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ELAINE LORING / TIMES CITIZEN

T.J. Norman reads his oath of office prior to the April 10 Iowa Falls School Board meeting. Norman is replacing Jack Kobe who resigned his seat in March.

Norman appointed new school board member

BY ELAINE LORING
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During the April 10 Iowa Falls School Board meeting, T.J. Norman was appointed to fill the seat vacated by Jack Kobe, who had to resign due to an upcoming job change and move to Kansas City.

Kobe, who was in his fourth year on the board, submitted his letter of resignation on March 13, and the board was tasked with finding a replacement. Norman, who served on the board from 2002 to 2017, and as board president from 2005-2014, was selected to serve through the rest of Kobe's term. Norman will fill Kobe's seat through the November meeting, after the 2023 school board election.

TJ NORMAN Cont'd ▶ A2



SHAWN DIGITY / TIMES CITIZEN

Mona Bleeker owns Antiques by Mona, which can be found by taking Exit 181 off Highway 20, then turning onto V Avenue, and making a left on Setchell. Bleeker has been in the antique business for over 30 years, 20 at her current location.

Off the beaten trail

Antiques by Mona's tucked-away treasure trove

BY SHAWN DIGITY | sdigity@iafalls.com

Mona Bleeker had just said goodbye to a friend. She quickly put back a framed piece of embroidery — a diversion from an earlier goal of preparing some old marbles.

Bleeker's antique store, aptly named Antiques by Mona, can be found a little way off Highway 20. Just take Exit 181, headed toward Eldora and Ackley, and work your way down V Avenue past Pine Lake Corn Processors. Take a left at Setchell, and you'll find it.

Maybe off the beaten trail, the antique store is a treasure trove where the gravel-road journey adds something to the experience.

And there, with its neon signs, Antiques by Mona is an entrance to the past with thousands of items. Walking into the shop and seeing all the storied and colorful treasures, one might think it was the magnum opus of a lifelong antique aficionado. But, no.

For Bleeker's presence in the antique game for 33 years, Antiques by Mona

“I think just basically for as long as I've done it, it's just the relationships that I've made in the business with auctioneers and other dealers, friendships like that that I've made.”

MONA BLEEKER, Owner, Antiques by Mona

wasn't a childhood dream come to life.

“I didn't really like antiques when I was younger,” she began.

As her business might reveal, she's since come around. After marrying her husband, Doug, Bleeker's mother-in-law “piqued [her] interest” in antiquities. Bleeker took the intrigue from her “avid collector” mother-in-law and moved into a different industry. “So I quit my regular job and stayed home for a year and then just started selling antique textiles in malls,” she stated.

It caught fire, too, Bleeker added, and from there, the rest was history, with the local antique magnate now looking at over three decades in the antique world. “I was pretty successful at it, and it just kind of mushroomed.”

Bleeker, in her years of experience, has bounced around Hardin County and state

to state. “I had a shop in Eldora — where I started with a partner — and then ended up moving over to the old Carnegie library building in Eldora. And then, eventually, when the interstate came through here, my business had gotten big enough that we decided to build a building out here,” she said.

And now, “out here,” you'll find Antiques by Mona, with the building explicitly constructed to become the antique store having been there for 20 years.

But as she moved there in 2003, she had a following that stuck with her as she moved from Eldora to V Avenue. “I did have a lot of clientele that followed me out here and that, but I constantly have people that have never been in the shop before they stop out, and that part of the business is fun.”

At this point in the game — after years and years of shows — Bleeker's at the point where she just wanted to get as many more people through her doors as possible. So for 2023 and the coming years, Bleeker wants the word out and the people in: “Probably just have more people know I'm here even though I've been here forever. People are always surprised when they come out and see the quality and the quantity of antiques that I have.”

ANTIQUES BY MONA Cont'd ▶ A2

Hotel/Motel board approves requests



4/13/2023 - revised

GRAPHIC COURTESY OF SIGNS AND DESIGNS AND IOWA FALLS CHAMBER/MAIN STREET

Two of these signs will replace the old ones advertising Iowa Falls on Highway 20. Iowa Falls Chamber/Main Street Director Diana Thies received money from the Schiller Grant and needed an additional \$1,583.50 from the Hotel/Motel board to complete the purchase.

BY ELAINE LORING
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The Iowa Falls Hotel/Motel Tax Funding Advisory Board met Wednesday, April 12 and approved three pending requests, initially reviewed at the March 8 meeting.

The first was a Tourism request for \$1,583.50 from Iowa Falls Chamber/Main Street Director Diana Thies. The money will go to toward two new billboards, which will advertise Iowa Falls, and will replace the existing signs on Highway 20. Thies had received funding from the Schiller Grant and was seeking the remaining cost from the Hotel/Motel board.

“We talked about it at our meeting today,” Thies said of the sign last week. “Do we do Historic Main Street? Is the Empress going to be around in 15 years? It's been 15 years since we did the last sign. I said yes.”

The proposed billboard, measuring 20 feet by 14 feet, says Iowa Falls in Hardin County, and also lists the

amenities of Historic Downtown, Scenic City Empress, Ellsworth Community College, Dining, Shopping and Lodging.

Board member Crystal Doering suggested other tourism-related items be added like Calkins Nature Area. “Is that a fight we don't want to fight?”

City Manager Jody Anderson noted that the signs, which these new ones will replace, currently have too much information on them, and all the information can't all be read while driving down the highway. Doering agreed.

Thies said she has had conversations with different people, and others agreed the Scenic City Empress needed to be listed. “I want it to be what the community wants on there,” she said.

“It's the only one in Iowa, so it's worth mentioning, and let's hope it's here in 15 years” Anderson said of the Empress.

HOTEL/MOTEL Cont'd ▶ A2



▶ **ANTIQUES BY MONA**
CONTINUED FROM A1

From those antiques, furniture and stoneware are some of her personal favorites. “I love furniture. I love really just unique items like kitchen items and stoneware. I like a full range of stuff, which I have to have for my clientele, but personally myself, I love carpenters’ benches [and] industrial antiques.”

And while Bleeker’s husband does much of the restoration side of things, Bleeker stated that most of her furniture stock is house-ready.

And the antiques are one thing, but there’s another aspect that she treasured: the friends along the way. “I think just basically for as long as I’ve done it, it’s just the relationships that I’ve made in the business with auctioneers and other dealers, friendships like that I’ve made.”

“I made really good, good friendships over the years,” she went on.

And to Bleeker, having those relationships is important because, according to her, “That’s what business is about — that long-term relationship with people.”

The relationships with her family members have been a



SHAWN DIGITY / TIMES CITIZEN

Mona Bleeker, owner of Antiques by Mona, believes in building relationships and enjoys her regular visitors, but has a lot of new customers stop in while on their travels down Highway 20.

windfall for her, as well. They’ve helped Bleeker numerous times at a number of shows she has done throughout the years.

More so in the past, Bleeker had been into the antique shows, and while she’s

still on the fence about doing one this year, she was also just as content to post up at Antiques by Mona, waiting for the next person to walk through the door. And there’s a certain je ne sais quoi to

the experience when traveling off the beaten trail of V Avenue — to which she had no qualms. “I am,” Bleeker recognized. “But, you know, antiquers love that.” ■

▶ **T.J. NORMAN**
CONTINUED FROM A1

“While it is not regular practice to replace a board member before their term expires, we are excited to welcome T.J. back to the Iowa Falls School Board for the next few months,” said Iowa Falls School Superintendent Tony Neumann. “Given the short window and nature of the position, the board was looking for someone with board experience to help us transition during the next few months. While I have not had the pleasure of working with T.J. in this role, he was a very dedicated and thoughtful board member to work with while I served as the high school principal here. He brings a great perspective and community knowledge that will help us over the next few months. He has stayed active in the school operations while serving on a few other committees during the last few years, so he will be able to hit the ground running.”

The board had a 30-day window to appoint a community member to fill the seat. Norman was sworn in at the beginning of Monday’s meeting and was welcomed with a unanimous vote by the board. ■

▶ **HOTEL / MOTEL**
CONTINUED FROM A1

The board awarded \$1,583.50 for the signs. The second request was from the Iowa Falls Firefighters Association, who were asking \$12,500 from both the Tourism and Economic Development funds, for a total of \$25,000. This money would go toward their annual convention being held in Iowa Falls this September.

“We’re thinking it’s going to be close, or a little more, numbers-wise,” Fire Chief Scott Eisentrager predicted of this year’s attendance, compared to last year’s.

“I was talking to some people, and they just couldn’t wait to get back,” said Fire Department First Assistant Chief Dennis Barrick. “All the people we talked to... the thing they loved about Iowa Falls is how they were treated, and they felt so welcomed here. They just wanted to come back.”

The bulk of the money goes to the tent and

chairs, and porta-potties. “It starts eating up funds fast,” Eisentrager said.

The board awarded \$25,000 for the convention. The third request came from Patrick Cooley of Olde Style Masonry in the amount of \$12,000 from the tourism fund to restore the south shelter at Foster Park. Cooley estimated the total cost of the renovation would be \$35,000 but had already received \$23,000 from the Schiller fund.

Dr. Francis Pisney has been working with Cooley on getting private donations, as well. Anderson also noted that some private donations had been received by the city.

Cooley would like to restore the indoor enclosed shelter first, then redo the floor and fireplace, saving the outdoor pits for last.

“If I was to work on it with four guys... probably four weeks,” Cooley said of the timeline to complete the project. “I’ll have the shelter done by the Fourth of July.”

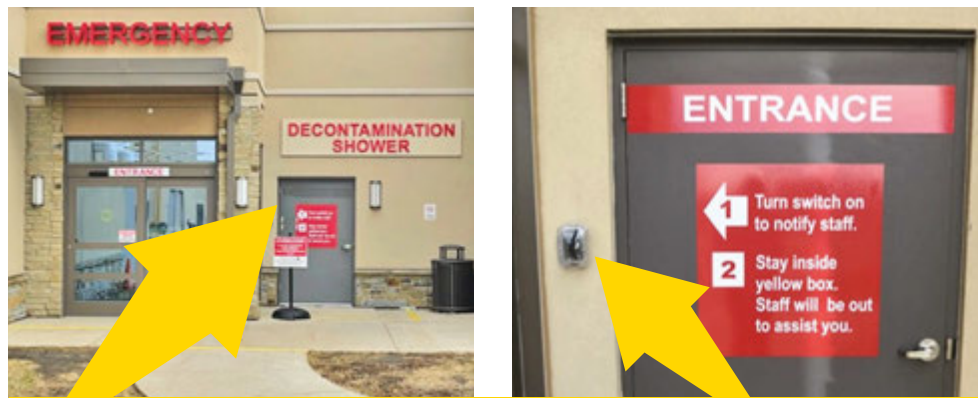
The board awarded \$12,000 for the project. ■

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