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MOMENTS BY CARRIE PHOTO
Aaron Goodenbour and daughter
Ayla. Goodenbour is a member of
the Tripoli Volunteer Fire
Department and also became a
father for the first time this year.
SEE PAGE 10-11 TO READ MORE

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ACHIEVING ALL THE GOALS

After teaching 15,000 kids about fire prevention and safety, Waverly firefighter Jeff Thier turns program over to a committee of five at the fire department

By **ANELIA K. DIMITROVA**
editorcft@gmail.com

When Jeff Thier joined the Waverly Fire Department in 2008, he wanted to give back to the community his family had settled in.

The 2004 move was a return to the roots, in a way, for the Thiers, as Jeff's wife, Leah, a physical therapist, hails from Waverly.

Hence Jeff felt a sense of duty to connect with organizations whose members invest themselves in the town they call home.

Prior conversations with a friend who served on the Ankeny Fire Department when the Thiers lived in that area prior to coming to Waverly had sparked an interest in Jeff to consider serving in that capacity.

So when he arrived in Waverly, he decided to join the Waverly Fire Department.

Since at the time the Thiers' daughters Abbey and Izzy were young, it made sense for him to take over the fire safety program for the elementaries.

Taught for many years by veteran firefighter Kevin Miller, the program is intended to raise awareness among students about issues of fire safety.

A father of young kids at the time, Jeff was a natural choice for the position since his own children were in the age group of the students.

"I really enjoyed teaching it and one of the joys of it was teaching my own kids and their friends," he said.

Seven years ago, the fire department started hosting Sunday afternoon open houses in October, to coincide with the national fire prevention and safety week, for families of elementary students.

The idea was to reach a wider audience beyond the classroom and provide some hands-on experiences. Instead of teaching fire safety in the school, and to the students only, the firefighters would meet and greet the moms and the dads, along with the kids, on the premises of the fire station, and provide education through activities that involve them all.

The firefighters would demonstrate the fire extinguisher, the robotic fire hydrant, and other equipment, and kids would leave with a memorable experience and useful knowledge on what to do in case of fire.

"Two things I have said to kids over the past 13 years — smoke detectors save lives and second, practice exit drills, they practice them in school, but they must

practice them at home, they should all know where the safe meeting spot is in case of fire."

Jeff said families should have a well-rehearsed exit plan in case of an emergency because it allows firefighters on the scene to know right away who is accounted for and who needs to be searched for.

"That's the key, there," he said in reference to the safe spot. "Everybody in the family needs to know where it is."

Over the years, he has asked his students to raise their hands if their family has an exit plan.

"Every year, more hands go up," he said. "I've never had a full class raise their hands yet, but each year, more and more hands go up."

The scope of the program has stayed the same even though the activities in the fire station have changed over time with the acquisition of new equipment.

Judging by the messages of gratitude the department receives in the form of handwritten cards, emails and verbal affirmations, Jeff is confident knowledge about fire safety is gaining traction in the community. The thank-yous just reinforce that point and melt the hearts of the firefighters who find it exciting to show off their trucks and gear to the students in exchange for their wide-eyed admiration.

But as his kids grew, Jeff started to feel it may be time for him to hand the school program to a fellow firefighter whose kids are in the age range of the target audience for the program, mostly, kindergartners to second-graders.

As he stepped away this fall, he said he had fulfilled all of his goals.

"I am not sure what the future path is for me on the fire department, but I already know my greatest accomplishment is completed," he said in a Oct. 10 Facebook post. "Nothing can beat talking to 15,000 kids and bringing families together during open houses to make the Waverly community stronger and safer for the past 13 years."

He thanked his family for the times they lent a helping hand, for the ideas they shared with him and for understanding why he took time away from family to "make things happen."

But after some internal discussions, it was decided that moving forward, a committee of five will be in charge of the program.

"I sure enjoyed it, but it is time to step back and let some younger guys in there," he said. "They will work as a group and put it on. It's a lot of work for one person."



COURTESY PHOTO
Second Assistant Fire Chief Jeff Thier talks to students at Waverly elementary schools during Fire Safety Week in these photos. Thier has led the fire education efforts of the WFD over the last 13 years since his daughters, Abbey and Izzy, were students.

ABOVE & BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

Emergency room nurses mark Oct. week designated as appreciation of their work with dedicated service in WHC's new Emergency Department

By ANELIA K. DIMITROVA
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Editor's note: This article originally appeared in the Oct. 12 edition of the Bremer County Independent.

Nurses have a special place in the hearts of their patients, and in the pantheon of nursing, emergency nurses also are held in high regard by the families of the patients they serve.

It just so happens that this week is dedicated to the appreciation of emergency nurses, but at the Waverly Health Center's Emergency Department, the cause for celebration extends also to the opening of new addition that houses the department.

It opened to the public on Sept. 27 and so far, about 350 patients have gone through its doors, says ER Department Manager Derrick Wygle.

During a tour of the facility at the open house in late September, the state-of-the-art addition drew admiration from the guests, and rightfully so.

Among the facility's highlights is a centrally located nurses' station, which allows for access and high visibility on the floor.

Other features, such modern patient rooms, light-filled spaces, and a rest area for the staff, are also among the amenities of the space.

But without question, the most valuable assets are the people who work here. They range from nurses, to staff members to educators, to coordinators to techs. In a nutshell, they are the brainpower without which no amount of technology can function.

Wygle says he is in awe of the dedication that everyone in the emergency department puts into their jobs because, above all, it is a team effort.

What he admires is the structure that has been put in place in the ER to make it successful at every level, he said.

The team now has an education team leader, Kimberly Endicott, and a trauma coordinator, Bailey Krull, two positions that will ensure that the department works with best practices and continuing education is part of the everyday routine in the department.

"They will redefine how we operate as a department based on best practices," Wygle said.

In lauding the performance of the emergency nurses in the department on the occasion of the week dedicated to their service, Wygle said that what is unique in the department is the synergy created by the new facility and the energy and passion that the team brings to their work.

"The brand new facility is fantastic, exciting, and was very much needed in our community," he said. "The most exciting piece of all of this is having the support, education and training to go with our brand-new facility. In order to provide that support, education and training to all of our nurses, the



COURTESY PHOTO

Derrick Wygle is the nurse manager at Waverly Health Center.

Left: The nurses' station in the new Waverly Health Center emergency department is centrally located within the facility.



leadership at Waverly Health Center has created many new positions throughout the hospital to include the Emergency Department.

"What has been eye-opening is the safety and security of the patients and the staff that have come with the new facility," he said. "Then the efficiency

and the effectiveness of assessing and treating the patients has been impressive."

He said that the emergency nurses, like other team members, including tech staff and others, have shown "dedication and willingness to serve others in the current times."

"Everyone is working above and beyond the call of duty," he said. "It takes 20 to 30 people to support one emergency nurse to serve one patient. I am thankful for their dedication, for the sacrifices they make, for the time they take away from their families...it is one thing to have a job, and quite another to work above and beyond. That's what our emergency nurses do, that's what our entire team does. It takes an entire organization to make it all happen."

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Chief McKenzie leads Waverly Fire Department

By ANELIA K. DIMITROVA
editorcft@gmail.com

Editor's note: This article appeared in the Feb. 4 edition of the Waverly Democrat.

A new chief is now at the helm of the Waverly Fire Department, but he is not a newcomer.

Bryce McKenzie, a thirtysomething father of two, is a third-generation firefighter, a man whose ancestors have been instrumental to the volunteer firefighting community in the area for years.

He is the scion of a family whose combined experience in the Waverly Fire Department exceeds 165 years, according to his father, Jim.

Elected to the post by his peers on Dec. 8, 2020,

Bryce McKenzie has worked for the City of Waverly's Street Department since 2012, but joined the fire department in 2003, as a senior in high school.

THE MCKENZIE SIDE OF THINGS

What prompted young Bryce to join then was partly the example of his father, but also the passing of his grandfather, Donnie, in 2002.

The first generation of McKenzie brothers who settled in Iowa in the 1940s — Lee, Donnie and Aaron — had a strong sense of public service.

Lee McKenzie was the first brother to enlist with the department in 1959, according to family records. Around 1964, Donnie joined.

By the time Donnie's son, Jim, turned 18, Donnie tried to convince him he should join, but it wasn't until Donnie's younger son, Scott, and his friend Bob Edgar, put on the firemen's helmets that Jim, too, decided to do the same.

That was back in 1978.

The story of having the son step into the firemen's ranks alongside his father that played out in the first and second generations of the McKenzies, replayed itself again with the next when Jim, now in the role of a dad, urged his son, Bryce, to follow the family tradition.

But it took the passing of Donnie McKenzie, Bryce's grandfather, to prompt Bryce to join, in part as a tribute



COURTESY PHOTO

At left: The McKenzie family: Nicole, Bryce, Cullen, 10, and Abrah, 7.

Above left and right: Cullen McKenzie models his child's sized fire suit and equipment.

Below left: Judging by this photo at a past Waverly Fire Department training session, a fourth generation of McKenzies may be coming up the ranks. Bryce McKenzie holds the hose for his son, Cullen, now 10.

to his grandfather's passing and his legacy.

"After my dad's passing, his passion took off," Jim said of his son's decision to become a firefighter.

Fittingly, Bryce's friend, Rob Edgar Jr., had also joined the department in fulfillment of his own family tradition of third-generation service.

So two sets of fathers and two sets of sons fulfilled the third generation promise.

The friendship between the young men grew deeper and both Bryce McKenzie and Rob Edgar Jr. took their duty to the next level when they completed a two-year program at Kirkwood Community College in fire science.

As fire chief of the Waverly Fire Department, Bryce McKenzie will not be the first member of his extended family to lead the department.

His relative, Dan McKenzie, served as chief from 2005 to 2008.

Family ties run deep in the Waverly Fire Department. Today, there are four sets for father-and-son teams serving there: Kevin Miller and his two sons Jordan and Jentry; Jeff Soash and Donny Soash; Jim and Cody Schutte.

Dave Nelson, who served as fire chief when Bryce enlisted in 2003, said he believes Bryce McKenzie may be the youngest fire chief in remembered history.

"He is a fine young man that has come up the ranks and I think he will do a good job," he said.

Bryce's wife, Nichole, is an registered nurse at the Waverly Health Center, and they have a 10-year-old son, Cullen and a 7-year-old daughter, Abrah.



A photograph of Bryce and Cullen, when the boy was a toddler, suggests "the McKenzie side of things," as Jim McKenzie called it, may reach a fourth generation.

Chief Bryce McKenzie, who took over from Dennis Happel at the beginning of the year, says his first order of business will be to learn the job.

"My favorite thing about this is being able to help the community," he said.

He added his grandpa would be proud of him that he has gone up the ranks, but would waste no time on praise, but rather urged him to get the job done.

"He would say, 'Congrats and do the job you need to do,'" Bryce McKenzie told Waverly Newspapers.

A self-described "doer," he said he is looking forward to the challenge.

"He took the drive and the compassion to protect the community to a new level," his dad, Jim, said. "We are all so proud of him."



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Nelson joins Waverly PD ranks

Janesville grad, former Waterloo cop wants to make connections with community

By ERIC VANSICKLE

news@waverlynewspapers.com

Editor's note: This originally appeared in the Aug. 26 edition of the Waverly Democrat.

Nick Nelson wants to serve the community, and he also wants to be able to make a personal connection with those whom he protects.

That's what attracted him to become part of the Waverly Police Department.

Nelson, a 2016 Janesville High School graduate and holder of a Hawkeye Community College police science degree, took his oath of office Tuesday afternoon as a severe thunderstorm raged outside of Waverly City Hall.

Staying dry inside the Ivan "Ike" Ackerman City Council Chambers to witness the event were Nelson's girlfriend, Sarah McAhren, and their 13-month-old daughter, Athena.

Nelson said he and McAhren decided to buy a house in town to raise Athena here. He learned the police department here was looking for a new officer. He was with the Waterloo Police Department for about two years and has his certification.

"I decided I would give myself a chance to be closer to home, and I get to be closer to Athena and be in a community that I actually really enjoy being in and want to be a part of for a long time," Nelson said.

He said the day-to-day unknowns of the job was what attracted him to the field.

"It's something new every day, it's different, it's exciting," he said as Athena was grabbing at his badge. "It's just something different that keeps me entertained, and I love being a part of the community and serving the public."

He also liked the small-town feel that Waverly has, comparable to Janesville. He said it's better to raise a family here.

"It's a gorgeous town, and I love a lot of the people here," Nelson said. "The people are so friendly and welcoming. It's a lot quieter. It's a better environment for me and my family, I think."

After earning his degree at Hawkeye, Nelson served as a civilian jailer with the Black Hawk County Sheriff's Office before taking an accelerated officer certification program through the Waterloo department.



COURTESY PHOTO

Above: Waverly Police Capt. Jason Leonard, Sgt. Curtis Hansel, Officer Nick Nelson and Chief Rich Pursell pose after Nelson was sworn in as a new officer Tuesday. Right: Waverly Police Officer Nick Nelson poses with his daughter, Athena, 13 months, and girlfriend Sarah McAhren.

Chief Rich Pursell said the Waverly PD has a thorough application process.

"When somebody makes it through all of our testing that we do for the civil service, they're all pretty qualified by the time they make to what we call our certified top 10 list," Pursell said. "He meets all of the pre-requirements for our employment."

"What's unique about Nick is that he's already a certified peace officer. He mentioned all of the things he's not getting in Waterloo... (and) their call volume is so high. They have a hard time getting out and doing a lot of things that we're actually able to do in a smaller community. He wants to bring that here, so we're excited to have him on board."



McAhren said having Nelson as a police officer makes her feel safer no matter where they may live.

"I enjoy hearing everything that he gets to encounter," she said. "I've rode along in Waterloo, so that was pretty interesting all of the different stories."

"It keeps her entertained," Nelson adds to a chuckle.

He said that working in Waverly will fit his style of policing.

"I want to be a part of the community, be a member, stopping and talking to people, being at sporting events, get to know some of the kids and just being a bigger part of the community than what I was allowed to in Waterloo," he said. "It's more of a community, and I wanted to be a part of that."

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Two WPD police officers promoted as chief mulls evolving needs, succession plan

By ANELIA K. DIMITROVA
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Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the April 22 edition of the Waverly Democrat.

Two Waverly peace officers are moving up the ladder in the department, as Police Chief Rich Pursell is putting in motion a succession plan on top of an initiative to adjust departmental resources to fit the evolving needs of the community.



SGT. CORY STEPHENS
WAVERLY POLICE DEPT.

Officer Cory Stephens has been promoted to a sergeant and Officer Holly Jacobsen to investigator.

In a department where anticipated retirements are on the horizon, the advancement of Stephens and Jacobsen ensures a smooth transition.

"Our goal is to prepare the department for the future, with a strong leadership team in place," Pursell said.



HOLLY JACOBSEN
INVESTIGATOR, WAVERLY PD

Jacobsen, who is the first woman to have been hired by the department 12 years ago, is also the first female investigator.

A bachelor of arts graduate of the University of Northern Iowa, Jacobsen has been in law enforcement for 19 years. She has completed

Our goal is to prepare the department for the future, with a strong leadership team in place.

- CHIEF RICH PURSELL

multiple courses to prepare herself for the position of an investigator.

The City Council approved the addition of the investigator position in the 2021 budget, bringing the department's numbers from 16 to 17 certified officers.

This will be the first time that the department is opening a second investigator position, with Troy Schneider holding the current one. Capt. Jason Leonard will be the supervisor of that team.

"There's been a shift in the types of crimes we respond to," Pursell said.

He noted that reports like financial crimes, identity theft, internet-based frauds and scams have spiked, creating the need for a second investigator.

"As we become more connected as a society, we have to have our police department respond to those types of calls," he said.

Stephens' new position will be adding a third sergeant to the force. Pursell said he thought it prudent, given the duties and the volume of work of the current staffers, to add a third-shift supervising sergeant so that the officers on all shifts have a supervisor nearby.

"A supervisor will be out on the scene with the officers, so they can work hand in hand," Pursell said.

Sgt. Cory Stephens named Peace Officer of the Year

Received same honor in 2017 for dedication to uniform, community

By ANELIA K. DIMITROVA
editorcft@gmail.com

Editor's note: This article originally appeared in the June 1 edition of the Bremer County Independent.

Earning Peace Officer of the Year award is an honor bestowed on the recipient for rising above and beyond the call of duty.

It's usually a once-in-a-lifetime recognition.

But Waverly Police Sgt. Cory Stephens has garnered the appreciation of his law enforcement colleagues twice in three years.

And while that is rare, those familiar with the work he has been doing over the past year would agree the second plaque, like the first, is an outward expression of his work ethic, his dedication to the uniform and his ability to work with the community.

The award was presented to him Thursday morning by the Waverly Exchange Club.

Deputy Glenn Beenblossom, himself a recipient of the award in the past, nominated Stephens for his "professionalism, approachability and dependability."

He said Stephens is a role model for young officers, who often look up to him for advice and guidance.

"Cory has worn many hats in his careers in the military and law enforcement," Beenblossom wrote in the nomination.

This past year in particular, Stephens was in the media spotlight for a friendship he had struck with a local man, Marquis Stephens.

Against the background of protests for racial justice after the death of George Floyd, Marquis Stephens reached out to Cory Stephens and asked to go on a ride-along with him to find out firsthand what it feels like to be in the officer's boots. Waverly Newspapers covered the story, which was later picked up by other outlets.

"Cory is a man of strong faith who knows no bias or prejudice while conducting his daily routine," Beenblossom wrote in his nomination.

Stephens was promoted to sergeant this year as the leadership team in the police department started implementing a succession plan.

He is also the president of the local Waverly Police Protective Association and the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 13.

An Evansdale native, he was deployed in Iraq in 2003 with the Third Infantry Division.

He and his wife, Sara, have two sons, Colton, 13, and Wyatt, 11.

He said he was humbled to be selected by his fellow



COURTESY PHOTO

Sgt. Cory Stephens, the 2021 Bremer County Peace Officer of the Year, is pictured with his wife, Sarah, and sons, Wyatt and Colton.

Top: Stephens is pictured with Bremer County Deputy Glenn Beenblossom, who nominated him, and Waverly Police Capt. Jason Leonard.

officers for a second time.

"I feel very honored, knowing that there are so many great officers in the county, that they have thought of me again," he said. "This nomination and my first one, both my nominations have been for the person I am day in and day out."

Asked where he would place his second plaque – his first one is in the den of his house – Sgt. Stephens paused for a second.

"Now that I will be in the sergeant's office, I might bring them both and hang them here," he said.

ANELIA K. DIMITROVA PHOTOS

Josie Briggs reacts in shock when her boyfriend, newly minted Waverly Police Officer James Johnson, knelt to propose to her along the banks of the Cedar River behind Waverly City Hall June 28.



A BIG DAY OF FIRSTS:

A badge, an engagement ring and history

James Johnson makes Waverly Police Dept. history as first Black officer, proposes to girlfriend before starting his first shift on 24th birthday

By ANELIA K. DIMITROVA
editorcft@gmail.com

Editor's note: This article originally appeared in the June 29 edition of the Bremer County Independent.

How many firsts can you pack in a day? Apparently, a lot, and all of them life-changing. Just ask James Johnson, a 24-year-old, who, over Father's Day weekend, won his first trophy in a bodybuilding competition.

Against the backdrop of this accomplishment, which was the culmination of months of workout and dietary dedication, on Monday, the following big day firsts unfolded in his life in this chronological order:

June 28 was Johnson's 24th birthday. The other two firsts were of bigger historic nature, and as fate would have it, a string of circumstances and serendipitous coincidences would align themselves to coincide with Johnson's birthday.

At 8:51 a.m. on Monday, Johnson was sworn in as a police officer in the Waverly Police Department, a milestone moment in the department's records, as he is the first Black officer to join the ranks.

It was also a transformative moment for his family history.

At 8:59 a.m., another personal moment happened. With his signature still fresh on the paperwork of his first contract, Johnson, dressed in his new uniform, knelt on the bank of the Cedar River, right behind City Hall, and asked the love of his life, Josie Briggs, to marry him.

It was a moment to behold.

The river was mirror quiet, and except for a few sniffles, which came from Teresa Briggs, Josie's mother — and, in full disclosure, from this writer, who learned about the proposal with only a few seconds to spare and stomach the surprise — the scene belonged to the couple.

Josie believed she was standing up for pictures against the backdrop of St. Paul's Church across the river after



ANELIA K. DIMITROVA PHOTOS

Johnson and Briggs, center front, pose in a group shot with (front) Capt. Don Eggleston, Mayor Adam Hoffman, (back from second from left) Chief Rich Pursell, Capt. Jason Leonard, Sgt. Craig Hansel, and Briggs' parents, Teresa and Dean.

the swearing-in, and did not suspect much of what was about to come even after Johnson started fumbling in his back pocket.

When she saw the ring, her eyes filled with tears and a big, bear hug followed.

Johnson's fellow officers and Mayor Adam Hoffman, who witnessed the intensely private moment, did so with avuncular pride.

Chief Rich Pursell, and Josie's dad, Dean Briggs had managed to keep Johnson's secret from leaking to the point where even Josie's mother had no idea of the timing of the precious moment.

Every single one of these events — the badge, the ring and making history, all on his birthday — could have taken on a life of their own, and occupied the day, and for good reason.

But Officer Johnson packed it all in, in the early hours of the morning, and then headed to his first day of train-

ing.

GROWING UP

The youngest of seven, Johnson grew up learning from his siblings and his mother, Allson Johnson, a bus monitor for the Davenport school district.

Above all, at home, he learned to respect others, a trait that comes out so clearly when he responded to some interview questions with, "Yes, ma'am," or, "No, ma'am," before launching into a longer explanation about his mom.

"She didn't play no games," he said, referring to his mother's no-nonsense approach to raising her children.

"She is the best."

Also instrumental in his life during his most impressionable years was his sister, Alyssa, who is a corrections officer in Scott County.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

Nezda leads Waverly Ambulance service

Former AirCare paramedic hopes to expand local EMS within community

By ERIC VANSICKLE
news@waverlynewspapers.com

Nick Nezda now has his feet on the ground after having his head in the clouds – literally.

A 10-year veteran of the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics AirCare helicopter as a flight paramedic, Nezda was hired in July to be the EMS manager of the Waverly Health Center's ambulance service. He goes from a posting on the roof of the UIHC's main building to a ground-level office near the new ambulance garage at the freshly built emergency department at WHC.

The Peoria, Illinois, native and UI graduate – with a bachelor's in EMS administration and currently working on a Master's in Business Administration – thought coming to Waverly would be a great opportunity to move emergency medical services forward as a profession.

"The hospital here is a great place for fresh ideas," Nezda said of WHC. "They are very open to a lot of new ideas, especially for ones that are the best for each patient, the people of Waverly and its employees."

"I liked the fact that the hospital is independent, which is a rare thing these days for a small hospital to not be part of a larger health care system. I liked that the administration is open to new ideas and want the ambulance service to be the best known at that. I hope my ideas will help achieve that, or at least progress toward that."

After graduating from UI, Nezda spent a few years as a paramedic with Area Ambulance Service, an independent EMS based in Cedar Rapids before joining the AirCare 1 crew as a flight paramedic.



ANELIA K. DIMITROVA PHOTO

Nick Nezda is the EMS manager at Waverly Health Center. He was previously a flight paramedic with the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics AirCare helicopter.

He said the main difference between working in an air ambulance and a ground-based one is the acuity of the patients that paramedics and EMTs encounter.

"We (in the helicopter) were going out to small communities, small hospitals, and we were coming up here occasionally," he said. "We get to see a greater diversity of patients while we're flying. It shows some of the great things that rural hospitals and ambulances are

doing, so it ignited an interest and passion for me to bring the best pre-hospital care to everybody.

"We weren't doing the lift assists or other routine calls in the helicopter, but the patient care and interaction was always the same. We were doing the best for each patient every single time."

Prior to coming to WHC, Nezda had a local connection in his family. His wife is the former Natalie Frazee, and she grew up in Waverly. The couple has two

sons, Luke, 14, and Abe, 4.

With the hospital here, Nezda hopes to bring the same level of education he enjoyed with UIHC to the paramedics and EMTs in Waverly.

"I want to drive to seek out education and cutting-edge practices here," he said. "I want to find ways to bring the best patient care here. It shouldn't matter whether someone lives in New York City or Chicago or Iowa City or Waverly. They should be cared for in the highest possible way."

He added the Bremer County seat has a lot of things going for it that helped attract him to town.

"The schools are a big positive for us, especially coming from a bigger city," Nezda said. "Wartburg (College) helps bring some of the cultural opportunities, like some of the arts programs they have, so we hope to bring that to our boys."

"I like that small-town feel, having not lived in a city less than 70,000 population, that is going to be a big change for me. But Natalie is from here, and she has a lot of friends who are still living here. We're very excited to be moving in in the first few weeks of November."

Also, the new facilities at WHC with the recent opening of the emergency department is another plus in Nezda's mind.

"It's great to have a place dedicated to EMS," he said. "It's right there by the emergency department, where we belong. We're getting a new ambulance in the spring – in the February/March time frame – and we're in the process of getting new cardiac monitors and defibrillators. The facilities are excellent, and they're becoming more excellent."

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MOMENTS BY CARRIE PHOTOS
 Left: MacCoy Kelly takes a nap at the Waverly Firestation during his newborn photos.
 Above: Adam, Katelyn and MacCoy Kelly.
 Right: Angel, Aaron and Ayla Goodenbour. Adam and Aaron are brother-in-laws and volunteer fire fighters.

FAMILY TRADITION

Brothers-in-law serve as volunteer firefighters in Waverly, Tripoli

BY TYLER POSLOSKY
 sports@waverlynewspapers.com

Adam Kelly remembers the day his life changed forever. Kelly became a first-time father when his son, MacCoy, was born Feb. 6. "Cold," Kelly said, with a laugh. "It was one of the coldest days of the

year. A lot of mixed emotions – excited, nervous." Parenting wasn't the only change for Kelly and his wife, Katelyn. A third-year member of the Waverly Volunteer Fire Department who works at ZinPro in Shell Rock, Kelly altered his approach to responding to every call whenever his pager went off. He's more selective these days, he said. "I couldn't just run out the door

anymore," he said. "Having a kid, you have to watch them." Kelly, 30, also is more conscious of what kinds of calls he responds to, especially since his top priority is returning home safely to his family. "If you're at a car accident, you're out in the middle of the road and it makes you think twice," he said. "And your situational awareness I think is a little bit higher." Kelly, who was raised in Waverly and graduated from Waverly-Shell Rock High School in 2009, decided to jump into the fray of firefighting after being encouraged by his friend, Patrick McNally, who also serves on the department. "I just wanted to become apparent in my community and serve my community and help out in any way I could," Kelly said. Kelly isn't the only local volunteer firefighter to take on the responsibilities of fatherhood and keeping his community safe. He need not look far. His brother-in-law, Aaron Goodenbour, is a member at the Tripoli Fire Department.

Goodenbour and also became a father for the first time when his wife, Angel, gave birth to daughter, Ayla, was born Nov. 27, 2020. "It's life-changing," Goodenbour said. "The change of pace for me, there's some days I'll work late, some days I won't, but I've been trying to not do that as much and trying to be home when I can. Obviously, with running ambulance and fire calls and stuff, too, it takes time away. But it's rewarding. It's fun to see them grow." Goodenbour, who turns 29 on Aug. 27, graduated from Tripoli High School in 2011. He served on the Frederika Fire Department for a little more than year before moving to back to his hometown of Tripoli, where he has been on the department for more than five years. Goodenbour works for Butler Bremer Communications and also serves as a training officer at the Tripoli Fire Department. Being a training officer takes time away from his family, he said. "You have extra meetings vs. just the monthly meetings like the rest of

the guys do," Goodenbour said. "You're always trying to coordinate with instructors and different things like that." What's more, Goodenbour is a third generation Tripoli firefighter. His grandfather, Cletus, father, Mark, and uncle, Rick, also served with the department. "Dad still does ambulance with me. He's a driver as well," Goodenbour said. "He's getting close to retirement I think, but he hasn't said yet." Having a brother-in-law as a volunteer firefighter is something Goodenbour enjoys. He began his career a few years before Kelly. "It's kind of cool," Goodenbour said. "I'll call him once in a while and we'll chat about calls or different stuff we've seen or what we dealt with and just stuff like that. We always chat about it. We get together and bring up a random call that we hear that each of us had. And just bounce ideas off each other and just different things that we could do different or how you handle it."

MOMENTS BY CARRIE PHOTOS
 Above left: Adam Kelly and son MacCoy. Adam, who is a member of the Waverly Volunteer Fire Department, became a father for the first time in February.

Above right: Aaron Goodenbour and daughter Ayla. Goodenbour is a member of the Tripoli Volunteer Fire Department and also became a father for the first time this year.

Right Ayla Goodenbour poses in her dad's helmet for newborn photos.

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“She was a role model for me,” Johnson said. “She beat me to the punch.”

Thinking back on how his fascination with police work started, Johnson recalled how excited he was when the DARE officer came to his school.

He wanted to be that person. Johnson graduated from Davenport West High School in 2015 and pursued a degree in criminology at Iowa Central Community College in Fort Dodge, which he earned in 2018.

Wearing the badge had been a dream for Johnson since childhood, so early on, he decided to do whatever it takes to get this accomplished.

After college, he realized he was missing law enforcement experience to qualify for a police officer’s job, so he took on a stint at the Bremer County Jail to gain the necessary skills.

For more than a year, he would drive daily from Independence, where he lives, to Waverly, to work third and then second shift at the jail.

“If it was going to push me a centimeter closer to my goal, I was going to do it without question,” he said.

It paid off. What Johnson learned working in the jail will serve him well as an officer, he believes.

“I learned patience and how to de-escalate things,” he said. “And how to talk to different people.”

In the process, he also reinforced his own belief that under all circumstances he should remain true to himself.

“I think I have an older soul,” he says when asked how he self-identifies generationally.

BODYBUILDING

That old soul, though, is always ready for new adventures.

This is how Johnson got into bodybuilding, and did so in the thick of the pandemic.

He was a gym regular at Iowa Strength, in Independence, where owner Chris Dunne asked him if he would be interested in being coached to compete in the Iowa Inferno Natural Bodybuilding Championships in Des Moines.

Thirty-two weeks of strict discipline — both in working out and eating food he weighed daily on a scale — came to a rewarding culmination when he was crowned the champion in his category, a first not just for him but also for his trainer.

The experience moved him in the ranks of professionals and next time he competes, the trophy is likely to come with monetary appreciation as well.

“To be able to weigh your food for 32 weeks shows commitment and shows drive,” he said.

It was not that he wasn’t tempted to try the pizza or his favorite Mexican dish when he and Josie would go out on a date. He was, but had the strength of will to just sip water instead while she enjoyed her food because he had his eyes set on the bigger goal. He said the deeper he went into the program, the easier it was mentally to say no to food urges.

“You don’t want to let 26 weeks of training go down the drain, then you don’t want to let 28 weeks go to waste...” he said. “It keeps you motivated.”

After his victory, Johnson received a medal, a trophy and a “really big sword.”



ANELIA K DIMITROVA PHOTO

Josie Briggs and Officer James Johnson share a moment along the Cedar River before Johnson dropped to one knee.

The training also helped him in the physical aspect of applying for the police officer’s job.

WEARING THE BADGE

Johnson will enroll in the Police Academy on Aug. 30, giving him a couple of months to train with an experienced officer on Waverly protocols meanwhile.

He acknowledges that his arrival on the force comes at a time when police departments are re-evaluating and redefining their practices in the aftermath of the worldwide protests sparked by the killing of George Floyd last year.

Here is how Johnson sees his own path: “I got the job solely based on my skills and education, and I am really glad for that,” he said. “I am also a part of this important cultural moment that will help diversify the department.”

He said that the national reckoning that has taken place in the past year, which has driven many officers out of the profession and prompted others to rethink their ambitions, has not impacted his dream to become a police officer.

“I think I want to do it even more now,” he said. “Somebody has to do it, somebody has to try to make a change. The public should know that it is not every single officer out there that is like that. You are always going to have bad apples, but you can’t blame the whole tree.”

DIVERSITY IN THE DEPARTMENT

Since 2009, when he hired his first female police officer, current Det. Holly Jacobsen, Chief Pursell has made it a point to seek out candidates who bring different per-

spectives to the force.

“One of the goals of the Waverly Police Department has been to increase the diversity within our candidate pool,” Pursell said. “We will always hire the person who is the most qualified and the right fit for our department.”

“The process of recruiting, vetting and hiring qualified applicants is one of the greatest challenges for law enforcement agencies. I personally felt it was time to get some help in recruiting strategies to meet those challenges.”

Pursell also took a course, Diversity in Recruiting and Hiring for Law Enforcement, on how to effectively find and retain diverse officers.

The takeaways from the course bore fruit. Of the 17-person department he leads today, there are three female officers and with Johnson’s arrival, one Black officer. Five are under 30.

“When we were interviewing James, he recited our mission statement that he had committed to memory and we knew we had found the right person for our department,” Pursell said in an email. “No other candidate has ever talked about our mission statement, let alone, recite it to us. We are excited to have James on board.”

Senior officers believe that Johnson’s enlistment will be a breath of fresh air.

“His youthful exuberance rubs off on people,” Capt. Jason Leonard said. “His character is contagious. We know that he is going to be a great fit for our department, especially in times like these, when there’s a lot that we can be melancholy about.”

ON A NEW PATH

As low-key as Johnson is, his current path is brimming with personal and professional changes.

He knows how to fight for what he wants and has the patience to wait for it to come to fruition.

When he proposed to Josie, he had waited for months for this moment. He had asked her father’s blessing last year, and several months ago, when he told her he was going to Menards with a friend, on the way there, they also stopped at the jewelry store to pick up the ring. It had been waiting to get on Josie’s finger after being tucked away in a shoebox for some time.

When he was sworn in as a police officer on Monday, Johnson had waited for that moment — and worked hard for it — since childhood.

He said he is lucky to have had the support of his family and Josie behind him in every endeavor he undertakes.

“I am ready to take this journey,” he said. “To grow as a person and grow as a character.”



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Deputy Meyer is newest addition to the Bremer County Sheriff's Office

By ANELIA K. DIMITROVA
editorcft@gmail.com

Editor's note: This article originally appeared in the Jan. 12 edition of the Bremer County Independent.

Former Fort Dodge police officer Matthew Meyer has a new badge and a new title.

The 28-year-old took the oath of office Monday, becoming the latest addition to the Bremer County Sheriff's team.

He is also the youngest deputy in the county's law enforcement agency.

A 2011 graduate of Fort Dodge High School, Meyer attended Iowa Western Community College on a cheerleading scholarship while pursuing a degree in sports medicine. He then transferred to Iowa State University where he switched his interest to conservation management.

In 2016, he joined the Fort Dodge Police Department and graduated from the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy. He worked in the department as a patrol officer and was a member of the tactical team.

He told his hometown newspaper, The Messenger, in August that the most memorable incident he responded to was "anything that involved paranormal activity."

His parents, Joanne and Mike Meyer, and a handful of friends attended the swearing in ceremony Monday at the Bremer County Courthouse, which was conducted by Ken Kammeyer, the chair of the Bremer County Board of Supervisors.

Sheriff Dan Pickett said Meyer replaces Tim Gilroy, who resigned on Nov. 3 to pursue other career opportunities, having worked as a deputy only since Oct. 28.

Pickett noted that yet another deputy is going to be hired from the same search pool in order to fill in the ranks of his department of 14.



COURTESY PHOTO

Deputy Matthew Meyer poses with his parents, Joanne and Mike, following his deputization ceremony. Right: Sheriff Dan Pickett congratulates new Deputy Matthew Meyer following his swearing in Jan. 11 in the Bremer County Board of Supervisors chambers.

Meyer said he is looking forward to the opportunity to serve alongside leaders like Pickett and Chief Deputy Robert Whitney.

"I am here for the people, I want to be a beacon of hope," he said. "I want to be that person someone can lean on."

Meyer's mom said she is excited about her son's new badge.

"He's at a new chapter of his life," she said. "We are all very proud of him."



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Sahr joins Bremer Co. Sheriff's Office

New deputy carries badge number once used by Hildebrandt

By ERIC VANSICKLE

news@waverlynewspapers.com

Editor's note: This article originally appeared in the March 30 edition of the Bremer County Independent.

The Bremer County badge number 9-7 has a bit of legacy behind it.

It was last used by retired reserve deputy and county school resource officer Terry Dehmlow, but some years prior to that, it was worn by current District 3 Supervisor Dewey Hildebrandt before he was elected as sheriff.

Now it will be held by the county's newest deputy sheriff, Nathan Sahr, who comes to the office after previously serving in the Parkersburg Police Department, Franklin County Sheriff's Office and most recently the University of Northern Iowa police.

"I'm very appreciative of this opportunity," Sahr said after being sworn in by Hildebrandt, who is the vice chairman of the Board of Supervisors this year. "I'm very excited to work for Bremer County."

"During my time in law enforcement, I've heard nothing but phenomenal and great things about this agency and the people that work here, and I'm excited to start and get to know these people and the people of Bremer County."

He said each of his three prior posts were different in size and scope. He thinks he can utilize his experiences here.

"It just teaches you to interact and talk and get to know all different types of people," Sahr said. "I'm excited to have that opportunity here."

Sheriff Dan Pickett said that Sahr is going to fit in well in his crew.

"He's got a great personality," Pickett said. "He's



COURTESY PHOTO

Following the oath of office ceremony, Sheriff Dan Pickett, Deputy Nathan Sahr and Supervisor Dewey Hildebrandt pose for a photo.

been at UNI for a couple of years and has worked with college kids down there, and he's been very active in his previous employment.

"We're fortunate to get someone who is certified with the experience that he does (have)."

Sahr was born in New Ulm, Minnesota, a small town near Mankato, and moved with his family to Waterloo at an early age. He graduated from East High School there

before attending what is now Waldorf University, where he played football and baseball for the NAIA Warriors program. He earned his bachelor's degree in criminal justice administration.

Sahr recently married his wife, Kaitlyn, who works as a dispatcher for the Iowa State Patrol Post 9 in Cedar Falls. They have a 4-year-old daughter, Chloe, and a son who is on his way in August.

After Hildebrandt, who was substituting for the absent Chairman Ken Kammeyer, swore him in, the former sheriff told Sahr that the new deputy was filling some big shoes in the sheriff's office.

That was when Chief Deputy Robert Whitney revealed Hildebrandt's former badge number.

"I was 9-7," Hildebrandt recalled as the supervisors' chambers erupted in laughter. At that point, Sahr gave the supervisor who represents the eastern side of the county a heartier handshake. "This guy's alright," Hildebrandt added.

"Just watch it, though, he might be 9-1," he quipped, aimed at Pickett.

"Maybe someday, I can help you with that," Pickett replied.

Sahr appreciated the fact a former sheriff administered his oath of office.

"It's always nice to have somebody who understands the law enforcement side of it working in the supervisor's office," he said of Hildebrandt. "I think it just speaks volumes to how great of a county this is to work in, that when they're done with law enforcement they can continue to work in the county."

He hoped that he could be half as good of a deputy as Hildebrandt was.

"I hope to continue to do great things," Sahr said.



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COURTESY PHOTO

The Denver Volunteer Fire Department serves the area surrounding the Mile-Wide City and into northern Black Hawk County.

DENVER



COURTESY PHOTO

A dozen volunteer EMTs and paramedics are on call with the Denver Ambulance Service.

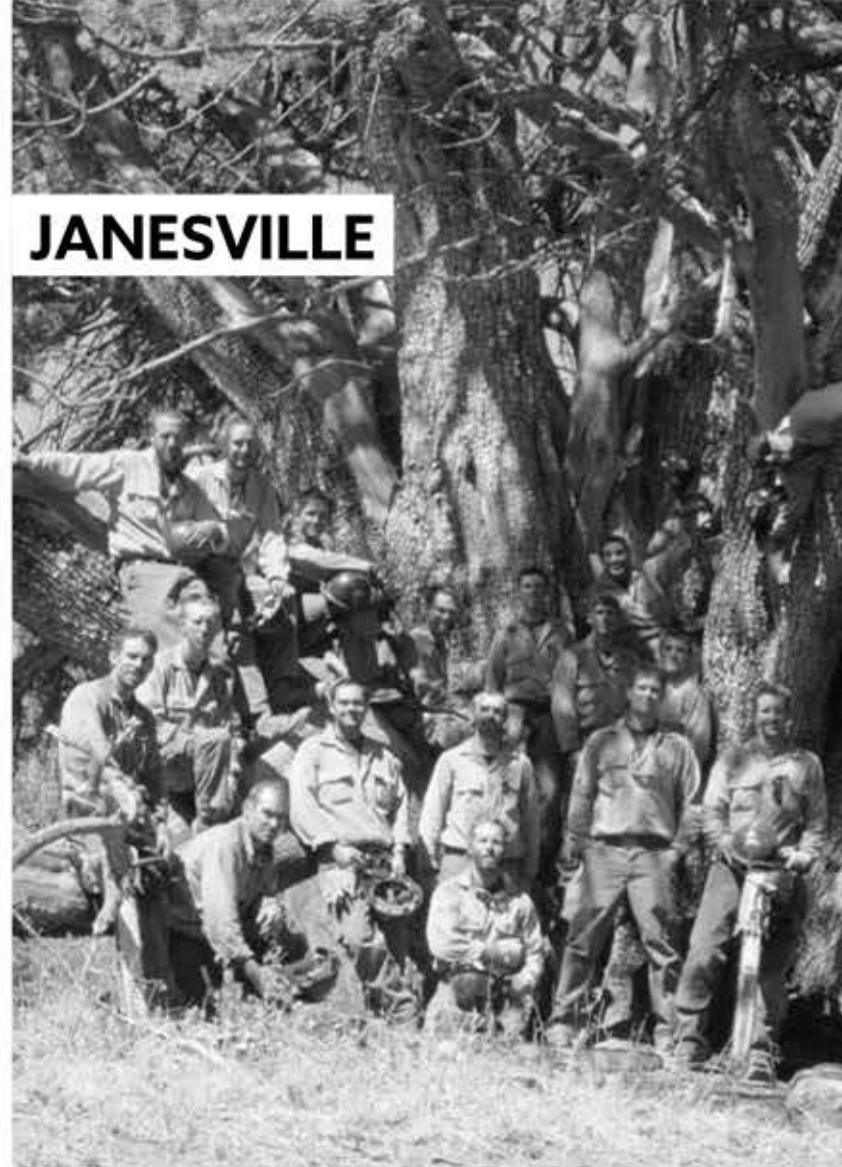
PLAINFIELD



COURTESY PHOTO

The members of the Plainfield Fire Department include Alex Schulz, Blake Franzen, Steve Koob, Kaitlen Leiron, Gerald Carpenter, Curt Lechtenberg, Kurt Bond, Gary Carpenter, Tom Poppe and Chief Tim Meeker. Not pictured are Chad Hansen, Lee Williamson (secretary), Don Franzen, Lee Franzen, Taylor Wedeking, James Livingston (chaplain), Ralph White, Pat Lentz, Zack Bark, 2nd Capt. Kyle Ohrt, Loren Tolnai, Clayton Wilken, Larry Poppe, Jon Iriarte, 1st Capt. Evan Wagner and Asst. Chief Bruce White.

JANESVILLE



COURTESY PHOTO

The Janesville Fire Department services the southwest corner of Bremer County and northwestern Black Hawk County. This photo was taken following a training session.

Our Local Heroes

READLYN



COURTESY PHOTO

Readlyn Fire Department
Back-row from left to
right:

Chris Joerger, Zach
Kuhlmann, Jerrid Nuss,
Miles Matthias, Nick
Kuker, Scott Broten, Ron
Oltrogge, Jim Lane, Brian
Oltrogge

Front-row from left
to right:

Ethan Kleitsch, John
Kleitsch, Randy Kleitsch,
Johnny Kleitsch, Chad
Ott, Austin Matthias,
Brian Powell, Dan
Blaylock

(not pictured: Kory Hesse,
Mark Koepke, Dan
Burgart, Nick West, Mark
McElhose, Zach
Woodman, and Trystan
Lampe)

SUMNER



COURTESY PHOTO

The Sumner Volunteer Fire Department is staffed by 30 firefighters.

COURTESY PHOTO

TRIPOLI

Tripoli Fire Department
Front Row: Andrew Boldt,
Kevin Burhow, Tyler Simon,
Secretary Brian Bunce,
Chaplin Briana Morey,
Travis Holm, Training
Officer Aaron Goodenbour,
Shawn Kohagen, and
Landon Burton Back Row:
Tanner Shonka, Jordan
Shonka, Justin Peine, Cody
Funk, Larry Piehl, Randy
Kirchhoff, Chief Dan
Burgart, Assistant Training
Officer Andy Mildenstein,
2nd Assistant Chief Marv
Christensen, and
1st Assistant Chief Kyle
Kirchhoff Not Present:
Tyler Shonka, Dan Smith,
Todd Gebhardt, Corry
Usher, Joshua Pitz, and
Travis Schwarze:



Our Local Heroes



SUMNER

COURTESY PHOTO

The staff at Sumner Emergency Medical Services (SEMS) include full-time paramedics Alicia Smith, Susan Leary and Steve Post; part-time and volunteer staff Holly Schemmel, paramedic, and Jeff Mason, critical care paramedic; volunteer EMTs Tammy Abernathy, Terri Amos, Debra Beckner, Doug Daniels, Mike Jergens, Eugene Knoploh, Laura Necker, David Pleggenkuhle and Todd Westfahl; and volunteer staff members Mary Burgart, Roger Burgart, Steve Shields, Bill Smith and Evan Webb.



TRIPOLI

COURTESY PHOTO

The Tripoli Ambulance Service is led by Kip Ladage and consists of a mostly-volunteer crew.

COURTESY PHOTOS
At right: The Plainfield First Responders crew includes Gary Carpenter, Cindy Shoemaker, Jenny Woodman, Melissa Schmall, Lori Sharp. Not pictured is Lee Williams. Far right: Readlyn First Responders/EMS consists of a crew of 10 volunteers.



PLAINFIELD



READLYN



WAVERLY

COURTESY PHOTO
The Waverly Fire Department is under the leadership of Fire Chief Bryce McKenzie. The other officers include 1st Asst. Chief Kevin Miller, 2nd Asst. Chief Jeff Thier, 1st Capt. Nate Koehler, 2nd. Capt. Rob Edgar, 1st Lt. Jason Dorman, 2nd Lt. Cody Schutte, training officer Jim McKenzie and secretary/treasurer Gary Doehrmann.

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