

Records

Worth Mentioning

Send your event to news@pcmexplorer.com

PCM Food Pantry

The PCM Food Pantry at the Monroe Presbyterian Church, 113 S. Main St. in Monroe, is open 9 a.m. to noon and 6 to 7 p.m. Mondays and 9 a.m. to noon Thursdays.

TOPS

TOPS 1025 meets at 5:30 p.m. every Monday at the First Reformed Church in Prairie City for weigh-in, with meeting to follow. Go to the north side parking lot at the church and enter in the north door. Call 515-994-2200 for information.

Men's Recovery meeting

Lighthouse Recovery Ministries hosts a Men's Recovery meeting at 6:30 p.m. each Monday at Grace Alive Church, 703 W. Second St. in Prairie City. Contact Barb at b.miller@lighthouse-recovery.com with questions.

PCM Clothing Closet

The PCM Clothing Closet, on the second floor of the Family Life Center at 105 S. Sherman St. in Prairie City, will be open from 3:30 to 7 p.m. every Tuesday and Thursday and 2 to 4 p.m. Sundays. Message volunteers through the PCM Clothing Closet Facebook page to schedule a time for donations.

Alzheimers and Dementia Support Group

The Prairie City First Reformed Church hosts an Alzheimer's and Dementia Support Group that meets at 3 p.m. the third Tuesday of the month at the Prairie City First Reformed Church. This support group is for family members and caregivers of those living with Alzheimer's and other dementias.

American Legion Auxiliary meets

The Monroe American Legion Auxiliary meet at 6:30 p.m. the third Tuesday of the month at the Legion.

Women's Recovery meeting

Lighthouse Recovery Ministries has a Women's Recovery meeting at 6 p.m. each Wednesday at the Grace Alive Powerhouse, 701 W. Second St. in Prairie City. Contact Barb at b.miller@lighthouse-recovery.com with questions.

Good News Club

Good News Club will meet from 3:30 to 5 p.m. Feb. 20 in the Monroe Elementary School media room.

February is National Financial Aid Awareness Month

DMACC launches new campaign to encourage greater FAFSA completion

February is National Financial Aid Awareness month across America and to highlight this proclamation, DMACC has launched a new campaign to encourage all prospective college and university students to fill out their Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA).

In Central Iowa only about half of high school students and their parents annually complete the FAFSA form.

"February is the perfect time for us to remind families of FAFSA's importance," Jerry McKeen, Director of Financial Aid at DMACC, said. "I hope that all colleges and universities in Iowa will see more incoming applicants file this important document."

The DMACC campaign will include outreach to high schools, digital advertising, new signage, marketing materials, radio and the new tagline, "Don't Hibernate, You'll Be Late, File Your FAFSA!" (DMACC's mascot is a bear).

Administered by the U.S. Department of Education, FAFSA is a form that asks some personal and income-related questions. Its purpose is to assess a person or family's financial need. FAFSA is a financial aid application, but it is often used in the scholarship selection process as well.



"FAFSA is free, it doesn't take much time to fill out and it serves as an on-ramp to be eligible for financial aid, scholarships, grants and loans. Besides applying to college, this is the most important task a prospective student and their families should do," McKeen said.

At DMACC, some financial aid, such as the Iowa Last Dollar Scholarship, have no income guidelines, but still require FAFSA. Each year, DMACC students receive scholarships and grants totaling more than \$20 million. During the last school year more than 13,000 DMACC students received financial assistance.

The average cost of a college education across the US has risen 25 percent over the past decade.

Receiving financial aid can ease the cost of a higher education.

"Unfortunately, many prospective students and families don't complete their FAFSA," McKeen said. "Perhaps it's an awareness issue or they think they won't qualify for grants or scholarships, but either way, it's worth the time to complete this form. We hope DMACC's awareness campaign will let people know that FAFSA is a valuable financial aid tool."

The FAFSA deadline for DMACC students enrolling in the fall semester is July 1, but McKeen recommends filling out FAFSA as early as possible. Some aid programs have much earlier deadlines such as the All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship, which has a March 1 deadline each year.

Iowa statehouse visit



Rep. Jon Dunwell (R-Newton) recently welcomed students from Newton, Diamond Trail and Lynville-Sully FFA chapters to the Iowa House. Submitted Photo

Farming

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that point. They got so cheap that people were just giving pigs away because there was no market."

Larger agricultural companies were leaving the little guys high and dry by flooding the market with pigs, significantly devaluing the livestock. While it didn't mean much for those big businesses, the drop in price forced family farmers into an ultimatum. Either they invest in capital and upgrade their facilities to match higher volumes of pigs or close shop.

"If you had 100 sows, you couldn't afford that," he said. "It wouldn't take you very long to run out of money. So people had to get out, people who were lifelong pork producers. A lot of them did what we did. You gotta change with the times, but we kicked it around for several years whether we were going to become custom feeders and build barns. We talked about it on three different occasions."

Eventually the Nearmyer and his brother realized if they did not adapt, they knew would get too old to do the work. They relented and built two hog buildings to start out. Each building can hold up to 1,500 hogs. It was one of the

best things they ever did, he remarked. Hog farming, which at first seemed like a volatile investment, now provides the brothers with a steady income.

"It's work," he said. "But we're used to work." "I don't think there's easy farm work out there, is there?" I asked.

"Ha! Haven't found it yet."

Nearmyer has been a farmer for most of his life. Like many Iowans, it's a job that runs in the family. At one point he "left" the profession — as much as a once-a-farmer-always-a-farmer can — for a job at Principal Financial Group in Des Moines, where he worked for about eight years. He would eventually find himself back in the fields full time, tending to corn, soybeans, hay, cows and pigs.

"Hog farming brought me back from working in Des Moines and allowed my brother to come back from working on my cousin's farm full-time to working back here part-time," Nearmyer said. "I enjoyed my time at Principal ... My life's changed more than once. Because I originally thought that I would farm forever. Then I thought I would work in Des Moines forever. Ended up coming back to farming."

Each aspect of Nearmyer's farm benefits the other in a continu-

ous cycle. The manure produced by the hogs and cows go directly to the fields, working as a natural fertilizer. In turn, some of the harvested grain goes back to the hogs or cows for feeding. It's a good system, Nearmyer said, and it keeps fertilizer costs down, which is a godsend at this time. Costs just continue to increase.

"They're going up for everybody, but especially your grain farmers. Fuel and fertilizer and the herbicides and the seeds. Everything is just going up," he said.

With 740 acres of fields and pasture to tend to, costs can add up pretty quick. It is Nearmyer's and his brother's job to raise the pigs until it comes time to transport them to market, where they are then transported to another location for processing. The good news is the production and feed costs of operating a hog farm has decreased significantly since the early 1990s.

But that doesn't mean the job isn't without its challenges. For Nearmyer, a past integrator — the person or business that provides the pigs — decided to step away. Which meant Nearmyer had a to find a new integrator. This was easier said than done. Iowa may be the No. 1 pork producer in the United

States, but he said there are more open hog spaces in Iowa than there are pigs to fill them.

"When our integrator said he wasn't going to do it anymore, that was a little unnerving because we didn't know what the future held," he said. "He had a bunch of guys around Monroe, Oskaloosa and Ottumwa areas that were feeding for him. That feed all comes out of Two Rivers Co-Op in Pella. Two Rivers worked with all of us to help find a new integrator."

Finding a new integrator is a lot like dating, Nearmyer said. He and his brother met with a number of organizations to find the best fit for them and their operation. Keeping the pigs healthy and well-fed is the ongoing challenge that Nearmyer is tasked with on a daily basis, but he and his brother are up to the task. It's a good living. It pays the bills.

Hog farming is a continuous cycle for Nearmyer. It isn't a one-season job, and it differs from a cow-calf operation, too. Spring is usually the time for calving, which leaves the summer for livestock to be out on the pasture before turning them out in stocks for fall. Pigs come and go. By the time the pigs leave, the buildings have to be washed and dis-

infected to be ready for the next load of pigs.

It's a lot of work, and it's hard work. Iowans who grew up around farming know it all too well. Figuring out a farmer's motivations or reasoning to stay committed to the profession is about as easy as predicting the weather for next growing season. Heck, it may be even more difficult to determine. Last I checked the "Farmers' Almanac" doesn't have a chapter on that subject.

"What has kept you in it for all this time?" I asked the 54-year-old farmer. "What is it that you like about hog farming?"

Nearmyer laughed. "Well, after you make

that initial investment like we did, you're in it for life. I figure my retirement plan is to work it until I keel over dead."

After giving it some thought, Nearmyer chuckled it up to he was born into it. He has always liked to tell people his family has farmed since they got off the boat to America, probably even before that. Might have been raising tulips, he said. Many Iowa families have the same story: It runs in the family. Nearmyer is no different. He admitted he likes farming.

"But, you know, if my dad was born into racing that would be a lot cooler," he said. "I can't explain it. It's just in your blood, you know."

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