

PEN CITY CURRENT

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Thursday, December 21, 2023 | 7 pages | Volume 8 • Issue 8



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Full Throttle - The MK Way

FINAL YEAR: HTC Senior setting high bars for those that follow as Crusaders

BY JOHN BOHNENKAMP
PCC SPORTS

FORT MADISON - Mary Kate Bendlage wants to win, so her sister knows she has the perfect partner for the family card games during the holidays.

"Oh yeah," Anna Bendlage said. "She is super-competitive. We never, ever lose. That's our claim to fame."

Holy Trinity girls basketball coach Tony Johnson has seen that competitiveness, too.

"That's been her makeup from the first time I met her," Johnson said. "Full throttle. 'What can I do to help us win.'"

Holy Trinity volleyball coach Melissa Freesmeier had Mary Kate in the lineup as a freshman.

"She's a workhorse," Freesmeier said. "She never gives up."

When it comes time for penalty kicks to decide a match, Fort Madison soccer coach Carrie Burken knows who will raise her hand first.

"She's the person that wants to score the winning goal," Burken said. "She's the person who wants to do PKs. Always like, 'I want to take the first PK.' I think for her to want to step up every single time speaks to her mindset, and her attitude as an athlete and a person."

Here's why Bendlage is so competitive, why she is willing to grab any moment that presents itself.

"I don't know where the drive came from, but I think a lot of it comes from the hard work I put in during practice," Bendlage said. "If I put in all of this extra time to be good at the things I'm doing, I want to win. I just don't want to go out and play and be mediocre. I want to go out and do great things, and show people that all of the hard work that we're doing is for a reason, and we want to win."

...

Everyone calls Mary Kate "MK," so we'll call this the MK Resumé:

- Four years of varsity volleyball, helping lead the Crusaders to the Class 1A state tournament the last three seasons, including

See **BENDLAGE**, page 6



Photos by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Bendlage waves to the student section after the Lady Crusaders wrapped up a semifinal win at the 2023 State volleyball tournament in November. Bendlage, a four-year varsity basketball and volleyball player set a new school scoring mark and surpassed 1,000 points last week. Below, HTC AD John Goetz hands Bendlage a commemorative ball as she's honored on Tuesday.



COUNTY NEWS

Chase, hunt nets arrest of suspect

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY – A high-speed chase through Lee County has landed one yet-to-be identified man in the Lee County Jail.

According to Lee County Sheriff Stacy Weber, a male suspect is in custody after about 10 deputies with the sheriff's department including reserves, along with officers from Fort Madison, West Point/Donnellson, and Keokuk police departments and two K9 officers searched the woods near Hillcrest off of 227th Street.

Weber and Chief Deputy Will Conlee located the individual walking up a creek bed after several hours trying to locate the male in the timber.

Weber said if wasn't for the people in and around the area the search would have gone into the night.

"If it wasn't for the people of Lee

See **CHASE**, page 4

GREAT RIVER HEALTH

SEIRMC, Aramark reach agreement on dietary services

BY PCC STAFF

WEST BURLINGTON – The dietary departments at Southeast Iowa Regional Medical Center are being taken over by a local vendor as of Feb. 23, according to a release from the health system Tuesday.

Aramark, a division of Vestis Corp. based out of Roswell, Ga., will take over the nutrition services at the West Burlington and Fort Madison campuses, and the Klein Center in West Burlington.

According to the release, Great River Health has entered into a partnership with Aramark to provide nutrition services at Southeast Iowa Regional Medical Center, West Burlington and Fort Madison, Henry County Health Center, and the Klein Center. All nutrition services employees

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WEATHER

THU 21 Dec..... Overcast with chance of rain, 48° F/ 44° F
 FRI 22 Dec..... Rain, 49° F/ 47° F
 SAT 23 Dec..... Mostly cloudy, 57° F/ 49° F

IOWA LOTTERY

LUCKY FOR LIFE 12/19..... 710 23 31 32, Lucky Ball: 14
 MEGA MILLIONS 12/19..... 17 26 50 58 61, Mega Ball: 11 Megaplier: 3
 PICK 3 MIDDAY 12/19..... 4 6 4
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Obituaries/ For the Record

For the Record

Fort Madison Police Report

12/18/23 - 9:35 a.m. - Fort Madison police arrested Brianna Marie Washburne, 38, of Fort Madison, in the 400 block of Avenue H, on a warrant for voluntary absence from custody. She was taken to Lee County Jail.

12/18/23 - 3:25 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of vandalism in the 1200 block of Avenue F.

12/18/23 - 5:51 p.m. - Fort Madison police arrested Chris Ann Turner, 39, of Fort Madison, in the 800 block of 10th Street, on a warrant for 2nd degree theft and charges of possession of a controlled substance - 1,2,3rd and unlawful possession of prescription drugs. She was taken to Lee County Jail.

12/18/23 - 8:57 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the 2600 block of Avenue H. 12/19/23 - 10:03 a.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of vandalism in the 1100 block of 24th Street.

12/19/23 - 1:32 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the 2600 block of Avenue I.

12/19/23 - 3:22 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of vandalism in the 2600 block of Avenue I.

12/19/23 - 10:48 p.m. - Fort Madison police arrested Matthew Jay Wells, 23, of Davenport, in the 1300 block of 14th Street, on charges of public intoxication and disorderly conduct - fight/violence. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

12/20/23 - 12:34 a.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of

a property damage accident at 18th Street and Avenue F.

12/20/23 - 1:02 a.m. - Fort Madison police arrested Brian Scott Burch, at 18th Street and Avenue F, on a charge of 1st offense OWI. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

Keokuk Police Report

12/18/23 - 11:55 a.m. - Keokuk police arrested a 14-year-old male juvenile, hometown not reported, in the 2200 block of Middle Road, on a charge of 5th degree theft less than \$300. He was released to a guardian.

12/19/23 - 12:00 a.m. - Keokuk police cited and released Tristin Hunter McKinney, 27, of Keokuk, in the 1300 block of Des Moines Street, on charges of permitting dog to run at large and allowing dog to attack.

12/18/23 - 8:02 a.m. - Keokuk police responded to a report of a two-vehicle accident in the 1300 block of Main Street. According to the report, a vehicle driven by Paula Faye Vice, 60, of Keokuk, was backing up from a gas pump and struck a parked vehicle, causing minor damages to the driver's side and driver's side rear doors. No injuries were reported.

Vice was cited for failure to provide security against liability. Both vehicles were driven from the scene.

12/19/23 - 7:57 a.m. - Keokuk police cited and released Victoria Marie Scott, 30, of Fort Madison, in the 3500 block of Main Street, on a charge of driving under suspension.

12/19/23 - 11:09 p.m. - Keokuk po-

lice arrested Angela Leann Hansen, 50, of Keokuk, in the 1900 block of Timea Street, on a warrant for failure to appear/contempt of court and a charge of driving under suspension. She was taken to Lee County Jail.

12/20/23 - 2:43 a.m. - Keokuk police arrested Jack Lee Dangel, 33, of Montrose, in the 1100 block of Franklin Street, on a warrant for failure to appear/contempt of court. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

Lee County Sheriff Report

12/18/23 - 11:15 a.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Collin Elijah Segoviano, 25, of Waterloo, at the sheriff's office, on warrants for possession of a controlled substance - 1,2,3rd and possession of drug paraphernalia. He was taken to Lee County Jail and later released on bond.

12/18/23 - 1:00 p.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Nancy Jean Reese, 44, of Waterloo, at the South Lee County Courthouse, on a warrant for failure to appear. She was taken to Lee County Jail.

12/18/23 - 9:30 p.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Bradley Allen Ferrel, 34, of Denmark, at Hwy. 61 and Carbine Lane, Keokuk, on charges of 5th degree criminal mischief, 5th degree theft less than \$300, and 1st offense domestic assault - bodily injury. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

Those listed above are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

OBITUARIES

HAROLD G. STUCKWISCH

Harold G. Stuckwisch, 80, of Warsaw, Illinois, passed away on Monday, December 18, 2023, at Blessing Hospital in Quincy, Illinois.

Harold was born on July 2, 1943, in Keokuk, Iowa, the son of Russell H. and Vera G. (Willet) Stuckwisch. On July 13, 1969, he was united in marriage to Betty Sherrill at Trinity United Methodist Church in Warsaw, Illinois.



STUCKWISCH

Harold began his working career at the age of eighteen at Keokuk Steel Castings, leaving in 1970. He then went on to work for J.R. McMahan in construction for many years before branching out on his own as a self-employed carpenter until retirement. Harold was an active member of the community.

He was a member of Trinity United Methodist Church, the president of the Warsaw Jaycees, and served on the Hancock County Board and the Warsaw Park Board. He was also instrumental in installing the basketball court in Warsaw and was quick to volunteer wherever needed, often using his booming voice to announce basketball games. Harold was always generous with his time and many talents. Over the course of his golfing career, Harold made three hole-in-ones. He was a gifted drummer and singer in his band "County Roads", recording four songs in Nashville. Despite his tough exterior, Harold will be remembered by those who really knew him as proud, compassionate, and kind-hearted. There were no strangers with Harold; he was the definition of a people-person.

Harold is survived by his wife Betty of Warsaw; his son Kevin (Barbara) Stuckwisch of Noblesville, Indiana; his brother Donald L. Stuckwisch of Cedar Rapids, Iowa; his sister-in-law Heidi Wilson of Hamilton; his brother-in-law Larry Rings of Colchester; two grandchildren; and numerous nieces, nephews and cousins.

Harold is preceded in death by his parents, his parents-in-law Robert and Maxine Symmonds, his sister Mary Jane Rings, and two sisters-in-law: Bonnie Munson and Barb Ross.

A celebration of Harold's life will be held at a later date.

Memorials may be directed to St. Jude Children's Hospital.

Tributes and condolences may be left at www.printyfuneralhome.com.

Printy Funeral Home of Warsaw 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.

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Obituaries/From the Front

OBITUARIES

THOMAS A. HOLTKAMP

Thomas Allen "Tom" Holtkamp 85, of West Point, Iowa, passed away at 12:36 p.m. Monday, December 18, 2023, at Blessing Hospital in Quincy, Illinois.

He was a lifelong resident of the St. Paul area. He was born on September 30, 1938, the son of Ben and Louise (Krieger) Holtkamp. On July 28, 1962, he married Dianne Walljasper. They were married for sixty-two years and raised three sons: Leslie (Tina), Loren (Ann) and Wade (Kari) on their farm near St. Paul.



HOLTKAMP

Tom enjoyed his career as a farmer and also enjoyed his pastimes of hunting, fishing, boating and RVing. He was a member of St. James the Less Catholic Church and served on St. James Parish Council and the God's Acre Sale Committee. As a township trustee of Marion Township, he served on the St. Paul - West Point Fire and Rescue Department Board of Directors. Tom also was a veteran and a member of the West Point American Legion.

Tom had a unique ability of dowsing for water and had helped many people in the area by locating good well water for their families. His affirmation of success was his statement: "I never hit a bad well."

Tom had a special devotion to St. Joseph, the Worker, who helped him in many ways. St. Joseph helped him find things, including his wallet in in a forty-five acre field.

Besides his wife and sons, Tom is survived by five grandchildren: Riley Holtkamp, Brianne Holtkamp Dunkelberger, Brent Holtkamp, Everly Holtkamp and Olive Holtkamp; great-grandchild: Blaine Dunkelberger; two sisters: Anita (Edward) Holtkamp Freesmeier Blindt and Geri (Donald) Holtkamp Conrad; sister-in-law: Carleen Walljasper Kurimski and numerous nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents; sister: Marian Holtkamp Linnenbrink; two brothers: Edward and Arthur Holtkamp; sisters-in-law: Clementine Rauenbuehler Holtkamp, Mary Linnenbrink Holtkamp, Darlene Weir Holtkamp; brothers-in-law: Albert Linnenbrink and John Kurimski.

Tom loved his family. He coached his sons' baseball teams, built them a go-cart racing track and helped them enjoy snowmobiling and motorcycling. He will be deeply missed by his family.

A visitation will begin at 12:00 noon, Friday, December 22, 2023, at Schmitz Funeral Home in West Point, where the family will receive friends from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. A Christian Wake Service will be held at 5:30 p.m. at the funeral home.

A Mass of Christian burial will be held at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, December 23, 2023, at St. James Catholic Church in St. Paul with Father Dan Dorau as celebrant.

Burial will be at St. James Cemetery in St. Paul with full military rites presented by the West Point American Legion Holtz - Geers Post #668.

A memorial has been established in his memory for St. Paul - West Point Fire and Rescue.

Schmitz Funeral Home of West Point is assisting the family with arrangements. Online condolences may be made to the family at www.schmitzfuneralhomes.com.



Henry County nutrition staff will stay with GRHS

GRHS - Continued from Page 1

at the West Burlington and Fort Madison locations along with the Klein Center nutrition services employees will transition to Aramark employees. Henry County Health Center nutrition services employees will maintain their current employment status.

"We made the decision to outsource our nutrition services to maximize efficiency while offering the best services possible across all our campuses for our patients, guests, and employees. This will also allow us to focus on our core business of providing high quality healthcare," explained Tomi Hagan, Chief Compliance Officer, Great River Health.

The Iowa Workforce Development's WARN log shows a reporting of 67 layoffs at the health system on Dec. 19, but officials said the employees transitioned to Aramark and no employees were being laid off.

The transitions are affecting the nutrition services department, according to Angie Budnik, Director of Marketing and Community Relations for Great River Health.

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From the Front/Classifieds

Sheriff thanks neighbors for helping nab suspect

CHASE - Continued from Page 1

County in that area this would have turned into a night search. Had the neighbors not been observing and on the lookout we wouldn't have caught him when we did," Weber said.

The suspect led officials on a high-speed dangerous chase up Hwy 218 from the intersection at Hwy. 61 in Keokuk. Weber said the highest speed he was clocked at was 136 mph in the white 2022 Lexus. At several locations in the chase law enforcement saw marks on the highway where the suspect lost control trying to navigate turns at high rates of speed.

"He blew by me on X23 west of West Point and then we spotted him headed west on Hwy 2 where he wrecked his vehicle by Hillcrest

between Hillcrest Hostas and Hwy. 2 on 227th Street. From there he left on foot into the woods."

The Iowa State Patrol had pulled the vehicle over on a traffic stop for a window tints and were talking to him when the suspect fled from the traffic stop at about 10:30 a.m. near Keokuk.

Weber said the state patrol is handling the investigation as it was their original traffic stop and any charges will come from that agency. The Lexus was registered out of Arkansas.

Lee County Conservation officers, Lee County EMS Ambulance, and Donnellson Fire & Rescue also assisted in the chase and subsequent search.

PEN CITY CURRENT CLASSIFIEDS

PUBLIC NOTICES

**PUBLIC NOTICE
MOUNT PLEASANT
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES
Mount Pleasant, Iowa,
November 8, 2023**

The Mount Pleasant City Council met in regular session on Wednesday, November 8, 2023, at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall, 307 East Monroe Street, second-floor meeting room. The meeting was called to order by the Mayor and the roll being called there were present Steven K. Brimhall in the Chair and the following named Councilmembers.

Present: Engberg, Crull, McWilliams, White, Griffith, Batty

Absent:

It was moved by Councilmember Griffith and seconded by Councilmember White that the Council approve the following consent agenda items with one roll call motion vote:

the minutes of the October 25, 2023, City Council meeting.

the payment of bills totaling \$920,216.87.

the report of officers including the following receipts for the month of October - \$1,330,840.66 General Fund; \$104,119.87 Road Use Tax; \$112,954.60 Local Option Sales Tax; \$248,625.97 TIF; \$443,186.84 Debt Service; \$102,965.60 Sewer Plant Improvement; \$8,023.21 Capital Projects; \$3,453.50 Trust & Agency; \$161,843.05 Sewer Revenue;

Renewal of a Class B Retail Alcohol License for Aldi, Inc. at 1309 E. Washington Street.
Renewal of a Class C Retail Alcohol License for Little Mexico Restaurant at 107 S Jefferson Street.
Roll call vote 6-0. Motion carried.

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EOE



\$39,085.50 Solid Waste; \$5,421.16 Library General Fund; \$267.47 Library Gift Fund. And the following disbursements for the month of October - \$263,125.13 General Fund; \$122,460.76 Road Use Tax; \$5,349.00 TIF; \$17,672.50 Debt Service; \$488,984.90 Sewer Plant Improvement; \$82,320.42 Capital Projects; \$3,503.37 Trust & Agency; \$53,256.94 Sewer Operation & Maint.; \$3,225.00 ARP Funds; \$43,021.71 Solid Waste; \$32,369.18 Library General Fund; \$773.19 Library Gift Fund. And Resolution No. 2023-83 including the following transfers for the month of October - \$31,057 from General Fund to Library Fund; \$86,251.40 from Local Option Sales Tax to Capital Projects; \$89,903 from Sewer Revenue Fund to Sewer Sinking Fund; \$75,000 from Sewer Revenue Fund to Sewer Operations & Maintenance; \$6445.00 from General Fund to Sewer Plant Improvement Fund; \$1965.51 from Vi King Central Park Foundation (IPAIT) to US Bank; \$55,906.49 from Local Option Sales Tax to Capital Projects; \$30,395 from Local Option Sales Tax to Capital Projects.

Renewal of a Class B Retail Alcohol License for Aldi, Inc. at 1309 E. Washington Street.
Renewal of a Class C Retail Alcohol License for Little Mexico Restaurant at 107 S Jefferson Street.
Roll call vote 6-0. Motion carried.

Walt Jackson, Henry County Emergency Management and Gail Thomas, Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission were present to inform the Council and Public of updates to the local Hazard Mitigation Plan. They also distributed public opinion surveys to be returned to City Hall.

Councilmember Griffith moved and Councilmember McWilliams seconded that the Council approve the agenda as printed.

Roll call vote 6-0. Motion carried.

Councilmember Griffith moved and Councilmember Batty seconded that the Council read for the third time and adopt the following ordinance:

AN ORDINANCE

AMENDING THE ZONING ORDINANCE, APPENDIX D, OF THE CITY CODE OF MOUNT PLEASANT IOWA, TO PROHIBIT THE USE OF SHIPPING CONTAINERS AS ACCESSORY BUILDINGS TO RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY AND TO PERMIT THE INSTALLATION ACCESSORY BUILDINGS IN THE SIDE YARDS OF LARGE LOTS:

Roll call vote 6-0.

It was moved by Councilmember Batty and seconded by Councilmember Griffith that the Council adopt the following entitled Resolution No. 2023-84:

RESOLUTION SETTING A PUBLIC HEARING ON AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE OFFICIAL ZONING MAP OF THE CITY OF MOUNT PLEASANT, IOWA, BY REZONING AND CHANGING THE DISTRICT CLASSIFICATION OF PROPERTY CONSISTING OF VACANT FARMLAND AND A DWELLING LOCATED ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF W WASHINGTON ST COMMONLY KNOWN AS 2000-2200 W WASHINGTON ST FROM "M-1 LIMITED INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT" TO "M-2 LIGHT INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT"

Roll call vote 6-0. Resolution adopted, signed by the Mayor and hereby made a portion of these minutes.

It was moved by Councilmember Griffith and seconded by Councilmember

White that the Council adopt the following entitled Resolution No. 2023-85:

RESOLUTION SETTING A PUBLIC HEARING ON THE SALE OF REAL PROPERTY LOCATED AT 202 N PORTER ST, IN MOUNT PLEASANT, IOWA

Roll call vote 6-0. Resolution adopted, signed by the Mayor and hereby made a portion of these minutes.

It was moved by Councilmember Engberg and seconded by Councilmember McWilliams that the Council adopt the following entitled Resolution No. 2023-86:

RESOLUTION OF CONTINUED SUPPORT AND FINANCIAL COM-

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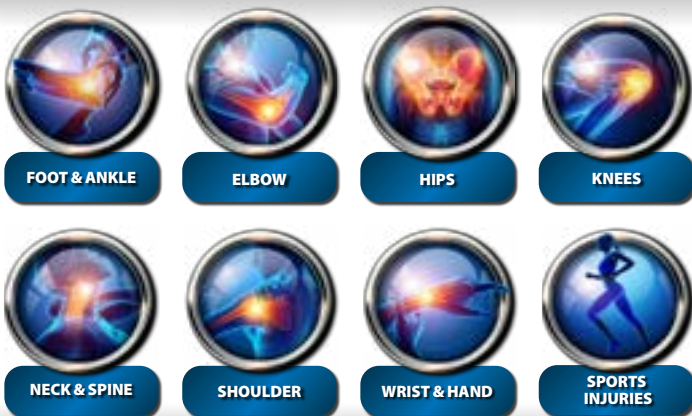
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Classifieds/Public Notices

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PUBLIC NOTICES

MITMENT FOR THE MAIN STREET PROGRAM IN THE CITY OF MOUNT PLEASANT, IOWA

Roll call vote 6-0. Resolution adopted, signed by the Mayor and hereby made a portion of these minutes.

Bryan Messer, 204 W Corry Ct, had questions for the Council regarding the new Solid Waste Program. The Mayor

directed him to attend the Council Work Session on Wednesday, November 15 at 5:30 p.m. in the meeting room at City Hall.

It was moved by Councilmember Batty and seconded by Councilmember Engberg that the Council adjourn. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 5:45 p.m. to meet in adjourned session on Tuesday, November 21, 2023.

Steven K Brimhall,

Mayor
ATTEST: Lori Davis,
City Clerk

PUBLIC NOTICE PROCEEDINGS FORT MADISON CITY COUNCIL 11/28/2023

The Fort Madison City Council held a special meeting at 4:00 p.m., Tuesday, 11/28/2023, at

City Hall, 811 Avenue E. Mayor Mohrfeld presided with Council Members Gray, Rink, Bowker, Amandus and Roller were present. Council Member Andrews arrived at 4:04 p.m. Council Member Yager was absent.

At 4:01 p.m., on motion, Council approved to enter into Closed Session to evaluate the professional competency of individuals, where said individuals

have requested closed session, pursuant to Iowa Code Section 21.5(1)(i). Council exited Closed Session at 5:24 p.m.

In Open Session, on motion Council approved to extend an offer of employment to the preferred candidate as City Manager, and to direct consultant, Mayor and those resources that the Mayor requests, to negotiate an offer of employment to

said candidate, subject to approval of an employment contract by Resolution by the City Council at the next Council meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:26 p.m.

/s/ Matt J. Mohrfeld,
Mayor
ATTEST: /s/ Melinda L. Blind, City Clerk

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From the Front

Bendlage has played varsity since her freshman year

BENDLAGE - Continued from Page 1

a state runner-up finish this season, when she was a first-team all-state selection.

- Four years of varsity basketball, with the program record for career points (set last weekend, now at 1,058 with more than half of the season remaining) and single-game points (41, set last season against Notre Dame).

- Three years in the shared soccer program with Fort Madison High School, the last two seasons as a captain.

Oh, and there's the nearly 4.0 grade point average — "3.97," Bendlage said — along with the work within the community and within the Holy Trinity system.

Go back to what drives her, and it explains all of the accomplishments.

"I'm very competitive in anything I take on, whether it's in the community, my class, my siblings," Bendlage said.

She laughs when she brings up the family card games.

"Everything is competitive in my mind," Bendlage said.

But if it seems like it's about individual accomplishments, her coaches say, it's not.

"She appreciates her teammates, and she's always giving them credit, and knowing that it takes a team to be successful," Freesmeier said.

"She'll do anything for the team," Burken said. "Anything I ask of her, she will do. I probably don't express my appreciation to her for that enough, and give her enough

credit."

"The biggest thing with her is she raises the level of play of everyone else," Johnson said. "When we don't play well, I don't have to say anything. She knows what we did wrong."

...

Bendlage was on all three of her varsity teams as a freshman.

That's not easy, she said. "Coming from eighth grade to being a freshman, you think, 'Oh, it's just another basketball game,' or 'Oh, it's another volleyball game,'" she

said. "But you're playing against girls who are 17, 18 years old who are seniors and you're 14, 15. It's a big age gap, and there's a lot of development that goes into those four years of high school. I don't think people expect that large leap — I certainly didn't. But I quickly learned how hard it was at the next level. It's different, it's a big change, but I'm glad I conquered it with the help I got."

There were expectations from the seniors in her first year, Bendlage said, and looking back now she

knows how much that was a base for what she has accomplished.

"They helped me grow into the person I am, attitude-wise and skill-wise," she said. "They pushed me to be my best during practices and in games. They expected a lot out of me, and I can't thank them enough for that."

Bendlage had 99 kills in her first volleyball season, then 243 as a sophomore, 379 as a junior, 322 as a senior.

"Her skill set was above average, and she had such athleticism from day one," Freesmeier said. "We knew we would be able to use that athleticism. And her drive was, and is, amazing. That's why she had an elite high school career, from start to finish."

Bendlage's points per game in basketball have steadily increased, from seven as a freshman, to 14.3 as a sophomore, 23.9 as a junior.

"That's the thing with her — even as talented as she is, she wants to get better every night at practice, work on something, do something better," Johnson said. "Make all her free throws. Rebound. It's just constant. It's never enough for her. She gets hungry to always get better."

Johnson remembers seeing Bendlage in her first practice as a freshman.

"Lo and behold, in four years, she became one of the greatest kids I've ever coached," Johnson said. "That's how much she has matured and grown over time."

...

Freesmeier has her players vote for captains.

Bendlage was getting votes, she said, as a sophomore.

"They already saw her leadership back then," Freesmeier said. "She is a born leader, but it's something she also works at."

Bendlage has been a soccer captain the last two seasons. In a shared program where Burken is at one school and several of her players at another, Bendlage has become a bridge between the two.

"I think most people, when they think of MK, they think of someone who is a really hard worker, super-competitive,

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Sports

Athletics have been a big part of senior's education

MK - Continued from Page 6

someone who is very self-motivated," Burken said. "I think when I think of her, I do think of those things, but I also think of her leadership. Not only on the field, but as a team captain, she does a really good job communicating with the HTC girls. I really appreciate that, because it's hard for me to communicate with them because I don't work there. So to have a point person to be able to communicate with, someone who I can tell something, and I know it will get done."

"I don't know if I've really expressed that to her before, but it's something I really appreciate."

Bendlage said her voice comes with the experience, and her coaches agreed.

"She's learned how to handle different groups, different girls, how she handles a freshman versus how she handled her classmates, who were very driven," Freesmeier said.

"She is very stern with what she wants to say," Anna Bendlage said. "But it comes off in a very positive, wanting-to-win way. She's very eager to win, and we all know that."

...

The Bendlage sisters — Mary Kate, Anna, and Olivia, who is in the eighth grade — make the three-mile drive from their home in Illinois every school day.

Mary Kate and Anna appreciate the time together.

"It's the morning talks every day — 'What do you have going on?' 'What's your day going to be like?'" Mary Kate said. "And then when we get to school, if we get there early, we'll sit in the car and talk, or we'll go get coffee somewhere."

"We talk about everything — sports, school, whatever," Anna said.

Anna wasn't in school Monday — she was taking a college visit. But there was a phone call as she was on her way back.

"I wasn't even at school yesterday, but we were talking all day," Anna said. "She wanted to know how it was going, what I thought. We're always talking."

The two have been varsity teammates the last three seasons in volleyball and basketball.

"I've seen them get closer and closer, and sports have a lot to do with that," Freesmeier said. "They lean on each other. When you can lean on someone, it makes you a stronger player, a stronger person. It makes you a better teammate."

"I know they've really enjoyed playing together, especially this year, because they were both able to elevate their games."

"We have a special bond that a lot of people don't get to have in high school," Mary Kate said. "The good thing about playing sports together is we know each other in and out, we know each other's hardships. We know when we're upset. We know what it feels like to have great success, and we know how to comfort each other."

In the moments after Holy Trinity's loss to Ankeny Christian in the Class 1A state volleyball championship match this season, the Bendlages hugged and cried on the court, then after consoling teammates shared



Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Mary Kate Bendlage, center, poses with her Lady Crusader teammates in a recognition Tuesday for reaching 1,000 career points and setting a new school scoring record. Below, Mary Kate, left and her sister Anna celebrate a point in last month's state volleyball semifinals.



another emotional embrace.

"I think after state volleyball, Anna knew where my heart was at," Mary Kate said. "Hers was in the same place, but she worked on comforting me first, knowing we don't have another year together."

"And then we focused on, 'Hey, we've still got basketball together. Let's go out and focus, do great things. Let's see the growth that this team can have.'"

During Senior Night ceremonies for volleyball, Anna brought up the car rides to school, and had to stop for a moment as the emotions got to her.

"I feel like next year, even when she's at college, we'll still be talking like that every day," Anna said.

"Just to be together, being with your sister, it's a bond I never want to break," Mary Kate said.

...

Sports have been an education for Bendlage.

"The things they teach me aren't just sports-related," said Bendlage, who is going to attend Mount Mercy University in Cedar Rapids, playing volleyball while majoring in elementary education. "They're things that I can take out into the community and use in everyday life. Every day I'm going to be working with people, and I have to read what they're doing, working off them and collaborating with them on ideas, or come up with my own."

"That's what we do in volleyball and basketball — I have to collaborate with my teammates, I've got to

come up with new ideas and new skills. I think it's like putting a puzzle together. Everybody has the pieces to put together to make a strong team."

Bendlage spends parts of her school day working with the students at Holy Trinity's elementary school in West Point. She wants to be a teacher, and the experience has taught her plenty.

"Seeing all of the little faces light up when I enter the building, it's the greatest," she said. "I get loads of cards every week. It's a great environment to be around. I love being around the kids, I love helping them see that small stepping stone in life that can make a difference. If I can do that, I'm satisfied."

Twice during the interview for this, Bendlage emphasized that she is a student-athlete, not vice versa.

"I need to make sure that my grades are OK, I'm managing my schoolwork, and then follow up on the sports and do the things I need to do," she said. "That's one of the things I've instilled in my head, and my parents have instilled in me, is that school is your first priority, and that if you're not able to handle school, we're going to have to back down on whatever it is."

She hasn't had to back down yet, but that may be coming.

...

Bendlage knows that she'll have to prepare this spring and summer for the upcoming college volleyball season, and that could mean she doesn't play soccer this season.

Burken understands.

"We've talked, and I know she has to do what's best for her," Burken said.

"Carrie Burken and I have a great relationship, and it's one I couldn't be more proud of," Bendlage said. "She cares for me in the classroom, in daily life, what's going on now, not just the three months I play on her team."

"To have that relationship, it's just another person who looks out for me 24-7. I know whatever I decide, she's going to back it up, she's going to understand. She's not going to be selfish about anything. She's going to care about what I care about."

There are moments left, though, for Bendlage to win in high school.

The victories are already on the resumé.

"I think in the last four years I've grown immensely, not just skill-wise but attitude-wise, looking out for my teammates and coaches, and trusting them when I need to," Bendlage said. "I wouldn't trade them for anything."

"She's just a good, good person, inside and out," Freesmeier said.

"She's something else," Johnson said. "Special."

Then he paused.

"Sometimes," he said, "you run out of words to describe someone like that."

