



OABCIG teachers • A2



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Ida County's Official Newspaper

IDA COUNTY COURIER

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Photo by Brent Harm • Ida County Courier

A wide variety of popcorn: Sterling Weeda stands next to a display of the many varieties of popcorn that Schlessman Seed Company has helped develop.

Schlessman Seed Company: Supplying popcorn around the world

by BRENT HARM
IDA COUNTY COURIER

Sterling Weeda, Director of Popcorn Operations at Schlessman Seed Company, has traveled across the globe in his role with the business. His home office is located in downtown Ida Grove. Weeda gave a brief description of the company.

“Schlessman Seed Company was formed in 1905,” he said. “It’s still a family-owned company based out of Milan, Ohio. We breed and produce hybrid popcorn seed. We also produce field corn seed, soybeans, wheat, and open-pollinated sweet

corns.”

Weeda explained how he got his start with the business.

“I started my career with a company called Pau Seeds in Ames,” he stat-

ed. “I was going to Iowa State, and I started off there as a part-time employee counting seed. Pau Seeds was bought by a company called Pannar. I had really good mentors along the way. I worked my way

up, and became the station manager in Boone for Pannar. I oversaw research operations and was in charge of our breeding and testing operations. My knowledge was built over a decade of

working under some really good people.”

Weeda discussed how that job led him to Schlessman Seed Company.

“Pannar was then bought by Pioneer, and shortly after I found Schlessman. I

started with Schlessman Seed Company in 2012. The office was in Sioux City, and we came to Ida Grove in 2014. This building sat open, but other than a new floor, new ceiling tiles, and some paint, it didn’t take too much to get going.

“Schlessman was advertising for a popcorn breeder and popcorn sales manager, and I thought, ‘Popcorn breeding can’t be much different than corn breeding,’ but as it turns out, it is.

“Popcorn is still corn, so the plant physically has all the same parts. The criteria (continued on page A3)

“I sell hybrid popcorn seed to many processors in the U.S., like Jolly Time and Snappy, but I have many smaller clients that only have 1-10 acres.”
— Sterling Weeda

Neubauer Inducted into Iowa 4-H Hall of Fame

Tammy Neubauer of Ida County was inducted into the 2023 Iowa 4-H Hall of Fame during a ceremony at the 4-H Exhibits Building at the Iowa State Fair on Sunday, Aug. 20. Ninety-one Iowa counties participated this year and selected 127 inductees for their outstanding service and dedication to 4-H. Inductees or their

surviving family members were presented a certificate by the Iowa 4-H Foundation President, David Bolte, and Interim State 4-H Program Leader, Mitchell Hoyer, as they were introduced on stage. “Counties select inductees for their exceptional work in contributing to the lives of 4-H members and (continued on page A2)



Ida County Historical Society makes plans

by MARY MORGAN
IDA COUNTY COURIER

The regular meeting of the Ida County Historical Society was held at the Ida Grove Public Library Aug. 24 at 7 p.m. with members Steve Wilkins, Morris Hurd, Judy Uhl, Jim Holst, Ann Holst, Emily Hoaglund, Jean Crawford, Jackie Netherton, Ray Netherton, Nancy Ford present along with Mary Morgan, guest from the Ida County Courier.

Morris Hurd presented his treasurer’s report. There were some talks on how to raise money. Hurd explained that they need to be asking now while the work is being done because people are more apt to donate before rather than later. A separate list of expenditures for repairs and painting of Moorehead house Mu-

seum and Carriage house was presented for a total of \$21,433.40.

Some old business discussed was a bid from Lance Ladwig for gutter and downspouts and leaf-guard \$4,922 was presented and approved. A bid from Doug Hopkins to repair the front and back porch and paint, supplies \$4, 324.30 and labor not to exceed \$2,000 was presented and approved.

Jackie Netherton showed a picture of the new sign painted by Joslyn Meyer, high school student. It will be erected as weather permits. This seems to be quite an accomplishment for Joslyn and I believe a future story is needed. Be on the watch for that.

Dates for Country School (continued on page A2)



Photo by Brent Harm • Ida County Courier

Sharing the good news! Pastor Neil Wehmas of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Ida Grove enjoys being a part of the community and sharing the good news of Jesus!

Pastor Neil Wehmas enjoys serving the community

by BRENT HARM
IDA COUNTY COURIER

Pastor Neil Wehmas, Associate Pastor at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Ida Grove, keeps busy with his job duties and his involvement in the community. His Associate Pastor title will change, depending upon a September congregational voters meeting, as Pastor

Richard Salcido retired at the end of July.

“I’ll be Associate Pastor until the end of September,” he explained, “then I’ll be either Sole Pastor or Senior Pastor.”

Wehmas talked about some of his duties as pastor at St. Paul Lutheran.

“Some of my responsibilities (continued on page A3)

Lisa Hopkins loves to hook a child with a book

by MARY MORGAN
IDA COUNTY COURIER

Lisa Hopkins started working at the library in January of 2008. She has given 15 plus years at the Ida Grove Library. When asked why she wanted to work here, she stated that she is a life-long library-user, she loves to read, and she needed a job and was lucky enough to get this one, she says. The library is lucky enough to have her. She is definitely a positive influence for the patrons. Her favorite books are “Happily Ever After” books, but she does read in all genres. Hopkins has some thoughts to share.

“I love being able to be a positive influence. I love when you hook a child with a book and then they come back and want another book by that same author or series. I love kids that just love to come to the library. I have always wanted

to be the best librarian I can be and make this the best library. I am lucky to have a director like Angie Scales. She is the third director since I have been here.”

Hopkins came with her husband from California. She and her husband live



Photo by Mary Morgan • Ida County Courier

Lisa Hopkins, Ida Grove Librarian

here in Ida Grove. They have raised three kids, a son, a daughter, and a step-daughter. She says, “Ida Grove is the smallest town I have lived in, but my world has never been bigger. It is home and I would not want to go anywhere else.”

Hopkins does the story-time for the preschoolers on Friday mornings. She is also responsible for the storyboards out at Moorehead park. There are 14 different boards. It is like reading a 28-page book on your walk. Be sure to take a look at Lisa’s work.

“I love when you hook a child with a book and then they come back and want another book by that same author or series.”
— Lisa Hopkins

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NATIONAL
FRANKENSTEIN
DAY
Aug. 30



Weeda takes pride in his work: Sterling Weeda, director of Popcorn Operations at Schlessman Seed Company, stands outside his downtown Ida Grove office.

—more about

(continued from page A1) for selecting popcorn starts with yield and agronomics, which are very important, but we're extremely concerned about what the kernel does, and how it pops, and what you get when it pops. There's an added layer of criteria that popcorn has to go through."

While popcorn production may be small in comparison to field corn, it is still a big industry.

"Popcorn acres in the U.S. this year are around 270,000," said Weeda. "Field corn is around 92 million. We don't have the research budgets that the big companies like Pioneer and Monsanto have, but I still believe we are making good progress on developing new hybrids that are good for growers and consumers."

Weeda shared some details of his duties for the company.

"Breeding popcorn and hybrid testing take place mostly in fields around Ida Grove, but we utilize winter nurseries for breeding and some seed production. Most of the seed production is grown near the main office in Milan, Ohio.

"Forecasting seed production can be challenging. How much of my hybrid will my customer need to grow next year, to fulfill their customers' needs the following year?"

"The other big part of my job is sales," he continued. "I sell hybrid popcorn seed to many processors in the U.S., like Jolly Time and Snappy, but I have many smaller clients that only have 1-10 acres. Larger companies buy the seed, contract farmers to grow it, then bring all the pop-

ping corn back to condition it and then sell it, either wholesale or retail, as popcorn."

Weeda talked about how his job has taken him to different places around the world.

"About eight years ago, we took on the endeavor of broadening our horizons on sales, so currently, I sell popcorn seed to five continents in the world. The international market has become very significant for us. Here in the U.S., you buy local at farmer's markets; that same 'buy local' sentiment has really taken hold around the world. Everybody wants to buy popcorn that's grown in their

*"About eight years ago, we took on the endeavor of broadening our horizons on sales, so currently, I sell popcorn seed to five continents in the world."
— Sterling Weeda*

country; they feel they're supporting their country. We've made good strides in our international sales.

"Most of the domestic customers are based in the Corn Belt region, but we also have customers in the southern and eastern states. Travel to international markets is always interesting, from South America, to Europe, to eastern Europe, it is very interesting to see how everyone farms. I like to say, 'It's the same, but different.' I travel quite a bit to Hungary and Turkey, because those countries seem to be easy for customers to travel to, and they are also good markets. Popcorn has taken me all over Europe. In South America, we've got customers in Brazil and companies we work with in Chile, so I get some international travel under

my belt.

"Anywhere that you can grow a crop, there's somebody that wants to grow popcorn. Some of the challenges with that is, sometimes the people in those countries don't even understand how to grow corn, so you do a lot of coaching at times."

Weeda shared some details about his life and work in Ida County.

"My wife is Julie Weeda, and she's the IT director at OABCIG. I've got three kids, Hannah, Dylan, and Danny. Here at this station, I'm the only full-time employee, but this summer, I had 14 kids on the crew helping pollinate corn. This

fall, I'll have four to five people hired on a crew to hand-harvest the corn. In the winter, I've got one or two people who put in part-time hours during the week.

"My main yield trial is up north of Galva. We have contracted sites all through the Corn Belt in the Midwest, for yield testing. Milan, Ohio is the main office where they produce the seed and condition it, and we ship from there."

Weeda described some of the difficult aspects of his work.

"Plant breeding in general is challenging," he said. "You're always trying to breed something new and better. There are cycles that happen. Customers want popcorn with high expansion, so you bring out things with high expansion, and there

... Schlessman

are customers that want high yielding popcorn for cheaper markets. Well, you can't just chase one person's market. Our goal at Schlessman is to breed and develop early-maturing, high expansion, good eating popcorn. Sometimes, I get beat out in the market because we've got competitors that have really late maturity popcorn, but not everybody can take their popcorn to South Dakota and grow it."

There are other challenges involved with Weeda's job as well.

"One of the challenges on the sales side is the language barrier," he said. "I stress to any kids, even the ones on my crew, to learn a second language. Cultures are very different around the world; once you understand where your customer is coming from, it makes it a lot easier to make sure you have the right product in their hands.

"The other big challenge in any seed business is finding the right balance of inventory for your sales. I have customers that are planting every month of the year. Trying to make sure that I have the right seed at the right time can be a big challenge."

Finally, Weeda summarized his favorite aspects of his work.

"I have a lot of freedom in what I do, and how I do it," he said. "I get to take the program in which direction I feel it needs to go. I get to travel the world, see neat places, and meet a variety of people. When I travel, I'm not in the tourist cities, I'm out where the everyday person lives, so that's a neat experience to have."

—more about

... Wehmas

(continued from page A1) bilities are bringing communion to shut-ins, making hospital visits, working with the youth group, and being present in the community. That's why I go to a lot of school activities. I help with LWML (Lutheran Women's Missionary League), elder's meetings, and evangelism. I'm a member of

*God did not make us to be by ourselves. He created us to be in a relationship with others. You need the other people in the church, and the other people need you.
— Pastor Neil Wehmas*

Kiwanis, and the Kiwanis Advisor to Key Club. It's a pretty exhaustive list, and it keeps me pretty involved."

All of that is in addition to his main duties of preaching, leading Bible studies, preparing sermons, and teaching confirmation classes. Wehmas has taken on many more responsibilities since the retirement of Pastor Salcido.

"We used to split hospital visits," said Wehmas, "and visiting the shut-ins and nursing homes. I would do youth and family, and he would do LWML, but now I'm taking all of that on."

Pastor Wehmas came to St. Paul Lutheran in Ida Grove in February of 2017. He became a pastor in June of 2013. His first calling was to Ocheyedan, Iowa.

"I had three churches there," he said, "St. Peter Lutheran Church in Ocheyedan, St. John Lutheran Church in May City, and Zion Lutheran Church in Horton Township."

Wehmas, an Ankeny native, talked about what led him to become a pastor.

"I was going to DMACC in Ankeny," he stated, "and not really certain what I was doing. One day, I ended up going to a campus ministry called Impact. I had a conversation with the pastor after the event, and he challenged what I believed. He gave me a little pocket New Testament to read. I took it home, and basically in one week, I read the New Testament. I started reading and I didn't want to stop. After that, I had this very strong desire to do ministry. The college ministry was a Baptist ministry. The reason I went there was because there was nothing from the Lutherans. I wanted to be somebody that people could reach out to, people that maybe the church overlooks. My idea was to go into college ministry, but that didn't happen. But I still had a passion and drive to bring the gospel to other people."

Pastor Wehmas grew up in a Christian household.

"When I was growing up," he said, "my dad made the rule that I had to go to church every single Sunday. There was no debate. Well, there was debate, but I never won. When I graduated from high school, my dad gave me the option as to whether or not I went, to let me choose. A lot of times, I chose not to go to church, so my faith wasn't exactly the strongest, but the experience at DMACC woke it up."

To become a pastor, Wehmas had to meet certain requirements.

"You need to have a Master's Degree," he stated, "so you have to get a Bachelor's Degree first. I went to Concordia University in Mequon, Wisconsin and got a four-year Bachelor's Degree in pre-seminary. Then, I

went to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis for four years after that. The third year is a vicarage, kind of like being a student pastor, working under an

experienced pastor. I did my vicarage at Eatonton, Georgia."

Things have changed a bit since Wehmas first started.

"The most obvious change I've seen has been Covid," he said, "and that really affected attendance. A lot of people have migrated to online services rather than in person, which is not ideal. You can't take communion that way, and you need other people. God did not make us to be by ourselves. He created us to be in a relationship with others. You need the other people in the church, and the other people need you."

The pastor described some of the most difficult aspects of his job.

"Probably the hardest thing is saying goodbyes," he said. "Sometimes it's funerals; we have around 14 funerals a year. Because I work with a lot of kids, it's kind of a bittersweet goodbye when they go off to college and everything. You're glad for whatever their experience is going to be, and you look forward to seeing what they do, but you do miss them. I think it's something teachers obviously go through as well. The other really hard one is when you teach kids in confirmation, and then you don't see them as much. Sometimes people move away, and things like that. The nature of a pastor's job is you're caring for every person, so whenever somebody leaves, you feel it."

Wehmas also shared his favorite part of being a pastor.

"I like being involved with the school, and going to the activities. You can't help but make a connection with the kids, parents, grandparents, uncles, and all those members of the church that you see when you go out there. You also make connections with the other parents, and the other kids that are not our members. It's just the joy of being in a small town and seeing all that. I encourage other pastors to do the same."

Finally, Wehmas summarized the most rewarding part of what he does.

"The best part is when somebody gets it," he explained. "When you're teaching something, or talking about something, and someone indicates that they understand it. Another thing is seeing people in their faith, seeing people serving someone in the community, and also bringing their faith to others, to their friends and neighbors. That's the ideal of a Christian; we hear the Gospel, we hear the good news of Jesus, and we bring it out into the world. That's the biggest joy, to bring the Gospel, to tell people that they have forgiveness in Christ. Hopefully they bring that same good news to others. When you see that happening, it makes you want to keep doing it."

Secretary Pate, Ida County Auditor's Office Celebrates Iowa Poll Workers for playing a critical role in keeping Iowa's Elections safe, secure

Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate and Ida County Auditor Charlys Folk join the Election Administration Commission in

announcing that Aug. 23 was National Poll Worker Recruitment Day. National Poll Worker Recruitment Day celebrates the

10,000 Iowans who step up each election to be poll workers in their communities and encourages more people to sign up as poll workers.

Iowa has been ranked third in the nation for election administration by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Election Data and Science Lab. Local election officials, including poll workers, play an essential role in keeping Iowa's elections safe and secure. Poll workers check in voters, make sure they have the correct ballot, answer questions, and help ensure elections run smoothly in each precinct. They're needed in all 99 counties for the Nov. 7 City-School Election.

The Ida County Auditor's office appreciates our current poll workers

and look forward to others that may be interested in becoming a poll worker.

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission established National Poll Worker Recruitment Day in 2020 with the goal of encouraging citizens to sign up to help America vote.

"We are thankful for the Iowans who have stepped up as poll workers and offered their time to serve their community and help their neighbors vote," said Secretary Pate. "We are proud to run safe and secure elections in Iowa, and poll workers are a critical component of ensuring every election is run smoothly and fairly."

For more information and to sign up to become a poll worker, visit pollworker.iowa.gov.

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