

QUEENS OF THE COURT

Check out the members of the 2022-23 All-REVIEW Girls Basketball Team — a winning hand for sure. See SPORTS Section C

REVIEW

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U.S. Rep. Randy Feenstra (R-Hull) speaks Wednesday morning at Alpha Ag Research near Sanborn. The Feenstra Agriculture Tour is a slate of constituent visits the congressman is making throughout his district in preparation for the 2023 Farm Bill. Photo by Elijah Helton

Dairy, packers, SNAP at forum

Feenstra talks about his priorities for Farm Bill

BY ELIJAH HELTON
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SANBORN—U.S. Rep. Randy Feenstra kept plowing along with his Feenstra Agriculture Tour, speaking with constituents during a Wednesday stop in rural O'Brien County.

The tour is a prelude to the Farm Bill, which will start making its way through Congress in the summer. The legislation is reauthorized every five years as the catalyst of federal ag policy.

"We want to have listening sessions, and that's what we have today," Feenstra said. "What do we want to see in the Farm Bill? What can we put in the Farm Bill that would make a difference in western Iowa?"

The Republican from Hull was visiting Alpha Ag Research. The company contracts with growers to test crops and technology at its facility southeast of Sanborn.

Director Corey Rozenboom introduced the congressman.

"Where we're at here in Sanborn is ground zero for agriculture, corn and soybeans," Rozenboom said.

The company was founded in 2011. Rozenboom said ventures like his are essential to the long-term future of the area's ag-based economy.

"My bid is that we can support businesses in O'Brien County and northwest Iowa with robust, good-paying jobs," Rozenboom said.

A couple dozen people attended the event.

Kevin Knapp is a board member of AMPI, a massive cheese co-op with a plant in Sanborn. He asked Feenstra about dairy margin coverage.

See AG TOUR on page A5

PART 1 OF A TWO-PART SERIES

SUBSTITUTE SHORTAGE

BY ALEISA SCHAT
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Substitute teacher Rosalyn De Koster chats with Emma Van Middendorp during a graphic design class at Boyden-Hull High School in Hull. De Koster, who is ordained as a minister, signed up to sub to meet a need. Photo by Aleisa Schat

REGIONAL—Rosalyn De Koster didn't go to school to be a teacher — she's a minister, ordained in the Reformed Church of America. However, the 38-year-old Hull resident began filling in as a regular substitute teacher in the Boyden-Hull School District earlier this year.

Unlike many others filling substitute teacher rosters across the region, De Koster is not a

former or retired teacher. She completed the steps to receive her substitute teacher authorization after a podcast she follows made her aware of the growing national need for more substitute teachers.

"I listen to Pantsuit Politics, and they talked about how they both became substitute teachers because of the teacher shortage," De Koster said.

Pantsuit Politics features con-

versations between two female friends who represent opposite sides of the political spectrum.

De Koster, who has two young children, is the director of musical arts and high school formation at American Reformed Church in Orange City, but her position is part time, and it

See SUBS on A9



SCHOOLS IN NEED OF MORE FILL-INS FOR TEACHERS, AIDES



Sioux County Board of Conservation director Rob Kloocke describes, as county supervisor Carl Vander Weerd listens on March 7 in Orange City, the land being purchased to expand Oak Grove Park north of Hawarden. Photo by Eric Sandbulte

Elevator need lifted up at Lyon board meeting

Supervisors set aside \$150K for accessibility

BY ELIJAH HELTON
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ROCK RAPIDS—The Lyon County Courthouse is taking it to the next level.

The elevator in the three-story

Rock Rapids building has had problems for years, even getting temporarily stuck on multiple occasions, after being installed in the 1980s.

"Sometimes it just doesn't work," said county auditor Jen Smit.

The board of supervisors decided to earmark \$150,000 for a

See LYON on page A5

OTHER BUSINESS:

The Lyon County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday also:

■ Approved the annual contract with Lyon County Ambulance to attend races at Rapid Speedway in Rock Rapids. The department will receive \$333,92 per event. The season opener is scheduled for May 5.

■ Kept salary increases to 7.1 percent for the upcoming fiscal year. The board heard requests for larger increases from some employees in the engineer's and attorney's offices. After lengthy discussion, supervisors retained the 7.1 percent raises, the same rate they decided in December.

Land purchase to expand Oak Grove

County providing funding from ARP

BY ERIC SANDBULTE
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ORANGE CITY—Oak Grove Park north of Hawarden will expand due to a land purchase in the works by Sioux County Conservation.

The organization will ac-

quire 54.3 acres of neighboring land to its north for \$440,000, although the closing date is not yet certain.

Those acres were part of the farm at 4003 Cherry Ave.

The farm, which is located on the eastern edge of Oak Grove, belonged to LeSharon "Kay" Osterkamp, who died at the

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WEEKEND WEATHER:

SATURDAY	SUNDAY
HIGH: 18	HIGH: 37
LOW: 4	LOW: 24
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For more information, please visit: siouxcenterhealth.org



Monday, March 27 | 12:00 pm
"Legacy Lives On" | What Happens When

Thursday, March 30 | 12:00 pm
"Understanding the Next Phase" | Medicare/Medicaid

Thursday, March 30 | 6:00 pm
"Understanding the Next Phase" | Medicare/Medicaid

Monday, April 3 | 6:00 pm
"Are you Ready for the Next Phase"
Estate Planning - Will, Trusts, Endowments

NEWS



Troy Lentell, principal at Kinsey Elementary in Sioux Center, takes questions from students in Jennifer Traver's third-grade classroom. Increasingly, Lentell is called upon to cover for teachers due to a shortage of substitute teachers in the area. Photo by Aleisa Schat

Schools searching for substitutes

SUBS

Continued from page A1 leaves her with a handful of open days each week.

"I knew about the shortage, and now that my younger child is in preschool, I have a little more time, and I just thought, 'I have time — why don't I do something to help?'" De Koster said.

She is not alone in becoming a substitute teacher as an act of public service.

Even within her own family, her spouse, Phillip De Koster, a church choir director and Hull attorney, got his substitute teacher authorization so he could fill in as the Boyden-Hull High School band instructor during last year's fall semester.

"They were without an instrumental band director, and there are four people they kind of pieced together to fill the role," Rosalyn De Koster said. "It was just first period, so Phillip called them up and said, 'I can do that for a semester.'"

Across the country, others are stepping in to address the shortage, including some unlikely candidates.

New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham became a substitute teacher to address acute staffing shortages in the state's schools, and she encouraged members of the New Mexico National Guard and other state employees to do the same.

At the beginning of last year, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt signed an executive order allowing state employees to work as substitute teachers for the remainder of the school year, and around the same time, North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper permitted state employees to take paid leave while covering for teachers in school classrooms.

De Koster said she was partly inspired to do her part because of the challenging climate for Iowa public school teachers, who have not only weathered the stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic but also have endured efforts by some Iowa lawmakers to undermine the public's trust in teachers.

"There's story after story of teachers getting burned out and not wanting to return, and there's all of this legislation that

is trying to restrict how teachers teach," she said. "It's all done by people who don't even really understand what teaching involves or entails — but they're trying to legislate it."

N'West Iowa need

School staffing shortages register unevenly across the country, and while many affluent and suburban school districts do not suffer, many others, including rural districts and districts with a high proportion of students of color, do.

In N'West Iowa, a broad survey of administrators conducted by The REVIEW reveals the substitute teaching crunch is real.

The shortage — exacerbated by the growing nationwide teacher shortage — affects the region's districts to different degrees.

Some struggle to find coverage for classrooms only occasionally, while others are engaged in a weekly effort to piece things together, often relying on teachers from other classrooms and administrators to fill in the gaps.

Troy Lentell has been the principal of Kinsey Elementary in Sioux Center for a decade, but in the last several years, he has found himself in front of a classroom, filling the shoes for his teachers.

"Getting subs has never been a super easy part of this role," Lentell said.

For most of the years he has been in his position, the school has had a healthy pool of substitutes to draw from, including retired teachers, new teachers on the job market still looking for full-time positions and an assortment of other community members who work part-time or have flexible schedules that allow for occasional substitute teaching.

The scramble to cover classrooms has accelerated in the years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lentell said.

"Within the last three years, I would say there's been a significant shortage of substitutes just across the board," he said.

In many N'West Iowa schools, staffing shortages extend to school workers of all kinds, and along with teach-

ers, substitutes are needed to fill in for missing food-service employees and bus drivers, which are in increasingly short supply in N'West Iowa.

Teacher's aides, called paraprofessionals, are also in high demand, and many N'West Iowa administrators said filling paraprofessional roles — whether permanently or temporarily — is one of the biggest challenges they face.

Even in a district that otherwise has abundant available substitute teachers, Central Lyon High School principal Jason Engleman said finding substitutes to fill in for absent paraprofessionals is an ongoing challenge at his facility in Rock Rapids.

"For the most part we've been pretty fortunate — we have probably a lengthier list than most districts our size — but we really struggle with paraprofessional support," Engleman said. "And they're just as necessary as the teaching staff, working with those students who have entitled services."

Substitute paraprofessionals are paid a lower daily rate than substitute teachers, and they must meet fewer minimum requirements to become eligible to sub.

Relaxed requirements

To combat the substitute teaching shortage in Iowa, which reached crisis level early during the COVID-19 pandemic, Gov. Kim Reynolds signed an emergency declaration in 2020 that temporarily relaxed several requirements for obtaining a substitute authorization.

An authorization differs from the substitute license, which only can be obtained by those who hold, or are eligible to hold, an Iowa teaching license.

Most of Reynolds' changes were made permanent in 2021, and to become authorized as a substitute teacher in Iowa, it is no longer required to have a bachelor's degree of any kind.

Instead, candidates must have an associate degree of any kind or 60 semester hours of college coursework from a regionally accredited institution.

Along with relaxed require-

ments, the process of obtaining a substitute teaching authorization also has become easier, and instead of attending classes in person, candidates for authorization can choose from among several online course options that are flexible and self-paced.

"That has helped, but it's still just a challenge to keep those positions filled," Lentell said.

He used to be called in to cover in classrooms for short periods three or four days a month; these days, it happens much more frequently, and sometimes he covers for a teacher for the entire school day.

"I've always said, 'I don't mind going in and covering a classroom every now and then — it's kind of fun staying grounded with the kids, and it just reminds me of what it's like to be in the classroom,'" the Kinsey Elementary principal. "But when it becomes three out of five days of a week, that does begin to impact what I'm doing — it begins to impact the culture of the building."

When issues come up, it is difficult for Lentell to put on his administrative cap and address them before they escalate, causing further problems. Other area administrators have found themselves in Lentell's shoes as well.

"I used to joke that the sub shortage can't be that bad because they haven't asked me to cover a class," said Sibley-Ocheyedan superintendent James Craig. "Just this week, I've subbed twice, and just this week, I said, 'OK, so it really must be bad now.'"

Other districts, too, are doing their best to address shrinking sub pools. Sheldon Middle School principal Cindy Barwick does not typically have to cover for missing teachers herself, but her district is weathering the effects of the shortage.

"We definitely feel the crunch," Barwick said.

Often, she said, teachers in co-teaching roles or members of the support staff are pulled in to cover for absent teachers; other times, teachers cover classrooms during their prep periods.

"We get pretty creative some days," Barwick said.

SUB SNAPSHOTS:

ROSALYN DE KOSTER

Subbing for: Boyden-Hull School District

Time subbing: One month

Age: 38

Residence: Hull

Among other online influences, Rosalyn De Koster was inspired to become a substitute teacher by a popular Instagrammer Sharon McMahon, a former government teacher from Minnesota who used online platforms to combat the spread of disinformation during the pandemic. Many of her posts on @sharonsaysso went viral.

"She's really passionate about teachers, and I started following her," De Koster said. "This summer, she spent a lot of time talking about how there's a teacher shortage."

De Koster, who works part-time as the director of musical arts and high school formation at American Reformed Church in Orange City, wanted to do her part to help, so she took a self-paced online course and earned her substitute teacher authorization. Earlier this year, she put her name on the sub list for the three public schools in the Boyden-Hull School District.

De Koster also started subbing to forge more connections in the community of Hull, where she lives with her husband and two young children.

"I've been having a hard time getting to know people in Hull since I work in Orange City, and we go to church in Orange City, so I thought this might also be a way for me to maybe get to know more people," De Koster said.



CAL HOEKEMA

Subbing for: Kinsey Elementary and Intermediate School in Sioux Center

Time subbing: Eight years

Age: 70

Residence: Sioux Center

When Cal Hoekema retired from decades of teaching, he put his name on the sub rosters for the middle and high schools in the Sioux Center School District.

The veteran high school English teacher, who taught for many years at Western Christian High School in Hull, had no interest in teaching at the elementary level.

"All my paperwork said high school and maybe junior high, but they were apparently so desperate, they called to see if I would sub in the elementary school," Hoekema said. "I thought, 'Well, I'll give it a whirl,' and I really enjoyed it."

This year, at the age of 70, Hoekema decided to limit himself to three days a week — four at most — if the school is desperate.

"Before that, I probably could have done it just about full time," he said.

He continues to fill in for missing educators because he appreciates the culture at the school — teachers have welcomed him with open arms — and the work is meaningful.

"I like to watch kids learn — that's a joy," he said.



JAN MEESTER

Subbing for: Kinsey Central Lyon Middle and High School in Rock Rapids

Time subbing: Nine years

Age: 69

Residence: Rock Rapids

Some mornings, retired teachers Jan and Randy Meester wake early, get dressed in professional attire and head across the street to Central Lyon High School or Middle School, where they spend the day substitute teaching.

"Yeah, just like old times," Jan said.

The couple have lived on Story Street in Rock Rapids for years, and Jan, who subs much more frequently than her husband, makes the quick commute a handful of days each week, sometimes even five days in a row.

"If they have a last-minute need, I'm pretty quick — I can show up pretty fast," she said.

When she retired from education in 2014, she worked part time for a few months at Grand Falls Casino & Golf Resort in Larchwood.

"I realized my talents were better served in the classroom," she said.

She taught high school English and Spanish classes for 35 years.

"I really enjoy teaching, and I guess it just keeps me in touch with my friends who are still teaching," Meester said. "We have a great student body, so I didn't have any reservations."

She said she sticks to subbing in the middle and high school, although she once subbed in the elementary when the secretary, a friend, called in a favor.

"I've said elementary subs are the real rock stars in this because you can't just say, 'Take out a book and read or write,' she said. "It's all hands on deck, every minute."



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