



# Pen City Current

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## Serendipity has Smith back in Fort Madison

*Editor's Note: This the next installment of our ongoing series looking at people who grew up in Fort Madison and have either stayed or moved back to the area and are making contributions to area communities.*

**BY CHUCK VANDENBERG**

PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - One of the worst kept secrets in Fort Madison is that high school wasn't Greg Smith's cup of tea.



SMITH

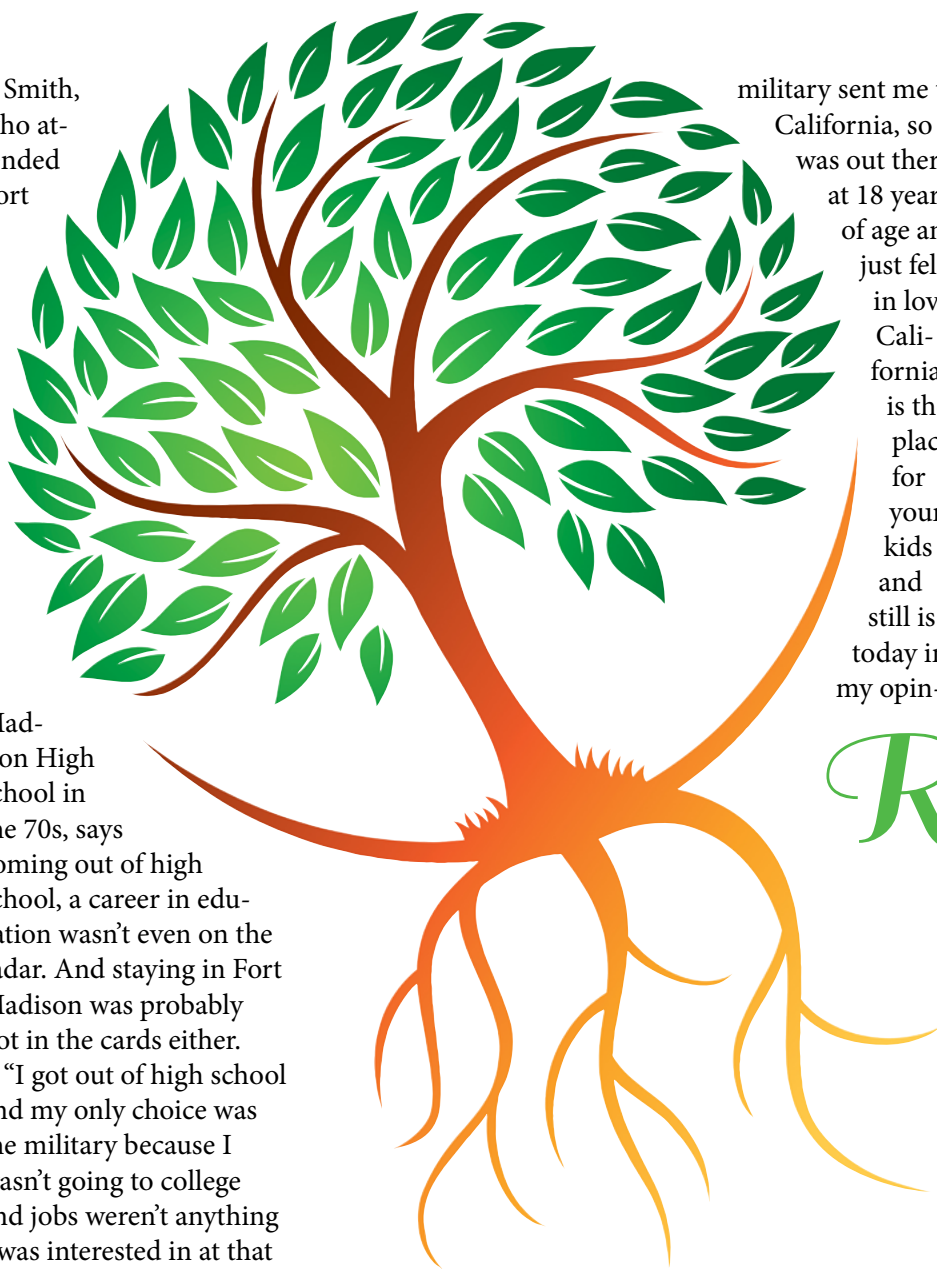
But now the Fort Madison High School Principal says his most valuable message to students is to not burn bridges because you never know where life's going to take you.

Smith, who attended Fort

Madison High school in the 70s, says coming out of high school, a career in education wasn't even on the radar. And staying in Fort Madison was probably not in the cards either. "I got out of high school and my only choice was the military because I wasn't going to college and jobs weren't anything I was interested in at that point," Smith said. "The

military sent me to California, so I was out there at 18 years of age and just fell in love. California is the place for young kids and still is today in my opin-

ion." After working through his military service and being discharged in 1979, Smith went about finding work in California and bounced from job to job working in security positions because of his experience in the military police corp. But eventually he moved back to Fort Madison in 1985 and got a job at the prison and helped out his parents. He said he liked the job but missed California so he moved back out to the



## Rooted

west coast. "The worst decision I've ever made," Smith said. He said again he moved around from job to job but it wasn't the same as it was as a young kid and he missed the feeling of community and self he had in the midwest and

See **ROOTED**, page 3

## FM man starts early mayoral bid

**BY CHUCK VANDENBERG**  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - A newly announced candidate for mayor of Fort Madison says the city has become stagnant and he wants to help restart growth.



SORRENTINO

Chris Sorrentino, who has taken out a petition to run for Mayor and already has enough signatures to satisfy the 30 he said were required to get on the ballot, said he wants to usher in an era where the city goes back to the basics, stops what he terms as "stupid spending" and bring the residents back into control of government.

The truck driver came to the forefront of local politics when he tried to fight an amendment to city code that prohibited him from parking his tractor on city streets or on his property. Despite his efforts the amendment was passed.

But Sorrentino said that setback isn't what prompted him to seek office.

"I've been very impressed with a lot of the feedback I'm getting from people," Sorrentino said

See **CANDIDATE**, page 2

## Dinner Theater 2017



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

FMHS' music department put on their annual dinner theater on Friday and Saturday nights. See inside for more photos and visit our website for videos.



Photo by Kelsey Vandenberg/PCC

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**From the Front/Local News**

**Sorrentino: City needs to rebuild trust with residents**

**CANDIDATE** - Continued from Page 1

Friday. "I feel that everyone is amply ready for a change. The residents I've spoken with have lost faith in the city's government."

Sorrentino said one of his main platforms is doing what is necessary to help the school district get a new elementary school built.

"Last November when we put the school on the ballot, you went to the ballot and you were voting for a new school and a new park. We don't need a new park and there wasn't enough discussion on it so people didn't know what they were voting for and voted against it."

He said the city council needs to be more engaged in the process because quality and contemporary education are a critical part of bringing jobs to the area. So the city council should have been holding meetings to help the school district get that measure passed.

"It needs to happen like that because at the end of the day regardless of who's on the council and who's the mayor, the city belongs to the citizens. They elect us to represent them and to do what's right for them and by them. So they need to have a very big voice in what goes on."

He said there is enough room on the new middle school property to have an elementary school and a high school on the property, which would save on transportation and help traffic flow.

"It's tearing our city apart. If you go to Central Lee, there is a campus where everything is in the same location. Buses come in and they're gone and that's what needs to happen," Sorrentino said.

With Fort Madison and Lee County still struggling with unemployment and dilapidated roads, Sorrentino said he's frustrated with the lack of progress in a town he wanted to come live in.

"I'm disgruntled. When we moved to Fort Madison, I was living in Burlington. I'm not a big city guy, I've lived in metroplex cities and rural areas and I like smaller towns. The first time I visited Fort Madison, I came down with a buddy of mine and drove through here.

*"They elect us to represent them and to do what's right for them and by them. So they need to have a very big voice in what goes on."*

-Chris Sorrentino  
FM mayoral candidate



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

**Early announcement**

Fort Madison resident Chris Sorrentino has decided to make an early announcement of his run for mayor. Signatures papers aren't due to be turned in until late August.

And I looked around and said this is Fort Madison and he said, 'Yeah, this is a podunk little town' and I said, "I love it!"

He said he would also advocate for youth programs so they have places to go and have activities and get to know each other again. We need to include our fire departments and local police to help get those types of programs going."

Other platforms would be increasing programs and aid for people with criminal records who are trying to get on the right track.

"Let's have programs to give them reinforcement to keep them out of those ways of life."

The economy is another area that Sorrentino feels is lagging behind other communities and without a lot coming in from outside the city, he said the city needs to be more responsible with its spending.

"Avenue G, since the theater opened, is starting to draw more traffic, but it's local traffic," he said. "But there is a lot of stupid spending on the city's part. Unnecessary spending. Things need to be prioritized. There's nothing to draw tourism here. We have our few events like the Rodeo and a few fishing tournaments but other than that nothing to draw tourism."

We have a fort that's in disarray and we have a riverfront that is just sitting there. We need to do something with that. We

highest accident rate at .97 compared to the next highest at .78.

Sorrentino also said he thinks the money spent on rehabbing the waste water treatment plant is out of line.

"At some point you have to ask is it cheaper to do the overhaul or to rebuild it. The stupid spending will stop. I will stop it and everything will be looked at from every angle before it's approved."

He said his biggest effort will be on rebuilding trust in the city.

"You have to rebuild the trust. That's part of the biggest hurdle I have. I'm not a politician, I want to go in there to represent the citizens. I actually had no intentions of ever running for office. I wouldn't even before get into an in depth discussion on politics. But after watching the last two years and Fort Madison falling apart and nothing being done, a lot of it was mind-boggling as you watch what's going on because you don't know how to respond. You just sit there and go, 'Really?'"

Signature papers for those seeking elections can be taken out anytime from the Secretary of State's website, but are turned in between Aug. 28 and Sept. 21 for the fall general election.

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**From the Front**

# Track back was a crazy one for Smith

**ROOTED** - Continued from Page 1

he said people from California have opinions of people from the midwest and typically they are opinions of being hardworking, honest and truthful.

"I just started thinking, you know, they're right. I've never had a problem with those people. It wasn't what was going on out there. Lots of back door stuff going on. I came back because I never had a bad experience here."

But when he again moved back to southeast Iowa, he said it was very slow going and the re-acclimation took some time, but the one thing that started happening that solidified his decision was the people. People started talking to him about his childhood and his parents and he quickly realized that this was the right move.

Then Smith decided to get a degree and ended up teaching elementary school as a second grade teacher, before moving to the local Area Education Agency. That's where Smith found his way into administration. Former Superintendent Ken Marang had asked Smith to write up a job description for a curriculum director for the Fort Madison Community School District. Marang couldn't find anyone during interviews that he was comfortable with and then told Smith he wanted him to take the job.

All the while Marang encouraged Smith to pursue an administration certificate. After several years as the curriculum director he got a call from Marang again when the former FMHS principal left for another posi-

tion. Marang told Smith he wanted him to take the job, but Smith said he would do it only if Marang would let him have the curriculum position back after a year if it wasn't working out.

Clearly, the move worked out for everyone and now Smith uses that position to try to help other kids see the future and execute it with a bit more focus than what he went through.

"Being in education is the perfect scenario. This is one of the most important four years of kids' lives," Smith said. "I come back home and have this connection to the community and the high school makes it even more so because everyone knows who you are. At the end of the day, people do know you and have a respect for the job you do. It's really a love affair, I've fallen in love with Fort Madison all over again."

Smith is actively involved in many organizations in Fort Madison including Kiwanis, the Fort Madison Chamber of Commerce, among others including a new committee formed to look into a regional education center for Lee County.

"Here you have the ability to maintain a feel of community," he said. "You don't lose that. Granted, now I walk down the street and don't know half the people. I couldn't say that 20 years ago, but the people that are coming in have the same mindset. The one thing I hear from people over and over again is, 'When I got married and decided to have children I wanted to bring my

kids back to a place where I knew the community was going to show them what a good kid looks like."

"I do think, like I do, that they see something they really enjoyed as a kid. You don't know as an adult if you're going to keep those values and those things that are important to you...but come to find out I think we do. They are so much of a part of who we are. I don't know that it's like that everywhere. It's safe here, people care about you here and I just love that. I wish more people would catch on to that."

Smith said he hears all the time from students who are just excited to get out of Fort Madison when they are done with school and students don't necessarily want to hear stories about coming back to the area, when all their thoughts are about seeing the world. Smith said he doesn't try to show them the values of staying here and raising a family.

He said his tactic now with students is to ask why they want to leave. He says his experiences may be able to help them reduce the amount of time they spend trying to figure out what they want to do.

"I think its a good thing to go and come back. But if we can help them not waste 10 years. 5 years is ok to go out and see what's out there, but 10 is too much," Smith said. "It's grand that you go out and see something else, because in the long run, if and when you do come back, it helps perpetuate what we have here."

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*FM Chamber members are #ChamberStrong*

PCC STAFF

FORT MADISON – The Fort Madison Chamber of Commerce’s Member Benefits Committee continues to visit member businesses as part of their #ChamberStrong campaign. The goal of the program is to personally visit every Chamber member every two years to thank them for their membership and support. The most recent visits took place Thursday. Members that were visited were Boulders Inn & Suites Fort Madison, Fort Colony Family Restaurant, Sunnybrook Fort Madison, and Shot-tenkirk (pictured on page 6).

Members have access to various networking opportunities throughout the year, professional development opportunities, use of the Chamber facilities, use of the Chamber bulk mail permit, workshops, and more. For more information about becoming a Chamber member, visit their website at [www.ftmadison.com](http://www.ftmadison.com) or call the office at (319) 372-5471.



**Boulders Inn & Suites Fort Madison is #ChamberStrong**

Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC



**The Fort Colony Family Restaurant is #ChamberStrong**

Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC



**Sunnybrook Fort Madison is #ChamberStrong**

Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

**Classifieds**

# the classifieds



**Pen City current**

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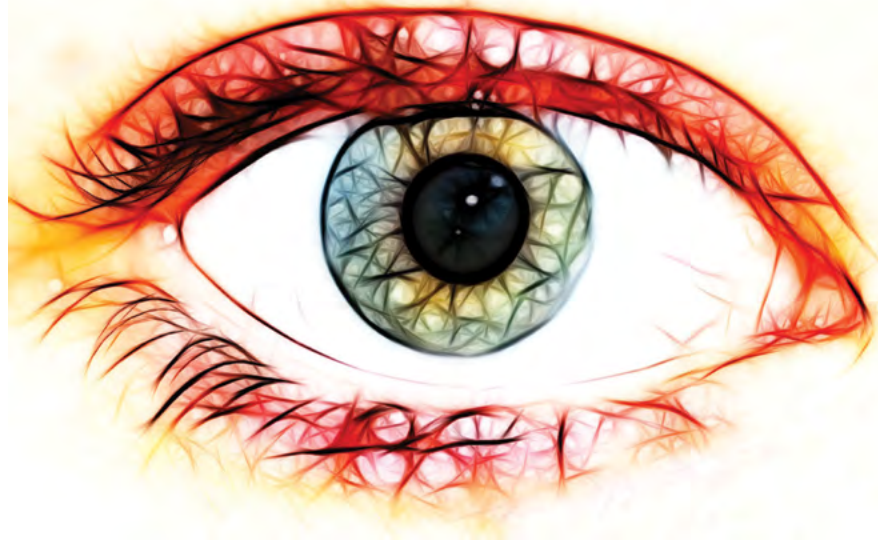
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## FM Chamber campaign rolls on

#ChamberStrong - Continued from Page 4



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Shottenkirk FM is #ChamberStrong

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# SCENE AROUND TOWN: FMHS DINNER THEATER 2017



FMHS students were Dancing in the Streets (or, rather, the school gymnasium) this weekend during their annual Dinner Theater performances.

