

# PEN CITY CURRENT

It's Black & White and **Read** all over

Tuesday, December 6, 2022 | 8 pages | Volume 6 • Issue 206



[www.pencitycurrent.com](http://www.pencitycurrent.com)

## YMCA, TEST KITCHEN MERGE



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Elliott Test Kitchen's Brian Mendez works with students Monday night on some no-bake desserts. The Test Kitchen and Fort Madison YMCA announced a merger Monday morning.

### NEW DIRECTOR: United Way's Siefken to take over Test Kitchen as Director

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - The Elliott Test Kitchen and Fort Madison YMCA had announced a merger that will take effect with the first school day in January 2023.

According to a release issued Monday morning, the YMCA and Test Kitchen engaged in the merger to help both programs expand capacities to help area youth.

Fort Madison YMCA Executive Director Ryan Wilson said talks have been underway since March. The new program will be called YTK, YMCA Test Kitchen. "We just wanted to make sure we're doing it right," Wilson said of the nine-months of discussions. "We had to work through some of the details and you have to remember you have two different boards of

See **MERGER**, page 8

### COUNTY NEWS

## Alliant inks deal with supervisors

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY - Lee County and Alliant Energy have entered into a joint agreement that outlines the responsibilities of each regarding a 2023 solar field project near Wever.

The project is planned to be the largest single solar field project in the state at 150 megawatts and would include battery storage facilities close to the Iowa Fertilizer Plant.

Justin Foss, strategic project manager at Alliant Energy told the Lee County Board of Supervisors Monday the project could start in quarter three of 2023 and would be finished by the third or fourth quarter of 2024.

There was no eminent domain utilized in securing easements for the work.

Voss said all the property owners involved have voluntarily signed easement agreements for the property.

Board member Ron Fedler said he's heard nothing but good things about the project from property owners.

"I talked to one of the landowners who was ecstatic. He was very pleased with the agreement. He said it was a no-brainer and there was no way he was going to turn it down," Fedler said.

The agreement stipulates that the county can recoup costs associated with the project within 60 days of receipt of costs. Alliant and the county agreed to negotiate in good faith any costs the county incurs as part of the agreement.

The agreement also outlines how Alliant will reimburse the county for any damage to county roads as part of a road haul agreement. The details of that subsequent agreement haven't been finalized.

County Engineer Ben Hull said there will also be language for catastrophic damage to any county roads in the unlikely event something like that would happen.

Hull said Alliant's plans are well within

See **ALLIANT**, page 4

### CITY COUNCIL

## Huppert, Hamelton first in line for Schulz' seat

BY PCC STAFF

FORT MADISON - Two candidates familiar to the Fort Madison City Council have submitted their names to fill an opening on the council effective Jan. 1

City officials are accepting applications for the position until Dec. 14 and will vote to fill the position by appointment at the Dec. 20 council meeting two weeks from Tuesday.

According to Fort Madison City Clerk Melinda Blind two men, Jerry Hamelton

and former City Councilman Jason Huppert have both turned in applications for the council to consider.

Huppert was the 4th Ward councilman from 2009 to 2017 defeating James Hampton in 2009. Huppert wasn't on the ballot for the ward in 2017 and the seat went to Mark Lair.

Huppert owned and operated Sidelines Sports Bar until it closed in 2021.

Hamelton has run unsuccessfully for city council on the ballot and for an appointment, but has vowed through social media posts to continue to run to represent city residents.

The two are vying, along with anyone else

who turns in applications prior to the Dec. 14 deadline, to replace current City Councilman Tom Schulz in the 2nd Ward. Schulz won a seat on the Lee County Board of Supervisors in the general election.

His resignation is effective Dec. 31.

Anyone interested in the seat should prepare a letter of interest and brief bio to submit to Blind at 811 Avenue E, Fort Madison, Iowa, or [mblind@fortmadison-ia.com](mailto:mblind@fortmadison-ia.com). The deadline for submittal is no later than 4:30 P.M. on December 14, 2022, in order to be considered for the vacancy.

For more information contact Blind at (319) 372-7700, ext. 206.

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### WEATHER

TUE 06 Dec.....Mostly cloudy and cool, 42° F/ 30° F  
 WED 07 Dec.....Partly sunny and cool, 45° F/ 32° F  
 THU 08 Dec.....Rainy and cool, 43° F/ 34° F

OpenWeatherMap

### IOWA LOTTERY

LUCKY FOR LIFE 12/04.....4 8 22 38 43, Lucky Ball: 12  
 PICK 3 12/04 MIDDAY.....914  
 PICK 3 12/04 EVENING.....772  
 PICK 4 12/04 MIDDAY.....7851  
 PICK 4 12/04 EVENING.....1556

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# Obituaries

## OBITUARIES

### ROBERT E. DOUGHERTY

Robert E. "Bob" Dougherty, II, 83, of Keokuk, passed away on Wednesday, November 30, 2022, at the West Point Care Center in West Point, Iowa.

Bob was born on November 21, 1939, in Keokuk, Iowa, the son of Robert E. and Dorothy (Heston) Dougherty. On January 1, 1964, he was united in marriage to Barbara (Dietsch) Gammon. They were divorced in 1975.



DOUGHERTY

Bob graduated from Keokuk Senior High in 1957, where he ran track. He attended University of Iowa, where he lettered in track. He proudly served his country in the United States Army, serving in the Green Berets with the 82nd Airborne Division, receiving his honorable discharge in 1963. Bob lived in Apache Junction, Arizona, and was employed at McDonald-Douglas in helicopter sales until his retirement. Throughout his career, he was a commercial pilot, managed the Muscatine Airport and owned Air Iowa, the first charter service in Iowa. In his free time he enjoyed drafting and designing airplanes. Bob's passion in life was always aviation.

Bob is survived by three children: Kim Dougherty of Keokuk, Karen (Jim) Davis of St. Francisville, Missouri, and Robert E. (Kelly Sullivan) Dougherty, III, of Des Moines, Iowa; six grandchildren: Morgan (Jason) Malone, Cody (Haley) Glasgow, Anna (Levi) Collins, Lucy (Fiancé Devyn Leeson) Dougherty, Alex Dougherty and Quinn Dougherty Brady; four great-grandchildren: Rowan, Ryder, Jesse and Parker; two brothers: Roger and Douglas; his sister Lisa; and numerous nieces, nephews and cousins.



Bob is preceded in death by his parents and two brothers: David and Michael.

Funeral services will be held at noon on Friday, December 9, 2022, at DeJong-Greaves-Printy Funeral Home in Keokuk, Iowa, with Pastor David Turner officiating. Burial with military honors provided by the United States Army and the American Legion Post #41 will be held at Keokuk National Cemetery directly following the service. Visitation will be held at the funeral home on Friday from 10 am until noon directly before the service.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be directed to the American Legion Post #41.

Tributes and condolences may be left at [www.dejongsfuneralhome.com](http://www.dejongsfuneralhome.com).

DeJong-Greaves-Printy Funeral Home of Keokuk is in charge of arrangements.

#### Pen City Current obituary policy

Pen City Current runs obituaries one time at no charge to funeral homes and they run the day they are submitted in most cases. They are also run as submitted by the funeral homes. Reposting of obituaries due to changes can only be requested by the submitting funeral home and will be assessed a \$15 reposting fee.

## OBITUARIES

### ROLAND H. NORTHUP

Roland Henry "Slick" Northup, 79 of Nauvoo, IL died Thursday, December 1, 2022 at Memorial Hospital in Carthage, IL.



NORTHUP

He was born May 23, 1943 in Niota, IL the son of Harry and Myrtle Hinman Northup. Roland graduated from Dallas City High School in Dallas City, IL with the class of 1963.

He was a veteran of the United States Army and proudly served his country during the Vietnam War.

Slick was first united in marriage to Pok Sun. They later divorced.

On March 7, 2000 Slick was united in marriage to Nancy Kayser in Pearl, LA. She survives.

Other survivors include one son, Shawn Northup (Trish) of Keokuk, one daughter, Camille Whitaker (Bryan) of Burlington, IA, one step-son, Frank Cady (Simone) of Burnside, IL and three step-daughters, Michele Campos (Carlos) of Summitville, S.C., Christina Money of Carthage, IL and Leann Cady of Oxford, GA, thirteen grandchildren and numerous great grandchildren. He is also survived by one brother, Harold Northup (Charleen) of Dallas City, IL, three sisters, Harriet Hinman of Woodland Park, CO, Patsy Loos of Camp Point, IL and Jean Marie Crosby of Woodland Park, CO and several nieces and nephews.



He was preceded in death by his parents and one sister, Mary Peterson.

Slick was a member of the Church of The Latter Day Saints and the American Legion.

He had been first been employed by Santa Fe Railroad and later by Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway for forty years until his retirement in 2003.

Slick loved to collect antiques including railroad artifacts and horse drawn implements. He enjoyed auto body work, attending car shows and car flea markets and was always on the hunt for things to add to his collections. Slick also loved his hot rod, a 1969 Torino.

A graveside service with military rites will be held at 2 p.m., Wednesday, at the Keokuk National Cemetery in Keokuk, IA.

Visitation will be held prior to the service from 12 noon - 2 p.m., Wednesday at the Vigen Memorial Home in Keokuk with family meeting with friends at that time.

Memorials may be made to St. Jude Children's Hospital, PAW Animal Shelter or the Alzheimer's Association.

Online condolences may be sent to the family at [www.vigenmemorialhome.com](http://www.vigenmemorialhome.com).

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## CHERYL L. BOLINE

Cheryl Lou Boline, 78 yrs, of Burleson, Texas and formerly of Burlington, Iowa passed away Monday, November 28, 2022 in Burleson, Texas. She was born March 18, 1944 in Fort Madison, Iowa. Daughter of Oscar (Cy) Ferris and Johnnie Ferris (McClaren).



BOLINE

Cheryl was a kind, gentle soul. Cheryl's love and care was only matched by her fiery spirit and her ability to worry herself sick over those she held dear to her heart. Retired as a 20+yr bookkeeper from disability, she lived within her means while diligently tracking her finances to make sure family was well taken care of if not short of a little spoiled. Cheryl loved the color green, she loved going out to eat with friends and family, she loved watching game shows, soap operas, hallmark movies, and the news. She, like many of us, had the guilty pleasures of a sweet tooth. She loved life no matter what life threw at her. She was a fighter and protector from first breath to last. Cheryl cherished us all as we cherished her and she will be dearly missed.

She is survived by three children: Scot McCune, Shannon Bell, and Shelly Bell of Denver, Colorado; and grandchildren: Sheldon Downer of Burleson, Texas; Ryan White of College Station, Texas; Ian McCune of Colorado Springs, Colorado; Sean Bishop and Christopher Bishop. She was preceded in death by her parents, husband (Steve Boline), two grandchildren, Tiffany Bell at age 10 and Don Sperow at age 25; and various close friends.

Visitation will be held from 10:00 - 11:00 am Wednesday, December 7, 2022 at the Barr Memorial Chapel, Fort Madison, Iowa. Her funeral service to follow and begin at 11:00 am Wednesday at the funeral home. Burial will be at Oakland Cemetery, Fort Madison. A memorial has been established, contributions may be left at or mailed to Barr Memorial Chapel, 1919 Ave F, Fort Madison, Iowa 52627. Barr Memorial Chapel is honored to serve the Boline family and an online guest book may be found at [www.barrmemorialchapel.com](http://www.barrmemorialchapel.com).

### OBITUARIES

## RALPH B. WENTZIEN

Ralph Bond Wentzien, 84 years, of Fort Madison, Iowa died at 4:08 am Sunday, December 4, 2022 at the Southeast Iowa Regional Medical Center, Fort Madison.



WENTZIEN

He was born February 19, 1938 in Marshalltown, Iowa, the son of Albert John and Lois Cecile (Bond) Wentzien. On August 3, 1958, he married Marilyn Lawrence at the First United Methodist Church in Marshalltown.

Ralph earned his BA degree in Psychology and Physical Therapist Certificate from the University of Iowa. He worked at the Fort Madison Community Hospital for more than 35 years as a physical therapist. In addition, he formed a partnership with Keith Rusher to offer service to Valley Clinic and several local home health agencies and care centers. He was a member of the St. Luke's Episcopal Church. In the past, he was a member of the Masons, Shriners, Elks and was on the Fort Madison YMCA Board.

Ralph is survived by his wife, Marilyn Wentzien, of Fort Madison, Iowa; two sons: John (Brenda) Wentzien of Elberta, Alabama and James (Susan) Wentzien of Portland, Oregon; one daughter, Jane Wentzien (Kara Morrow) of Fort Madison, Iowa; one sister, Judith Ann Loftus of Arizona and two grandchildren, Miles and Jack. He was preceded in death by his parents.

His family will greet friends from 4:00 - 5:30 pm Friday, December 9, 2022 at the Barr Memorial Chapel, Fort Madison. A private Memorial Service will be held at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Fort Madison at a later date. In lieu of flowers, a memorial to be established for St. Luke's Episcopal Church or the Fort Madison YMCA, contributions may be made at Barr Memorial Chapel, Fort Madison. Barr Memorial Chapel is honored to serve the Wentzien Family and an online guestbook may be found at [www.barrmemorialchapel.com](http://www.barrmemorialchapel.com).

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## For the Record/From the Front

### For the Record

#### Fort Madison Police Report

11/30/22 - 11:05 a.m. - Fort Madison police arrested Connen Craig Hahnbaum, 33, of Fort Madison, in the 2200 block of Avenue A, on warrants for assaulting a police officer, harassment, and being a felon in possession of a firearm. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

11/30/22 - 9:49 p.m. - Fort Madison police cited Lance Joseph Guzman, 65, of Fort Madison, at the intersection of 34th Street and Avenue H, on a charge of driving under suspension.

12/01/22 - 4:51 a.m. - Fort Madison police cited Benjamin Gurney Stiles, 45, of Keokuk, at the intersection of 23rd Street and Avenue H, on a charge of driving under suspension.

12/01/22 - 8:11 a.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of a property damage accident in the 300 block of 33rd Street.

12/01/22 - 5:00 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the 1700 block of Avenue L.

12/01/22 - 5:55 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of a property damage accident in the 800 block of Avenue E.

12/01/22 - 7:50 p.m. - Fort

Madison police cited Mary Elizabeth Johnson, 59, of Fort Madison, at the intersection of 6th Street and Avenue D, on a charge of driving under suspension.

12/01/22 - 8:55 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of a property damage accident in the 100 block of 2nd Street.

12/01/22 - 10:56 p.m. - Fort Madison police cited Laura Denise Farr, 46, of Fort Madison, at the intersection of 48th Street and River Valley Road, on a charge of driving under suspension.

12/02/22 - 12:56 a.m. - Fort Madison police arrested Patrick Wayne Doty, 41, of Burlington, in the 3400 block of Avenue N, on warrants for 2nd degree criminal mischief and domestic abuse assault. He was transferred to another facility.

12/02/22 - 8:48 a.m. - Fort Madison police arrested Henry Francis Becerra, 54, of Fort Madison, in the 1800 block of 36th Street, on charges of 3rd degree theft greater than \$750 and less than \$1,500 and 3rd degree burglary - vehicle 1st offense. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

12/02/22 - 9:05 a.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the

3900 block of Bluff Road.

12/02/22 - 11:13 a.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the 800 block of Avenue E.

12/02/22 - 1:27 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the 4800 block of Avenue O.

12/02/22 - 2:30 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the 1800 block of Avenue H.

12/02/22 - 3:33 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the 700 block of 34th Street.

12/02/22 - 4:39 p.m. - Fort Madison police arrested Gary Lee Stromer, 63, of Wever, in the 1500 block of 39th Street, on a charge of 1st degree harassment. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

12/02/22 - 4:41 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the 1700 block of Avenue H.

12/02/22 - 4:52 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of vandalism in the 2600 block of Avenue L.

12/02/22 - 10:01 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of vandalism in the 2600 block of Avenue L.

12/03/22 - 10:32 a.m. - Fort Madison police cited Emma Jean Lurvey, 18, of Fort Madi-

son, in the 1200 block of 25th Street, on a charge of 3rd degree criminal mischief.

12/03/22 - 3:52 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of vandalism in the 800 block of Avenue G.

12/03/22 - 9:08 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of a hit & run at the intersection of 18th Street and Avenue E.

#### Lee County Sheriff Report

11/30/22 - Lee County sheriff deputies had no activity to report.

12/01/22 - 10:23 a.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Mitchell Aaron Kruse, 30, of Houghton, at the sheriff's office, on a judgment hold warrant. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

12/01/22 - 12:33 p.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Vincent Keith Valdez, 56, of Ottumwa, at the sheriff's office, on a warrant for simple assault. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

12/01/22 - 1:33 p.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Christopher Lynn Long, 44, of Des Moines, in the 3600 block of 190th Street, Wever, on a charge of 2nd offense OWI. He was taken to Lee

County Jail.

12/01/22 - 2:03 p.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Manuel Obil Chiguil, 44, of Farmington, at the sheriff's office, on a judgment hold warrant. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

12/01/22 - 9:36 p.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Phillip Ryan Beavers, 32, of Keokuk, in the 800 block of Johnson Road, Keokuk, on two warrants for violation of probation. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

12/01/22 - 10:03 p.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Joshua Adam Bowen, 42, of Wever, in the 2000 block of 343rd Avenue, Wever, on two warrants for voluntary absence from custody and two judgment hold warrants. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

12/02/22 - 12:03 a.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Zander Sean Crank, 18, of Keokuk, at the intersection of South 12th Street and Timea Street, Keokuk, on charges of no valid driver's license and interference with official acts. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

12/02/22 - 1:01 a.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies cited Samantha Biddenstadt, 20, of Keokuk, at the intersection of 12th Street and Timea Street,

Keokuk, on a charge of possession of drug paraphernalia.

12/03/22 - Lee County sheriff deputies had no activity to report.

12/04/22 - 2:11 p.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies responded to a report of single-vehicle accident at the intersection of 241st Avenue and Peach Orchard Road. According to the report, a vehicle driven by Neil Andrew Macomber, 19, of Montrose, was traveling south on 241st Avenue, approaching Peach Orchard Road, when it lost traction over a concrete bridge, slid along the guard rail, left the roadway and struck a cluster of trees, rolling, and coming to rest on its top. Macomber was transported to the hospital by ambulance and his vehicle was towed from the scene. Macomber was cited for failure to maintain control.

12/05/22 - 2:10 a.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Brett Lee Traman, 33, of Burlington, at the North Lee County Courthouse, on a warrant for violation of parole. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

*Those listed above are arrested on suspicion of a charge and are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.*

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## Part of Alliant solar field project is in Bottoms flood plain

ALLIANT - Continued from Page 1

### Touching the Community with Care

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all county required setbacks from county property including roads.

"We have setbacks both from structures and county rights of way addressed in here. All those distances exceed Lee County ordinances for right of ways," Hull said.

"Should the county have incidental fees for staff or whatnot, there's some reimbursement there, too. We've also agreed separately, to work on a haul road agreements specifically about the roads and we've made a lot of progress on it."

Hull said when Alliant picks a contractor they will also be held accountable and responsible for the work.

The agreement also includes a parent guaranty or bond that will be provided by Alliant Energy to the county within 60 days of Monday's approval of the agreement.

Foss said the project is in the flood plain near Green Bay bottoms but the Green Bay levy district is in the process of recertifying and they won't know what the current flood plain is until that is done.

"We do have the ability to build in the flood plain and we will. The question is are we protected against a 500-year flood or a 100-year flood," Foss said.

"If the flood amount is too high, then we'll end up not building in that area, because it would be cost prohibitive to raise our equipment up that high."

Foss said in the event that happens the project has secured enough property northwest of the IFC plant to add that solar equipment to that higher ground.

The easement agreements are good for 30 years with two additional 10-year extensions being optional.

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## Sports

# Crusaders roll over Highland behind Hellige's 26

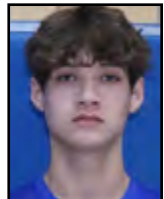
**1ST HALF:** Crusaders throw up 50 in the first half before tapping on the breaks in win over Huskies

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG  
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - It really was just a little over two minutes of competitive basketball Monday night as the HTC Crusaders rolled to a 74-24 win over visiting Highland.

Holy Trinity got its first win in a big way led by Luke Hellige, who finished with a game-high 26 points in the win. He had 22 in the first half, including five 3-pointers.

"We've seen them shoot like this all summer and all year in practice. We knew the lid would come off at some point and this was a good game to just play relaxed basketball," Head Coach John Hellige said.



HELIGE

Holy Trinity had 11- 3-pointers on the night with freshman Layne Rung hitting on four attempts and Maddux Rung converting two.

The Crusaders got control of the game about three minutes into the first quarter when Hellige scored inside for a 7-6 lead, sparking a 21-2 run leading to a 28-8 first quarter lead.

Hellige had 13 in the first quarter alone.

The Crusaders defense didn't give up a single point in the second quarter rushing out to a 50-8 lead.

"We had some high intensity on defense, but I thought our offense did a really nice job of moving the ball and letting things come to us and playing loose," John Hellige said.

We came out just a little clunky in the third. We were hoping not to do that. I felt the starters closed that period well and then we got a chance to let those guys that work hard in practice every day get some time on the floor."

Being up by 42 at the half, Holy Trinity came out a little sloppy to open the second half, missing their first three shots, but Luke Hellige again got things turned around about three minutes into the third period with a bucket off a rebound inside.

Highland scored twice to cut the lead to 50-12 before Hellig's bucket, but then were held to just one point the rest of the quarter and trailed 62-13, prompting John Hellige to dump the bench.

Layne Rung had 14 points and Maddux Rung finished in double figures with 10. Hellige also had 12 rebounds to lead Holy Trinity.

Connor Gehling finished with eight points and Brayton Schneider had six.

The Crusaders (1-2) host Mediapolis (1-1) Tuesday night before traveling to New London on Friday night.



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Holy Trinity's Maddux Rung goes up for a layup and scores in the first half of Holy Trinity's 74-24 win over Highland Monday night.

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## From the Front

# Plans for Test Kitchen include adult cooking class

**MERGER** - Continued from Page 1

directors. That takes a little more time.”

Wilson said he was humbled to be approached by Test Kitchen founder Kumar Wickramasingha to help lead the program into the future.

“I was humbled when Kumar approached me and wanted to work with us as a YMCA. That was an honor for us to be considered,” Wilson said.

“Kumar and I have been real methodical on this process regarding who’s going to lead this as we go forward.”

As part of the announcement it was revealed that current United Way of the Great River Region Executive Director Karen Siefken will be the new director of the Test Kitchen.

Siefken has several decades of experience working with YMCA’s mostly in aquatic programming. She started with the United Way in 2017, and during that time has grown the group’s annual campaign by 80%.

“I am thrilled to continue all the amazing work that Kumar has done and to help move YTK forward. This feels like a natural fit for me. I’m excited to be a part of this new and growing relationship,” Siefken said.

“We’re going to continue the good work Kumar has done and we’re going to expand upon that as well with the goal of bringing the Test Kitchen concept to YMCAs in other communities.”

Siefken said she’s continuing to do the work at the United Way until Dec. 31 and then will step right into operations at the Test Kitchen. The fact that the new program was YMCA-based made it an attractive opportunity for Siefken.

“It did make it much more appealing. YMCA is worldwide organization similar to United Way, but their programs run every day and you can see the impact on people’s lives on a daily basis,” she said.

With United Way you make an impact on daily lives, but it was much more difficult for me to see sitting at a desk.”

Wilson said the cooking program that’s entrenched with the Test Kitchen will continue to be a big part even though the YMCA hasn’t had much experience in that type of education.

“The cooking side was nothing I was worried about during the process with someone like Kumar on board and continuing to be part of the opera-

tion,” Wilson said.

“I see that being very transitional. He’s not going anywhere. He’s going to be with us and he already has people in the kitchen.”

Wilson said other than that the two programs are very compatible.

“If you think about the concept, 95% of what they do is similar to what the Y does. After-school programming aimed at youth, education, summer camps, and child care,” Wilson said.

“Kumar has had this working for seven years and it has grown exponentially, and the Y has had the same growth rate over that time period. It makes sense.

The Test Kitchen Education Foundation (TKEF) was founded in 2015 by Kumar Wickramasingha and the goal was to provide a safe environment for students who needed extra help with academics.

Many students needed assistance beyond the school day. Regionally, there was no organization able to fill that void. In addition to providing certified educators to assist with academics, Wickramasingha’s extensive experience and passion in the culinary arts added an entirely unique element to the Test Kitchen experience.

Today the TKEF serves over 500 students per month with its wide variety of programs. The Fort Madison YMCA has been serving diverse groups of young people for decades.

Wickramasingha and Wilson will collaborate with a newly-formed committee to expand existing and future programs.

Wilson has been with the YMCA since 2008 and the Y has continued to grow under his leadership. The program offerings, additional locations, and partnerships has seen the Y budget go from \$400,000 in 2008 to eclipse the \$1,000,000 mark in 2023.

The YMCA continues to offer childcare, youth sports, and with the merger, it will allow the Y to increase the diverse programming with their members. Future plans are to start new programs such as adult cooking classes, family cooking events, and offering additional physical activities such as a walking/running club for students and families.

With the new endeavor, Wilson said there has been a big response from the community to support the YTK idea. Local businesses and community members have pledged to support YTK’s kick off on January 1.

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