



Pen City Current

Friday, March 31, 2017 | 6 pages | Volume 1 • Issue 87

YMCA may take over reins of city pool

Council to discuss idea at Tuesday's council meeting

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - A move by the City of Fort Madison and the Fort Madison YMCA could have the city pool in the hands of recreation experts by the start of the season.

According to Fort Madison YMCA Director Ryan

Wilson and Fort Madison City Manager David Varley, negotiations have already taken place to turn over management of the city pool to the YMCA this year. Approval to move on the negotiations needs to come from the Fort Madison City Council at Tuesday's meeting.

Wilson confirmed negotiations had taken place between city officials and a committee of the YMCA board this week and the conversations were very positive.

"Well, I was approached by the city and by David and



WILSON

he and I talked in person about it and he gave me some information. A couple of days later I took it our board that we had this possible opportunity on our plate and the board thought it was something to take a look at," Wilson said.

The YMCA then formed a committee and did some research into the project and met with the city again on Tuesday.

"We talked about some things and got to the point where we all feel comfortable," Wilson said.

See **POOL**, page 2

Pioneer pulls down the shades on April 28

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - He came with a couple hundred bucks, a Chevy, a girl, and a built a business that's been a part of Fort Madison for the past 40 years.

Now at the age of 68, Tom Crocker's gonna retire because in his words, "I wanna have some time for myself before I die."

Tom has been the owner and operator of Pioneer Glass since 1987 and worked for the company since 1975. He said it's been Pioneer Glass since 1967 and before that it was Tri-State Glass Company.

He said in a perfect world, someone would step in to buy the business but he doesn't think anything like that is going to happen.

"Well, I'd like to see somebody step in, but I'm pretty doubtful of it because you have to have been in the glass business," Crocker said.

At one point, Crocker said Burlington Glass was interested in the business but things have changed for them in Burlington and that doesn't seem to be in the future.

The company's last day in business will be April 28. The building is currently for sale through Fraise Auction & Real Estate and interested parties can contact them at 319-470-0115.

Crocker said once the doors are closed he will probably set up an



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Calling it quits

Tom Crocker, 68, owner and operator of Pioneer Glass will be retiring on April 28 and that will be the last day of business for the company at 1827 Avenue L.

auction with Fraise to sell off some of the equipment and possible some inventory.

"The building is for sale, and I'll probably end up auctioning off

the equipment and some of the inventory, but not too many people are interested in sheets of glass," Crocker said.

See **PIONEER**, page 6

Many FM, township assessments bumped up in 2017

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - Residents checking their 2017 assessed valuations are finding some larger numbers this year.

Fort Madison and all the townships in Lee County took a sizeable hit on valuations of land and property, according to random sampling of county residential property on www.beaconscheidercorp.com. and County Assessor Theresa Murray.

The increase in property taxes that will result from the increased valuations is not good news or local referendum attempts coming down the pipeline.

The Fort Madison School District is trying to pass a referendum in June to build a new elementary school on the current property where the current middle school sits and the Lee County Health Department has a referendum set for May 2, to obtain funds to build a new health department facility on property the county owns just west of the current Lee County Sheriff's Department and jail facility just off Hwy 61 near Montrose.

Lee County Assessor Theresa Murray said all the county townships saw an increase this year as did the City of Fort Madison.

"All townships land values went up in 2015 and 2017. Rural residential has really gotten hit the hardest," she said.

"This is totally and completely based on property sales in those areas," Murray said Wednesday. "The sales ratio for 2016 was 6% higher than our assessment. We can be subject to an equalization order from the state. They would do that all across Lee County and that's not fair. Fort Madison sales could be different

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From the Front/Obituaries

City following Washington and Burlington lead

POOL - Continued from Page 1

Varley said the city had been thinking about the idea for a while, but said recent state budget cuts that eliminated offender labor that was being used in the parks, gave the city a reason to look at turning over the pool and using those saved resources to focus on the city parks.

"This will allow us to save staff and time and put those resources to our parks," Varley said. "It was kind of prompted by that, but we've been thinking about it for awhile. It seems like it makes sense to have someone better at recreation do the recreation part and we're better at the facility. Hopefully the public would get some better service, maybe some different hours and things like that."

Varley said the city's looking at paying the YMCA a management fee in hopes of making it a profitable venture for them. He said typically municipalities run pools and lose money but it would be the city's hope and intention that the YMCA could make it a profitable venture for their programming and services.

"We lose money on it and I think the YMCA can run it more efficiently," he said. "They have economies of scale and they can close that gap. We don't expect them to lose money and we would cover any loss or look at a management fee to help with that."

Wilson said he sees it as a win for the YMCA and out of the gate anyway he wouldn't see any changes, with the exception of the YMCA being the manager of the pool.

"All staff at the public pool would become YMCA staff. Lifeguards would be employed and managed by

the Y. The biggest thing that will make this go is that we would keep Sara Mueller in place at the pool. She's been that person that has been overseeing the city pool in the past for the city.

"At this point it's in the city's hands to put something together," Wilson said. "So assuming he gets that nod from the council, the hope would be for us shortly after that to have a contract in hand for me to take to my board."

Wilson and Varley both pointed to Washington where two years ago the Washington YMCA took over operations of the municipal pool and both have heard good things from that relationship. The Burlington YMCA last year took over operations of the West Burlington Municipal Swimming Pool.

"The feedback I got back from Burlington was pretty positive," Wilson said.

Varley said he spoke with Washington officials and both parties there spoke highly of the change. He said after hearing that, he decided to approach Wilson.

"It kind of makes sense all around. If it works for everybody...let's give it a shot for a year."

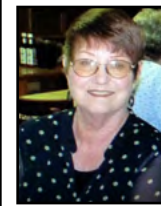
Varley also said he'd like to get approval from the council at Tuesday's meeting so the YMCA can start working on it and not be behind with the pool opening coming in May.

"Tuesday, if they give us approval, the following meeting we'll have a contract ready. Then the YMCA can start working on it. I don't want to put them any more behind. We can make it formal at a following meeting."

OBITUARIES

M. Diane Scott

M. Diane Scott, 71, of Ft. Madison, passed away on Wednesday, March 29, 2017 at 8:15 a.m. at the Great River Medical Center in West Burlington.



SCOTT

She was born on October 30, 1945 in Des Moines, Iowa to James and Elizabeth "Betty" McGivern Scott. Diane retired from Continental Airlines as a flight attendant and then became an in-flight supervisor for Northwest Airlines. She was certified with FAA and trained flight personal on all levels. After

moving back to southeast Iowa she worked at Country Outlet Fashions in Wever. She was of the Catholic faith and was a 1964 graduate of Aquinas High School. Diane enjoyed decorating, reading and sharing recipes. She loved spending time on Facebook and staying in touch with her friends and she loved her animals.

Survivors include two brothers, Tom (Dorothy) Scott of Wever and Jimbo (Cathy) Scott of Ft. Madison; several nieces, nephews, great nieces and great nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents.

The funeral mass will be held on Monday, April 3, 2017 at 11 a.m. at Ss. Mary & Joseph Church with Revs. Mark P. Spring and John McGivern officiating. The family will meet with friends from 10 a.m. until the time of the service at 11 a.m. at the church. Burial will follow in Sacred Heart Cemetery.

A memorial has been established in her memory and online condolences may be left at www.kinglynk.com.

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Area News/For the Record

For the Record

Fort Madison Police Report

03/29/17 10:51 a.m. - Fort Madison Police responded to a report of larceny/theft. No specific location was listed.
 03/29/17 - 10:52 a.m. - Fort Madison Police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the 700 block of Avenue G.
 03/29/17 - 1:12 p.m. - Fort Madison Police responded to a report of a burglary in the 2700 block of Avenue I.
 03/29/17 - 1:28 p.m. - Fort Madison Police responded to a report of a larceny theft in the 1500 block of Avenue L.
 03/29/17 - 3:04 p.m. - Fort Madison Police responded to a report of a larceny theft in the 600 block of 34th Street.
 03/29/17 - 9:47 p.m. - Fort Madison Police arrested Ray James Vowels, 27, of Fort Madison in the

3000 block of Avenue K on a charge of driving while barred, an aggravated misdemeanor. He was taken to the Lee County Jail and held.
 03/30/17 - 6:53 a.m. - Fort Madison Police responded to a report of a stolen vehicle in the 3000 block of Avenue E.
 03/30/17 - 7:01 a.m. - Fort Madison Police responded to a report of a burglary in the 2500 block of Avenue I.

Lee County Sheriff's Report

03/29/17 - 6:30 a.m. - Lee County Sheriff's deputies responded to a one-vehicle accident on Hwy 61 near exit 18. A deer entered the roadway and struck a vehicle driven by Tina Louise Dideriksen, 47, of Burlington. No injuries or citations were issued at the scene.
 03/29/17 - 2:59 p.m. - Lee

County Sheriff's deputies arrested Jacob Alexander Heule, 29, in the 500 block of Dewey in Donnellson, on charges of 3rd-degree criminal mischief and 2nd & subsequent public intoxication. He was taken to the Lee County Jail and held.
 03/29/17 - 3:43 p.m. - Lee County Sheriff's deputies arrested Micahel James Kirk, 45, at the Lee County Sheriff's office, on a warrants for contempt and voluntary absence. He was taken to the Lee County Jail and held.
It should be noted a criminal charge is merely an accusation and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty in a court of law.

Fort Madison Fire Department

03/29/17 - Fort Madison Firefighters responded to four medical calls and one false alarm.

Leadership group fundraiser to benefit Keokuk projects

PCC STAFF

LEE COUNTY - Lee County Leadership and the Keokuk KPlay organization, would like to invite all residents in the greater Lee County area to come out and support Bentley's Playground fundraiser April 1, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. at McCredie Ball Field. Local businesses and patrons have put teams of ten together to play in a kickball tournament. Hy-Vee will be there grilling and a concession stand will be available. All proceeds go towards KPlay and Bentley's Playground. First games starts at 9 a.m. and the championship game will be held at 2:15 pm.

Lee County Leadership is a collaborative effort program between

the Fort Madison Area Chamber of Commerce, Keokuk Area Chamber of Commerce and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach - Lee County and is designed to train emerging leaders in community-based leadership skills. The program utilizes researched-based leadership curriculum from ISU Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development. "Leaders" use their learned skills to implement the selected projects; the projects are for the betterment of a non-profit / not-for-profit organization and the communities in Lee County. KPlay was one of three projects chosen for the class of 2017 to work on. Project

leaders including Mark Boussetot (Keokuk), Doug Ewing (Keokuk), Maggie Guzman (Fort Madison), Shandra McWhorter (Fort Madison) were challenged to create and implement a fundraising opportunity for KPlay and Bentley's Playground.

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From the Front/Classifieds

Murray targeted higher selling map areas

ASSESSMENTS - Continued from Page 1

than Keokuk or Denmark or whoever and we have to look at those sales map areas.”

According to random sampling of 20 residential properties, agriculture, commercial and industrial lots were left out of the sampling, with five each from different quadrants in a grid defined by Avenue H and 24th Street, the average increase in assessed valuation was \$5,141 with the highest random being \$12,640 in the northeast quadrant and one having no increase in the northwest quadrant. However, 18 of the 20 showed no other increases in the past four years.

The tax rate for 2015, the most recent number available on Beacon was \$39.20 per \$1,000 assessed valuation. The taxable portion of the assessed value is, again based on 2015 Beacon numbers was 55.6% of the total assessed value. So a home assessed by the county at \$100,000 including the land the structure sits on, would be taxed at approximately \$55,600.

The home that went up \$12,640, with taxable valuation at 55.6% would be subjected to tax on \$7,028 and using the 2015 number would pay an additional \$275 in taxes. The average figure of \$5,141 would result in an increase in property tax of \$112. Other credits such as military exemptions and homestead credits can help bring the property tax down.

A random sampling of 20 Keokuk residential properties on 20 different streets on both sides of Main Street showed increases on two properties one was \$12,600, one decrease by \$1,500 and the other 17 had no change.

“A lot of Keokuk didn’t change,” Murray said. “The sales analysis showed Keokuk was fine. We changed a few things there here and there.”

Murray said assessed valuations in the county were at about 90% of market value and she feared the Iowa Dept. of Revenue would come in an install a correction, which she said would have hit everyone at close to 10%.

Since it’s real estate sales that determine market value, Murray said she thought it was only fair to assess higher in areas that were selling higher.

“If our sales come through higher than what our assessment is, we can be subject to an equalization order. They can do that all across Lee County and I just don’t think that’s fair. We looked at sales ratio in the map areas and Fort Madison sales were much higher than what we were assessing so corrected there. Keokuk was ok so we didn’t do as much adjusting there. The townships also all took an increase, and they all took an increase in 2015 too, so they got hit twice,” Murray said.

Murray said she felt Lee County would have received the equalization order so she said she targeted areas that were selling higher.

“That’s more fair. If you got a better neighborhood or city or township is selling higher that’s where you should

“That’s more fair. If you’ve got a neighborhood or city or township that is selling higher, that’s where you should increase the assessment.”

-Theresa Murray,
Lee County Assessor

increase the assessment,” Murray said.

“It’s entirely sales that drives this. If I hadn’t done this we would have seen a countywide increase. I really don’t know for sure what that would have been. Our ratio was below 90 so at least a 10% increase across the county.”

She said it’s been more than 10 years since the state came in a set a lower equalization order.

According to state law, counties must take a look at assessed values every year. Murray said the state uses a computer program and all the real estate sales for the year at part of that data and the program indicates where assessed values aren’t at 100% market value depending on residential sales data.

She said the increases are also based on square footage, so the bigger homes will see higher increases than smaller homes.

Murray said any residents who has an issue with the assessed value can call the county and ask for inspection.

“One phone call and we come out and inspect. Now we always tell them there’s no guarantee it will go down and if we find an error it could go up. If we find our data information is incorrect we could make an adjustment,” Murray said. “We do our own analysis like an appraiser would.”

Murray says the county has to be within 10% of market value or the state can make the corrections for the county.

“Every single property that transfers, a deed is recorded and a Declaration of Value. The buyer has to declare what they paid. We get a copy and the Department of Revenue gets the original. When we get the copy, we put the assessment in and what it’s sold for. The Dept. of Revenue analyzes it and we have to be within 10%,” Murray said.

“That being said, this is mass appraising, it’s not a perfect science. We have an open door policy. If you think you could not sell you house for what it’s assessed at call us and we’ll come out and do an inspection. We had six appointments this afternoon,” Murray said Wednesday.

She also said the Beacon website has a tool that allows you to put in your address and it will take you to a list of sales of comparable homes so you can get a clearer picture of market values in your area.

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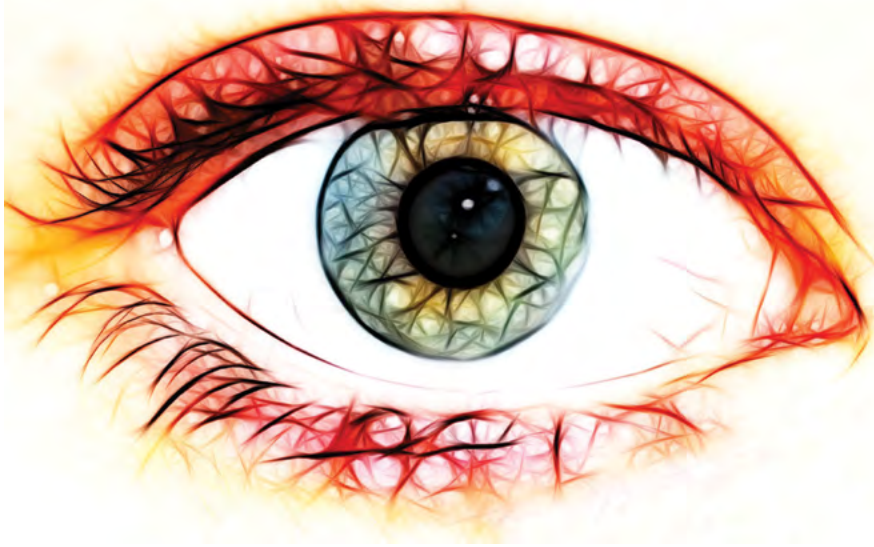
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Crocker said office work not his forte

PIONEER - Continued from Page 1

He said some of the suppliers may take the glass back and take off a restock fee, which would be probably more than he would get at an auction.

Crocker said he would have preferred to hand the business off to one his employees, but no one stepped forward.

“No, I thought I had one, he was the best one I ever had. He and I did all the outside work. He was smart, could figure things out, but he quit about 3 weeks ago.”

The business currently has four employees, not including Crocker, but at one point had as many as eight.

In leaving the business, Crocker said it’s the people that he will remember the most.

“You know, most of them are just great,” he said. “But then you’ve got your small percentage that tries to make your life miserable. But I would say most people were just great.”

Crocker was born in Nebraska and moved to a farm in western Iowa after the seventh grade where he attended high school before being drafted into the Navy in 1969. He became a member of the UDT teams, or “Frogmen”, which were Underwater Demolition Teams. Crocker said they were a step below S.E.A.L.S.

“The first eight weeks, it’s the same training and they split us off,” Crocker said. “I was in that program for four years and then moved back to Iowa. I

moved here in 1975 from Iowa City.”

He said the physical nature of the job, coupled with a simpler life calling, prompted him to hang up the for sale sign.

“I had back surgery a year and a half ago and I can’t do what I used to do. I could be in the office and do that stuff, but I can’t do that – it would drive me nuts. I like to do the physical work and some of the paperwork, but I just can’t sit in an office,” he said.

Tom and his wife Trish, who died in April 2014, were married in 1976. She had three children she brought to the marriage, Kathy, Sara and John. Kathy has two children of her own.

“There not blood, but they’re Trish’s and I’m like a father to them and they’re like my kids,” he said.

A garden, some chicken, and hobbies await Crocker once the business affairs have been settled.

“I’ll never be at a loss for something to do. I’ve got seven acres and a pond to take care of but I can stop and take a break whenever I want to,” he said with an easy chuckle.

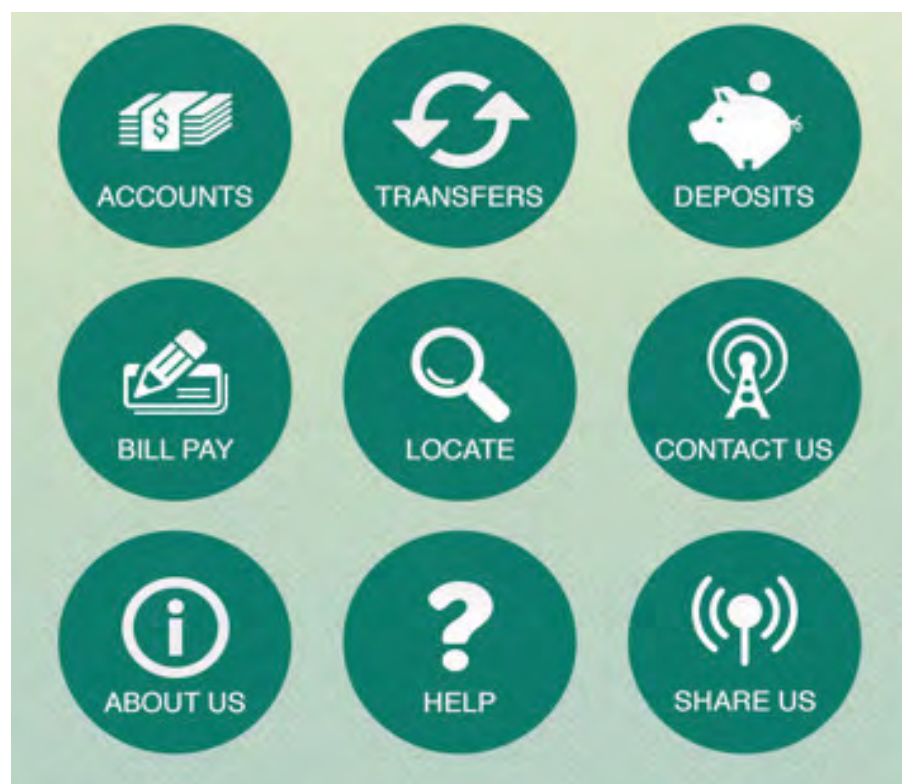
“I have a garden and some chickens, but I plan on getting back to..., I have not done any for a few years now... but stained glass.”

He said the stained glass work would be something he would do for himself as his days as a business man are done.

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