

Pen City Current

Tuesday, January 8, 2019 | 21 pages | Volume 3 • Issue 20

2018 - A Year in Review

November & December

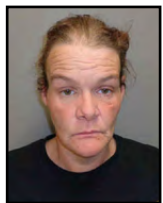
Area cops bust family burglary ring

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY - What started out with a couple of tips of a suspicious vehicle in the county, turned into one of the single biggest theft ring busts in recent Lee County history.



G. MANNING



T. MANNING

The Lee County Sheriff's department now has more than \$10,000 in stolen goods in their possession after West Point Police Chief Brad Roberts got a whiff of something bigger than just a suspicious vehicle moving through Donnellson and West Point in early October.

Roberts said a tip from a resident who got a license plate off a vehicle that was parked in an alley got the ball rolling and began a four-week investigation.

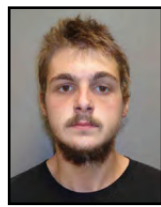
Arrested in connection with the burglaries were: Teresa Manning, 43, charged with posses-

sion of stolen property, possession of burglar's tools, burglary 3rd degree, and ongoing criminal conduct. Joseph Manning, 18, charged with a warrant for failure to appear, and theft in the 5th degree, possession of burglar's tools, possession of

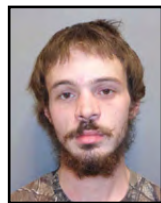
Brandon Manning, 20, with burglary 3rd degree, of burglar's tools, possession of property, and ongoing criminal conduct.

Gary Manning, age 52, already in custody at the Lee was charged with burglary possession of stolen property of burglar's tools, and criminal conduct.

Gary and Theresa are the the the two other adult chil-



J. MANNING



B. MANNING

stolen prop-
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of stolen
criminal

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The possession of stolen property and 3rd degree burglary are both class D felonies, which carry a maximum five year prison sentence and up to \$7,500 fine. Ongoing criminal conduct is a class B felony, which carries a maximum of 25 years in prison according to Iowa law. The possession of burglar's tools and fifth degree theft are misdemeanors.

"It started in Donnellson when someone had observed a vehicle behind a garage in an alleyway and a resident confronted them. They took off and he got a license plate and that's what kicked it off. From that point we had several observations of that same vehicle and began investigating," Roberts said.

He said authorities continued to receive reports of the same vehicle combing the alleyways and streets in the county.

Roberts said the investigation involved the collaboration of multiple agencies and many man hours.

See THEFTS, page 3

School releases assembly video

District recording shows student rebuffing FMMS principal's offer to hold the end of his banana

Video released to Tri-State Public Radio, Pen City Current on Wednesday morning

BY CHUCK
VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - After nearly a full year of hearings, filings, and negotiations, the Fort Madison School District has turned over video segments of a 2017 assembly that includes possible inappropriate behavior on the part of a school official.

Pen City Current had been made aware of alleged inappropriate conduct by Fort Madison

Middle School Principal Todd Dirth, who had encouraged a student to hold the end of a banana suit that was hanging between his legs, at an assembly on Dec. 12, 2017.

Efforts to reach Dirth at Fort Madison Middle School Wednesday were directed to the central office. District officials have declined to comment on the issue due to the incident being a personnel issue, but released an unsigned statement that read Dirth's employment continues and, following



Photo obtained from the Fort Madison Community School District

FMMS principal Todd Dirth shoots a basket wearing a banana outfit at a December 2017 assembly. His conduct at that assembly was the center of discipline administered by school administrators. The video of the incident is provided at the end of the article.

an investigation, he was disciplined for actions at the assembly.

"Mr. Dirth has been

and continues to be a valued employee of the Fort Madison Community School District. In late

2017, the District investigated Mr. Dirth's conduct during a school assembly that occurred in Decem-

ber 2017. At the conclusion of the investigation, the District took appropriate disciplinary action related to the incident."

Pen City Current on Dec. 13th, submitted a request under the Freedom of Information Act for release of the video on the grounds it was made at a public school assembly on district equipment. On Feb. 13th the district responded saying the video was protected under Iowa Code Chapter 22 because it contained personal information in personnel records. On March 2, Pen City Current filed an appeal with the district indicating it wasn't

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2018 - A Year in Review: November & December

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Fort Madison family nabbed in burglary case

THEFTS - Continued from Page 1

“This was a result of some strong collaboration between agencies and a lot of manpower. We couldn’t have made this case without the efforts of my entire staff and the assistance of the sheriff’s department. These guys put in a lot of hours and most of these guys have other full time jobs,” Roberts said.

Lee County Sheriff’s Department Detective Chad Donaldson was also part of the investigation. He said Roberts started the investigation.

“Roberts is the one who started putting the pieces together there as numerous storage shed break-ins and reports of suspicious vehicles in the area. From there we developed the list of suspects and started the investigation as a result,” Donaldson said.

He said he expects additional charges relating to the string of burglaries to be filed as the investigation reveals additional details. Donaldson said a lot of law enforcement resources were used on the investigation, including manpower and technology to build the case.

“We deployed certain tools at our disposal to assist with the investigation and to make sure we were aware of their locations and things of that nature,” Donaldson said. “We’re still trying to determine what items were actually stolen. But, for example, there was a tackle box stolen from a storage department that had more than \$1,000 in fishing tackle in it, which has been identified and returned.”

He said the suspects are currently in custody.

“There are still multiple burglaries under investigation in regard to this particular crew, and I believe there will be additional counts of burglaries filed on these four.”

Donaldson said three of the four are sitting on \$50,000 cash-only bonds.

Other items in the burglaries include snow blowers, several generators, fishing equipment, gas cans, about a dozen big screen televisions, tools and other memorabilia and paraphernalia.

Lee County sheriff Stacy Weber said anyone who thinks they may have been victimized by any of the burglaries in the county should contact the sheriff’s department to view the items.

“Due to the large quantity of possible stolen items, we



Lee County Sheriff’s Dept. detectives Clint Wray, left, and Chad Donaldson, right, stand with West Point Police Chief Brad Roberts with a portion of the items recovered from a theft ring this week.

are asking for the public to help identify property they are missing. Detectives Donaldson and (Clint) Wray can be reached at 372-1152 ext. 3332 and ext. 3313 to arrange for viewing of the property on Thursday Nov. 8th from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the sheriff’s office located at 2530 255th Street, Montrose, Iowa.”

West Point/Donnellson Police Department, the Fort Madison Police Department, and Lee County detectives and reserves were part of the 4-month long investigation.

“The Sheriff’s Office wishes to thank the public for their assistance in this matter and the West Point/Donnellson Police Chief Brad Roberts and his staff and the Lee County Reserves for the extensive efforts and time put forth to bring this investigation to a close,” Weber said.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 37,066 times and was engaged with 17,760 times.

City readies for 2019 lighted downtown Christmas parade

PCC STAFF

FORT MADISON – As the streets of Fort Madison’s Main Street District get ready to kick off the 2018 holiday season, many families, friends and visitors will line Avenue G on November 23rd at 6:30 p.m. the day after Thanksgiving, to witness the magnificent sight of the Annual Parade of Lights.

More than 40 completely lit floats will once again flow through downtown creating a magical Christmas experience for everyone young and old in the anticipation of Santa’s arrival.

Spectators enjoying the parade will get to see many of their favorite floats that make this parade truly a one of a kind experience in our area. Floats include a rocking horse, a merry-go-round, a fireplace with real fire, an American Flag shooting fireworks, a snowman being built, a giant snow globe, and, of course, the Lighted Parade train are just a few of the many lighted floats.

“We have converted almost all the existing floats over to LED the last couple years which has helped with maintenance needs”, stated Thomas Older, 2018 Parade Chairman. “Although we may not have a new float this year, we were able to offer new sponsorships opportunities to a few existing floats with the goal to look at getting those businesses interested and planning early for the 2019 parade and a new float idea.” Volunteers are always needed. Those interested in participating, please contact the Partners office- maybe you have design ideas for a new float, welding skills to offer or the willingness to help light the floats to keep the parade going forward are always welcome.

As in the past, there will be no parking along Avenue G between 11th -13th streets all day Friday the 23rd and starting at 5 p.m. along Avenue G between 5th-11th streets. Also, every evening following the Parade of Lights, the floats will be lit and on display in River-view Park for drive-by viewing until the first week in January.

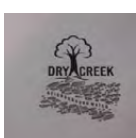
This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 7,742 times and was engaged with 831 times.

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CAUTION

POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS

There’s Snow Place Like Home for the Holidays.



Pen City Current will not publish an e-Edition Sunday, December 23 through Tuesday, January 1. Our special 2018 Recap editions will publish Wednesday, January 2 through Tuesday, 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!

Pen City current

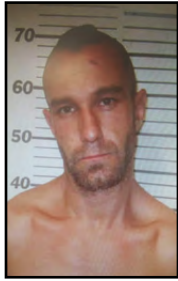
2018 - A Year in Review: November & December

Police take shooter into custody

Swanson taken into custody following alleged shooting incident Saturday night

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - Fort Madison police captured a man they said considered armed and dangerous at about 4:15 p.m. Monday night in an alley in the 800



SWANSON, JR.

block of Avenue G. Police took Gary Lee Swanson, Jr., 30, of Fort Madison into custody after being on the look out for the man since a Saturday night shooting that sent another Fort Madison to the hospital. Fort Madison Police posted on Facebook Sunday that they were looking for Swanson as part of the investigation into the shooting.

Police Chief Tim Sittig said at 7:24 p.m. Saturday police officers were called to the Fort Madison Com-

munity Hospital Emergency Room where 34-year-old James Michael Rhoer, of Fort Madison was being treated for a superficial gun shot wound from a handgun.

Rhoer was treated and released. Charges are pending as the investigation into the alleged shooting continues.

Sittig said the shooting appears to have occurred in the area of 15th and 16th Streets near Avenue M. No possible motive for the shooting was released.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 7,289 times and was engaged with 14,95 times.

Swanson Jr. facing charges including attempted murder

Shooting suspect being held in Lee County Jail on \$100,000 cash-only bond

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - Fort Madison Police are charging a 30-year-old Fort Madison man with attempted murder and two other charges stemming from a shooting Saturday in the city.

Police captured Gary Swanson Jr., at around 4:15 p.m. Monday in the 600 block of 26th Street after a police officer, who was on his way home after a shift, spotted Swanson. Police had been asking the public for it's help in locating Swanson. He was sought in connection with a shooting that happened Saturday just after 7 p.m. in the 1500 block of Avenue M.

Police Chief Tim Sittig said at 7:24 p.m. Saturday police officers were called to the Fort Madison Community Hospital Emergency Room where 34-year-old James Michael Rhoer, of Fort Madison was being treated for a superficial gun shot wound.

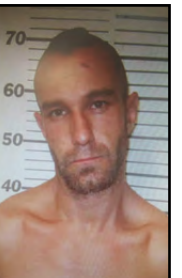
Rhoer was treated and released.

Swanson is now facing charges of attempted murder, willfull injury and a felon in possession of a firearm. All three charges are felonies with attempted murder being a class B felony punishable by up to 25 years in prison. Willfull injury is a class 3 felony in Iowa and carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine. The felon in possession of a firearm is a class D felony and carries with it a maximum of five years and a \$7,500 fine.

Swanson is being held at the Lee County jail on a \$100,000 cash only bond and has a Nov. 29 court appearance at 11 a.m.

Sittig said the shooting appears to have occurred in the area of 15th and 16th Streets near Avenue M. No possible motive for the shooting was released.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 7,151 times and was engaged with 2,002 times.



SWANSON



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Apra-Poe

Chicago's Duffy Hudson asked guests to "suspend disbelief" as he spent more than an hour bringing about the enigmatic Edgar Allen Poe at the Fort Madison Public Library. Hudson brought Poe out in a retrospective of his personal life, including interpretations of "Tell Tale Heart" and "The Raven".



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2018 - A Year in Review: November & December

Photos conflict with district's statements to IPIB

VIDEO - Continued from Page 1

looking for personal information, but a copy of a video recorded in front of more than 400 students and faculty. On May 11, the appeal was denied.

The issue was then sent to the Iowa Public Information Board on June 18th. The IPIB is a state board governed by Iowa code that is charged with formally and informally mitigating requests for public records. The FMCSD's attorney, Emily Ellingson of Lynch Dallas out of Cedar Rapids, filed a response with the district's opinion that the record was used in disciplinary action and was privileged under Chapter 22.7 of Iowa Code. The Current responded that the video was taken in front of an entire student body, faculty, and potentially other viewers, on public recording equipment and does not contain any personal information protected by Chapter 22.

Ellingson then filed a motion to dismiss to the IPIB on July 10th, writing that the complaint was filed with the IPIB more than 60 days after the alleged incident and was therefore beyond the scope of the IPIB. That motion to dismiss was granted by IPIB director Margaret Johnson. A hearing was held on July 19th regarding the dismissal. Pen City Current was not at that hearing, but received an audio recording of the hearing. At that hearing, the board upheld the dismissal 8-1 and Pen City Current filed for a rehearing that was held on Aug. 18.

At the July hearing, Ellingson, who was in attendance representing the district, told the IPIB that the district had maintained constant contact with Pen City Current during the initial request and the appeal process. At the following hearing she had stepped back from the statement after Pen City Current directed the board members to documentation in their possession that showed a reminder of the pending records request and no communication from the district other than one email indicating the issue had been forwarded to the district's law firm.

Also at the July hearing, Ellingson told the board that IPIB director Johnson may not have been aware that the district didn't create the video, but had to acquire the video. Johnson, told the board about three minutes later, when a member pressed Ellingson as to why it took 60 days to respond to Pen City Current's initial request, that the district had to find the video.

"That I have an answer for. It took 'em a while to find it," Johnson said at the hearing.

"He (Pen City Current Editor Chuck Vandenberg) requested it on the day that the event happened and to determine whether or not there's been any kind of a tape, and I think that was during the investigation this was discovered," Johnson said.

At the same July hearing Johnson told the board she was given the impression

that the video was recorded by someone in the district. In an email Wednesday morning Johnson said she was initially was led to believe that the district did not record the video.

Ellingson told the board it was her understanding initially that the district didn't have the video, but she didn't dispute that the video was eventually in possession of the district and therefore it was a district record.

In the video released Wednesday morning at the school district's office, a 360-degree camera was used to record the event and was set up on the floor of the gymnasium in full view of all in attendance. It was monitored, and at several times relocated on the gymnasium floor, by a district staff member.

Superintendent Erin Slater and Ellingson were not at the viewing on Wednesday morning, but provided a statement to Pen City Current and Tri-States Public Radio reporter Jason Parrott. Parrott had also filed an open records request for the video, after Pen City Current's request was dismissed by the IPIB in August. Parrott's request was also denied by the district under Chapter 22.7 and he immediately filed with the IPIB for a hearing to avoid the 60-day jurisdictional window.

While Parrott's case was working through the IPIB process, another unrelated opinion was handed down by IPIB attorney Amanda Adams that had an impact on Pen City Current's and Parrott's complaint. A police officer in Ankeny was involved in a car accident and the dashboard camera caught the accident. Ankeny media requested the video footage, but were denied by the police department on the grounds that the video was part of the officer's personnel file because of discipline resulting from the accident.

Adams issued an advisory opinion in that case, in summary, finding that the camera was a public camera and the incident occurred on a public street, therefore the video should be released to the public. After that advisory opinion was upheld unanimously by the IPIB in late September an offer was extended to Parrott and Pen City Current to view the video in exchange for a dismissal of the IPIB complaint by Parrott and Tri-States Public Radio.

Parrott and TSPR initially declined the offer stating that any viewing of the video should be a public release and not a private viewing. The complaint was originally being reviewed by Adams, but then was turned back over to Johnson several weeks ago. Johnson indicated that the complaint now became more complicated because the district did offer a viewing. On Thursday of last week, the offer to view the video footage was accepted by Parrott and included an offer for Pen City Current to view the video as well.



Photo acquired from the Fort Madison Community School District as part of an open records request from Tri-State Public Radio and Pen City Current.

The video was presented in 11 segments in order to save time on the recording between assembly activities. Segments 1-8 show students engaged in a lowered-rim dunk contest with staff monitoring the event for safety, one staff member playing music, Dirth emceeding

to make another basket. In segment 10, Assistant Principal Brent Zirkel dunks a ball and then carefully falls into the line of students who fall like dominos as part of the skit, while Dirth pulls the end of the banana back out of his costume and it hangs again below his waist. Segment 11

“

That I have an answer for. It took them a while to find it. He requested it on the day the event happened and to determine whether or not there's been any kind of tape, and I think that was during the investigation that this was discovered.”

-Margaret Johnson,
Director, Iowa Public Information Board

the activities, and a staffer running the 360-degree tripod camera and relocating it throughout the gym.

In a 45-second 9th segment, Dirth shows up in the gym with a yellow banana outfit draped over him with the end of the banana hanging below his waste. There are 35-40 students lined up on one side of the gym and the rest of the student body is in the gymnasium bleachers. Dirth is seen with his back to the basket and at least on one occasion tries to make a basket bouncing the ball backward between his legs. After a miss, he walks to the bleachers and selects a student to come out to the floor. The student's face is blurred in the video. Dirth mentions something to the student at which point the student yanks their arm back and walks off the floor, turning at one point to say something back to Dirth on the way back to the bleachers. While the student walks from the floor, Dirth is holding up the end of the banana outfit with one hand

He then tucks the end of the banana back into the top half of the suit and tries

is 11 seconds of more basketball action.

The video footage is provided here: <https://youtu.be/aoJsfaOB6dA>.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 20,917 times and was engaged with 11,500 times.



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2018 - A Year in Review: November & December

Critical Jays' error helps Crusaders in 3rd

BY CHUCK
VANDEMBERG
PCC EDITOR

CEDAR RAPIDS - A two-point error in favor of the Holy Trinity girls volleyball team was the catalyst for a return trip to the Class 1A state championship.



BOX



BOEDING



LAWLOR

After about a seven minute delay, the scoreboard was changed to 11-12 and the Crusaders took control from there on out.

Senior Emily Box, who finished with a 50% kill efficiency on the night going 22 of 44 attacking, got a block to knot the score at a dozen each, but the Crusaders would commit a defensive error to tie it up again at 13. That would be the last time the Jays would have the lead in the match.

Holy Trinity went on a 5-0 run from there with back-to-back kills from senior Taylor Boeding from the outside hitter spot to give HTC a 19-13 lead. The teams would trade sideouts and points to 24-18 when senior Mya Lawlor got another kill from the outside. The Jays' senior Katelyn Langel got a center kill to make it 24-20 and Head Coach Melissa Freesmeier called a timeout to set up a play with Box on the seat out of the rotation.

Gehlen Catholic senior Brooklyn Heissel served and the Crusaders were able to move the ball to the outside where sophomore Claire Pothitakis shot a kill down the front right side for the match winner and put HTC one set from a return trip for the title.

HTC rushed to a 6-0 lead in the fourth set with senior Eryn Anderson serving. The Jays' senior Anna Britt attacked in the middle that found the floor in front of the Crusaders' back line to stop the run and then Gehlen

Catholic went on a 6-0 run of their own, capped by a bump from Box that went long left. She made up for it with a kill off Gehlen's Sydney Livermore's serve to break the tie at 7-6.

HTC would run away with the rest

through a 3-5 HTC lead. Freshman Kassi Randolph put a four-point string together giving the Crusaders a 13-6 lead before sending a serve deep and right for a sideout. Holy Trinity would stretch the lead to 20-11 on a kill by



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Senior Eryn Anderson (25) drives an attack against the Jays' Katelyn Langel (7) in the 26-28 second set loss Tuesday night. The Crusaders would rebound in the final two sets to get the win.

of the set to win the match, highlighted by five kills from Box, who again found herself in the chair as HTC tried to cap the game at 24-14. After Gehlen coach Mike Meyer called a timeout at 24-16, the Crusaders got a push over the net on the left side that trickled off a couple Jays and hit the floor for the win.

Box said it was tough for her being on the sidelines at the end of the third and fourth sets.

"I wanna be in there every point of the game, but I can't so I have confidence in the girls. The second set got rocky but with Eryn coming in behind me, I know that she can do great things."

The senior was a 2017 All-Tournament team selection and said she figured the match would be pretty even.

"When we came in I knew we were going to be pretty evenly matched. We have four pretty solid hitters and the semis are never an easy game," she said. "The first set was an amazing feeling and we had the momentum. Losing the second was really close and we tried to finish, but it wasn't there for us," she said. "The next two sets we did an amazing job finishing. The turning point was the rotation error and that worked out for us."

The first set was back and forth

Boeding again from the left outside forcing a Gehlen timeout. Box was in the rotation trying to finish off the first set and got a kill on a nice set from Randolph to put the set away 25-15.

Ties were the theme of the second set with a total of 20 ties in the 26-28 Crusaders loss. Despite eight ties leading to an 11-11 score, the Crusaders never gave up the lead and the serve went back and forth. At 7-7 the two teams played a long rally that was capped when a Jay cleared a ball that seemed long, but landed on the back line. The Jays would take their first lead at 12-11 on an Aubrey Niles ace and a Langel error would push the lead to 15-13. The two squads would then tie at every single point until 26-26 when Box scored a kill to knot it up. After another long rally Livermore got a kill across the front of the net to put Gehlen with one point of tying the match. In the next rally another long shot caught the back line to give the Jays the win.

Leading up to the rotation error that wasn't contested by Meyer, the Jays had all the momentum as senior Katie Peters had three kills to give Gehlen a 5-3 lead. HTC would benefit from a Jays' net violation to get to 4-5, but the Jays would go 5-0 and steal

See SEMIS, page 7

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2018 - A Year in Review: November & December

Crusaders play for title tonight

SEMIS - Continued from Page 8

all the wind from the HTC faithful in the balconies. Holy Trinity would battle back to 10-11 to bring the crowd back in but Peters and Niles would combine for three successful attacks to make it 14-11 when the rotation error was found. The improper rotation was a server who started play at 13 and 14 and both those points were nullified setting the score at 11-12 Gehlen. The Crusaders took over from there.

"That just energized them," Freesmeier said. We just said 'here's the break we were looking for, now let's use it'."

She said Box had her best tournament so far.

"She was on it today and she has that capability and we know it. The thing is - she believes in her teammates and they believe in her and that makes the difference."

Randolph will be going into the title match as a freshman, but was in attendance in 2014 when her sister was on the state championship team in 2014 that featured Nebraska All-American Mikaela Foecke.



RANDOLPH

"Knowing that my sister was able to win a state championship gives us hope," Randolph said. I mean, I think we're all nervous but once we get on the court we settle in. The seniors really help us and encourage us when we're down."



POTHITAKIS

Senior Taylor Boeding said the rotation error was the turning point of the match, but the girls were able to finish and that was what made the difference.

"It was definitely a momentum stopper for them and we took advantage of that and took back the momentum," Boeding said. "Box is a powerhouse on our team. She's the one we look to when we're lost and in tough situations. Not having her, we had to look inside ourselves and find the will to win and I think we did a great job of that in the third and fourth sets."

The Crusaders bowed out of the 2017 tournament in the semis in straight sets to Janesville. Boeding said the Wildcats will be tough with last year's player of the year Bree Thompson across the net.

"This means everything to me, the other seniors, and the whole team. Our goal was to get back to the

championship and have the opportunity to win a title. Bree Thompson is a great player, we have to focus on our blocks and seeing where she's gonna hit and just leave it all on the line."



FREESMEIER

Freesmeier said the seniors have matured in each post-season match and facing the adversity of the second and first half of the third set showed their toughness.

"Our seniors are competitors, no doubt about it, and we had to find a way to take that competitiveness to some of our younger kids and do it in a way they felt comfortable. Our seniors - I saw them step up and I've seen them step up in the post season and just be good leaders. You can be a great hitter and a great

“

She was on it today and she has that capability and we know it. The thing is – she believes in her teammates and they believe in her and that makes the difference.”

-Melissa Freesmeier
Head Coach



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Sophomore Claire Pothitakis directs a ball for the Crusaders in Thursday's semifinal win at the U.S. Cellular Center in Cedar Rapids.

passer, but until you see that leadership come out - that was big for us tonight."

Anderson finished with 13 kills on 44 attacks with Box and Anderson being taken care of again by Randolph and sophomore Bailey Hellweg who combined for 45 assists on the night. The Crusaders only had two service errors but converted five aces on the night. Boeding led the way defensively with 22 digs, followed closely by Lawlor and senior Elyse Pothitakis with 18.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 7,805 times and was engaged with 1,510 times.

HTC one match from title

Perennial powerhouse Janesville next up for Crusaders



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Senior Eryn Anderson shows her emotion after the Holy Trinity Crusaders closed out 2nd-seeded Gehlen Catholic in the Class 1A state volleyball tournament Thursday night in Cedar Rapids. The Crusaders take on top-ranked Janesville on Friday night at 7 p.m.

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Burglars hit Rashid Pharmacy

BY CHUCK
VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

involved in the incident.

Rashid said the burglars cut the phone lines to the building at about 3:30 Monday morning and then broke in a door to see if the alarm had been disconnected.

"They cased the place for about two hours after cutting the lines and then came back and took some narcotics," Rashid said.

He said he couldn't disclose additional information about the theft because the investigation is underway. He said there is video evidence and that will be released today to help with the investiga-

tion.

The store was closed for about three hours until about 11 a.m. when it was reopened for business.

Anyone with information on the incident should contact the Fort Madison Police Department at 372-2525.

According to Fort Madison Police Chief Tim Sittig, who was at the scene this morning, authorities received a report of the burglary at approximately 7:30 a.m. Monday morning.

Sittig said investigators reviewed video evidence of the break-in and



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

A Fort Madison Police Cruiser is parked in the alley way behind Rashid Pharmacy & Wellness in the 2400 block of Avenue L Monday morning. Burglars broke into the pharmacy sometime between 3:30 and 7 a.m. Monday and stole an undisclosed amount of narcotics.

FORT MADISON - A \$1,000 reward is being offered for information in connection with the Monday morning burglary at Rashid Pharmacy & Wellness in Fort Madison.

Fort Madison Police are looking for suspects involved in the burglary that occurred sometime after 3:30 a.m. Monday.

Pharmacy owner, Joe Rashid, said Monday morning he is offering \$1,000 for information that leads Fort Madison police to the suspects

worked with pharmacy staff to determine what medications and how

much were taken.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and

social media 30,145 times and was engaged with 5,456 times.

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IFC donates \$10K to food pantries

PCC STAFF

WEVER - For the second consecutive year, Iowa Fertilizer Company and its employees are donating thousands of dollars to the St. Vincent's De Paul Food Pantry in Burlington and the Lee County Food Pantry in Fort Madison.

Through employee donations and the company's matching contribution, \$10,000 will be split between the two organizations to help better ensure families in southeast Iowa have access to food and other supplies this holiday season.

"Iowa Fertilizer Company and our employees are committed to supporting organizations that are driving community improvement efforts throughout the region," said Darrell Allman, Iowa Fertilizer Company's Managing Director. "I would like to thank our team members for generously donating to the food pantries in Burlington and Fort Madison and encourage our entire community to continue supporting local charitable efforts that enhance the lives of those in need."

To help raise money for the donation, eleven Iowa Fertilizer Company employees worked with nearly 50 local vendors

See DONATION, page 9

2018 - A Year in Review: November & December



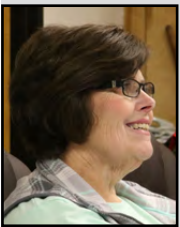
One of the traditions of Ruthie's and Bill's family is the holiday picture. Above, 'Bill' (Jim Cole) readies the camera for the 1980 Thanksgiving family photo as part of OFP's Making God Laugh debuting this weekend at the Old Fort Playhouse. At left, 'Richie' (Ty Clute) bangs out a bongo poem about his life for the family.

Photos by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

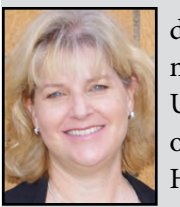
FMCSO board member Gayla Young passes away Monday

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – Fort Madison School District Superintendent Dr. Erin Slater has confirmed



YOUNG



SLATER

this morning that current school board member Gayla Young died this morning at University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics.

No additional information was available this afternoon, but Slater said the school district will be issuing a statement surrounding the death possibly later today. District staff was notified via email this morning.

Young, a teacher in the Danville school system, was re-elected to the Fort Madison board in September 2017 after serving her first four-year term winning her seat in 2013. She was the current vice-president of the school board.

Pen City Current will publish service information as it becomes available.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 15,461 times and was engaged with 4,640 times.

Silent auction, employee donations contributed to successful drive

DONATION - Continued from Page 8

and contractors to secure items for a silent auction. The employees included: Matthew Baumert, Kathy Dye, Lori Greene, Eric Greene, Jill Lenahan, Diane Kaltefleiter, Larry Rasmussen, Katy Salvador, Jim Uppena, Hugh Vandegriff, and Mike Wendland. Businesses that donated were from both Lee and Des Moines counties.

Iowa Fertilizer Company is a leader in the fertilizer industry. The plant in Wever, Iowa, is the first greenfield nitrogen fertilizer facility constructed in the United States in more than 25 years.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 15,190 times and was engaged with 2,104 times.



IFC employees present Lin Cramer, center, with a check for \$5,000 for food at the Fort Madison Food Pantry.

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2018 - A Year in Review: November & December

Pooches hear stories from kids

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - It was a bit 'ruff" at the start, but a new project from Richardson Elementary students is helping dogs become more social, while helping younger students become better readers.

A group of second grade students from Kim Fullenkamp's class at the Fort Madison west side elementary are using a research-based initiative to help improve their reading skills, while helping dogs at the PAW animal shelter adapt to human interaction... and giving back to their community.

For the second month in a row, Fullenkamp's students brought black milk crates and story books out the animal shelter about a mile south of the Hwy. 61 and 48th Street intersection. The students, this being the month of December, brought their favorite Christmas books and plopped down on the cement and dirt runs in front of kennels containing the dogs.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Students from Kim Fullenkamp's 2nd grade class at Richardson have taken to reading to the PAW animal shelter dogs. Fullenkamp said research shows reading to the dogs is good for the students and the animals.

"I saw a post on Facebook that a group in Missouri was reading to dogs as part of a research project and I thought it would be a great community project for the kids," Fullenkamp said Wednesday as her class spread out among the kennels.

"Our goal now is to come out every month and have the students sit and read to the dogs."

Fullenkamp said she researched the impact of reading to dogs and realized that at shelters in particular, the dogs get

more socialization and the children's voices can be calming to them. It also has the added benefit of helping the students with reading skills.

She said the students have planned the program from the ground up and enjoy coming out to the shelter for part of the day.

Since it was December and a month of giving, the students also took the opportunity to collect supplies for the shelter and presented those to PAW Director Sandy Brown.

Brown said the dogs, who were a bit rambunctious for the first part of the readings with all the extra added attention from media and kids, have reacted very well to the reading and seem to enjoy the interaction.

"They seem a bit more agitated today, last time they settled in pretty quick and then it was really cool to listed to the kids read and see the dogs sitting there," Brown said.

"It's good socialization for the animals and helps them become more

adoptable, and it's good because it helps the kids with reading."

Fullenkamp said there is a cost associated with the program because they have to pay for the school bus to transport them to the shelter. She said Connection Bank gave them \$100 donation for the project. To have the students come out once a month during the school year will cost about \$140 more and she said she's looking for donations to help offset that cost.

"It surprised me a little that some people said "No", but I think that's because they really didn't understand what was happening. This is the first time something like this has taken place around here" Fullenkamp said.

According to the program, the students have to practice reading the books they will take to the shelter with their parents at home and the parents have to sign off that the student is reading the book well enough to be able to read on their own to the animals.

Fullenkamp that helps

make the student more comfortable with the book and leads to better experience for the student...and the dog.

"Dogs aren't judgmental when you're reading to them in a kennel. They sit and actually listen and that makes the stress on the students less because there is no feedback. Just listening. Reading in front of peers can be very stressful on students. We just think this is a win for the students and the animals."

Those interested in helping fund the class's efforts can reach Fullenkamp by email at Kimberly.Fullenkamp@fmcscd.org or by calling the school at 319-372-2765. More information about the PAW no-kill animal shelter can be found online at <http://pawfortmadison.com/> or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/PAW-Fort-Madison-Animal-Shelter-179648212052707/>.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 13,797 times and was engaged with 1,145 times.

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2018 - A Year in Review: November & December

City hints at roundabout on west end

Project is scheduled for 2023, but could save \$350K

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - The Fort Madison City Council approved an application for a grant for federal funds to potentially help fund constructing a roundabout at the intersection of Hwy. 61 and 53rd Street on the west end of Fort Madison.

At Tuesday's meeting the council voted 7-0 to approve applying for the grant, but discussion focused on the cost benefit of a roundabout vs. the traditional four-way intersection.

Larry Driscoll, the city public works director, said a roundabout would cost roughly \$850,000 to build, but upgrading the intersection with additional turning lanes and new traffic lights would cost roughly \$1.2 million.

Concerns from public meetings about future plans for Old Highway 61 and from councilman centered around the delays north and south bound at the intersection.

"Do you feel, in general, we would spend less to do



DRISCOLL

this roundabout than all the other stuff we've talked about and still have a new intersection," Councilman Chad Cangas asked.

"Correct, last year I came here with HRGreen and we gave a proposal for that intersection and it was \$1.2 million for right turn lanes and new traffic lights," Driscoll said.

"The roundabout, I feel, is just a good solution to eliminate the long-term traffic lights there."

Councilman Bob Morawitz asked what the impact would be to semi-traffic and said he could see it slowing down traffic as they work through the roundabout.

Driscoll said it would be constructed with aprons on them that allow for the bigger turning radius needed for truck traffic.

City Manager David Varley said he's been involved in the construction of about a dozen roundabouts and cited data that indicated they were a better way to handle intersections than traditional street lights where applicable. The City had discussed putting a roundabout at the Avenue H and 18th Street intersection a few years back.

"Just a quick reminder that data shows a decreased amount of time getting through the intersection about

82% and it also reduces the frequency of accidents at 73%. He said the accidents that do happen are less severe as traditional intersection accidents are usually t-bones," he said. "They work. I can't think of a single downside to them."

Councilman Chris Greenwald said when the city first discussed the roundabout for 18th Street he didn't like the idea, but after using the one recently constructed in Burlington, he's now on board with them.

Cangas agreed that he didn't like change, but the roundabouts he's encountered, he likes.

The reconstructed intersection isn't on the city's schedule until 2023 and Driscoll said the city could amend the purpose of the grant at some point if they decided the roundabout wasn't the way to go.

In other action, the council:

- voted to appoint Varley to the Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission effective Jan. 1, 2020.
- tabled a preliminary agreement with Viking Cruise lines to coordinate efforts to secure docking for the company's future Mississippi River excursions with Fort Madison being a port of call.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 11,858 times and was engaged with 3,403 times.

Pothitakis sisters again offer gifts of warmth

PCC STAFF

FORT MADISON - In 2017 Samantha and Nicole Pothitakis, twins from Fort Madison, wanted to help others during the holiday season. They decided to help to bring some warmth to others through sharing. This year they are back again with their Share-A-Scarf, Wear-A-Scarf. The juniors from Holy Trinity Catholic High School purchased a number of scarves and tagged them all with a bible verse and the Share-A-Scarf, Wear-A-Scarf label and tied them around trees at Central Park in Fort Madison.

Last year they gave away over 100 scarves.

"We couldn't believe the need in our community," Samantha said.

What was even more exciting to the girls was the feedback from those that were able to make great use of the scarves.

"Some used them as gifts to those in need, some used them for friends that needed a scarf, and some used them for kids they knew that could use some extra warmth for the cold winter season", Nicole said.

"The scarves are there for anyone that needs one or knows someone that needs one. Just stop by and pick a color and grab one. It's perfect for those that may not have enough warm winter wear." Samantha indicated that they check in on the park to see if the scarves are getting low as they like to try to put more up when needed and when the scarves get low.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 9,635 times and was engaged with 1,707 times.



Samantha and Nicole Pothitakis tie scarves around trees in Central Park again this year. Last year more than 100 scarves were given as part of the Sharing program.

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2018 - A Year in Review: November & December

Jury finds Hamann played role in woman's accidental death

Jury rules Morning Sun man guilty of leaving the scene of the accident where his girlfriend was found dead

BY CHUCK
VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - A north Lee County jury found a Morning Sun man guilty of leaving the scene of an accident where his girlfriend of



HAMANN

about a year was found dead about nine hours later.

Damian Hamann,

29, took the stand Wednesday morning in Fort Madison and was questioned by his attorney, Curt Dial of Keokuk, and cross-examined by assistant Lee County Attorney Bruce McDonald.

Hamann is accused of leaving the scene of an

accident that resulted in the death of 20-year-old Sadie Alvarado in the early morning hours of Sunday, Aug. 5.

Testimony in the trial began on Tuesday and revealed that Alvarado jumped from the pickup truck Hamann was driving after the two got into an argument about staying the night at a friend's house.

Hamann told Dial that he had planned to spend the night at the friend's house on 235th Avenue in West Point but Alvarado didn't like staying at other people's houses. After an argument at the home, the two ended up leaving his friend's house at around 1 a.m. with plans to head back to Morning Sun and stay at Hamann's residence there.

About 1/2 mile into the trip back on the gravel

roads, Hamann said the two were still fighting and Alvarado said she was going

to jump out of the car and opened the door and jumped out.

Hamann testified that he was traveling at speeds in the range of 20 mph in his truck that was also towing a trailer with a race car on the back. Hamann had raced in a Figure 8 event at Lee County Speedway on Saturday night. Hamann said Alvarado had been drinking at the races most of the night and at a bar in West Point with Hamann and some friends following the races. Hamann testified that he had one beer at the races and then three more beers at the bar over a span of about four hours before heading to his friend's house. He told Dial he did not drink additionally that night.

Hamann told the jury that he didn't stop to check on Alvarado

because he didn't think she was injured and assumed she was walking back to his friend's house. On Monday during the state's case, McDonald produced cellphone evidence through Lee County Sheriff's detective Chad Donaldson that showed a string of texts between Hamann and his friend about the incident and inquiring to see if Alvarado had shown up. However, no evidence was found on the phone that indicated a call to emergency crews or law enforcement about the incident or Alvarado's whereabouts.

Hamann proceeded to his home in Morning Sun and then came back to the area obtaining a ride from his ex-wife. He was at his friend's house on 235th Avenue when Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation Investigator Ryan Herman canvassed the neighborhood looking for evidence in the incident.

Herman testified that Hamann was visibly upset when he came to the door at his friend's residence and told Herman that he believed the girl discovered in the ditch was his girlfriend. Hamann said his friend heard that the body was discovered on a scanner. During his direct examination by Dial on Wednesday, Hamann said he was shaken when he heard from his friend that a body had been found in the ditch.

"He told me that there has been a body confirmed in the ditch, and I lost it. I was in tears," Hamann told the jury.

Alvarado was found by Mike Ungerer and his wife who were on their way home from church. The two called 9-1-1 and flagged down another couple to help at the scene. Emergency response crews from Lee County EMS, Lee County Sheriff's Department, West Point Fire & Rescue, and DCI were called to the scene.

McDonald produced photographic evidence that showed Alvarado less than 10 feet from the roadway and her sandals were found roughly 18 feet from her body. Upon investigation of the body, an ID with a different name was in Alvarado's pocket, but her real iden-



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Officials with the Iowa State Patrol, Lee County Sheriff's Department West Point Fire and Rescue responded to the scene of where 20-year-old Sadie Alvarado's body was found on Aug. 5.

tity was made when Hamann informed Herman that he believed it was his girlfriend.

Dr. Dennis Firchau of the University of Iowa Hospitals & Clinics Decedent Care Center, testified Tuesday that he ruled Alvarado's death accidental due to multiple blunt force traumas to the head. In addition to subdural bleeding under the skull, Alvarado had severe bruising on the left side of her brain, along with multiple contusions and abrasions and a skull laceration. Firchau also testified that Alvarado's blood-alcohol content was .184.

During his cross-examination of Hamann Wednesday morning, McDonald laid foundation that Hamann knew Alvarado was "very intoxicated" and that she said she was going to jump from the vehicle and opened the door and did it and Hamann didn't stop.

"Did you stop to check on her...Did you even slow down?" McDonald asked Hamann.

"No. I didn't believe she was injured," Hamann said.

Dial told the jury during his closing statement that the state hadn't produced any evidence to show how fast the truck was going and said he didn't believe the state proved the incident was an accident because Hamann didn't believe an accident had occurred. He said the jury was responsible for only considering the evidence produced at trial and nothing else.

"It's an accident if you know there was an injury. He had no knowledge of any injury," Dial told the jury.

During his closing statement, McDonald told the jury it isn't plausible that Hamann didn't think an injury could have occurred.

"He took off to protect himself and to hell with Sadie," McDonald told the jury.

Hamann is currently released on bond and, according to Lee County Attorney Ross Braden, he will remain on bond until sentencing which was set for Feb. 1. Braden said he will be looking for jail time of Hamann on the Class D felony conviction.

"It carries an indeterminate prison sentence, but we'll be asking for jail time considering the circumstances," Braden said after the trial.

Dial asked District Judge Michael Schilling at several points during the trial for a directed judgement and dismissal which were denied. After the verdict was read, Dial asked for the judge for a deferred judgment consideration and Schilling said the court would look into the matter. Dial said the sentence could be prison time, probation or a deferred judgment which would carry a term of probation and, if completed successfully, would wipe the conviction off Hamann's record.

This news story was read on pencitycurrent.com and social media 11,051 times and was engaged with 4,178 times.

May the timeless message of Christmas fill your heart and home with joy now and throughout the coming year.

MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR

From all of us at Holy Trinity Catholic Schools

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–Chuck & Lee

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