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The Mississippi River crested at 22.91 feet at McGregor Friday morning, April 28—the third highest crest ever at the location. In Marquette, flood water stretched all the way to the Driftless Area Wetlands Centre. (Photo by Will Koether)

22.91 feet is third highest crest at McGregor

By Audrey Posten

The Mississippi River crested at 22.91 feet at McGregor Friday morning, April 28. That is the third highest crest ever at the location, trailing only 23.75 feet set in 2001 and the record 25.38 feet in 1965.

The crest was roughly a foot lower than the National Weather Service projected earlier in the week, when it expected flood waters to reach at least 24 feet.

“We were prepared for anything,” said Marquette Mayor

Steve Weipert. “After all the prep, the hard work was over, but we still had to keep the pumps full and walk the dikes.”

Road conditions were also monitored. Early last week, the road at the intersection of Highway 76 and Anti-Monopoly Street, at Casino Queen Marquette, was built up in anticipation of rising water. The city authorized the closure of Pleasant Ridge Road in Marquette corporate limits to protect the flood prone one-lane road near the city shop/Mar-Mac Police Sta-

tion. Access to Marquette from Highway 76 was also cut off when the road was closed near Effigy Mounds National Monument. All roads have now re-opened as water receded.

City officials from both Marquette and McGregor remained in communication with Canadian Pacific Railway as workers continued to raise and maintain the tracks to stay in service.

“The railroads built a lot of dikes, which helped us,” Weipert

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Monona launches junior firefighter program

By Audrey Posten

The Monona Fire Department is engaging the next generation of volunteers through a new junior firefighter program. Jacob Schellhorn and Noah Goltz, both MFL MarMac high school students, were appointed last month to work side-by-side with the department to learn the skills necessary to become a firefighter.

Firefighter Jeremy Schellhorn presented the idea to chief Dave Smith a year ago, after son Jacob expressed interest in the fire science career field. The experience would be a helpful resume builder for a two-year college program. Smith and the

rest of the department, many of whom would have jumped at the opportunity when they were in high school, were supportive.

“All the guys are completely for it,” Jeremy Schellhorn said.

The program also received the blessing of the city of Monona, the insurance provider and high school principal Larry Meyer. Flyers went up at school, and Goltz and Schellhorn were the two who applied. Jeremy Schellhorn said it’s a good starting number based on the amount of gear the department currently has.

Jacob Schellhorn is excited

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MFL MarMac high school students Noah Goltz (left) and Jacob Schellhorn were recently appointed to the Monona Volunteer Fire Department’s new junior firefighter program. (Submitted photo)

Elkader child care roundtable looks for solutions to financial, staffing issues

By Willis Patenaude

The Elkader Community Childcare & Learning Center Board recently held a roundtable involving community members, business owners, city officials and other individuals who were invited to begin a conversation about how to solve the city’s current daycare crisis, which threatens to shut down the only daycare facility in town.

The core of the problem is financial, consisting of both a lack of incoming revenue, bud-

get shortfalls and the real need to raise wages in an effort to be competitive in the daycare industry, which has been historically plagued by low wages.

The Child Care Coalition argued wages are “at the root of the child care crisis” in Iowa, which is magnified by the fact it is the third lowest paid profession in the state, earning on average between \$19,000 and \$23,000 annually, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The same statistics concluded “many are overworked” as

well, due to a dwindling workforce which started long before the COVID-19 pandemic began and intensified as Iowa suffered a loss of over 40 percent of its child care providers prior to the pandemic, according to the Iowa Women’s Foundation.

As a result, wages were a focus of the roundtable, highlighted by the board’s recent decision to increase the starting wage from \$8 to \$10 per hour. Sights are set on eventually increasing to \$12, which would put the center on par with other area

providers. As board president Amanda Schneider stated at the event, \$10 is “not enough.”

Low wages also relate to staff retention, which has led to the center operating at less than 70 percent capacity, and it doesn’t always attract the best candidates. At the time of the roundtable, the daycare was operating at 68 percent capacity with just six full-time teachers, two part-time teachers and one full-time cook. Full capacity would be around 12 full-time employees.

The raise in wages—which

took effect on March 27 and includes no benefits—is a short-term fix funded through grants received in 2022. In effect, it has created a \$53,000 budget deficit moving forward. If additional funding is not received, the center will likely close within 24 months as funds become depleted. A closure would have a negative ripple effect throughout the local economy.

“We are hoping that 24 months is enough time to find

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said. "It took a ton of time and manpower to accomplish that."

According to Weipert, only one Marquette family left their home due to the flooding, while others moved valuables and appliances to higher ground. In McGregor, any South McGregor residents were asked to leave their homes due to the expansion of the flood wall across B Street.

Flooding impacted local businesses too. Casino Queen Marquette closed early last week, but announced it planned to re-open Tuesday, May 2. Sump pumps were working hard to relieve basements in buildings along McGregor's Main Street of water.

Some businesses made the best of the situation. Paper Moon Bookstore, for example, advertised that anyone who spent \$50 or more could tour the high water in the 1860s dirt floor basement. Staff said the promotion had been successful, with as many as 15 people taking advantage in one day.

Nauti Marina and Big Buoy's Tiki Bar—which was engulfed by flood wa-

ter—remained hopeful that the river would recede quickly so season-opening operations could commence.

As of Tuesday morning, May 2, the Mississippi had already dipped below major flood stage, to 21.1 feet. The National Weather Service graph showed the river dropping steadily over the next week, to 18 feet by Monday, May 8.

"We'll continue to monitor it as it goes down. Then it's a backwards procedure," Weipert said of clean-up efforts.

In an April 25 release, the city of McGregor said officials met with Main Street contractors to determine the best course of action moving forward while McGregor experiences flooding.

"Work on the Main Street project has been halted for now. Contractors will monitor the site to determine when the site is safe to resume work as flood waters and groundwater begins to recede. As more information becomes available, it will be provided," the city said.

Both cities praised the public works depart-



Even at nearly 23 feet, the Mississippi crested at roughly a foot lower than the National Weather Service originally predicted. Pictured is the Marquette riverfront. See more drone images at times-register.com. (Photo by Will Koether)

ments—as well as McGregor Hook and Ladder firefighters and other volunteers—for their preparation and continued monitoring of flood protection efforts.

"They knew what they had to do and they did their job," Weipert said. "I also want to thank the citizens. We have great residents."



(Above) The "guts" of Big Buoy's Tiki Bar in McGregor were removed in anticipation of major flooding. (Left) At the time of the crest last Friday, the Mississippi River had completely overtaken Indian Isle. (Photos by Audrey Posten)



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for the opportunity.

"I've always wanted to be a firefighter, and now to actually be able to do it, that will be fun. Getting some background in it and being able to have some experience is what I wanted to do," he said.

Goltz had a similar dream of joining the fire department one day.

"I've always loved watching them," he shared. "My family has been doing it, and I wanted to follow in their footsteps and do volunteer work for my town."

The junior firefighter program is a national effort first launched by the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) in 2007. The goal was to support fire departments by fostering relationships and engaging youth in learning about, and ultimately becoming, members of

the emergency services. There are now thousands of local junior firefighter programs nationwide thanks to NVFC-provided resources, tools and information to develop and manage programs.

Junior firefighters will be allowed to engage in most department activities except emergency situations.

"They can't go into a house fire or run the jaws or be in the hot zone of a HAZMAT situation, but they can be on the support team," Jeremy Schellhorn explained. "If there's a structure fire, they can run hose on the outside. The jaws of life are battery operated. A good thing for these guys to do is grab batteries, because those could run out. After the fire is over, they can go in with overhaul."

"We'll help out on calls

and be there for the firemen," Goltz added.

Jacob Schellhorn said he and Goltz will attend meetings regularly, including the business meeting the first Wednesday of the month and training the third Wednesday. During training, the junior firefighters can work side-by-side with other volunteers.

"It's a good time. The guys are nice and we have a lot of fun," he shared.

Aside from a good learning experience, Goltz and Schellhorn hope their participation in the junior firefighter program will inspire other youth to give back to their communities.


"It might get other people excited that we can do this," Jacob Schellhorn said. "Kids also need to understand that, if you're not driving safe anymore,

it's not going to be older guys showing up. You're going to have classmates showing up too. That might get in their minds to not drive fast, to put their seatbelt on."

Jeremy Schellhorn said engaging youth is critically important as older volunteers age out of the department. He referenced the list for those applying to become a firefighter.

"We used to have a big list, but it keeps shrinking. This is one of the ways we discussed to pull guys or girls in. Have the youth come in and pick it up and stick around and want to do this," he explained. "We want to continue to build and keep our department strong. To have these young guys want to step up and do it is awesome. We want to continue this if we have more kids who want to do it."

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