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T-R PHOTO BY SOREN M PETERSON

Kathleen Keefer, second from right, is pictured with her three children during her 100th birthday celebration held in Traer last Sunday. From left to right, Pastor Mark Keefer of Traer, Sue Swinehart of Ft. Collins, Colo., Kathleen Keefer, and Robert 'Bob' Keefer of Raleigh, N.C.

Forever young at heart Traer resident marks milestone 100th birthday

By RUBY F. MCALLISTER
TIMES-REPUBLICAN

TRAER — This past Sunday, Jan. 15, Kathleen Keefer radiated the warmth and joy of a life well lived as she welcomed both family and friends to her 100th birthday celebration held at the Traer Public Library.

Keefer, who has called Traer home for the last 14 years, officially celebrated a century of life on Jan. 17.

"I feel wonderful," Keefer said as she greeted party guests. "The nicest part of all of this is all the grandkids and great-grandkids."

With her three children by her side on Sunday — sons Robert 'Bob' Keefer of Raleigh, N.C. and Pastor Mark Keefer of Traer, and daughter Sue Swinehart of Ft. Collins, Colo. — Keefer never once stopped smiling as the party room filled to capacity.

"They're all young at heart," Jill Sealock, one of Keefer's five grandchildren, said of her grandmother and the three Keefer children when asked what she pegs as the secret to Keefer's 100 years of longevity — a statement repeated by many in attendance at the party.

Posed with the question herself, the birthday girl didn't hesitate: "Being active. I've always been active. I remember even as a kid I'd be out bright and early looking for my dad and he'd be bringing the cattle in."

Keefer — one of six children — and her twin brother Kenneth, who lived to be 90, were born on a farm outside of Omaha, Neb. to Joseph and Anna Hiltabidel. As a young woman, she married Samuel Keefer — they later divorced — and the family moved extensively as part of Samuel's career in hospital administration including to Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Ohio, Sioux City and finally Waterloo in 1966.

100TH | A3

Biden on classified docs discovery: 'There's no there there'

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

APTOS, Calif. — A frustrated President Joe Biden said Thursday there is "no there there" when he was persistently questioned about the discovery of classified documents and official records at his home and former office.

"We found a handful of documents were filed in the wrong place," Biden said to reporters who questioned him during a tour of the damage from storms in California. "We immediately turned them over to the Archives and the Justice Department."

Biden said he was "fully cooperating and looking forward to getting this resolved quickly."

"I think you're going to find there's nothing there," he said. "There's no there there."

The White House has disclosed that Biden attorneys found classified documents and official records on four occasions in recent months — on Nov. 2 at the offices of the Penn Biden Center in Washington, and then in follow up searches on Dec. 20 in the garage of the president's home in Wilmington, Delaware, and on Jan. 11 and 12 in the president's home library.

Attorney General Merrick Garland last week appointed Robert Hur, a former Maryland U.S. attorney, to serve as special counsel to oversee the Justice Department's inquiry into the documents.

The discovery complicates a federal probe into former President Donald Trump, who the Justice Department says took hundreds of records marked classified with him upon leaving the White House in early 2021 and resisted months of requests to return them to the government.

DOCS | A5

U.S. hits debt limit and Treasury begins 'extraordinary measures'

By JENNIFER SHUTT
IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH

WASHINGTON — The nation reached its debt limit Thursday, beginning the uncertain process known as extraordinary measures, in which the U.S. Treasury Department uses accounting maneuvers to

avoid defaulting on the debt.

The often-used practice is intended to give the Republican House, Democratic Senate and Biden administration time to negotiate a bipartisan agreement to raise the debt ceiling to a dollar figure or suspend it through a

certain date.

This year's debate over how exactly to do that is expected to be especially tense after Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican, made promises to several of his party's more conservative members in exchange for

the votes needed for him to hold the gavel.

Democrats and the White House are adamant they won't agree to drastic spending cuts to discretionary programs, which fund the vast majority of federal agencies,

DEBT | A3

A new home



T-R PHOTO BY NICK BAUR

From left to right, Roman, Marina, and their son Nikita Stenkins alongside translator Marina Gromov at their home in Marshalltown.

Displaced Ukrainian family recounts journey to Marshalltown

By NICK BAUR
TIMES-REPUBLICAN

As Russia's war in Ukraine rages on and continues to draw global attention, Marshall County has become an unlikely home for families displaced by the devastating and far-reaching conflict occupying Eastern Europe.

One Ukrainian family in particular, now living in Marshalltown, is hoping to start anew and lay down fresh roots in the Hawkeye State after losing their home and fleeing countless miles halfway across the globe to settle in the United States.

The Stenkins family, Marina, Roman, and their son Nikita, hail from the embattled city of Mariupol, which has seen some of the war's worst destruction and ruin at the hands of the Russian Army.

Before the war, the Stenkins family enjoyed a relatively typical and successful existence. A trained engineer, Roman owned his own business, which used self-built machines to drill water wells and complete other excavating enterprises. Marina worked as a quality assurance technician, and the pair raised their son along the way, similar to many other working parents.

Looking back, with the benefit of hindsight, they said, speaking together through a translator, "we had everything that we actually really wanted" in regards to their life in Mariupol.

Yet Mariupol, and by extension the Stenkins, were located in the

"buffer zone" between Ukraine and neighboring Russia, with their home roughly 20 miles from the hotly contested border.

As such, when Russia invaded Ukraine in late February of 2022, Mariupol bore the brunt of the havoc wreaked by the invasion. On the ground fighting, large-scale bombardments, and missile strikes have pounded the city since the invasion began, with estimates as high as 95 percent of the city being destroyed by the fighting.

At the beginning of the war, the Stenkins would travel back and forth from their residence to a local bomb shelter nearly every day as the missiles and bombs descended upon their home. Eventually, the city no longer had access to electricity, heating, or other necessities as a result of the destruction.

But on one fateful day, the Stenkins returned from a trip to the shelter to find that their apartment building, where they had been living and raising their son, had been directly hit by a Russian ballistic missile, destroying many of their belongings and presumably burning alive their friends and neighbors nearby.

It was then that the Stenkins set about finding a way out of the active warzone.

"We were fearing for our life, and we didn't have any place to live anymore," they said.

So they packed what little they had left, piled into the car and headed west, leaving behind hard drives full of family photos and other personal

belongings for fear they would be stopped and searched by Russians as possible spies.

"You risk your life in your apartment or you risk your life in the car on the way," the Stenkins said. "We were hoping that maybe, any day this war will be done and everything will just go back to normal."

The family arrived in Poland, taking refuge there with their parents who also fled the country, before eventually traveling to Germany to place their parents in the care of close friends.

"We understood only one important thing," they said about their journey. "In every single moment, everything can change and you can lose everything, material things, what you have, but if your family and your people are close to you, it's the biggest treasure that you can have."

It was in Germany that Marina Stenkins learned there was a possibility to leave Europe for the United States, information passed along by her cousin, Maria Myroshnikov, who is also a newly settled Ukrainian in Marshall County.

The Stenkins applied for and were granted "humanitarian parole" in the United States, which allows an individual who may be otherwise ineligible for admission into the United States for a temporary period for urgent humanitarian reasons.

They were granted a stay of up to two years in the country, but the

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