

PEN CITY CURRENT

It's Black & White and Read all over

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Keokuk gets Insight on hospital



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Keokuk city officials released information on Thursday indicating that a Michigan-based health group called Insight had signed a letter of intent to purchase the Keokuk Hospital from Blessing Health System.

INTENT: Agreement says group will buy hospital pending other factors

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

KEOKUK – The City of Keokuk announced an agreement in principal with a Michigan-based medical provider to possibly re-open the city’s hospital.

According to a release dated Jan. 1 from the city Thursday afternoon, Insight, out of Flint, Mich., has signed a letter of intent to acquire the hospital from Blessing Health Systems.

Keokuk City Administrator Cole O’Donnell said there aren’t a lot of details that can be released yet, but confirmed the agreement.

“All we did was stew for a couple months. Blessing let us know they had this letter of intent, but told us we couldn’t say anything. They just allowed us to release it today, so this comes as

very good news,” O’Donnell said.

Keokuk Mayor Kathy Mahoney was unavailable for comment, but is quoted in the release as saying, “When the Keokuk Area Hospital closed, a void was created in the health care services for our citizens. The announcement from Insight means that this void will be closed, and the people of Keokuk can rest a little easier.”

O’Donnell said he couldn’t confirm what level of services would exist at the hospital, but the city was told by Blessing that an Emergency Room would be part of Insight’s plans.

Insight Chief Strategy Officer Atif Bawahab said the medical group was determined to help fill the need for reliable, quality healthcare services in Keokuk.

See INSIGHT, page 4

SENATE FILE 1022

Public schools send letter to Rep. Graber

Superintendents issue joint statement in opposition to Reynolds’ School Choice

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY - A suggestion from a Fort Madison School board member became a reality Thursday when the three public school district superintendents in Lee County issued a joint statement in opposition to the Governor’s School Choice legislation.

The legislation provides educational savings accounts (ESAs) that would provide up to \$7,598 per student per year in scholarships that can be used toward tuition at the



GRABER

state’s private schools. The first two years income restrictions would be placed on families based on poverty guidelines, but starting the third year, there would be no income restrictions.

Mio Santiago made the suggestion for the joint statement at Monday night’s FMCS board meeting encouraging the three district heads to state with one voice that the governor’s proposed legislation will be detrimental to all three districts.

That letter was sent Thursday to state Rep. Martin Graber (R-Fort Madison) in opposition to Senate Study Bill (SSB) 1022.

The content of the letter is printed below in its entirety, and addresses how the bill will shrink programming at public schools because of the loss of dollars flowing in.

The proposed bill could cost as much as \$300 million the first year, according to data from the governor’s office, and as much as \$900 million over four years.

“Public schools represent the biggest contributors to a community’s growth and vitality. Eroding the framework in our ru-

See SUPERS, page 4

FUNDRAISER

SEI Regional Hospice hosts Pack the Gym in Pink at SCC

WEST BURLINGTON – Southeast Iowa Regional Hospice is partnering with SCC Blackhawk Men’s Basketball to ‘Pack the Gym in Pink’. This fundraising event for the hospice program will take place on Wednesday, February 8, 2023 when the Blackhawks take on Mineral Area College Cardinals at the SCC Loren Walker Arena

in West Burlington starting at 7 p.m. Admission is a free will donation that will benefit Southeast Iowa Regional Hospice. There will be a silent auction during the event along with the sale of t-shirts and rally towels. T-shirts can be pre-purchased by stopping by the SCC Athletic Office or the Southeast Iowa

Regional Hospice House. A special meal deal, that includes a hamburger and chips for \$2.00, will be offered in the SCC Cafeteria with half the proceeds being donated to the hospice program.

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WEATHER

FRI 20 Jan	Partly sunny and cold, 32° F/ 22° F	
SAT 21 Jan	Mostly cloudy and cold, 34° F/ 27° F	
SUN 22 Jan	Mostly cloudy and cold, 34° F/ 23° F	

IOWA LOTTERY

LOTTO AMERICA 01/18.....	12 18 24 27 45, Star Ball: 1 All Star Bonus: 5
LUCKY FOR LIFE 01/18.....	12 27 35 42 44, Lucky Ball: 6
PICK 3 01/18 MIDDAY.....	5 6 2
PICK 3 01/18 EVENING.....	2 3 8
PICK 4 01/18 MIDDAY.....	6 9 5 4
PICK 4 01/18 EVENING.....	3 6 4 8
POWERBALL 01/18	6 15 22 42 47, Powerball: 26 Power Play: 3

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Obituaries

OBITUARIES

PHYLLIS J. FRAZIER

Phyllis Jean Frazier, 92, of Fort Madison, Iowa, passed away peacefully on January 1, 2023, at the University of Iowa Hospitals in Iowa City, surrounded by love and family.

She was born in Clinton, Iowa on October 21, 1930 to Leola Catherine (Snyder) and Thomas Anthony Cormick.



FRAZIER

Phyllis, lovingly known to family and friends as Jeannie, and to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren as Deanie, had two older sisters, Ruth Maxine Haigh and Mary Catherine "Billie" Bertlshofer, and a younger brother, Jack Keith Cormick.

She married Thomas Albert Frazier in Fort Madison on August 11, 1951. Together they had their beloved daughter, Brenda.

After graduating from Catholic Central High School, Fort Madison, in 1948, Phyllis had several interesting jobs including as a telephone operator and working on the atomic energy line at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant. She also partnered with her husband Tom in the Chocolate Shop in downtown Fort Madison, across from the Catermole Public Library, and in Frazier's Old Fashioned Salad Dressing business.

Phyllis was known for her deep love for animals of all kinds, including her pet dogs, cats and iguana, always having time for coffee with friends and family, her contagious laugh, and telling family stories to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Phyllis was active up until the last few months; she enjoyed shopping, eating out, walking in the park, and an occasional visit to the casino.

Phyllis was preceded in death by her beloved husband Tom, cherished daughter Brenda Frantz, granddaughter Danielle Frantz, her parents, brother and two sisters.

She is survived by her grandsons Jamie (Jessica) Frantz and Michael (Stephanie) Frantz, great-grandsons Kellen, Gilbert, Bodie and Lewis Frantz, son-in-law Keith Frantz, and several nieces, nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be held at 10:30 AM on Tuesday, January 24, 2023 at SS. Mary and Joseph Catholic Church, Holy Family Parish, with Father Joseph Phung as Celebrant. Burial at Oakland Cemetery, Fort Madison. Barr Memorial Chapel is honored to serve the Frazier family and an online guest book may be found at www.barrmemorialchapel.com.

OBITUARIES

LARRY G. WEIRATHER

Larry Gene Weirather, 85, of Montrose, IA died Wednesday, January 18, 2023 at the Southeast Iowa Hospice House in West Burlington, IA.

He was born on August 6, 1937 in Keokuk, IA, the son of Carl and Mabel (Elston) Weirather. He graduated from Montrose High School with the Class of 1955. On January 15, 1956, Larry was united in marriage to Deanna Rudd in Keokuk. She survives.



WEIRATHER

Other survivors include one daughter, Vickie Blanford (Larry) of Montrose, two sons, Jeff Weirather and Neal Weirather (Diana) all of Montrose, six grandchildren and eleven great-grandchildren. He is also survived by three brothers, Carl Weirather, Jr. (Janet) of Montrose, Bobby Weirather (Judy) of Quincy, IL, Gary Weirather (Sarah) of Quincy, one brother-in-law, George Rudd (Martha) of Montrose and several nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents, two sisters and their husbands, Donna Elschlager (Calvin) and Betty Philp (John), and one brother-in-law, Russell Rudd.

Larry had served in the Army Reserve and was called up to active duty during the Berlin Crisis in 1959.

He had been employed at Consolidated Packaging in Ft. Madison, IA for forty years. Larry also farmed and did carpentry work with his brother.

He was a talented woodworker and had made many things for his home out of oak including a shaving table, buffet, kitchen island and a fireplace. He enjoyed doing yard work and always had an immaculate lawn. He loved watching NASCAR races and was a fan of Kyle Busch.

According to his wishes private family services will be held at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the Montrose Ball Association.

The Vigen Memoria Home in Montrose is assisting the family with arrangements.

On-line condolences may be sent to the family at www.vigenmemorialhome.com.



LYLE D. MILLER, JR.

Lyle Dean Miller, Jr., 62, of Keokuk, IA died Thursday, January 12, 2023 at his home.

He was born July 29, 1960 in Keokuk the son of Lyle Sr. and Betty Mortimer Miller. On February 14, 2014, Lyle was united in marriage to Judy Kay Conover in Keokuk.



MILLER

She survives.

Other survivors include one daughter, Alicia Ann Miller Dugger, three step-sons, Kenneth Walter Davis and Robert Henry Davis both of Keokuk and James Earl Davis of Des Moines, IA and fifteen grandchildren. He is also survived by two brothers, Billy Lee Miller of Lenox, IA and Danny Ray (Tracy Lynn) Miller, three sisters, Roberta Joann Miller Thurman, Mary Francis Miller Hemingway and Bonnie Dee Miller Elder all of Kahoka, MO and numerous aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents, his grandparents, Harold and Frances

Miller and Tomas and Violet Mortimer.

He had been employed by Shannon Saw Mill in Missouri and later, prior to his retirement, he was employed at Scott's in Ft. Madison, IA.

Lyle loved to cook a large breakfast in the morning for him and Judy. He was an outdoorsman and enjoyed hunting, fishing, planting flowers in the yard and searching for arrowheads and mushrooms. He also enjoyed when Judy's son would come and have long visits with them. He will be missed dearly by everyone that knew him and that was touched by his kindness and smile.

A Celebration of Life will be held from 1-5 p.m., January 28, 2023 at the Alexandria Community Center in Alexandria, MO.

Memorials may be made to the family.

The Vigen Memorial Home in Keokuk, IA is assisting the family with arrangements. Online condolences may be sent to the family at www.vigenmemorialhome.com.

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From the Front

Bill moving quickly through Legislature

SUPERS - Continued from Page 1

ral communities by diverting dollars to private schools will have a detrimental effect on the very foundation that provides our communities with economic growth and development. If you support this bill, you will be shortchanging our children and our families by essentially defunding programs, as cuts will be forced upon our schools due to decreased funding and reduced enrollment.

As you are aware, Iowa's public school funding formula is based on enrollment. Fewer students compounded with less funding equates to fewer resources for the majority of children who are educated in Lee County's public schools.

Iowa public schools educate more than 90 percent of the children in our state. In total, our three districts had a certified enrollment of more than 4,700 students this year. This is the number of students you would be impacting in a negative way by supporting SSB 1022.

For the past decade, Iowa public schools have lagged behind neighboring states when it comes to funding. This important funding is needed to continue to make teacher pay competitive, meet ongoing expenditures (utilities, books, etc.), and make new investments in our schools to increase opportunities for students. This new system of vouchers would diminish the dollars available for public schools, while also reducing our enrollment. While the current bill provides minimal funding for public schools for enrolled private school students, it will do nothing to improve opportunities for our current students.

The public education system is built to improve outcomes for all students, for the betterment of society as a whole. Every student who enters our school is welcomed and receives critical services. We never turn

students away because of their race, color, socioeconomic status, or any other factor. We will continue to serve ALL students, while private schools will be able to pick and choose who they serve.

Thank you for representing Lee County at the state capital. Rural Iowa and Lee County have significant needs, requiring Investment from our state. We hope you will prioritize these county needs over sending \$300 million into Polk, Linn, and Johnson counties. After all, the voucher plan does nothing to help rural Iowans.

Sincerely,
Dr. Andy Crozier Superintendent Central Lee
Dr. Dan Mart Superintendent Keokuk
Dr. Erin Slater Superintendent Fort Madison

Crozier has also been on social media saying the legislature has been speaking out of both sides of their mouth.

"Legislators told public education they didn't have the funding to provide higher increases in the past. They did. Now they magically have the funding to provide a government handout to Iowa's most affluent families. This is essentially a tax cut for the 1%" he posted on Twitter Wednesday.

The bill is quickly moving through the legislature and Reynolds issued a statement on the progress Thursday.

"This is just the first step in giving educational freedom to Iowa's students and parents. For too long government has told parents when, how, and where their kids can receive an education. It's time for the government to get out of the way and allow parents the freedom of choice in education," Reynolds said.

"It is not shocking to see the same special interest groups who tried to lock our students out of their classrooms advocating against this bill. They were wrong then, and they are wrong now."

Supervisor says Ambulance plans remain the same

INSIGHT - Continued from Page 1

"Insight is committed to providing world-class expert healthcare to our patients," Bawahab said. "Our physicians and hospital administrators are driven by an oath to improve the quality of life of residents in the communities we serve."

Dr. Jawad Shah, founder and CEO of Insight, and a practicing neurosurgeon said the group is committed to the highest level of care and a paramount level of service in re-establishing healthcare services in Keokuk.

Lee County Supervisor Chair Garry Seyb said he was surprised by the news, and welcomes it for the citizens of Keokuk.

"If it comes to pass that at some point we have a hospital and ER in Keokuk that's good news for the city. But other than the press release, I don't have a lot of information. I was surprised by the release."

Lee County has scheduled a special election for March 11 for voters to designate ambulance services as essential services in the county and to assess a .75/\$1,000 levy to help offset the costs of running the ambulance. Current budget estimates show a current year shortfall of close to \$2 million, The 2023-24 proposed budget has expenses projected at \$4.66 million.

Seyb said the announcement doesn't change the county's plans for EMS services across the county.

"This doesn't change our posture for the ambulance service. An ER in Keokuk would allow us to take on more transfers than we are currently able to handle and still provide emergency services in Keokuk while allowing us to get back on station quicker," Seyb said.

Supervisor Tom Schulz also said the news was welcomed.

"It's always good when you can see the light at the end of the tunnel."

No information about the timeline for potential operations to be up and running was eluded to by officials with either the city or Insight.

Attempts to reach Blessing several days ago for comment on the rumored deal went unreturned as of this publishing.

Hospice fundraiser Feb. 8

HOSPICE - Continued from Page 1

Sponsors for this event include Southeastern Community College, Great River Health, Burlington Beacon, Design by Hand and Standard of Beaverdale. Silent auction items are still being accepted.

Southeast Iowa Regional Hospice is based in West Burlington and Fort Madison and serves Des Moines, Lee, Henry, Van Buren, and Louisa counties in Iowa. They also operate a residential hospice house on the Southeast Iowa Regional Medical Center West Burlington campus.

Hospice care helps people with terminal illnesses have greater quality of life in their end-of-life journey. Because death affects the entire family, it also ensures families are cared for and supported during this important time. Hospice professionals address physical, psychological, and spiritual needs to improve patients' comfort and assure their dignity.

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Iowa News/Opinion

ISU to get \$60M for veterinary diagnostic laboratory

DES MOINES -- Today, Governor Kim Reynolds announced \$40 million in funding to help complete Phase 2 of Iowa State University's Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL).

The Governor has also proposed in her budget an additional \$20M from the Re-build Iowa Infrastructure Fund (RIIF)--\$10M in FY24 and \$10M in FY25—to total \$60M in state support for the VDL project.

“The Veterinary Diagnostic Lab is absolutely critical to support and protect our state and country’s agriculture industry and food supply,” said Gov. Reynolds. “This investment will significantly expand the VDL’s capacity to support Iowa’s \$32.5 billion animal agriculture industry and will keep this nationally-recognized lab on the forefront of cutting-edge technology. Iowa will remain a global leader in agriculture, combatting foreign animal diseases, and recruiting and retaining veterinary talent.”

“We are deeply grateful to Governor Reynolds for allocating these critical resources to construct Phase 2 of the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory,” said Iowa State University President Wendy Wintersteen. “This funding will help ensure the VDL can continue to provide cutting-edge services and support to Iowa’s livestock and poultry producers.”

“The Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory is enormously important to Iowa’s nation-leading livestock industry and provides immeasurable expertise on worldwide animal health and food safety issues. I want to thank Gov. Reynolds for making this critical piece of infrastructure a high priority,” said Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig. “Our close partnership with the Veterinary Diagnostic Lab has been essential in implementing our response to the highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreak and we rely on their team’s recommendations as we enhance our preparedness for other foreign animal disease threats.”

Fully accredited by the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians, the VDL provides quality diagnostic services for animal species, including necropsy, bacteriology, serology, histopathology, virology, parasitology, molecular diagnostics, and toxicology as well as offering analytical services. The full-service laboratories at the VDL process upwards of 100,000 cases each year and conducts more than a million tests annually.

Funding for this initial investment is being made available through the federal American Rescue Plan Act.

Legacy Theater kicks off 2023 season

CARTHAGE - The Legacy Theater in Carthage will kick off its 2023 season with a showcase to highlight the performers of the coming year.

The Legacy Theater 2023 Showcase is Saturday, Feb. 11, a free event at the theater. Social time begins at 6 p.m. with complimentary appetizers and a cash bar serving wine and beer. At 6:30 p.m. the program begins. The evening will include a combination of outstanding, live local performers and video previews of many of the shows planned for the year.

Featured live on stage during the evening will be Duke Oursler of Macomb, country Americana singer/songwriter; T Heberlein of Quincy, stand-up comedian; and Liz Bentley of Quincy, an up-and-coming country singer. These performers provide a forecast of the kinds of shows that will be featured during the coming year at The Legacy Theater.

A series of videos, produced by Phil Weiss of Western Illinois University, will give a glimpse of the 2023 schedule, starting with Shawn Gerhard, the Ultimate Garth Brooks, on Saturday, March 11, at 7 p.m.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Reader wants spirit of Christmas carried through the year

Dear Editor:

Epiphany gave us the last of those God chose to be the pivotal people in the birth of Jesus, those who would bring God in his human form into the world, raise him, and spread the message of the birth of the infant King. None of these were people of high status. None were on the inside of society. In fact, many were on the fringes or outsiders to the community or nation. Let's start with Mary, a young, unwed woman. She was placed into a dangerous position in society by being unmarried and pregnant. She could have been stoned. Her reaction? The strident beauty of her Magnificat, her recognition that God has chosen her for this crucial role and what it means for others like her, society, and the future. Joseph, a carpenter with a choice to make. He could either accept or deny Mary. He relied on a dream and faith. He also showed kindness and compassion. I think about the people of Bethlehem. What were they thinking when they denied a safe space for a woman about to give birth to a child? Did they need an Angel or a dream to open their hearts? Maybe this is one of the reasons God didn't ask them to spread the word of Jesus's birth. Maybe they wouldn't have left the safety and comfort of their homes or traveled outside of their community. Perhaps, they wouldn't have even believed the message. Instead, God chose outcasts, the shepherds. Men who lived with their flocks in the hills. They came when called by the Angel and had the courage to take the message of the birth with them to give to others. Lastly, we have the wise men. Strangers in the land. Herod was more than happy to use them for his purposes, but strangers they would remain. Outsiders who would leave rather than follow the directions of an immoral leader.

The cast was set. We have the same people today. Today's Marys aren't carrying the Christ child, but scripture shows us what an uncaring people did then and many still do today. It shows us the value of people on the fringes of society and how critically important the strangers in our land are. Anyone who reads the Gospels knows how they should treat others. We should treat everyone as we want to be treated. It's one of Christ's two commandments. It's helpful to have the concept illustrated for us. The Christmas story tells us the value of the humble, and even the outcasts among us, just as we see it in the parable of the sheep and goats. Christ is in all of us so what we do to the least of us, we do for Christ and what we fail to do for them, we fail to do for Christ. What kind of a people do we choose to be? The citizens of Bethlehem with closed doors and hard hearts? Mary, who rejoiced in being recognized and valued in what others viewed as low status? Joseph, who showed compassion, kindness, and undertook a task many would refuse. The shepherds, who listened to the message and made sure it was heard by others. The wise men, who took a different path so they could protect the vulnerable. I hope we choose to be the voices for the silenced, to be kind, compassionate, and to recognize God in the face of everyone. And to always err on the side of Love.

Let's bring the Christmas story to life in our hearts and community throughout the year.

Mary Jo Riesberg
Keokuk

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