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Pickup out to defend title
in 2023 Observer baseball poll
Page B1



HOLY WEEK SERVICES SET
Local churches announce
celebrations for Easter season
Page B6



The Observer

dewittobserver.com

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Teacher charged with sex crimes

Police investigation started
12 months before arrest

By **NICK JOOS**
News Editor
njoos@dewittobserver.com

A former Central DeWitt teacher was arrested last week following accusations he had a sexual relationship with a female student while employed at the school.

Cody LaKose, 37, now of Cedar Rapids, taught science classes at Central DeWitt from 2010 to 2018. He was arrested March 21 after being charged with five sex crimes, including two felonies, after a police investigation found he allegedly engaged in sexual activities with a 17-year-old student, sometimes on school grounds.

LaKose is charged with one count of

INVESTIGATION | PAGE 2



CODY LAKOSE

Peterson said
sharing student
name a 'mistake'

By **NICK JOOS**
News Editor
njoos@dewittobserver.com

Central DeWitt Superintendent Dan Peterson said it was a mistake to post the name of a former student who has accused a for-

mer teacher of sexual misconduct while she was a student.

In a March 21 message sent to district parents and posted to the school's website and social media pages, Peterson explained former Central DeWitt High School teacher Cody LaKose was facing five sex charges, including two felonies.

STATEMENT | PAGE 2



Contributed photos

Students at Calamus-Wheatland formed a committee to help encourage blood donations, and participation numbers spiked. Blood drive committee members this year were (from left) Ben Kastantin, Ava Cavey, Mitch Franks, Megan Forret, Malana Mohr, Alyssa VanderHeiden, Raegan Dickman and Mackensie LeBarge.

IN THEIR VEINS

Calamus-Wheatland students boost interest in blood donations, host multiple drives

By **NICK JOOS**
News Editor
njoos@dewittobserver.com

Students at Calamus-Wheatland successfully used some positive peer pressure to their advantage in the hopes of possibly saving lives.

Over the past year, an influx of Warriors have begun donating blood, thanks in part to a centralized effort by the school's blood drive coordinator, Lori Forret, and a contingency of students who wanted to make a difference.

Previous to 2022, the community's primary blood drive was hosted by National Honor Society mem-

bers in the Wheatland Community Center. Participation was fine, Forret said, but having it at that location made it difficult for students, teachers and staff members to donate thanks to both being in class and participating in sports and other activities in the evening.

Forret had the idea of moving the blood drive to the Calamus-Wheatland Activity Center and since the first blood drive there in February of 2022, participation has spiked thanks to both the new location as well as a passionate effort by students to rally their friends to donate.

Megan Forret, a senior and Lori's daughter, was one of the students leading the charge, along with fellow senior Ben Kastantin and others. Megan and those other committee members strummed up student interest in blood donation by making videos, sharing stories and making personal pleas to every student. They asked for people to either donate or find other ways to contribute.

And, their efforts paid off right away.

The first drive at the activity center garnered 57 donations, 23

BLOOD | PAGE 3

Glenn Miller orchestra to return

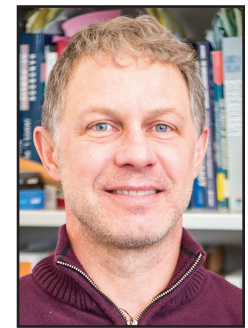
DeWitt hosting swing dance band April 15

STAFF REPORT
news@dewittobserver.com

A musical act scheduled at the Central DeWitt Performing Arts Center is bound to get people to their feet.

The Glenn Miller Orchestra swings into DeWitt on April 15, 2023, at 7 p.m.

The Glenn Miller Orchestra, a captivating American swing dance band, is a self-con-



STEVE LINDNER

tained group consisting of the music director, five saxophone players, four trumpeters, four trombonists, and three rhythm musicians (piano, bass and drums). Two vocalists — one male and one female — are featured, and each perform individually and as part

of The Moonlight Serenaders vocal group.



The Glenn Miller Orchestra performed its first concert in 1956, and has been on the road ever since. Today, the 18-member ensemble continues to play many of the original Miller arrangements. More modern selections are also arranged and performed in the Miller style and sound.

The orchestra travels over 100,000 miles each year, playing nearly 300 dates. The orchestra has performed in all 50 states, as well as throughout Europe, Australia, Iceland, New Zealand, Guam, the Philippines, South and Central America. Miller's orchestra and music have been heard continuously around the world since 1938.

CDPAC Board President and City of DeWitt Administrator Steve Lindner said the

CDPAC | PAGE 2

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STATEMENT

Continued from page 1

In the postings, Peterson included the police affidavit that detailed the charges LaKose is facing along with a police narrative that provided details of the alleged sex acts.

The identity and address of the former student, who is now an adult, was included in the documents shared by Peterson.

The school district later removed the woman's name from the message.

"These are extremely ugly allegations and findings, but I want to be transparent with the information that can be shared. I realize that just because information can be shared, doesn't mean it should be shared," Peterson said in the message. "I just believe in this situation, regarding a former school employee, I should provide as much information as I can. Please guard your heart and eyes from the attachment if you don't want to read it."

In the message, Peterson said the woman was courageous for approaching police, but said he did not contact her to ask for permission before sharing her name.

Peterson said he soon realized including the woman's name and address in the email was a mistake and said he apologized to the woman's family.

"My original thought was since the public document listed the victim's name, it was all public and her name would be public," Peterson said. "I quickly learned after sending the document out that she didn't know that her name would be included."



DAN PETERSON

CDPAC

Continued from page 1

gig is a big one for DeWitt.

"We are excited to bring this world-renowned act back to DeWitt," Lindner shared. "We hosted them 12 years ago for our grand-opening performance to rave reviews. COVID postponed any 10-year anniversary plans, so we feel a bit like we're celebrating a decade-plus of bringing great live performances to our community with this show."

The CDPAC is a 799-seat state of the art auditorium located in the Central DeWitt High School. The CDPAC Board

oversees the CDPAC nonprofit dedicated to serving the community.

"Glenn Miller Orchestra is a top-notch performance that I encourage all to come and enjoy," said CDPAC board member and President & CEO of the DeWitt Chamber & Development Company Angela Rheingans. "The opportunity to enjoy live music is a key component to a thriving community."

Ticket prices are \$30 online or purchased in person prior to the show. Tickets are \$35 at the door. Student tickets are \$10 at the door.

Tickets can be purchased in person at DeWitt City Hall or Emma Raes Antiques & Uniques and online at cd-pac.org. Once on the online purchase window, select "Glenn Miller Orchestra" at the bottom of the drop-down menu.

For more information, contact Linder at (563) 659-3811.



ANGELA RHEINGANS

INVESTIGATION

Continued from page 1

sexual exploitation of a minor and one count of sexual exploitation by a school employee, both felonies. LaKose was also charged with three aggravated misdemeanor charges of sexual exploitation by a school employee.

LaKose resigned from Central DeWitt due to personal reasons in 2018, according to Superintendent Dan Peterson. Since then, LaKose has taught in Cedar Rapids and at Iowa City Regina, where he was working at the time of his arrest, according to Iowa City Regina Superintendent Lynne Devaney.

DeWitt police filed an arrest warrant March 20. LaKose was arrested the next day and transferred to Clinton County where he was jailed. LaKose was released March 22 after posting a \$10,000 cash bond.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled Oct. 31 at 8:30 a.m. at the Clinton County Courthouse.

On March 2, 2022, the DeWitt Police opened an investigation after a former student reported LaKose had allegedly "groomed her" and had a sexual relationship with her while she was a student and a minor. This alleged activity took place in the spring of 2017, the affidavit said.

The former student said she decided to report the relationship because of concern LaKose would "groom" students at his current teaching position, court documents state.

The Daily Iowan reported that LaKose was placed on administrative leave from Regina following his arrest.

The Observer contacted the former student, who is now an adult, after her name was shared by Central DeWitt Superintendent Dan Peterson in an email to parents and a post on the school's

website.

The Observer honored the woman's request not to be identified in the newspaper.

The police affidavit alleges in the spring of 2017, LaKose engaged in sexual intercourse with the student in his office at the school, kissed her and engaged in other sex acts.

The former student said she and LaKose texted and talked in person, and LaKose requested she pose in lingerie and send nude photos, court documents say.

The affidavit said on June 3, 2022, a photo of a penis was sent to the former student using a cell phone number police confirmed belonged to LaKose.

On Oct. 5, 2022, DeWitt Police Officer Justin Witt contacted LaKose to set up an interview, a request LaKose declined by text, court documents state. Later that same day, the former student said she received a message from the same cell phone number asking if "she had said anything."

LaKose's attorney, Mary Wolfe, told The Observer her client did not want to comment.

LaKose resigned from Central DeWitt Dec. 21, 2018, due to personal reasons, Peterson said.

LaKose's resignation included a separation agreement proposed by Peterson and approved by the Central DeWitt School Board.

"I felt it was in the best interest of the district to allow Mr. LaKose to resign his employment," Peterson told The Observer.

The Observer asked Peterson why he believed that was the best course of action.

"Mr. LaKose wished to resign for per-

sonal reasons at that time and I wanted to support that decision to leave the school district," Peterson said.

The Observer then asked Peterson if LaKose had ever been under investigation for sexual misconduct either during his time as an employee or after he resigned.

"I cannot answer that given it is a personnel and confidential situation," Peterson said.

Peterson also declined to disclose if LaKose had, at any point during his employment with the district, received any verbal or written reprimands in any form.

The separation letter included a list of terms that said LaKose would receive benefits and pay through the end of the 2018-19 school year.

The agreement also said, "No further action will be taken by the district regarding LaKose's employment because the district has determined circumstances do not legally require the filing of a complaint with the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners or further action."

Another stipulation in the agreement said the school district would provide LaKose with a letter of reference he could use in seeking new employment.

A reference letter is a document that verifies a prospective employee's previous work and includes dates and positions held, Peterson said.

Peterson said the reference letter was included in the separation agreement because "it didn't place any value or evaluation of Mr. LaKose's performance as an employee of the district. It was merely acknowledgement (by) the district. It had the dates of his employment and the positions he held."

Swimming lesson sign up nears

Lake: New process will hopefully fix technical troubles from last year

By KATE HOWES
Staff Writer
khowes@dewittobserver.com

In an effort to avoid a backup of online traffic — which resulted in sinking the entire system a year ago — registering for swimming lessons at the DeWitt Aquatic Center (DAC) is going to be a little different this year.

As opposed to being able to sign up for all available sessions at the same time on a Saturday morning — like last year — this year's process will be spread out over the course of five days.

DeWitt Parks and Recreation Director Kevin Lake said he and members of his department already have talked with Cogran, the company whose software the parks and recreation department uses for online registration.

Cogran has increased its volume potential "two- or three-fold," Lake noted, to ensure it can withstand more traffic and won't oversell certain sessions — primarily, private lessons — which is what occurred last year.

In addition to that, Lake said the department felt it best to stretch out the registration days and sessions, allowing parents/guardians to register their swimmers on different days of the week so as not to over-tax the system.

Registration for the 2023 swim season will open Monday, April 3, at 9 a.m.

Swim lesson types and dates offered on that day will be Session 1 Group Lessons (June 12-23) and Session 2 Group Lessons (July 10-21).

On Tuesday, April 4, at 9 a.m., registration will open for Parent-Tot 1 session (June 12-23); Daffy Dolphins 1 (June 12-16); Daffy Dolphins 2 (June 19-23); Daffy Dolphins 3 (July 10-14); Daffy Dolphins 4 (July 17-21); and Parent-Tot 2 (July 10-21).

On Wednesday, April 5, at 9 a.m., registration will be available for Private Lesson 1 (June 5-9).

Then, on Thursday, April 6, at 9 a.m., parents may sign up for the Private Lesson 2 (June 26-30).

And then on Friday, April 7, at 9 a.m., persons may register for the Private Lessons 3 slot for July 24-28.

Online lesson sign-up will close April 30, at 11:59 p.m.

People may sign up for the sessions of their choice once the registration for said sessions has opened and can do so anytime thereafter until April 30, assuming spots still are available.

Lake said the reason behind making the online registration process available during the week is to make sure that he and employees at Cogran will be on hand



KEVIN LAKE

during these hours in case anything should go awry.

"We're going to start it on a Monday, when the software folks will be in their offices, I will be in my office," Lake explained. "If there are any fires that need to be put out, we will be able to deal with them much more quickly. We'll all be available to help manage the site."

He added, as per usual, only those registering for group lessons need to know to what level their children have advanced. Anyone who needs to be reminded of that information may contact the DeWitt Fitness Center at (563) 659-5127 to find out.

New this year, lesson changes will result in fee

Lake suggests, as always, people be prepared to know the dates/times of sessions that will work best for their families prior to registering.

After all, something new being implemented this year will be a \$20 fee charged to anyone who requests a change in a lesson group or date/time. There will be no exceptions.

"I think spreading (the registration process) out is going to help for sure," Lake said. "But if people are going to need a specific date/time, I would recommend registering their children as soon as possible so they can get the date/time they need. But if a family has flexibility, there's no need to rush."

To register, go to parks.cityofdewittiowa.org.

Weather permitting, the DAC is scheduled to open for the season May 27.



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Page B1-B2



A HOP AND A SKIP
Families gathered and set their kids
loose Saturday to hunt some treats
Page 7



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Observer photo by Scott Hoag Photography

The Henningsen home on 250th Street north of Grand Mound sustained heavy damage Friday night from what the National Weather Service determined was a tornado that traveled across Clinton County. Law Enforcement received damage reports from all across the tornado's path between Grand Mound and Charlotte, which sustained widespread damage.

'The tornado just went right over our house'

Severe weather system damages homes, businesses across area

STAFF REPORT
news@dewittobserver.com

Jennifer Henningsen was pulled over for speeding Friday night while driving home.

She told the officer she was sorry, and said she was driving quickly because her house had been hit by a tornado.

The officer let her go with a warning.

Henningson's son, Ty, had been home alone when the twister scattered pieces of their barn, grain bin and horse trailer around the yard northeast of Grand Mound.

"Mom, the tornado just went right over our house. No. Really," Ty told his mom via text.

The Henningsen's house was deemed inhabitable, and neighbors had arrived the next

day to help pick up the pieces.

A similar scene took place farther north in Charlotte. At about 3 p.m. Saturday afternoon, Tonya Lamphier stood in the front yard of her Charlotte home surrounded by reminders of the powerful winds that swept through town the previous evening. She was still in shock, she said, gesturing toward the debris and destruction.

The grinding sound of chain-saws reverberated through the small Clinton County town as hundreds of volunteers helped residents and business owners clean up their community after an EF-2 National Weather Service-confirmed tornado scored a path through the area.

STORMS | PAGE 2



Observer photo by Nancy Mayfield

Tonya Lamphier stands among rubble on her property in Charlotte. Lamphier said the windows of her home were broken by the storm and her shed was blown away.

Officials did not report concerns to state

Teacher stayed in classroom despite ongoing investigation

By **NICK JOOS**
News Editor
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Former Central DeWitt teacher Cody LaKose continued to teach at an Iowa City high school for more than a year after DeWitt police opened an investigation into an alleged sexual relationship between him and a 17-year-old student.

The Observer on Monday asked DeWitt Police Chief David Porter and Central DeWitt Community School District Superintendent Dan Peterson if they had notified state officials or LaKose's current employer of his alleged misconduct prior to his arrest.

Both said they had not. "That's not something we would normally do," Porter said. "That's something the school would do. I'd hope that was something the school would have done ... prior to him leaving. But I don't think that happened."

Police subpoenaed the Central DeWitt Community School District for LaKose's personnel files in October 2022, but Peterson, the school system superintendent, said he was never notified law enforcement was investigating LaKose for the alleged relationship.

"I didn't know he was being investigated. I just knew we received a subpoena from the DeWitt police regarding his personnel files," Peterson said.

Peterson said during LaKose's employment at Central DeWitt – and after – the administration "didn't have any reason to report (LaKose)" to state authorities who control the licensing of teachers.

Peterson would not specifically say if school officials had investigated LaKose during his employment at the school from 2010 to 2018.

LaKose resigned after receiving a separation agreement that Peterson proposed to the Central DeWitt



DeWitt Police Chief David Porter said his department was not obligated to alert state officials to an investigation of sexual misconduct involving a teacher.

LAKOSE | PAGE 2

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Heating Plumbing

LAKOSE

Continued from page 1

School Board in December 2018. The document guaranteed LaKose would continue to receive his salary and benefits for the remainder of that school year and also called for the district to provide him with a reference letter he could use to seek future employment.

After resigning from Central DeWitt, LaKose taught in Cedar Rapids and at Iowa City Regina High School. Regina placed LaKose on administrative leave after police arrested him at the school March 21.

Peterson said a representative from Regina contacted Central DeWitt High School Principal George Pickup for a reference before hiring LaKose.

When contacted Monday by telephone, Pickup told The Observer that Peterson told him not to answer questions involving LaKose.

Minutes later, Peterson sent a text to The Observer that read, "I need to correct myself. We didn't receive any pre-employment reference calls regarding LaKose."

While not specifically mentioning the Central DeWitt district, Regina Principal Glenn Plummer and Superintendent Lynne Devaney sent a letter to parents assuring them that Regina conducted reference checks and reviewed records of the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (IBEE) before hiring LaKose in 2020.

An Observer review last week of IBEE cases found no records involving LaKose. According to charging documents, the



Dan Peterson said he didn't know there was an investigation despite having received a subpoena in October.

former student told police on March 2, 2022, she and LaKose had performed sex acts while on school property. The documents also said she provided police with electronic communications of a sexual nature that tracked to LaKose's cell phone. According to the documents, one of LaKose's messages to the student read, "I think a nice shower pic ... is in order."

The physical evidence corroborated the information the victim reported to police, and police confirmed that a Twitter account and email address used to send the messages were registered to LaKose, a court affidavit says.

Mike Cavin, the executive director of the IBEE, said the licensing board sometimes receives notice from law enforcement when a teacher is the subject of a criminal investigation, but state law does not require it.

However, Cavin said school officials face a higher standard of reporting.

Cavin explained that Iowa law requires school officials to report internal investigations of teachers to the IBEE when they involve such things as inappropriate relationships with students.

According to Iowa law, the IBEE can take action against a teacher's license for a variety of reasons, including sexual exploitation of a minor, committing any act of physical abuse of a student and "soliciting, encouraging or consummating a romantic or otherwise inappropriate relationship with a student."

LaKose faces five charges, including two felonies for sexual exploitation. LaKose was released from Clinton County Jail after a \$10,000 bond was posted March 22. The former student filed a no-contact order against LaKose the same day. LaKose's arraignment is scheduled for April 28 at 8:30 a.m. in the Clinton County Courthouse.

LaKose's attorney, Eric Tindall, did not respond to messages left with his office seeking comment.



Observer photo by Scott Hoag Photography

This home on 230th Street northeast of Grand Mound collapsed onto its occupants, including Joe Mackin, who was extricated from the rubble by first responders.

STORMS

Continued from page 1

A piece of lumber was imbedded in the roof of Lamphier's two-story, white-framed house, which had several windows blown out by the force of the wind.

Large hunks of twisted metal were scattered about the property, some of it from the roof of the Charlotte Area Activity Center across Highway 136 from Lamphier's home.

"I'm just so grateful to everyone who came to help today," Lamphier said, noting Charlotte Volunteer Fire Department members were part of the effort Friday.

Damage reports were scattered across Eastern Iowa including from Bellevue, Preston and DeWitt. The storms were part of a large, multi-state tornado outbreak that also ripped through communities in Illinois, Indiana, Tennessee and Arkansas.

Among the damage in Charlotte was a 10,000-gallon propane tank which leaked and forced an evacuation of the northern portions of Charlotte. HazMat teams from Davenport responded to the gas leak.

Clinton County Auditor Eric Van Lancker said many in Charlotte were sheltering in the Lutheran church but were able to return to their homes around 9:30 p.m. Friday.

Trees and power lines blocked roads throughout the county, and Van Lancker said all roads leading to Charlotte had been cleared of debris within three hours of the tornado.

Grand Mound resident, Joe Mackin, was rescued from his home by first responders and taken to a local hospital after being trapped in his collapsed house Friday. He was released from the hospital several hours later, his son, Josh Wright, said.

Mackin was the only storm-related injury reported by law enforcement in Clinton County. Three people were injured in Bellevue when the cabins they were staying in were blown over by a tornado that the National Weather Service (NWS) said hit the northern part of the town. Its estimated peak wind speed was 104 mph, the NWS said.

All three injured people were staying at Moon River Cabins, as well as Riverview RV Park and Vacation Rentals — which are adjacent to each other — along the Mississippi River in Bellevue, according to the Bellevue Police Department.

One person was rescued from the river after winds from the tornado blew the tiny home she was staying in into the river. Riverview Vacation Rentals owner Dan Blitgen may have saved her life by rescuing the woman himself.

"I couldn't find a rope, so I found a 50-foot water hose and tied one end around me and had a guy on shore hold the other end," Blitgen told local media outlets. "Then I swam out and

got her floating on a pillow and helped get her back to shore."

Blitgen said a sudden hailstorm also destroyed several trees, cabins and campers.

Jackson County EMA official Lyn Medinger said the incident was localized to the area around the cabins, as damage across the remainder of Jackson County was less significant.

Clinton County appeared to have sustained more overall damage, as parts of Calamus, Welton, DeWitt, Wheatland and Grand Mound were without power throughout the evening.

The tornado crossed Clinton County Friday at 6 p.m. and left a path of damage beginning near Grand Mound and ending northwest of Charlotte.

The National Weather Service (NWS) on Sunday determined the estimated EF-2 tornado was at its strongest — with winds of approximately 120 mph — when it plowed into Charlotte, uprooting trees and causing widespread damage across the town, necessitating the large volunteer clean-up effort. The NWS said the tornado traveled nearly 18 miles on the ground between Grand Mound and Charlotte. Its maximum width was estimated at 350 yards.

State issues disaster proclamation

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds issued a disaster proclamation for 12 counties in response to the March 31 severe weather. The governor's proclamation allows state resources to be utilized to respond to and recover from the effects of this severe weather in Cedar, Clinton, Delaware, Des Moines, Dubuque, Grundy, Johnson, Keokuk, Linn, Mahaska, Wapello, and Washington counties.

The proclamation activates the Iowa Individual Assistance Grant Program for qualifying residents, along with the Disaster Case Management Program. The program provides grants of up to \$5,000 for households with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Grants are available for home or car repairs, replacement of clothing or food, and temporary housing expenses. Original receipts are required for those seeking reimbursement for actual expenses related to storm recovery. The grant application and instructions are available on the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services website at dhs.iowa.gov/disaster-assistance-programs. Potential applicants have 45 days from the date of the proclamation to submit a claim.

Observer General Manager Wendy McCart, Editor Nick Joos, Staff Writer Nancy Mayfield and Bellevue Herald-Leader Editor Dave Namanny contributed to this report.

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OPINIONS AND COLUMNS

Students need real protections

Officials didn't protect students; proposed law should include police

Here at The Observer, we're glad the Iowa legislature is trying to strengthen the laws that require the prompt reporting of teachers who are suspected of wrongdoing.

Hopefully, House File 430 will help prevent the lack of reporting that allowed a former Central DeWitt teacher to remain in a classroom after authorities possessed evidence he had sexually exploited a student.

It's unclear to us what, exactly, state law requires of law enforcement officials and school leaders when they have reason to believe a teacher is behaving inappropriately with students. We'll leave that to legal experts to decide, but it's obvious changes in the law are needed.

What we are sure of is that multiple public officials failed their moral duty to report teacher Cody LaKose to the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners or his current employer as they should have.

Early last year, a former Central DeWitt High School student told DeWitt police she had been in a sexual relationship with LaKose when she was a student. According to court filings, she also provided police with cell phone evidence that LaKose had asked her for nude photographs.

Eventually, police sent a subpoena to



TREVIS MAYFIELD
Publisher

the Central DeWitt School District seeking LaKose's contact information, presumably to correlate it with the cell phone evidence the former student had provided police.

The police department, according to DeWitt Police Chief David Porter, never reported the investigation to state regulators. "That's not something we would normally do," Porter told The Observer.

The school district did not report it to anyone, either.

Dan Peterson, Central DeWitt's superintendent, told The Observer he didn't report LaKose to state regulators because he didn't know LaKose was under criminal investigation. But because police had sent a subpoena to the district months earlier seeking information about LaKose, it is hard to believe that is true.

It is obvious that neither of these public officials did everything they should have done. It is also obvious that neither one is

taking responsibility for it.

The lack of reporting resulted in LaKose being allowed to continue teaching at other schools after he left Central DeWitt, which also holds the distinction of having agreed to a separation agreement with LaKose in 2018 allowing him to leave the district quietly while still receiving his pay and benefits for the remainder of the school year.

Peterson has refused to say why LaKose left the district or if the school district was investigating him at the time.

After leaving DeWitt, LaKose taught in Cedar Rapids and at Iowa City Regina High School, where police arrested him last month.

LaKose is now facing accountability for his alleged actions. He stands accused of five charges, including two felonies.

But as far as we can tell, Porter and Peterson are facing no accountability for failing to report LaKose to state authorities, leaving LaKose licensed and teaching elsewhere in the state.

House File 430, which was introduced before the LaKose case came to public light, is a step in the right direction. It should not, however, focus exclusively on educators. The LaKose case shows exactly why law enforcement professionals should be included as obligatory reporters as well.

Given how much time Iowa legislators have spent during the current legislative session talking about ways to protect children from all sorts of things, we hope they will amend this proposed law to give students all the protections they deserve.

Observer's Mission Statement

Sycamore Media's fundamental goal is to help small communities understand themselves through fair, objective journalism. We believe that honest information is powerful, and we believe it is a vital ingredient in good decision-making and effective self-government.

We will strongly advocate for government transparency and accountability, fair play and an honest assessment of public issues. We also will endeavor to ensure that all individuals and reasonable ideas are given fair hearing. Beyond that, our work should help provide connective tissue for our communities, helping businesses succeed through marketing services and binding people together through shared experiences, accomplishments and celebrations.

With parents' rights, Iowa giveth and taketh away

The Iowa Legislature and Governor Kim Reynolds cannot seem to make up their minds whether they support parental rights or are against Mom and Dad being the decision-makers when it comes to their children's well-being.

Trying to analyze Republican officials' views on parental rights is challenging. Baseball's infield fly rule is simpler.

In 2021, the Republican majorities in the Iowa House and Iowa Senate passed legislation to prohibit schools from requiring students to wear facial masks in the classroom to fend off Covid. The governor quickly signed the new law, offering this explanation: "Iowa is putting parents back in control of their children's education and taking greater steps to protect the rights of all Iowans to make their own health care decisions."

Iowans who disagreed with the effects of the new law at least could understand its parental-rights premise. But last month, the Republican majorities in the Legislature and the governor made a sweeping U-turn on parental control of children's health care — at least when that care involves teens and pre-teens who identify as transgender.

The Legislature passed a controversial bill prohibiting health care professionals from giving medical treatment "for the purpose of attempting to alter the appearance of, or affirm the minor's perception of the minor's gender or sex, if that appearance or perception is inconsistent with the minor's sex [at birth]."

Doctors had been providing that care only in a small number of cases in Iowa and only then with the approval of parents. The LGBTQ clinic at University of Iowa Hospitals served 211 patients under age 18 last year, the Cedar Rapids Gazette reported.

Such treatments included medications called puberty blockers that have been used for 30 years in the United States. These slow the physical changes puberty causes in the human body. That gives children, their parents, and their health care professionals time to deal with the serious distress the



RANDY EVANS
Iowa Freedom of Information Council

child is experiencing because of a mismatch between their biological sex and the gender they identify with. Other treatments for minors have included hormone therapy and, only rarely, surgery.

But when the governor signed the gender health bill last month, she explained why parental permission was not an adequate reason for minors to receive these treatments.

"I have to do what I believe right now is in the best interest of the kids," she said. "It's not easy for our elected officials to make these decisions. We have to try to figure out what's the best for the majority of our kids."

Iowans can be forgiven if they have trouble understanding why it is not the parents who get to make those what's-best-for-the-kids decisions, in consultation with their child's health care providers.

We can forgive the Matt McIvers of Iowa who all are asking why their opinions count for nothing when it comes to medical care for their trans kids and why, instead, Kim Reynolds and Republican lawmakers have the superior intellect to make these decisions for kids.

McIver, a Des Moines dad, is the father of an 11-year-old transgender son. He told the online news site Iowa Starting Line the prohibition on gender-affirming health care for trans kids is "government overreach that inserts legislators in between parents and children."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Lawmakers taking too much control

Editor:

I am writing to express my concerns about the rise of authoritarianism in our society and its impact on our individual rights, particularly in areas such as parenting, education, and healthcare.

Authoritarianism is a political system that seeks to concentrate power in the hands of a few, often at the expense of individual freedom and civil liberties. It is characterized by a strong central government, limited political freedoms, and the suppression of dissent.

Unfortunately, we are seeing the effects of authoritarianism in various aspects of our society. For instance, our right to raise our children as we see fit is being challenged by government interference and regulation. Additionally, our school system is becoming increasingly privatized, which has led to the neglect of public schools and a lack of resources for students.

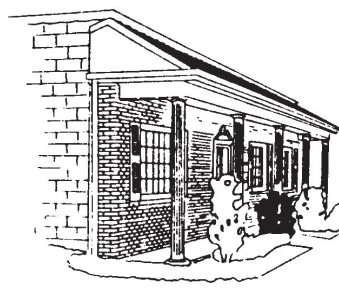
Moreover, the recent spate of school

shootings highlights the urgent need for comprehensive gun reform. The fact that assault guns are being used to kill students, regardless of whether they attend private or public schools, is a chilling reminder of the consequences of a lack of sensible gun legislation.

In addition, we are seeing an erasure of education around issues of race and sexuality, which undermines our ability to understand and respect other people's lives. This is particularly troubling as it perpetuates ignorance and perpetuates harmful stereotypes, leading to the perpetuation of discrimination and prejudice.

Finally, I am deeply concerned about the attack on a woman's right to choose regarding her reproductive health. It is deeply troubling that certain groups of people want to limit women's autonomy over their bodies and reproductive health. It is particularly worrying that people without medical or historical knowledge are making decisions that should be left to doctors, historians, and parents.

LETTERS | PAGE 5



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RECORDS FALL
Area track teams make most of warm weather
Section B



CITY WIDE GARAGE SALE
DeWitt's Citywide Garage sale is back with even more deals!
Page 8-9



The Observer

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District investigated LaKose before resignation

Board president, superintendent refuse to answer questions after Facebook post

By **NICK JOOS**
News Editor
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Central DeWitt School Board President Bob Gannon confirmed in an April 12 Facebook post that the district investigated Cody LaKose while he was employed as a teacher

in the district. Gannon, who pointed out he was not on the school board during the time of the investigation, did not disclose the reason for the probe, or the date it was opened. Gannon's post was the first public confirmation the district had

investigated LaKose, who was arrested March 21 while teaching at Iowa City Regina High School and charged with sexually exploiting a Central DeWitt high school student in 2017. For three weeks following LaKose's arrest, Central DeWitt Superintendent Dan Peterson had refused to publicly acknowledge the district had investigated LaKose. When LaKose resigned in

December 2018, the school district agreed in a separation agreement to continue paying LaKose's salary and benefits for the remainder of the school year. Peterson said district officials did not notify state regulators of LaKose's alleged misconduct, or that an investigation had taken place, because they "did not have any reason" to do so.



LAKOSE | PAGE 2 BOB GANNON

'P' is for PARADE

Local library hosts ABC Fashion Show Parade



The Observer photos by Kate Howes

'M' is for model: Five-year-old Emma Birney, of DeWitt, makes her runway debut during the ABC Fashion Show Parade at the DeWitt Community Library. Youngsters who participate in Preschool Storytime with children's librarian Miss Vicky decorated paper vests for the show, including their letter and objects that start with that letter. **(Top right) Vests made out of paper** were colored, decorated with each child's letter, and pictures of objects that begin with that letter were worn by the models. **(Bottom right) Five-year-old Sullivan Kedley**, of DeWitt, shows off her stylish paper vest featuring words beginning with the letter 'U'.

DeWitt traffic light timing adjusted

Changes include removal of left-turn lights at 4th Ave.

By **KATE HOWES**
Staff Writer
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DeWitt City Council members hope a proposal they approved at their meeting April 3 will help reduce the amount of time drivers have to sit at 11th Street traffic lights.

In August, after residents and city officials acknowledged the waiting time where 11th Street intersects with Maynard Way and East Fourth Avenue was problematic, the council held a special meeting to discuss how to increase efficiency at the two intersections.

Specifically, vehicles traveling east and

TRAFFIC | PAGE 10

Teachers earn grants totaling \$60,000

STAFF REPORT
news@dewittobserver.com

The Education Foundation of Central DeWitt awarded its teachers \$60,000 in grants this year.

Recipients were recognized at the Donor and Teacher Appreciation Breakfast April 13, catered by Family and Consumer Science Teacher, Alisa Sage, and her culinary students.

The grants help teachers enhance classroom learning and directly benefit Central DeWitt students in various ways. In the last 30 years, the foundation has provided

EDUCATORS | PAGE 3



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LAKOSE

Continued from page 1

Peterson has also said he didn't realize LaKose was being investigated despite DeWitt police having sent a subpoena to the district seeking information about LaKose last year.

Gannon's post did not say if police were involved in the district's investigation of LaKose in 2018, and he told The Observer he would not answer questions about what he wrote.

"Administration was made aware of rumors, an investigation was conducted including numerous interviews with staff, students and community members, and all steps taken at that time were under advisement of legal representation," Gannon wrote.

LaKose was arrested 13 months

after police opened a criminal investigation into his alleged crimes. LaKose is facing five sex-crime charges, including two felony counts of sexual exploitation. Police allege that in the spring of 2017, LaKose engaged in sex acts on Central DeWitt property with a 17-year-old student.

Gannon, who was elected to the Central DeWitt School Board in 2019 and currently serves as the body's president, said in his post that the Iowa Department of Education contacted the school after LaKose resigned in December 2018 but did not say why.

Peterson told the Observer April 14 he would not answer additional questions before consulting the school's legal counsel. Peterson then told

The Observer via email on Monday that he would not respond to The Observer's questions.

"This is all of the information that can be provided at this point in time," Peterson wrote. "We will provide and communicate additional information as appropriate."

LaKose's lawyer, Eric Tindall, has not responded to messages left with his office seeking comment.



CODY LAKOSE

Timeline of events

Spring 2017 – Cody LaKose engaged in sex acts on school property with a 17-year-old Central DeWitt student, according to court filings.

March 17, 2017 – LaKose allegedly sent the student this message: "I think a shower pic ... is in order."

Dec. 19, 2018 – Central DeWitt Superintendent Dan Peterson provided the school board with a separation agreement for LaKose that guaranteed the teacher's pay through the end of the school year. The agreement committed the district to providing LaKose with a letter of reference.

Dec. 21, 2018 – LaKose officially resigned from Central DeWitt.

January 2019 – LaKose was hired at Franklin Middle School in Cedar Rapids.

August 2020 – LaKose was hired at Iowa City Regina Catholic Education Center.

March 2, 2022 – A former Central DeWitt student reported to police that LaKose had performed sex acts with her in 2017, according to court filings. She provided police with cell phone evidence that shows LaKose had requested nude photographs, according to court filings.

March 21, 2022 – Police met with Peterson, who said police did not tell him an investigation about

LaKose was ongoing. "We were told nothing at that time," Peterson said. "(Police asked about) his past conduct and those kinds of things."

June 3, 2022 – LaKose sent the former student a photo of a penis via text message, according to court files.

October 2022 – DeWitt police subpoenaed LaKose's Central DeWitt personnel records.

Oct. 5, 2022 – DeWitt police contacted LaKose via his cell phone to schedule an interview. LaKose declined. Soon after that, LaKose allegedly texted the former student asking, "if she had said anything."

March 20, 2023 – Police issued an arrest warrant for LaKose.

March 21, 2023 – LaKose was arrested while teaching at Iowa City Regina and was charged with five crimes, including sexual exploitation of a minor.

March 22, 2023 – LaKose posted bond and was released from Clinton County Jail. The former student also filed a no-contact order against him.

April 5, 2023 – DeWitt Police Chief Dave Porter and Peterson told The Observer they did not report LaKose's alleged conduct — or the existence of a criminal investigation — to the state board that regulates the licensing of teachers.

April 28, 2023 – LaKose's arraignment is scheduled for 8:30 a.m. at the Clinton County Courthouse.

Message from Central DeWitt School Board President

Dear Saber Community,

There have been many questions regarding the handling of the employment and subsequent resignation of Mr. LaKose in 2018. I have taken these questions and concerns very seriously, both as a community member and as an elected official appointed to oversee the procedures and policies of our beloved Central DeWitt Community School District.

I was not a member of the school board during the timeframe in question, so I have thoroughly educated myself on the information available to the District in 2018. I have found that administration was made aware of rumors, an investigation was conducted including numerous interviews with staff, students and community members, and all steps taken at that time were under advisement of legal representation. In the process of my review, Dr. Peterson received an inquiry from the Iowa Department of

Education regarding the resignation of Mr. LaKose. In conjunction with our legal counsel the district fully and freely responded to these questions.

I know many have questions regarding why details are not more public in this situation or other matters that occur in our schools. As a public school, by law, not everything can be made public. For example, Iowa law requires the District to keep an employee's job performance and personal information confidential. Our administrative team's first priority is to ensure the safety of every student who pass through our doors. I trust them every day to make these decisions based on the facts they have at the time and guidance from education officials and legal counsel when warranted.


Additionally, an incredibly insensitive mistake was made in the initial email communication to our saber parents. The victim's name was not

redacted from the publicly available documents. This was not a violation of privacy laws but was recognized almost immediately and corrected in the following social media post. Both communications were made with intent to be transparent and forth coming with our community. It took incredible bravery and courage for her to come forward, and I am thankful that she has done so at this time. I sincerely regret that her name was not redacted from the documents we shared.

I have been elected to provide oversight of our District leaders for our community, which is a responsibility I take with forethought and compassion towards everyone involved. The District has and will continue to cooperate with the Iowa Department of Education and all other authorities.

Sincerely,
Bob Gannon, Central DeWitt CSD School Board President

COMMUNITY SHRED DAY



Saturday, May 13

8:30 - 11:30 a.m.

Bank Parking Lot

Declutter and protect yourself from identity theft by safely destroying unwanted, sensitive documents that have been accumulating all year.

Join us at the DeWitt Bank & Trust Co. Community Shred Day on May 13. We are proud to offer this service FREE of charge to the community. Community members will be allowed to bring up to three bags of paperwork to shred.

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CLINTON COUNTY DEMOCRATS
HALL OF FAME DINNER

Sunday, May 7, 2023, 5:00 PM

Clinton County Fairgrounds, 328 E 8th St, DeWitt

Featured speakers:

Zach Wahls, Iowa Senate Minority Leader
Jennifer Konfrst, Iowa House Minority Leader
Rita Hart, Iowa Democratic Party Chair

Join us for a buffet dinner, pie auction and recognition of our
2023 Hall of Fame inductees:

Mary Wolfe, Former Iowa State Representative
Rick Lincoln, Former Clinton County Sheriff

Admission is \$40

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Kindly RSVP by April 30

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