



Pen City Current

Thursday, Dec. 7, 2017 | 6 pages | Volume 1 • Issue 282

City won't land Viking Cruise Lines port of call

Local officials had waning hopes of a deal

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - According to information from Fort Madison Mayor Brad Randolph, Vikings Cruise lines

has made a decision to halt discussions to build ships and offer tours in the United States.

Randolph said he received information from Viking Cruise Lines on Tuesday, which he said was disappointing news for Fort Madison.

"While the news is unfortunate,



RANDOLPH

moving forward, the City, Fort Madison Partners, and Fort Madison Economic Development will consider other options for a best use of the riverfront and focus the monies set aside for another project or possibility," Randolph wrote in a text Wednesday evening.

"The fact that Viking considered Fort Madison for a port of call, means that our community has a lot to offer, and we

need to pursue all opportunities to take advantage of that fact."

Randolph also included the following excerpt from the Viking communication.

"Viking has terminated current discussions to build vessels in a US shipyard for Mississippi River and U.S.

See CITY, page 2

These 'Hounds move in P.A.C.K.s

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - This isn't your grandfather's junior high. This isn't even your mother's or your older brother's middle school.

An idea that started churning almost a decade ago, coupled with new innovative ways of reaching students has resulted in a 90-minute block at the Fort Madison Middle School called P.A.C.K.

It's an acronym that stands for Proud, Authentic, Courageous and Kind and if there were any confusion among the students at the school as to the meaning of the program, it's on display, big and proud on a 90-foot banner right in the cafeteria on the main floor of the building. Emblazoned in FMMS crimson and black, the banner shows the words, but also the traits of each word on the banner.

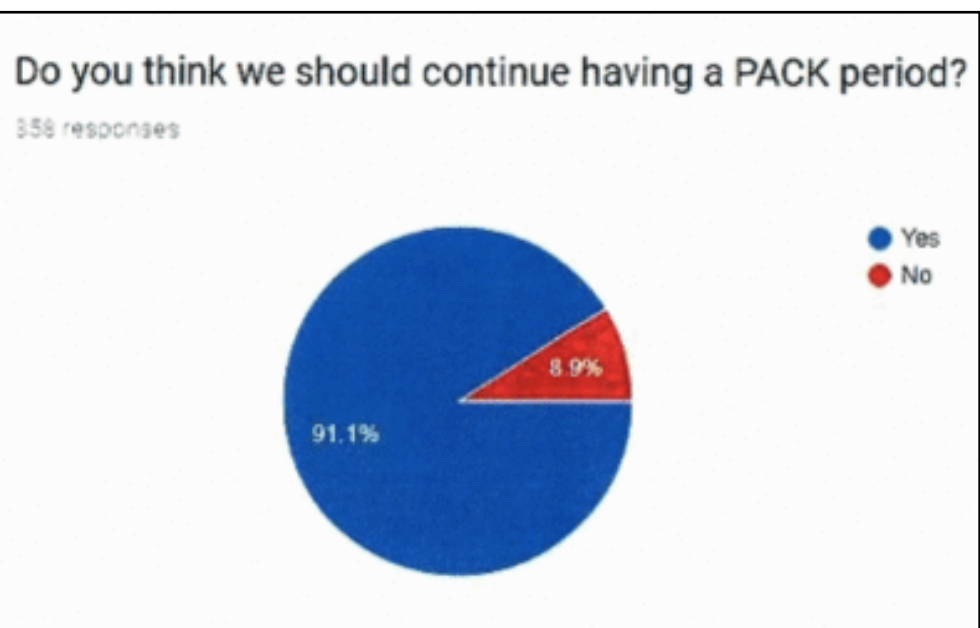
It hovers over the 4th-8th grade students every time they pass through the common area.

But they aren't always just passing through for lunch or moving from one class to



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Students, administration, peer mentors, and teachers gather in the multipurpose room during P.A.C.K. period on Wednesday including Asst. Principal Brent Zirkel, standing right, Principal Todd Dirth, second to right, and Foundations Instructor Brian Mendez, standing, far left. Below, student responses from a P.A.C.K. questionnaire.



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Local News/From the Front



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Fort Madison students donated 441 jars of peanut butter to the Fort Madison Food Pantry on Monday. The donation will be used as part of the pantry's annual Christmas basket giveaway that takes place on Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon at the Pavilion in Riverview Park..

City will keep looking for ways to capitalize on riverfront asset

CITY - Continued from Page 1

Coastal cruising. As the details were being refined, it became apparent the economics did not meet Viking's goals."

Fort Madison city and economic officials had reserved hope that Viking Cruise lines would consider Fort Madison for a stopping point and that venture could help spur development of the city's riverfront property.

Councilman Rusty Andrews said he wasn't surprised by the bad news.

"While it is unfortunate, not just for Fort Madison, but also for many Mississippi River communities to hear of their choice not to proceed with U.S. cruises, I am not surprised," Andrews said.

"I hope to see Fort Madison capitalize on the asset they have and continue with riverfront improvements, For not only possible new endeavors, but also for those already using our riverfront."



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Pen City Current

Founded in 2016



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Pen City Current and www.pencitycurrent.com are products of Market Street Publishing, LLC. Pen City Current is published Sunday through Friday mornings.

From the Front/Lottery Numbers

In first year, P.A.C.K. has students attention

FMMS - Continued from Page 1

the next. From 10:50 to 12:20 every day, all the students in the school stop core programming and enter P.A.C.K. period.

FMMS Principal Todd Dirth created a Foundations course with Stephanie Dobson and Roxanne Puga at the middle school back in 2006. The Foundations program was another attempt to address, not just the educational needs of students, but the larger social needs including character development.

Programs such as that and Ascent were the precursors to the current P.A.C.K. system that has emerged with the collaboration of the FMMS staff.

Associate Principal, Brent Zirkel, said the program is ever-evolving, and to say that the response to the program from students and staff has been encouraging, may be an

understatement.

"We're gonna build this airplane as we are flying it" Zirkel said Wednesday morning just prior to the P.A.C.K. period.

"Kids are coming to us now with very different backgrounds. When I grew up you came home from school, you go out and play, and parents say come home when the streetlights come on. Back then we were playing with 14 or 15 other kids and you learned your social skills that way. Now we find kids are going home and getting on devices and not interacting with the family, sometimes not even having dinner with the family."

With Dirth building the cornerstones of Foundations, the Ascent class framework, and collaborating with students to define those programs, Zirkel said the staff

wanted to try to continue to expand upon those programs while incorporating the digital world. He said he woke up on a Saturday morning with an idea on how to incorporate all the different pieces at a starting point for a new program.

"Foundations is generally taught to 6th-8th graders but we're hoping to get him down to the 4th and 5th graders and possibly add someone else to work with the older kids. You couldn't ask for a better personality to work with these kids than Brian Mendez. I wish we had three of him."

He took the outline to Dirth and the two brought in Stephanie Dobson, the school's guidance counselor and Melissa Helt, the FMMS social worker and other staff to start working on what a possible schedule



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Fort Madison Middle School Asst. Principal Brent Zirkel shows a website that is part of the school's new P.A.C.K. program. The program is school-wide and integrates different teaching models for 90 minutes each day wrapped around lunch, recess, and courses like band and P.E.

could look like."

"They started working on the P.A.C.K. acronym with students close to three years ago," Dobson said. "They started with those kids and asking what does that student look like as a community member and how is that person defined. The pieces of the architecture had been being built by Mr. Dirth, students and staff, but not brought together. It was probably the precursor - the beginning idea that a lot of kids walk in our doors where school is not the first thing on their minds. We wanted to make it a safe place because there is a lot of social and emotional growth that takes place at this age - so that was the drive. The FMMS team came up with the idea of pulling all these together."

Zirkel was quick to say that the idea came to him in a moment of clarity, but from there collaborating with the other staff and administration is what made it work.

"When we say we're building it, it's not just me or the staff, it's me, the staff and the students that are building this program," he said.

At 10:50 students report to either the lunchroom for lunch or go outside for recess or got a P.A.C.K. room they are assigned to and work on projects. One such room on Wednesday was the media center, where Stan Schmidt was overseeing groups of students collaborating to produce a learning activity.

Students in all the classes were fully engaged in either forming

Kahoots of five questions dealing with the P.A.C.K. plus a digital citizenship question. Other students in other classrooms were engaged in group social activities or games in what is called "PACK Play. Others were planning a macaroni and cheese dinner with students leading the recipe discussion and volunteering to bring in menu items.

But in only one case was a teacher in front of the class and that was because items were being written on the whiteboard. Students were grouped together in each section and were fully engaged in the work in front of them.

Zirkel asked several eighth graders in the rooms what was their favorite part of the P.A.C.K. period and several answers included working with other kids who they don't usually get to interact with. One student said he like the games associated the period and another said he like the digital and technological projects that are associated with P.A.C.K.

Michelle Bentler, who spearheads the school Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (S.T.E.M.) program captured some grant money this year for training and supplies helped create the mini golf STEM project as well as a cardboard pinball machine for the 4th and 5th graders and other projects that bring the S.T.E.M. piece into the PACK period.

"It's been pretty seamless for it being a new idea," Helt said. "In the middle of last year we started talking about it

and meeting as an administration team to try to pull it off at the beginning of the year. There were a handful of glitches but it's been pretty successful," she said.

Helt said the social and emotional programming is what should give the program longevity.

"I really feel like it's the relationship piece. It focuses on that social/emotional piece. There's a lot of hands on activities and that helps expand those relationships. But during that part of the day it takes away the academic process and the students are working with other students and teachers that they don't usually interact with and they get to see teachers as someone other than the person at the front of the room," she said.

The staff surveyed the student body and got 358 surveys back. Of those surveys, more than 88% of the students said they were happy with the P.A.C.K. program, and 81% said they were able to meet other students they otherwise would not have been able to meet. And a impressive 91% of the students said they wanted the program to continue.

When pushed to identify what parts of the P.A.C.K. program they enjoyed most, 71% said the S.T.E.M. challenges, and 62% said they enjoyed the team building model of the program.

Zirkel said peer mentors were incorporated as part of the program to give students exposure to leadership skills. Twenty-four students were



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Students raise their hands to volunteer to bring menu items for a macaroni and cheese dinner being planned as part of teacher Amy Doherty's Wednesday's P.A.C.K. period.



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11/29 EVENING
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11/29 EVENING
2 6 9 4

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FRI 08 Dec

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SAT 09 Dec

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High – 36.1° F | Low – 18.3° F

SUN 10 Dec

 Clear Skies
High – 32.3° F | Low – 32.1° F

MON 11 Dec

 Clear Skies
High – 39.1° F | Low – 20.1° F

[OpenWeatherMap](#)

Digital citizenship a piece of program

FMMS - Continued from Page 3

initially selected to be peer mentors in the P.A.C.K. classes and of the 24, 22 said they wanted to continue on in the program when given the option to get out after the first quarter. Dobson said the other two have since expressed interest in staying in the program as well.

The PACK mentor program was such a hit that the school expanded it to 36 students and Zirkel said if it continues to be successful he'd like to build that to 100 different mentors by the end of the year.

"Research is showing that 67% of the jobs these students are preparing for don't even exist yet and human knowledge doubles every 18 months," he said. "So we are training them for the future that isn't here yet in a futuristic model that we ourselves are learning about as we

go. It's pretty remarkable."

Another piece of the program is digital citizenship and Zirkel said that is an important facet that was integrated after the start.

"We don't have a digital citizenship curriculum in the district and we're in the process of developing it. We thought if we wait we're going to lose several years of students that aren't going to get that curriculum so we're moving on it now, but once you build it, it becomes obsolete because things are always changing.

A website www.bloodhoundpack.com, was set up for that part of the program and is broken down into two categories, one for 4th and 5th graders and the other for 6th-8th graders. Again Zirkel pointed to the student involvement in creating

the website and scenarios that are on there for the students to discuss so they can be exposed to certain social media norms before they actually encounter them in real life.

One of the fictional scenarios was a 13 year old who had posted pictures of her in a swimming suit and asked for reactions and likes and another student tries to tell her it's not a good idea. The website allows the students to see and discuss that scenario before actually being confronted with it.

"We sent out a survey and then scrubbed the names for confidentiality and we post those scenarios on a 'Post or Don't Post' page and create those discussions with the kids before they actually encounter it on their devices," Zirkel said. "It's one of the other pieces. Kids at this age don't have that frontal lobe development

yet and this is one of the tools we use to help with that development."

He said the other nice thing is that teachers are benefitting from the program as well.

"Teachers are working together like they never have before and during P.A.C.K. they are actually modeling some of the collaboration pieces for the students."

He summarized the program as a progress through struggle, a slogan the team has demonstrated this year.

There is struggle because of adversity, but you need adversity to grow. I've been amazed by our teaching staff this year. P.A.C.K. is something we've never done before. People can get bogged down in change, but our staff has jumped in and embraced it and we're having some really great experiences with it."

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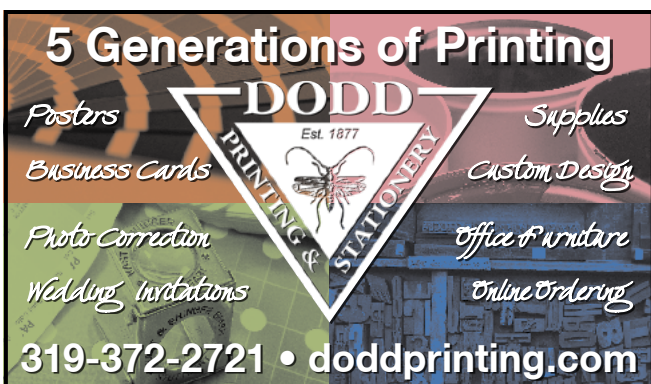
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Public Notices/Classifieds

PUBLIC NOTICES

PUBLIC NOTICE
Fort Madison Community School District
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Minutes of the December 4, 2017 Work Session

I. The meeting was called to order by President Wondra at 6:00 p.m. Directors Young, DiPrima, Hope, Ross and Troxel were present.

Also present were Superintendent Slater and Director of Curriculum and Student Services Kim Harmon. Director Hotop was absent.

II. Recognition of guests. President Wondra welcomed members of the audience in attendance.

III. Approve the agenda. It was moved by DiPrima and seconded by Young to approve the agenda as presented. The motion passed on a 6-0 voice vote.

IV. Study on Curriculum. Kim Harmon led a discussion on data and assessments.

V. Adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 6:59 p.m.

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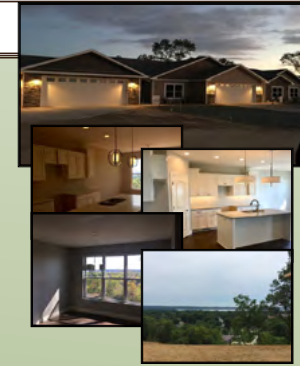
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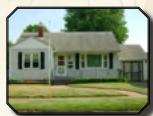
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Celebrations

KINZE MEHL



KINZE MEHL

FORT MADISON - Pen City Current congratulates Katelyn and Daniel Mehl of Donnellson on the birth of their daughter Kinze Mehl.

Kinze was born on Nov. 18, 2017 at 8 a.m. at Fort Madison Community Hospital. Kinze is welcomed home by 3-year old Brycen.

Grandparents are Lori & Dave (deceased) Mehl - West Point and Roger and Denise Church of Keokuk. Great-Grandparents are George and Gayle Austin of Donnellson and Kathy Church of Keokuk.

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