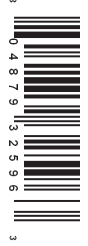




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Central plans to have 2023 football season

By Willis Patenaude

It was earlier this year when Central made the surprise decision to cancel the 2022 varsity football season for a variety of reasons, but mostly revolving around the program's inability to field a full team in recent years. That culminated in numerous game cancellations, something activities director Aaron Reinhart tries to avoid.

Over the intervening months, Reinhart, coach Ben Heitland and others, took a long look at the program. While the aforementioned problems are still present and prevalent, in a turn of events that underscores Reinhart's commitment to the program, Central decided this past week to field a varsity team and compete in the 2023 football season.

Despite this commitment, the intervening months before the first kickoff will be rife with hitches, none more so than the ability of the program to field a full team.

It was this reason that led player Isaac Loan to agree with the cancellation, stating, "I agreed with the decision last year be-

cause over half of the team were underclassmen and we didn't have very many kids out."

In a conversation with Reinhart, he stood behind the decision, but was also forthcoming concerning the obstacles that lay ahead. Chief among them remains the commitment level of Central students when it comes to putting on pads and helmets.

Ideally, the school would have at least 40 kids to field a full, legitimate JV and varsity roster, but Central has only averaged around 20, which is made ever more difficult if those athletes are mostly underclassmen, as was the case this past season.

It's simply not a sustainable existence, though Reinhart mentioned this problem is not unique to Central. It's a statewide issue, with Reinhart offering up Calamus-Wheatland and Rockford as other examples. As recently as 2018, Rockford played in the championship game, but this past year, announced it would only field a JV team due to declining numbers.

According to stats from the

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For McGregor-based hatter David Gibson, 18 years restoring old hats and crafting new ones has given him insight into the unique qualities of hats and those who wear them. By doing so, he's also gained rare knowledge of an historic trade. (Photo by Audrey Posten)

Restoring and making hats provides Gibson with rare knowledge of historic trade

By Audrey Posten

"It's amazing how personal a hat is. You have to understand physiology, personality—a lot of psychology goes into this."

For McGregor-based hatter David Gibson, 18 years restoring old hats and crafting new ones has given him insight into the unique qualities of hats and those who wear them. By doing so, he's also gained rare knowledge of an historic trade.

Gibson came upon hat making by accident.

"I wore vintage hats, and they needed repair," he said.

Living in Oregon at that time, Gibson stumbled on a custom hat maker's shop. The man no longer did many repairs, but welcomed Gibson to use his equipment under his direction.

"After I repaired my hats, he said, 'Well, this guy wants this hat repaired,'" Gibson recalled. He was working as a contractor then, remodeling and building homes, but stopped by the shop when he had time. "Then, with my back, I could no longer work on houses, so I just kept going. I didn't intend it to be a full-time job, but it turned into that."

Gibson has dedicated the past

eight years to hat making full time. Several years ago, he took over the business, VS Custom Hats, shortened from Vintage Silhouettes.

Gibson didn't realize early on that owner Art Fawcett was one of the world's most known custom hatters—and a wealth of history.

"He did men's dress hats. That was his specialty," Gibson said. "He was able to train me in what he knew and I took it from there."

Gibson also honed his craft by

apprenticing with a western hatter and training with a milliner.

Traditionally, hatters and milliners joined cappers as the three trades listed on union stamps inside hats. Hatters focus on men's hats, milliners on women's hats and cappers make sewn caps. Each is blocked, or shaped, in its own way.

The first-hand knowledge Gib-

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MCGREGOR MAIN STREET CONSTRUCTION Traffic flow, wayfinding ideas outlined at meeting

By Audrey Posten

McGregor Deputy Clerk and Economic Development Lead Brandi Crozier, at the Dec. 21 council meeting, presented a series of plans to address community parking, wayfinding and communication during phase I of the upcoming Main Street reconstruction project.

Phase I work will stretch through the 100 and 200 blocks of Main Street, through McGregor's downtown, and include replacing sewer, water and storm sewer as well as curb and gutter, sidewalks and reconstruction of Business 18/

Main Street.

The street will be closed to vehicles and parking throughout construction, phase I of which is slated to start in spring 2023 and wrap up in the fall, necessitating alternative parking and traffic flow to provide adequate access to the business district.

Temporary recommendations include angling parking on the east side of A Street (between Bickel Insurance and Paper Moon) and creating a no parking/delivery truck staging area on the west side. According to Crozier, the move would

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Gibson often uses felt to make hats. The felt comes to him in an un-sized bell shape and has to be blocked into a size and shape using moisture and steam. The hat making process also includes ironing, stiffening, sanding and cutting. It takes a combined eight hours over a roughly one-week period.

HATTER, from page 1

son has accumulated over nearly two decades has been vital. There's little to no resources or information available about hat making. The literature most hatters refer to was published in 1905, according to Gibson.

"I have probably 20, 30 books most people don't know exist. Some from the 1800s and a few up to the 1940s," he added. "It's a very secretive business. Even now. I get requests weekly from people wanting to come apprentice because there's so little information."

Gibson is presently one of only a handful of true bespoke hatters, or one who makes hats specifically for a person and the shape of their head. He works out of a shop at 238 Main St., behind Cabin Fever Soaps.

Finding adequate work space was hard to come by when his family moved to McGregor—another moment Gibson described as accidental. Lifestyle changes, paired with hot, dry conditions and an increasing numbers of wildfires in Oregon, prompted the Gibsons to seek small-town living in the Midwest. A friend suggested the Driftless Region.

"The house came up on a Sunday, and we did a walking tour on Google and put in an offer," he said. "I liked that [McGregor] is near water, has a bit of terrain, is quaint and quiet."

The community also fit his style and that of VS Custom Hats.

"We specialize in classic style," Gibson said. "McGregor is a very classic, small, Mississippi town—classic design and layout, classic lifestyle. Very much in line with what we do."

Gibson's current workshop space is temporary. By next summer, he hopes to have his garage converted into a hat shop where he can work and also sell hats. It will be located about a block and a half off Main Street, a destination for locals and visitors alike.

The VS Custom Hats clientele is broad, stretching across the country—and even around the world. Gibson has restored and made hats for people who live in their vehicle, as well as famous performers and those "who you could say have their own countries," and everyone in between.

When he started, Gibson estimated about 80 percent of his work included restoring hats. To date, he's restored thousands. That's actually harder than starting from scratch, he said.

"That's where a good hatter starts, is learning how to restore old ones because you have to learn the qualities of the hat. Taking them apart and putting them back together, you're learning the restoration process," Gibson said. "I just did a Panama hat not too long ago. Holes all over it, and it needed to be replaced. But he was adamant it needed restored. I reblocked it very carefully, took it apart and put it back together. There were visible holes I had to put linen material behind. I sent it to him for the Cannes Film Festival because he's a movie producer. That was how personal the hat was for him."

Pointing to a rack in his workshop, Gibson added, "A lot of the hats on that rack were somebody's grandfather's hat, and when he passed, somebody's father

had it and he didn't wear it very often. Then the grandson ended up with it and it was sent to me to be restored. The bottom middle is a bowler hat—we call it derby here—and I've renovated several of those. The felt itself doesn't wear out, it's the leather and other materials."

Another hat on the rack is a hand-braided boater from the 1860s.

"The cotton has rotted, so I have to hand sew this back together," Gibson shared.

These days, though, roughly 90 percent of the hatter's work is making new hats.

When a client comes to him, Gibson recommends a brim size based on each individual's body and face structure. He also suggests a specific crown and colors.

"I talk about their lifestyle and how they're going to wear it," Gibson continued. "If you have the right hat that fits you, you're going to wear it."

Many of Gibson's clients don't meet with him in person. Instead, he sends them a package to help them record their head measurements and shape.

From there, blocking is the first step in making a hat. Hats are largely made from two different materials, straw and felt. Wool is sometimes used, but higher grade furs are preferred, according to Gibson.

Beaver is the dominant in the custom trade, in addition to rabbit and mink. Beaver felt is dense and doesn't deteriorate like other materials. In fact, many hats created hundreds of years ago using beaver felt, much of it harvested from the Midwest, still exist today, mostly in museums.

Now, beaver are farm raised and not trapped. Gibson purchases fur from only a few companies in the U.S., Portugal and the Czech Republic. Portuguese felts are considered the best in the world.

The felt comes to him in an un-sized bell shape. It has to be blocked into a size and general shape using moisture and steam. Gibson has dozens of wooden blocks to help with this process.

"That's why there's so



Many of the blocks Gibson uses today are rare, dating back to the 1800s or early 1900s. The ribbon he utilizes to finish hats is equally rare. (Photo by Audrey Posten)

many of them, because each block design has to have at least five sizes—five to nine or more. My sizes vary from 6.5, which is very small—kids—all the way up to my largest is an 8.5," he explained.

While some blocks were made recently, most date back to the 1800s or early 1900s.

"Some I purchased individually, and then I bought out a hat shop in St. Louis and had it shipped to Oregon. They get passed from hatter to hatter," Gibson said. "Unfortunately, a lot of hat blocks were burned over the years. So they're quite rare. Vintage shaped blocks for straw hats are incredibly rare."

Creating a bespoke hat from start to finish is about eight hours, but not all at one time.

"It's usually over a week because I let the felt settle in between. Felt is a dynamic fabric and those fibers are always moving every time you steam it and heat it. There's ironing, stiffening and sanding and cutting." He continued, "The blocking process is the first part, and you let it sit on the block a bit to form. Then you iron it to that block so it activates the inner structure. You put shellac in and it hardens when you iron it. That helps with water proofness. Then we take it off and sand it. So sanding and sizing, then I have to trim the brim down,

and that happens with another 150-year-old device."

The finishing process involves putting leather—often sheep, goat or calf skin—inside the hat. Then, it is shaped and finished out around the crown with a ribbon.

Like other materials in Gibson's shop, the ribbon is older—and rare. Some is from the 1920s. Two rolls are from World War II, and were military ribbon for officers' hats.

According to Gibson, ribbon has to be a certain structure because, when it's steamed, it must form a rainbow shape.

"Not all ribbon does that," he said. "It's actually harder to get the ribbon than the blocks. In World War I, we stopped using silk and found an alternative, which was modal rayon and cotton, and that's what most of this is, copying the qualities of silk. We'll eventually have to have another alternative, another way of finishing the crown. But a classic men's hat uses ribbon, even today."

Depending on the facility, Gibson works on a half dozen to a dozen hats at once. He'll block one hat, finish out another, then work on multiple renovations in between.

Gibson likes to get hats to their owners in three to four months, but the waiting list is currently lengthier. It doesn't help that the turnaround time for materials

has stretched from a few weeks to now months.

"Sometimes, it's overwhelming because you're trying to keep up with the demand," he admitted. "There's only one of me, and you can only go so far. This isn't something you can just teach everyone, not as a bespoke hatter. And I'm the only one I know who is classically trained in three disciplines: milliner, western and dress."

Gibson's 10-year-old daughter is currently apprenticing with him. He pointed to one hat in the workshop that she's cleaning and repairing.

"She has the talent and eye for it," he quipped.

Gibson is excited to share this passion with her. To bring out the history and personality of each hat and its owner.

"People ask me, 'What's the best hat you can make?' It depends on who I make it for," he said. "I'm not a hatter who creates something that's fantastic and then somebody has to figure out how to wear it. Those are fun, but they're meant to be displayed and not worn. A talented hatter would make a hat that truly fits the person and looks as if they always owned it. That's the artistry."

For those seeking more information, Gibson is available by appointment only. Visit vscustomhats.com or call (541) 778-6081.

HAWKEYE SANITATION

Christmas & New Year's Garbage Schedule



Clayton County routes:

Garbage: Our Friday, Dec. 23rd routes will be collected on Thursday, Dec. 22nd.

Our Rural Site pickups in McGregor that would be on Saturday, Dec. 24th will remain as scheduled.

Reminder: Cardboard has been banned in the landfill and cannot go in the garbage. Please recycle so we can keep our garbage clean.

Recycling: All recycling routes will remain as scheduled.

Reminder: The following items are not recyclable and should be disposed of along with your garbage: wrapping paper, gift bags, Styrofoam, plastic wrappings, and bubble wrap. Please call the recycling center at 563-547-3199 with any questions on recycling.

The offices at Hawkeye Sanitation and Recycling will be closed on Dec. 23rd, 26th and January 2nd.

Happy Holidays from Hawkeye Sanitation, Inc!

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Effective July 1, 2023, the factor used to compute the Federal Universal Service Charge (FUSC) that is assessed on interstate services will increase from 23.8% to 33.0%.

This federal universal service fund program is designed to help keep local telephone service rates affordable for all customers, in all areas of the United States. Please call Alpine Communications at 563-245-4000 with any questions you may have regarding these changes.