

PEN CITY CURRENT

It's Black & White and Read all over

Friday, October 27, 2023 | 7 pages | Volume 7 • Issue 180



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Mayoral debate one-sided

CANDIDATES: Mohrfeld, Hoskins, and Reuther tangle on city issues at Forum

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – A forum for the upcoming city election helped provide a little separation of candidacies prior to the upcoming Nov. 7 City/School election.

Incumbent Mayor Matt Mohrfeld said the city is better now than it was four years ago when he took the mayor's chair. He's challenged by Rodney Hoskins and Fort Madison businessman Jerry Reuther.

Also part of the forum sponsored by Fort Madison Partners was the at-large council seat candidates including incumbent Kevin Rink and challenger Jerry Hamelton.

Hamelton and Hoskins have both been on ballots in the past, but neither has ever secured enough votes to be elected or appointed to



MOHRFELD



HOSKINS

a seat.

Hoskins said he is running again for the mayor's seat because the community needs a little better leadership. Reuther said he wanted more stuff in town, "and that's pretty much it."

"I'm tired of running out of Fort Madison for things to do with the family, and that's pretty much it," Reuther said.

Mohrfeld thanked the residents for letting him be the mayor for the past four years, but he quickly deflected the successes over that

See **DEBATE**, page 6



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

A couple of boaters fill up at the city's new marina transit docks on Thursday morning in Fort Madison. With the new dredged marina, it's now easier for larger boats like this one to come in and fuel up which should create additional revenues to help maintain the marina. A full story will appear in Monday's edition.

WINE WALK

Glass presale for annual Wine & Beer Walk set for Nov. 10

FORT MADISON - The Fort Madison Wine & Beer Walk is right around the corner for 2023! The Walk will take place Friday, November 17th from 5-8:00 pm. "We're celebrating our 13th year doing this event" says Tim Gobble, Fort Madison Partners Executive Di-

rector. "We again have a great variety of local and regional vendors serving up seasonal flavors, as well as some of their favorites for you to enjoy at a variety of locations in the Historic Downtown Avenue G District- 25 locations will be participating". More information about

vendors and locations can be found on the Fort Madison Partners Facebook page.

Just like in past years, we have a sponsor for the glasses: Eternelle'

See **PRESALE**, page 4

FM PARTNERS FORUM

Candidates for at-large seat disagree on city manager

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – Fort Madison City Council candidate Jerry Hamelton said incumbent Kevin Rink has served long enough without the city seeing any change.

Hamelton is a three-time candidate and has been beaten by Rink twice and has missed being appointed on two different occasions.

Rink is looking for one more term in what he called his farewell tour.

The two squared off in the Fort Madison Partners Candidate Forum Wednesday night. They are vying for an at-large council seat in the Nov. 7 City/School general election.

Rink said he was "hell-bent" on not running again.

"No, I'm not doing this again. And then a few people talked to me, and I wavered back in August and then I said I would do the Rink farewell tour," he said. "Over the past 16 years, I've served the community and lots of decisions have gone through these hands."

Hamelton said he's running for the same reason that he's been trying to get on the council. To be a voice of dissent and make change.

"I'm running for the same reason as last time. I believe some of these people mean well, but they are doing it the wrong way," he said.

"When you raise taxes, you run people out of town. It can be proved in the data. Population declined, businesses are not moving here, industry is not moving here."

Hamelton has been an opponent of

See **AT-LARGE**, page 3



MOHRFELD



HAMELTON

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WEATHER

FRI 27 Oct.....Cool with chance of showers, 65° F/ 34° F ☁
SAT 28 Oct.....Chilly with chance of showers, 47° F/ 35° F ☁
SUN 29 Oct.....Chilly with showers likely, 41° F/ 25° F ☁

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Obituaries/Local News

OBITUARIES

NANCY UNDERWOOD

Nancy Underwood, 76, of Ft. Madison, passed away on Thursday, October 26, 2023 at 7:43 AM at Mercy Hospital in Iowa City.

She was born on December 25, 1946 in Burlington to John and Edythe Miller Underwood. Nancy enjoyed quilting, embroidery and doing puzzles.

Survivors include two brothers, Richard (Vicki) Underwood and Charlie (Peggy) Underwood both of Ft. Madison; one sister, Bonnie (Mike) White of Camdenton, MO and nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, a brother, Roger and a sister, Shirley Hunter.

Per her wishes, cremation has been entrusted to the care of King-Lynk Funeral Home & Crematory. There will be no formal services at this time. Online condolences may be left at the King-Lynk Funeral Home & Crematory website: www.kinglynk.com.

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.

Brewer to perform at FMAAAA

FORT MADISON - The FMAAAA Art Center welcomes Dr. Abbie Brewer on Saturday, October 28, 2023 from 7pm to 9pm playing classical piano in the Main Gallery. Dr. Abbie Brewer is a pianist, teacher, and travel enthusiast based in Cedar Rapids, IA. She began studying the piano at the age of 8 in Nebraska. After moving to Iowa in junior high, she began exploring collaborative performance by accompanying her junior high

choir. Active involvement in music throughout high school led her to pursue a degree in music education. As a student at Wartburg College, Abbie continued to accompany and began teaching piano to elementary students in the Tower School of Music. Her first teaching position took her to southern California where she also earned her Masters degree from Azusa Pacific University. She returned to Iowa for her doctoral studies at the

University of Iowa, and continued to teach piano and perform, taking advantage of chamber music opportunities in Bulgaria and Italy. Currently, Abbie teaches courses in piano, music theory, and music history at Coe College. She performs with Durward contemporary music ensemble, the Coe College Concert Choir, and is in demand as a pianist in the Cedar Rapids area. Abbie has been praised for her thoughtful playing as well as for her confident, direct approach to teaching.

Her current project, Snapshots, is a series of house concerts: recital and conversation that takes place in small performance spaces. Living rooms, cafes, churches, or any place with a recently tuned piano make great spaces for house concerts. Audiences get up close to the piano and learn about the lives and works of composers. For this performance, listeners will get to hear works by 4 American composers of the 19th and 20th centuries: Louis Gottschalk, Edward MacDowell, Amy Beach, and Florence Price. This house concert series is supported by the Iowa Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

FINALE is a performance series conceived just as we were coming out of the covid years. It was designed to provide a venue for artists of all types to get back to performing in public at the FMAAAA Art Center - trying out new sets or new material in front of a low-pressure audience. FINALE is for musicians, authors reading passages, poets, and more. It continues as a monthly event March through December opposite our Opening Reception, coming in as the final stroke of the exhibition month. This is a free to attend event with donations welcome. The FMAAAA Art Center is located at 825 Ave G in Fort Madison, Iowa.

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From the Front

Hamilton wants to be council's voice of dissent

AT-LARGE - Continued from Page 1

the city's franchise tax since its inception in 2020. The former law enforcement officer said the city approved the tax after mishandling city funds for years prior.

"You hear one thing, and they do another. Nothing changes and that's why I'm running," he said.

Rink said nobody wanted to impose the franchise tax, but he said in the wake of the tax, area industries are still trying to grow and bring on additional employees.

"It's tough to go through the budget book and say we can't get a new police car, we don't have any money. Some of this will loosen up so the budget can loosen up," he said.

Hamelton countered that the people of the city can see what the city is doing, but they are so aggravated they are giving up.

"We put in the newspaper we are going bankrupt, but let's go build this massive project. This is what this town does. People aren't stupid, the reason you don't get participation is that people don't want to deal with this," he said.

"But you get so aggravated reading stuff that you have to do something about it. The money we collect needs to go to police, fire, streets, and not toward putting my name on something. Stop spending my money on that. Buy a new police car, a new fire truck, a new fire station."

Hamelton said industries made their voice heard on the franchise tax and the city hasn't seen growth since then.

"We had local industry right here. Reps from Siemens, Climax, begging this council not to do it and telling them what it would do to their industry. That's pretty much all we have left," he said.

Hamelton said fiscal conservatism and spending city money on city functions is the way to reduce the budget, while bringing jobs in with sensible taxation. He said things like creating more things to do in the city isn't a role of the government.

"It's a market economy and I believe that's the role of the economy," he said.

Rink said he'd like to see more local groups step up and help with beautification efforts throughout the city.

"I thought at one time there were fraternal groups that adopted certain areas and families that planted flowers and went down and checked on it. They kept it nice looking for our little part here in southeast Iowa," he said. "But what do we do about it? Put our thinking caps on and if it comes back to the city, there's a lot of work that needs to be done."

Hamelton said he believes the city does need to be more engaged in that effort.

He said a dissenting voice on the council would give a fresh approach and lend advocacy to contrary approaches.

"I obviously believe we're doing it wrong. The way is to bring jobs. (Former Mayor) Steve Ireland used to say all the time jobs, jobs, jobs. He was right. It's the key. Bring jobs here and everything else will follow. Put things in this town and people will come."

Rink said there needs to be even more open communication and people need to not be aggravated or frustrated and come give their two-cents worth.

"You can stop me when you see me out and about. Heck, give me a quarter's

worth. But let's keep talking," Rink said.

Hamelton said there's just too big of a divide between the council and the people they represent. He cited Rink's Coffee with a Councilman that he claims never materialized with Rink and events like that aren't happening with constituency. He also said more people need to step up and run for office.

"That's our biggest problem."

The two also disagreed on the need for a city manager. The city is currently working with a search firm to find a replacement for David Varley, who's been gone since May. Hamelton said city staff is strong enough to run their own departments and don't need to run decisions by someone else to make the decision.

"I don't think we need a manager. We're continuously shrinking more and more every year. Everything the city manager does, there's department heads that take those responsibilities. Department heads can make the decision," Hamelton said.

But Rink said the city manager serves as the city's CEO.

"We can't have the public works director, police chief, fire chief, all making decisions that he should be making," Rink said.

Despite his fiscal conservative approach, Hamelton said the city does need to take on debt to fund the new fire station and public works building.

"I don't like that, public debt. I don't like the franchise fee, but we misused our funds and we spent it on pet projects. Things that make you smile and get us re-elected and get our picture in the paper. But our mortgages are linked to the fire department. We're going to have to take on public debt at this point, I think. We're going to be forced to," he said.

Rink agreed saying briefly, the city will have to increase taxes, but there's no way around it.

"We're going to have bond for it, plain and simple."

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Sports/From the Front

HOUND VOLLEYBALL

Johnson, Smith get SEC honors

PCC Staff

FORT MADISON – The Bloodhounds' Taylor Johnson was named to the Southeast Iowa Conference first-team all conference released this week.

Johnson led the Bloodhounds with 180 kills on 628 attacks for a 12.3% efficiency. Her 180 kills were sixth best in loop play. She also led the Lady Hounds with 40 blocks, eight solo and 32 assists, fourth best in the Southeast conference.

Sophomore Mara Smith was named 2nd team all-conference.

Smith was second in the conference in assists with 601, fifth in serve attempts with 317, and 5th in serve efficiency at 90.9%.

Elle Ruble and Aija Jenkins were selected for the All-Conference honorable mention teams.

The SEC player of the year was Leighton Messinger of Washington.

Jenkins, Johnsons, Amy Yasenochok, Ruble, Lauryn Helmick, Alexis Beebe, Mazie Hotop, and Brylie Lorence all earned Academic All-Conference designations.

Fort Madison finished 3-2 in conference action with a 1-4 Conference tournament mark this season, good enough for fifth place. Overall, the Hounds finished 6-32.

The 30th Annual Southeast Iowa Volleyball Classic is set for Saturday, November 4th at 7:00 p.m. The match will be played at Mediapolis High School in Mediapolis, Iowa.

The cost is \$5.00. The match features the top high school senior volleyball players from southeast Iowa. Selected players were first nominated by their coach, placed on a ballot, and voted on by the varsity volleyball coaches of the Southeast Conference and Southeast Iowa Super Conference.

Holy Trinity's Mary Kate Bendlage, Taegan Denning, and Natalie Randolph are scheduled to participate in the event as well as HTC Head Coach Melissa Freesmeier.

2023 Players:

Danville: Kenna Furnald and Jaeda Molle

Fairfield: Maddie Jones

Fort Madison: Taylor Jones and Gabrielle Ruble

Holy Trinity: MaryKate Bendlage, Taegan Denning, Natalie Randolph

Keokuk: Makenna Altgilbers

Mediapolis: Lilly Luttenegger, Ella Russell, Haley Steffener, Macy Steffener, Hanna Wagenbach, Jaydon Wirt

New London: Sophie Malott

Notre Dame: Taryn Stephens and Aviana West

Van Buren: Ivy Davison

Waco: Emma Wagler

Wapello: Emily Hemphill

West Burlington: Isabella Blaufuss and Taryn Havener

Winfield- Mt. Union: Audrie Gipple

2023 Coaches:

Shannon Hills-Copeman – Highland

Melissa Freesmeier – Holy Trinity

Erin Steffener – Mediapolis

Kenna Greiner – Wapello

Central Lee schools get high ranking

DONNELLSON, IOWA — Both Central Lee High School and Middle School have achieved "High Performing" status on the 2023-24 Iowa Department of Education School Performance Profiles.

The Iowa Department of Education recently released the profiles, which include index scores and rating categories for every public school in the state. Both CLHS and CLMS have improved their rating to "High Performing."

The middle school's overall composite score was a 61.28, while the high school scored a 61.79.

"We are exceptionally proud of the outstanding performance achieved by both our middle school and high school on the Iowa School Performance Profiles," said Dr. Andy Crozier, Central Lee Superintendent. "As a district, we are unwavering in our commitment to fostering continued improvement in all aspects of education. We look forward to building on this success and making even greater strides in the years to come."

CLHS attributes its success in the profile to its data-driven approach and dedication to whole group,

small group, and individualized instruction. The school also places a strong emphasis on student accountability in order to foster both their academic and social growth.

The CLMS staff's dedication to collaborative teaching ensures high-quality, timely, and relevant instruction for students. Their teamwork is a key factor in the school's improved performance and success.

Both schools and their staff are deeply committed to providing personalized support and creating opportunities for academic success for their students. Central Lee fosters a positive school culture for both teachers and students, encouraging collaborative efforts among teachers within their respective subject areas through their professional learning communities.

Launched in 2018, the Iowa School Performance Profiles fulfill state and federal requirements by providing report cards that reflect the performance of all public schools.

To access the Iowa School Performance Profiles, visit <https://www.iaschoolperformance.gov>.

Wine walk Early bird sale at Boozy Rae's

PRESALE - Continued from Page 1

Beaute' Full Service Salon & Spa so graciously agreed to partner with us for 2023. Also, the "Early Bird Commemorative Glass Sale Event" will be held at Boozy Rae's- located at 622 7th Street, - from 5-7:00 pm on Friday, November 10th. This will be the ONLY night to get your commemorative 2023 glass at the \$10.00 price. After the 10th, the glasses will be available at the Partners office, The Funky Cowgirl and Eternelle' Beaute' during business hours for \$20.00 until the 17th. The glasses won't be available until the Pre-Sale Event on the 10th. The day of the event, the only place to buy the glasses will be at the Partners offices, located at 614 7th Street until they are gone.

The Wine & Beer Walk makes for a perfect evening with loved ones or a bubbling night with friends and family. If you have been here before, we know you will come again. If you haven't attended the award-winning Fort Madison Wine & Beer Walk, see for yourself how the event puts the spirit back into iconic Avenue G in downtown Fort Madison for the holiday season! It is encouraged all to adhere to the CDC and LCHD guidelines to make the event safe and fun for all- vendors and patrons alike. See you on November 17th from 5:00-8:00pm! All proceeds benefit Fort Madison Beautification Foundation- a 501c3 organization.

Flags at half-staff to honor victims

DES MOINES – Governor Reynolds has ordered all flags in Iowa to fly at half-staff immediately in honor and remembrance of the victims in the tragic shootings in Lewiston, Maine. Flags are to be lowered to half-staff until sunset, October 30, 2023. The governor's order is issued in conjunction with President Biden's proclamation to lower all United States flags to half-staff for the same length of time.

Gov. Reynolds also ordered all flags in Iowa to be lowered to half-staff from sunrise to sunset on Friday, October 27, 2023, in honor and remembrance of Anthony "Tony" Hoffman of the Ionia Volunteer Fire Department who lost his life in the line of duty on October 22, 2023. Hoffman was killed in a traffic accident as he was responding to a field fire. Hoffman was a 17-year veteran of the Ionia Volunteer Fire Department.

"Anthony Hoffman's service and dedication to the Ionia community will never be forgotten," said Gov. Kim Reynolds. "Iowa is stronger because of Anthony Hoffman who volunteered to put his life on the line to protect his community. As we lower flags, let's honor his legacy and service."

Flags will be at half-staff on the State Capitol Building and on flag displays in the Capitol Complex. Flags will also be half-staff on all public buildings, grounds and facilities throughout the state.

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For job descriptions and to apply, download an application from our county website, www.leecounty.org/employment.aspx, or you can pick an application up at the Engineer's office and return your completed application along with a resume to Lee County Engineer, P.O. Box 158, Fort Madison, Iowa 52627, or email it to engineer@leecounty.org. Applications will be accepted until 4 p.m. on Thursday, November 2, 2023.

If you have any questions, please contact Lee County Engineer Office at (319) 372-2541 or email them at engineer@leecounty.org.



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From the Front

Challengers offer little to mayoral debate

DEBATE - Continued from Page 1

time to the city staff, the community, and the councils he presided over.

"We're better today than yesterday," Mohrfeld said. "Are we better now than we were four years ago when I took the helm. In my opinion we are better and we should be better tomorrow than we are today."

In carrying the theme, Mohrfeld said at the end of the forum that those who don't think Fort Madison is better today than when he took over as mayor, should pick a different candidate.

Hoskins focused his comments on the city's history and getting back to those priorities.

"What I disagree with is basically our government. We disinherited the fort. The fort is our historical piece. It's part of our heritage. We had a historian in here offering grant money and offering to restore it. We don't need to say yes yes yes. By the time it's said and done, we're using tax dividends to support these things," Hoskins.

Hoskins stumbled through many of his answers to questions, prompting a barb from Reuther during the debate.

"Rodney, you just confuse the s#*t outta me," Reuther said.

But Reuther himself struggled to answer several of the questions posed, including city budgets.

"I haven't been following it that close really. Basically the agendas are about approving alcohol permits," he said.

Mohrfeld laid out past accomplishments over the last four years including the city's newly finished marina project. The private company that is building and operating the hospitality center is about six months away from opening that component of the project.

But he said the Mayor has no vote, so he's been happy with most of the decisions that have come in front of the council.

"I agree with them all," he said slightly tongue in cheek.

"I have conflict with some of them, but as a mayor, you don't get a vote. You steer the ship, but you don't have a vote. There are some I didn't agree on where they landed, but I think our

council is educated and our staff is educated."

Mohrfeld disagreed with Reuther's assessment that there weren't enough things in town for families to do. He listed off about a dozen events that take place in the community and said people need to get out and do those things.

"Is the question as simple as nothing to do, or are we not doing it? Is it the role of government to create more things to do... some. If we think driving to Burlington to go roller skating is prohibitive, I disagree," he said.

"What we have to do is mentor into a population to get off their butt, if you will, and go do something."

Hoskins said the city should partner with the schools to find more activities for the families.

"I would love to see city officials get involved in that, too. We're a small town but it's the mentorship of small communities. Kids text all the time, maybe we should have a texting competition to see how many words you can type."

Hoskins also said events shouldn't have to always be centered around alcohol, saying 90% of the mayor's list of events in the community involved alcohol. Mohrfeld challenged Hoskins to mark on his list the events that involved alcohol.

Reuther said a few suggestions could revolve around skating rinks or bowling alleys and arcades, like he has put in his business on the city's west side. He owns Boba Bubbles and Steam Demons Vape Lounge.

"There have been a few changes and I'm not hell bent on a bowling alley or skating rink. I'm not saying that is the best option either," Reuther said.

"But being out, being social, and being part of the community. You're not going to get there staying home playing video games. We put an arcade out there and that seems to be picking up. They're just suggestions, I guess."

One of the questions centered around new state property tax laws and the impact the law will have on the city's ability to tax for services.

Reuther said he's not in favor of raising taxes.

"I don't agree with the tax hikes. I don't see our roads getting better, getting more firefighters, more police officers, so, no, I

don't agree with that," Reuther said.

Hoskins said the city should look to its constituents for donations to help fund some city functions.

"If we're raising taxes to cover something for the city, I would feel like you should go to your constituents, and you'd be surprised about what they'd be willing to donate. Maybe you could get a good salvage part from a dealership," he said.

Mohrfeld said the state, under the new law, didn't just cap property taxes, they, in essence, lowered them.

"We had a safety level and that's going away, too," he said. "It's terrible so how do we react to it," he said. "We have to do some progressive things to realize growth, but in the short term, we have to prioritize. We're meeting with legislators, and we haven't been told what the impact of this legislation is."

Living in the rural part of the state is a unique challenge in Iowa, Mohrfeld said. And the city shouldn't be looking to the state for help.

"We are down in the corner of the state, and we are forgotten about, and river towns are the oldest challenges," Mohrfeld said. "We need the attention of the state. But guess what, we're not going to get it. So what we have to do is band together as a region in SE Iowa."

Hoskins said that can be overcome by the people.

"It's the people of Fort Madison that makes Fort Madison. Our state government cannot make that happen."

Reuther said it's a matter of getting to work.

"Strap 'em up and go. Work hard and get noticed."

All three candidates agreed that the city should take a bigger role in beautification. Mohrfeld said infrastructure is where the city can be engaged with beautification.

"We cannot look like a worn-out old town. We need to look at our curb appeal and what people feel like walking through town," Mohrfeld said. "We have work that needs to be done end-to-end."

He said public-private partnerships are the fastest way to get things done.

Reuther said the city should be more involved in the beautification process.

"We got people coming off the boat during the summer. I was going through town, and they were literally driving around central park. Yea, I think we need to do more for beautification. That would help," he said.

Hoskins said the city should be focusing on its history and how funding could be used to help rejuvenate the Old Fort and some of Fort Madison's history. He said the city should repair what is the city's responsibility to repair.

"The city's sidewalk is the city's sidewalk for a reason," he said.


Hoskins said his best attribute is his integrity. He said his time in Fort Madison gives him a good perspective of what the community needs.

Mohrfeld said his experience in community government and his family's legacy are important attributes, but it's his ability to bring people to the table that may be his greatest value.


Reuther said owning six businesses locally and in Ohio, gives him the experience required to oversee the city's business. It's his first time appearing on a ballot.

Polls open at 7 a.m. on Nov. 7.


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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 28

HTC HIGH SCHOOL

2600 AVE A

FORT MADISON, IOWA

An Evening of Fellowship and Fundraising

4:00 p.m.

Happy Hour (Sponsored by Josh Denning & Associates)

Live Auction beginning with Grow-An-Acre grain sale

Dinner by Sonny's On The Sidewalk (4-7)

6:00 p.m.

Student class projects sold throughout the auction

7:00 p.m.

FFA serving walking tacos (7-9)

9:00 p.m.

\$10,000 Cash Raffle drawing (Sponsored by TJ Excavating, Keokuk Family Dentistry, Edward Jones - Corey Kelch, and Randolph Dental)

10:00 p.m.

Pizza Oven Raffle drawing (Sponsored by Keokuk Family Dentistry)

LIVE AUCTION ITEMS INCLUDING TOOLS, HOME DECOR, TOYS, GIFT CERTIFICATES AND PARTIES! ALSO, TASTY DRINKS AND APPETIZERS COMING OUT OF OUR HORS D'OEUVRE ROOM (SPONSORED BY CONNECTION BANK) ALL EVENING!

Throughout the evening will be the opportunity to Fund A Need!

This year's goal: \$17,000 to carpet four high school classrooms.

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