000 to the estate of Nelson.

Prior to sentencing, McDonald put Nelson's brother, David Summers of Birmingham, on the stand to give a statement on behalf of the family.

Summers remained standing and looked at Mayorga, who remained cuffed throughout the hearing.

"Joe, you've taken from us a great friend, a great brother, and a great uncle. We wish so much we could be in your family's position that we could go visit him. But we can't, we've lost him forever. You've taken a great deal and we love him and we miss him so much. I prayed for the Lord for him to grant me forgiveness, I

“

He said something about my wife and I became enraged and I shot him.”

-Joseph Mayorga, Jr., convicted on 2nd degree murder

haven't gotten that, but I will and I pray for your salvation. I just want you to know you've hurt us," Summers said through broken words and tears.

Mayorga made a statement apologizing to the family and said both families have suffered.

"Nothing can take back my actions, Mayorga said in red county fatigues. "I apologize greatly. We've all suffered - my family as well as yours. I'm sorry for my actions and for that I'll pay for the rest of my life. I apologize," he said standing and addressing 15 members of Nelson's family and friends.

Judge Kruse asked Mayorga to explain the details of the shooting.

Mayorga said he and Nelson were sitting in his 2007 Chevy Impala in the garage of his residence in Burlington talking when Nelson said something that angered Mayorga.

"He said something about my wife and I became enraged and I shot him," Mayorga said.

Kruse asked what weapon was used, to which Mayorga replied a .38 caliber revolver. Kruse then asked where he shot Nelson.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

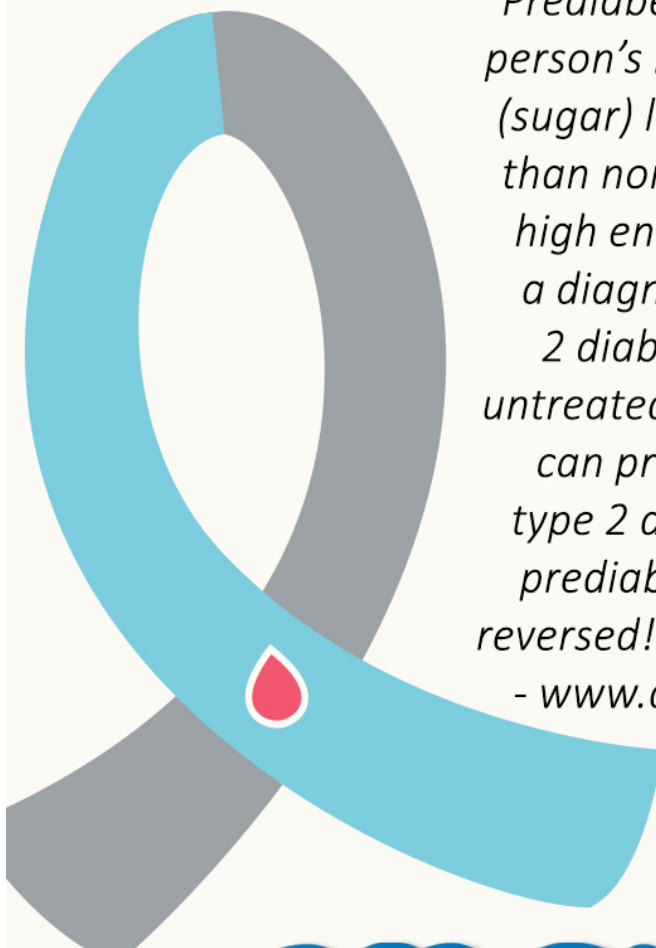
Joseph Mayorga Jr., is escorted to court at the North Lee County Courthouse this morning by Lee County Sheriff's Detective Chad Donaldson, left, and Lee County Jail Administrator John Canida, rear. Mayorga was sentenced to 50 years in prison for the Feb. 11, 2017 murder of James Merlin Nelson.

See MURDER, page 11

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Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Burlington Northern Santa Fe workers tend to a derailment just east of the Hwy. 61 overpass near the Lee County Sheriff's Department Monday at about 1:30 p.m.

This photo was seen on social media and pencitycurrent.com 75,130 times and was engaged with 7,909 times.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Sun dogs

A view over the Highway 61 bypass overpass northeast of Fort Madison Monday morning showed a faint version of sun dog anomalies. The sun's light shines through frozen crystals suspended in the air to create the arcs on the sides equidistant from the sun, visible here on the far left and right of the photograph. In sharp frigid temperatures the sun will take a diamond shape reaching up to a sun dog above the sun.

2018 - A Year in Review: January & February

CL student arrested after school threat

Student made threats on school trip about wanting to commit violent act against the school with a firearm

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

DONNELSON - According to Lee County Sheriff Stacy Weber a Central Lee High School student has been arrested this afternoon after an investigation into a threat to commit an assault involving a firearm at the school.

Detectives were called to the Central Lee High School immediately after school officials had learned of the threat. The student was interviewed and subsequently arrested and charged with harassment in the first degree, an aggravated misdemeanor. The student is also under 18 years of age, therefore authorities are not required by Iowa Code to release the name.

Weber said the parents of the student have been extremely cooperative and have surrendered all their firearms to local law enforcement. The Lee County

Sheriff's department released a statement on Facebook, citing a tech issue with the department's email service. The Facebook post had more than 55,000 views and 200 shares within 24 hours.

"The investigation is ongoing, but we felt the public needed to know the threat was taken seriously and charges were filed immediately," Weber said. "The Sheriff's office would like to assure the public that steps have been taken to ensure the safety of our school and the students who attend it."

A statement placed on the district Facebook page stated the following:

"On Friday, February 23rd, the district was provided an anonymous tip about a high school student who, at a recent school activity trip, made verbal threats of committing an act of violence with a weapon. Upon



WEBER

receiving this tip, the district administration acted immediately and contacted the Lee County Sheriff's Office.

The district searched the student's locker, computer, and personal belongings but found no weapon or evidence of a plan to commit an act of violence. The student was interviewed by local Lee County Sheriff detectives. Information has been turned over to the county attorney for any criminal charges. The student has been suspended from school grounds and activities for the near future. The district administration will make a determination of the student's enrollment at Central Lee after a full investigation is completed.

Safety and security are the utmost importance for the Central Lee School District. The district encourages our stakeholders to alert us of any suspicious activity or verbal/written threats. By working together, we can make our community and schools safe for our students."

Weber said further information may be provided by the Lee County Attorney's Office at a later date.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 8,910 times and was engaged with 2,531 times.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Fort Madison wrestler Harlan Steffensmeier, shown in here in earlier action this season at Fort Madison, was named Co-Outstanding Wrestler at the Ed Winger Classic by taking the title at 152 lbs. knocking off state champion Grant Stotts of West Des Moines Valley.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Hounds' senior Sheymouhr Redd-Donald scores on a fast break Tuesday against the Grayhounds.

Variety Show

Aaron Copic, left, and Francisco Trejo, both seniors at Fort Madison High School, perform as part of a quartet at the annual FMHS Variety Show Sunday afternoon.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

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2018 - A Year in Review: January & February

Reserve program can be jump start to career

RESERVES - Continued from Page 8

Sugars said she's been sworn in for a year and half, but has been involved in the program for the past three years.

"When I got hired on, we didn't do the physical testing, but I went through the regional tests," Sugars said.

Carle and Gibbs both started as reservists who found an interest in law enforcement and now have made full-time careers out of the profession.

Sittig said reservists usually sign up for two reasons.

"One is that they use it as stepping stone for a full-time job and others just want to give back to the community," he said. "So if that's an interest to them, some of them progress and get to the point that through getting all the required training passed and approved they can take a car out. Others are perfectly happy riding and partnering up, either way is perfectly fine with us."

Reservists would also need to learn 10-codes and the phonetic alphabet as part of the training program and would need to pass a background check.

"Once they complete their certification program, the moment we take them on as a reserve officer, depending on their work schedule, that's about 18 months, but once they complete that, they are eligible to write citations and everything other than implied consent," Gibbs said.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 11,087 times and was engaged with 2,263 times.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

At top, Madeline Taylor of Fort Madison and Dave Zaceski of Illinois walk with hundreds of others as part of the annual North Lee County Right to Life March for Life on Saturday morning.

Mayorga apologizes to family as part of sentencing

MURDER - Continued from Page 10

"In the eye," he replied.

Kruse asked Mayorga if he realized that shooting someone at close range could kill him.

"I didn't...I guess I kind of blacked out at that point. I didn't understand what was going on...there was a lot going on," he said.

Kruse asked Mayorga if the crime happened in Lee County, to which Mayorga responded it hadn't. That caused a brief delay as Mayorga's attorney Allen Cook and McDonald met with the judge to discuss the issue of the crime happening in Burlington and a possible venue issue.

However, after a brief recess to review the case law on crimes being committed in one county and the body disposed in another, the issues were resolved as Mayorga, after discussion with his attorney, waived any venue issues.

"It was the same night that I drove him to Indian Path, which is in Wever, Iowa in Lee County, and disposed of his body right there," Mayorga said.

Cook said Mayorga was willing to waive those venue issues to prevent the case starting all over and wanted to put the issue behind him.

Nelson's body was discovered at the park at about 11 a.m. on Feb. 11 by visitors of the park. According to family members, Nelson was working construction at the Iowa Fertilizer Company prior to his death, but they weren't sure what his job status was when he was killed.

On Feb. 11th, the Lee County Sheriff's Office responded to a call of a possible deceased person at a Lee County roadside park near Wever, Iowa.

Upon arrival, a male subject, later identified as 47-year-old Nelson, was found deceased. An autopsy performed on Nelson determined that he was killed by a single gunshot to the head. According to Iowa Department of Criminal Investigations Special Agent Rick Rahn, since the body was discovered in Lee County, the court case would be handled there, however Mayorga had the option to ask for a change of venue.

Mayorga had been incarcerated in Muscatine County on a federal gun charge but was transported to Lee County on Sept. 28 to face murder charges. Information was sketchy at the trial as to the disposition of the guns charge, but Kruse said the sentence would run concurrent to any probation or parole associated with that case.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 9,098 times and was engaged with 3,342 times.

#HyperLocalSuperFresh

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2018 - A Year in Review: January & February

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-Chuck & Lee

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