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Sioux City Journal

Founded in 1864

Friday, August 4, 2023

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SIoux CITY LEWIS AND CLARK INTERPRETIVE CENTER

THE NEXT STAGE



TIM HYNDS, SIOUX CITY JOURNAL

Tracy Bennett, Executive Director of the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center and Betty Strong Encounter Center, stands at the recently constructed Spirit of Discovery Stage July 27, 2023. Bennett had long wanted an outdoor performance space at the centers.

Interpretive Center adding projects

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SIOUX CITY — The Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center's outdoor "Spirit of Discovery" stage may still be a work in progress, but it has already seen performances from folk musicians from Sweden as well as local singers offering a musical medley of Frank Sinatra tunes.

"This summer, we wanted to have a soft opening for our outdoor stage," executive director Tracy Bennett said of the performance space which opened in June. "We've booked a handful of shows that were well-attended, and we'll have even more shows next summer."

The 900 Larsen Park Road center began raising funds for the project months ago. So far, the Gilchrist Foundation and CF Industries have made monetary contributions for the construction of the stage and the purchase of a sound system.

"We still have a ways to go with our fundraising," Bennett explained. "We have to be able to run electricity to the stage, build overhead sails to protect it from the elements, and plant flowers to give the space a punch of color."

New projects, new challenges

The Spirit of Discovery stage is just one of several projects that the cultural complex has lined up.

A large outdoor sign with LED capabilities will soon be installed, and a new, long-term exhibit is currently in the works.

If you go

WHAT: The Sioux City Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center and the Betty Strong Encounter Center

WHERE: 900 Larsen Park Road

ADMISSION: Free

ONLINE: siouxcitylclc.com

"We are driven by three imperatives," Bennett said. "Those are to continue to bring new opportunities for guests to learn and be entertained, to do so for free, and to keep the center well-maintained and welcoming."

She also wants the center to carve out its own identity.

"People have a misconception that we're a museum and that we're just Lewis and Clark all of the time," Bennett said. "We're much more than that."

Much more than just Lewis and Clark

Opened to fanfare in 2002, the Sioux City Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center celebrated Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark's time in Siouxland and the (2006) bicentennial of the Corps

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PHOTO COURTESY OF LEWIS AND CLARK INTERPRETIVE CENTER

Greg Gregerson sings in the musical review "My Way," the first production offered on the Spirit of Discovery Stage on June 16, 2023.

State panel proceeds with ethics complaint

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DES MOINES — The Iowa Board of Educational Examiners on Wednesday found probable cause to proceed with an ethics complaint the Sioux City School Board filed against former superintendent Paul Gausman.

During its monthly meeting, the BOEE met in closed session to review an investigative report into the complaint, which alleges Gausman attempted to bribe two newly-elected school board members to pick a board president the then-superintendent preferred.



Gausman

The board then reconvened in open session and voted to set a hearing in the case. The panel had the option of moving forward with a hearing or dismissing the complaint.



Greenwell

At this point, the case will either go before an administrative law judge for a hearing, or a settlement could be reached, according to a flowchart on the BOEE website.

"The District believes the matters outlined in the complaint 22-190 are substantive and serious," said Sioux City school board president Dan Greenwell.

Greenwell filed the complaint in December 2022, with backing from the majority of the seven-member board. The filing came nearly six months after Gausman left the Sioux City district to become superintendent of Lincoln Public Schools.

The complaint claims that Gausman approached newly-elected board members Bob Michaelson and Jan George on Nov. 17, 2021, five days before they took

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North student testifies in ex-coach's trial

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SIOUX CITY — For two months, a female Sioux City North High School student's meetings with Abdier Marrero often included him touching her buttocks as she entered and exited his guidance office and continued after she told him she didn't like it.

Once he began asking her to meet him daily, sometimes more than once a day, including in his office after school, the student reported his actions to an adult at the school.

"I wasn't comfortable in that situation anymore, and I needed to tell an adult. This was really crossing a boundary," the girl testified Thursday, the second day of Marrero's trial. "I knew what happened to me was wrong. I didn't want something bad to happen to me."



Marrero

Marrero, 41, a former North High cross country and track coach and guidance counselor, is charged in Woodbury County District Court with one count of sexual exploitation by a school employee. He resigned in December 2021 after girls on the cross country team reported to school officials he had slapped many of them on the butt and made comments to them about their bodies from 2018 through 2021. He was arrested in July 2022 and has pleaded

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Projects

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of Discovery.

The Lewis & Clark Center — as well as the adjoining Betty Strong Encounter Center that was built in 2007 — is a private, nonprofit cultural complex that is sustained by Missouri River Historical Development Inc. (MRHD).

This makes fundraising tricky, according to developmental director Lori Snow.

“Because we have Sioux City in our title, people think we’re funded by the city,” she said. “Instead, we’re reliant on the Siouxland community to keep us going.”

Utilizing the corps of discovery in creative ways

While the cross-country expedition of Lewis and Clark continues to inspire broad and varied themes for the facilities’ programs and exhibits, the center uses that history as a creative jumping off point.

For instance, the popular summertime “Exploration Wednesday” program allows kindergarten to third grade students and fourth to sixth grade students to learn about history as well as participate in an arts and craft project.

The ongoing Sunday afternoons are often dedicated to a wide variety of musical performances, which may include a jam



PHOTO COURTESY OF LEWIS AND CLARK INTERPRETIVE CENTER

Queen Loaf from left, Chandler Todd, Cory Birch, and Noah Towns, perform during a RAGBRAI concert on the Spirit of Discovery stage at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center.

session with the father-and-son duo of Jack and Mike Langley and prestidigitation from “Magic Man” Corey Fravel.

Or it might be a scholarly presentation of a historical figure like Eleanor Roosevelt or a destination like the Loess Hills.

A diversified slate of programming

“We tend to attract very young kids or older people,” Kim Mathers, the center’s communications director, said. “Now, we need to focus on attracting more

of the people in between.”

Which is why the “Spirit of Discovery” had “Queen Loaf,” a Dueling Piano program of contemporary songs by musicians Noah Towns and Chandler Todd when tens of thousands of cyclists came to Sioux City for the start of RAGBRAI on July 22.

“The riverfront had tons of people who checked out the Interpretive Center and stuck around for ‘Queen Loaf,’” Bennett said.

Indeed, she said the center remains a popular destination for out-of-towners wanting some-

thing unique to do in Sioux City.

“We regularly attract people from all across the country,” Bennett explained. “They may have seen us while driving on the Interstate or they may have stopped to look at the Missouri River. But visitors look around the center and like what they see.”

Actually, Mathers said she’d liked to see more “locals” at the center.

Attracting more ‘locals’ to the center

“Every day, I’ll hear people say

they live in Sioux City and never knew the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center existed,” she said, shaking her head. “We may not have a big advertising budget, but we’ve been around for a long time.”

“It’s that perception problem again,” Snow said with a smile. “People think we’re going to strap them in a chair and talk nothing but history to them.”

In fact, Bennett is looking forward to the annual Sergeant Floyd Memorial Encampment, when fully-uniformed reenactors recreate the burial of Sgt. Charles Floyd, the only member of the Corps of Discovery to die during the journey.

The reenactment is one of several Lewis and Clark activities to take place on Aug. 19 and 20 at the Sergeant Floyd Monument, the Sioux City Public Museum, and the Sergeant Floyd River Museum and Welcome Center.

The Encampment Weekend also draws big crowds to the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center.

“On Sgt. Floyd Weekend, we always get a good response,” Bennett said. “Not only will we have a food truck serving barbecue but we’ll have what may be the final ‘Spirit of Discovery’ concert of the season.”

“We have the Irish Shamrock Band slated to perform on our new stage at 6 p.m. Aug. 18,” she continued. “Bring a lawn chair and enjoy some barbecue as well as foot-stomping music at the same time.”

Ethics

From A1

office, and asked what it would take for them to support Perla Alarcon-Flory’s bid for re-election as board president.

“Dr. Gausman directly offered to allow Mr. Michaelson and Mr. George to make any of their desired changes in school operations, programs, activities, and other matters in exchange for their vote for Ms. Alarcon-Flory as president of the board,” Greenwell said in the letter to the Board of Educational Examiners.

Greenwell’s letter claims the conversation took place at a public place in Des Moines with Alarcon-Flory present. Michaelson and George objected to Gausman’s offer multiple times, according to the complaint.

“Ms. Alarcon-Flory remained silent regarding the bribery offer during the discussions at the table,” Greenwell said in the letter.

The complaint alleges Gausman admitted to the post-election conversation at a meeting on Jan. 27, 2022, with Greenwell and Taylor Goodvin present, as well as in a separate discussion with then-board vice president Monique Scarlett.

In the complaint, Greenwell also contends Gausman disclosed information from a confidential closed-door board meeting to some district staff. Greenwell alleges Alarcon-Flory passed on the information to Gausman, who then shared it with cabinet members. Gausman allegedly admitted to Greenwell and Goodvin that he shared the information and the cabinet members also confirmed they received the information, according to the complaint.

Alarcon-Flory recently resigned from the board to relocate to Arkansas with her family.

The BOEE is a professional practices panel and establishes and oversees the licensing process

for educators at the state’s accredited schools. Sergeant Bluff-Luton schools superintendent Chad Janzen chairs the eight-member board, which is appointed by the governor and subject to Iowa Senate confirmation.

Because BOEE complaints are not considered public records under state law, they are only identified by case numbers during the board’s open sessions. But a related lawsuit Gausman filed against the school district and four board members listed the complaint number, allowing The Journal to track the case through the BOEE’s proceedings.

“The BOEE performed a detailed investigation of items contained in the complaint. They found probable cause exists that violations as stated in the complaint have occurred and set the case for a hearing,” Greenwell said. “The District will continue to cooperate with the BOEE as this matter moves forward.”

At an April 21 meeting, the

BOEE denied Gausman’s motion to dismiss the complaint, sending the report instead to a state investigator. The BOEE also directed the investigator to gather more information and return the case to the board before Wednesday’s meeting.

Greenwell, a frequent critic of Gausman before and after Greenwell was first elected to the board in 2019, previously filed an identical ethics complaint on Aug. 1, 2022 with the same claims in a similarly worded letter, without board support. The BOEE requires complaints to be from the district, and the one filed in August was not approved by the school board. Gausman requested Greenwell’s complaint be dismissed due to lack of jurisdiction, but Greenwell had withdrawn his complaint prior to any ruling.

In his lawsuit against the school district and four board members personally — Greenwell, George, Goodvin and Michaelson — Gausman alleges the board held illegal

closed-door meetings citing the wrong Iowa code sections in order to avoid notifying Gausman or the public of their discussion of him and the following board decision to file a complaint against him with the Iowa BOEE.

The suit claims on Jan. 24, 2022, March 28, 2022 and Nov. 30, 2022, the board held special meetings and closed sessions to discuss Gausman and his professional qualifications.

The school district has countered that it followed proper procedures in conducting the meetings, citing a section of the state code that allows closed sessions to “evaluate the professional competency of an individual whose appointment, hiring, performance or discharge is being considered when necessary to prevent needless and irreparable injury to that individual’s reputation.”

Gausman led the Sioux City district for 14 years before starting his current job at Lincoln public schools on July 1, 2022.

Coach

From A1

not guilty.

Four of his former runners, all of whom have since graduated from high school, testified Wednesday Marrero had slapped them on the butt, commented on their body, or both, and his behavior had become so ordinary, it was accepted as part of the team’s culture.

“It felt very normalized on the team, kind of a don’t say anything culture on the team,” the girl who would later inform a fellow coach about Marrero’s actions said Thursday.

The girl said Marrero slapped her butt at least two dozen times at practice during her sophomore season. But when he called her to his office, she said, after closing

the door, he would touch her differently, grabbing her rather than slapping her “almost every time I went in.” Some of the meetings ended with a hug in which he would reach down and grab her butt, the girl said.

“I knew it was definitely unusual, and I tried to rationalize it,” she said. “I voiced that I didn’t enjoy the physical contact in general.”

The touching persisted, she said, and Marrero often called himself her future husband, a running joke between them in reference to the girl once telling him she wanted to be a doctor with a stay at home husband. She testified she sensed the joking took a sexual turn when he told her “wait until the wedding night” and “once you’re 18.”

“There was definitely weird undertones to it,” said the girl, the

second to testify Thursday.

She and another cross country team member who testified before her said Marrero had suggested the girls cross country team get new uniforms with bikini-style shorts similar to those female athletes wear in college and the Olympics and much smaller than what most high school teams wear.

“You girls would look good wearing these,” Marrero told them, the first girl said.

Both girls said that during conversations with Marrero, he would look at their breasts rather than look them in the eye. Marrero told the second girl another runner was slower one season “because she came back with a huge rack,” referring to her breasts’ growth from the previous season.

“I think it showed how much he was really observing us,” the

girl said.

The Journal is not identifying the girls by name, though they are being addressed by name in court.

Marrero’s attorney, Patrick Parry challenged statements made by both girls, pointing out differences between their testimony to statements made during their depositions in December.

During her deposition, the second girl never defined Marrero’s actions in his office as grabbing, only slapping. She said in her deposition that on only one occasion did Marrero touch her butt while hugging her. She testified Thursday it happened 15-20 times. The girl told Parry the deposition was an intimidating situation and had flustered her.

As he had with previous witnesses, Parry challenged her use

of the word “normalized,” a term each girl has used to describe Marrero’s behavior with the girls team. When she reported Marrero to school officials, the girl provided the names of other girls. She denied telling them what to say or what words to use.

“They’ve probably heard me use it,” she said.

She, like the others who testified, said Marrero never made explicitly sexual comments to her or tried to kiss her.

“Was it ever clear that he was trying to date you, put the moves on you, anything like that?” Parry asked her.

“No,” she said.

The trial is scheduled to resume Friday and could be submitted to the jury in the afternoon. If found guilty, Marrero could face up to five years in prison.

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PUBLISHER

Lee Enterprises

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The Sioux City Journal is a Lee Enterprises Newspaper and is published daily. Effective June 19, 2023, it will be published online daily, and three days per week in print (Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays). USPS: 4007408. Postmaster send address changes to 2802 Castles Gate Drive, Sioux City, Iowa 51106. Periodical postage paid at Sioux City.

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