

The Oskaloosa Herald

Volume 173, number 52

SATURDAY, JULY 22, 2023

2 sections, 12 pages • \$3.00

The price of economic development

Heritage, food production and economic development hang in the balance as airport battle continues

CHANNING RUCKS
STAFF WRITER

Editor's note: This is the first of a five-part series on the status of the proposed South Central Regional Airport and the farmland where the government wants to build it.

About five miles west of Oskaloosa, just off the Highway 163 corridor, lie hundreds of acres of Iowa farmland that have seen more than a century of Mahaska County history unfold on its fields.

Dotting the gravel roads in the area is one heritage or century farm

after another. The families who work the land there have agricultural roots in Mahaska County that run generations deep — and they'd like to continue their heritage as landowners in the county for generations to come.

In 2012, the Mahaska County Board of Supervisors voted to enter the South Central Regional Airport Agency, or SCRAA. A 28E agreement between Oskaloosa, Pella and Mahaska County formed the agency

with the goal of constructing a new regional airport in the Leighton area. Since the formation of SCRAA, the cities of Pella and Oskaloosa have jointly purchased 379 acres of farmland near Leighton to build the new airport.

In June 2022, after a long legal battle fought by a new board of supervisors, the Iowa Supreme Court declared the 28E agreement to be illegal because it restricted the free exercise of government by future

boards, binding them to a decision made in years past. Supervisors voted to leave the SCRAA shortly after the decision, taking with them the power of eminent domain over the chosen site for the new airport.

After the supreme court decision, the four remaining landowners involved in the fight felt that they had won a hard-fought victory after ten long years. The relief for landowners

See **PRICE** on A3

PELLA HONORS ONE OF ITS OWN

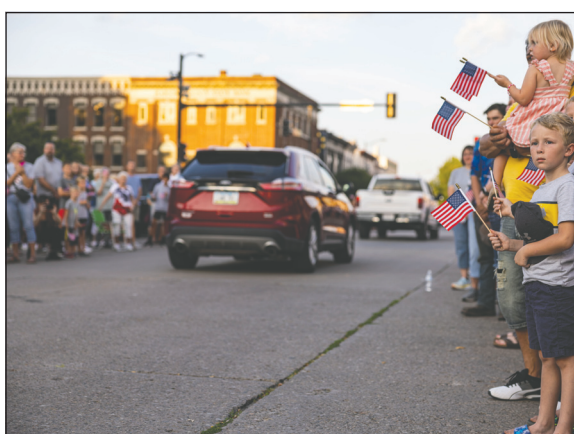


Ayrton Breckenridge

A hearse drives down Franklin Street during the Welcome Home Procession for Pfc. Jacob T. Atchison on the square in Pella, Iowa on Thursday, July 20, 2023.



Community members hold flags during the Welcome Home Procession for Pfc. Jacob T. Atchison on the square in Pella, Iowa on Thursday, July 20, 2023.



Community members watch cars go by during the Welcome Home Procession for Pfc. Jacob T. Atchison on the square in Pella, Iowa on Thursday, July 20, 2023.

Life lessons learned at the county fair

CHANNING RUCKS
STAFF WRITER

OSKALOOSA — Fun, sun and a lot of livestock. That's what Mahaska County's youth are enjoying this week at the Southern Iowa Fair.

Between funnel cakes and creative activities like joke telling contests and barbecue suppers, it's hard not to love a good-old-fashioned county fair. But beyond the fun and games, there are deeper and more valuable lessons about hard work and patience being learned that will last a lifetime.

Lane Vroegh, 13, of Eddyville, has been raising hogs his entire life.

"My parents and grandparents always bred them. It's just something we've done all our lives," he says.

With years of experience raising and showing swine under his belt, Vroegh says that one key lesson he's learned is not to take anything for granted. Raising livestock is a full-time process throughout the year. He wants people to know that success at the county fair doesn't happen overnight.

"[People should know] all the hard work we put into it," Vroegh says. "We spend day and night, a bunch of hours in the barn working with our projects."

Colton Caves, 15, of Fremont, says the same goes for showing goats. It takes a lot of work to raise livestock and a lot of time to build a relationship of trust that transfers to the show ring.

"[It takes] time that you've got to spend out with your animals, working them every night, spending the time getting them to trust you and you trusting them," Caves says.

Caves has been showing goats for two years. He got involved through a friend of his, purchased two goats to show last year, and now calls it a fun hobby.

For kids who are just starting their careers as county fair exhibitors, Vroegh says that even with all his experience raising and showing livestock, the best advice he can give to beginners is just to have a good time.

"Just have fun. Your very first show, you've got to go out there and have fun. It isn't about the winning for the very first show. Just have fun," he says.

This year's beef judge, Austin Brandt, of Corning, Iowa, hopes that like Vroegh and Caves, livestock exhibitors will learn new things about hard work and how to care for their animals throughout their time at the fair, and that they'll keep learning even after it's over.

"I want them to just take away any

See **FAIR** on A2

Pella Community Center on track for new facelift

EMILY HAWK
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

PELLA — The Pella Community Center continues to move closer to a much-needed facelift as local government and volunteer groups hash out a plan for renovations.

On Tuesday, Pella City Council received an update from Schemmer, the project's engineer, and representatives from Friends of the Pella Community Center, during a policy

and planning meeting. Both groups pitched the current renovation plans for the building, along with conservative cost estimates for the project.

The base plan for the project includes electrical, mechanical and plumbing upgrades, improving accessibility, replacing HVAC systems and windows, masonry repairs, restroom renovations, fire protection enhancements and

See **CENTER** on A2

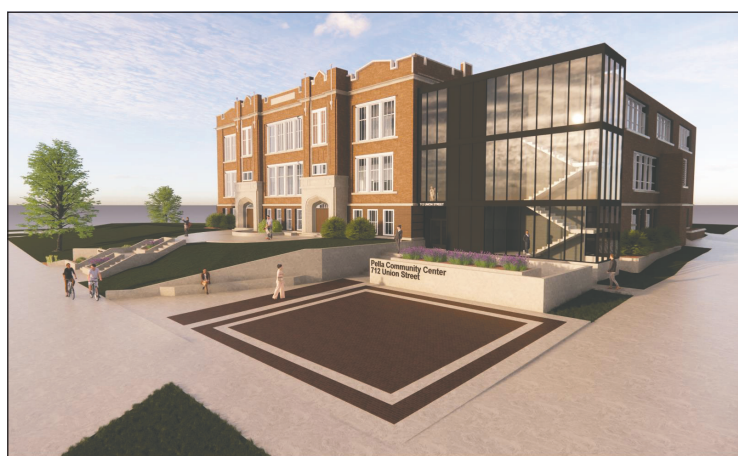


Photo courtesy of Schemmer

A rendering of the exterior of the Pella Community Center.

The Oskaloosa Herald



Publishing since 1850
Oskaloosa, Iowa, USA
Copyright 2023

CONTACT US

- facebook.com/OskyHerald
- twitter.com/OskyHerald
- Oskaloosa.com
- oskynews@oskyherald.com
- Phone: 641-672-2581

WEATHER

Today:
▲ High of 85, ▼ Low of 61
Slight chance of thunderstorms throughout

INDEX

- News A2-4
- Milestones A5
- Voices A6
- Sports B1-3
- Comics B4
- Public Notices .. B5-6

INSIDE

Eagles' upset bid falls short in heartbreaking loss to No. 1 Beckman Catholic

Page B1

The most experienced realtors! Put our experience to work for YOU!

NEW!!

205 Solar Dr., Oskaloosa • \$140,000
3BR/2BA • Charming Ranch Home!

Listed by Alexis Wright 569-3602

PRICE REDUCED \$10,000!!

609 1st Ave. E., Oskaloosa • \$314,900
4BR/2BA • Features Fine Craftsmanship!

Listed by Lori Oaks 660-7011

925 W Mary, Ottumwa • \$350,000
2BR/4BA • In-Town Acreage!

Listed by Lisa Tucker 660-2972

HAWKEYE
Real Estate & Property Mgmt

Chris Roach, Broker Licensed in the State of IA

- The Area's Most Experienced Agents
- Full-time Support Staff
- Proven Marketing Strategy

641-673-MOVE • HAWKEYE-RE.COM

NEWS

Central welcomes six new board members

PELLA — Central College announced changes to its Board of Trustees with the addition of six new members and the retirement of three individuals.

Joining the Central board are Lori Fegley, Kara Kohler Hoogensen, Shannan Mattiace, Marc Poortinga, Dave Smith and Kelly Vielmo.

"We welcome the diversity of experiences in the members joining the board," says Central president Mark Putnam. "Our board members bring the perspectives of employers for our graduates, and as alumni, donors and community members. Our current board has done a fantastic job of cultivating the next generation of leaders and recruiting talented individuals. The college is fortunate to have such strong leadership from its board of trustees."

A look at the new members: — Lori Fegley, a 1980 Central graduate, is a retired

educator from Cedar Falls, Iowa. She previously served on Central's Parent Advisory Council, National Advisory Council and a class reunion chair. She and her husband, Brian, a 1980 graduate, were selected as Mr. and Mrs. Alumni in 2009. They are past parents of Central alums Allison, a 2008 Central graduate, and Peter, a 2011 Central graduate.

— Kara Kohler Hoogensen, a 1996 Central graduate, is a senior vice president of benefits and protection — head of workplace benefits, at Principal Financial Group in Des Moines, Iowa. She and her husband, Steve, have two children, Kate, Class of 2024 and Mallory.

— Shannan Mattiace, a 1990 Central graduate, is a professor of political science and international studies at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania. She received an honorary degree

from Central in 2021. Her teaching and research focus on Latin American and Mexican politics, inspired by Central professors and study abroad experiences in Merida and London. She is married to Tomas Nonnenmacher.

— Marc Poortinga, a 1998 Central graduate, is a co-owner of Distinctive Custom Cabinetry in Phoenix, Arizona. He spent his early work career serving in various roles for Pella Corporation before starting Distinctive Custom Cabinetry in 2007. He is married to Ellen Gallinger Poortinga, a 2004 Central graduate. They have four daughters, Maree, Ellie, Audrey and Jolie.

— Dave Smith is president and owner of Ridgeway Petroleum, Inc., a gas station, convenience store and car wash operation located in Lansing, Illinois. Dave and his wife, Kathy, are past parents of three Central alumni —

Cal, a Class of 2018 graduate, Carter and Cody, both 2020 graduates.

— Kelly Vielmo, a 1999 Central graduate, works at PricewaterhouseCoopers in the technology field, in the Washington, D.C. area. He and his husband, Jack, have three teenage children.

Three Board of Trustees members were granted trustee emeritus status in recognition of their years of service to the college.

Shayla From, West Des Moines, Iowa, served for 15 years with many leadership roles as board secretary, and a member of the executive committee and others. She was a guiding force behind the creation and development of the Central RED Society along with board colleague Donna Davison Smith, Central Class of 1981.

Sophie Mathonnet-Vander-Well, a retired pastor from Pella, Iowa, completed 21



Provided photo

The new Central board of trustees joining in 2023 are, front row, from left: Shannan Mattiace, Kara Kohler Hoogensen, Lori Fegley and Kelly Vielmo. Back row, from left: Dave Smith and Marc Poortinga.

years on the board. She served as the chair of the academic excellence committee and member of the executive committee, student development committee and others.

Bill Rankin, a 1969 Central graduate, from Seattle, Washington, was a board member for eight years since 2015. Through his years of service, he was on the executive com-

mittee, student development committee, enrollment committee and others.

"These committed and brilliant trustees provided excellent leadership throughout their time on the board. They are, and continue to be, devoted to Central students and their success," says Tej Dhawan, Central Board of Trustee chair.

PRICE

CONTINUED FROM A1

was short-lived, however. In May 2023, the City of Oskaaloosa announced it has plans to execute an 80/20 annexation with the 379 acres of airport land it already owns jointly with Pella, as well as the connecting portion of the Highway 163 corridor.

The city would need to obtain 80% of the land prior to annexation, and could then involuntarily annex the remaining 20% into city limits pending approval from the City Development Board. Once annexed, the city will have the power to execute eminent domain on the land, making the possibility of a new airport viable once more — even without the county's participation.

As of Aug. 8, 2022, 63% of the land needed for the airport project has been purchased by SCRAA, according to a land acquisition offer submitted to landowner Dave Prine by a SCRAA consultant.

"Here comes the next round, the next chess move, I guess

you'd say, by the city," says Jack Rempe, one of the last four remaining landowners holding out against the airport. The Rempe farm will be heavily affected if the city's plans come to fruition. The airport's runway is set to stretch right through the middle of the Rempe family farm.

"Now it's back to where we were again," he says, "wondering what exactly a guy should do."

After years of litigation, charged government meetings and often heated public comments, two opposing narratives have surfaced regarding the use of Mahaska County farmland for a new airport.

City officials say the construction of a new airport in Mahaska County is an essential step in Oskaaloosa's economic development.

"The City of Oskaaloosa sees the regional airport as a critical dimension of area growth that will benefit and grow the city, while also providing financial benefits for the county," wrote Oskaaloosa City Manager Amal Eltahir in an editorial published in the

Herald on June 22.

Eltahir says that in a recent strategic planning session with community stakeholders, "anti-growth attitudes and lack of understanding of the 'bigger picture'" were identified as threats to the success of the community.

On the other hand, the four remaining landowners are standing by their multi-generation heritage as farmers working to produce quality food products in Mahaska County.

In Iowa, most everything revolves around the production of corn and beans. As the top corn-producing state in the nation, agriculture is a major driving force of Iowa's economy. Quality farmland is in high demand and short supply. Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA), sponsored a Conservation Reserve Program reform bill in May of 2022 due to a shortage of available farmland for young producers to grow food.

The farmland needed for the new airport is some of the best and most productive land in Iowa. The state itself is home to some of the most fertile soil in

the nation — and in the world, according to the Iowa State Extension Office.

Iowa State University developed a Corn Suitability Rating system, or CSR2, in the 1970s to measure a land plot's suitability to produce a bushel of corn. Today, the Farm Service Agency uses the scale to analyze the productivity of farmland for government programs like the Conservation Reserve Program. The rating scale runs from 5 to 100, with 100 being the most fertile for growing corn.

AcreValue, which analyzes data about soils, climate, crop rotations, taxes, interest rates and corn prices, reports that the state average CSR2 is 68. The Mahaska County average is 67.

According to the Mahaska County Assessor's Office, the average CSR2 for the farms affected by the new airport is 78.78. The highest-rated plot is 89.44, while the lowest comes in at 64.28.

Charles Brown, a southeast Iowa farm management specialist with the Iowa State Extension Office, says that any land with a CSR2 of 80 or higher is classified as "very good" farmland. He considers the land along the 163 corridor to be "prime farmland" because of the quality of the soil, the lay of the land and the quality of farming throughout the years. Brown says that farmland along the 163 corridor is "some of the better land in Iowa."

Iowa farmers have an old saying: Farmland is precious — after all, Iowa isn't making any more of it. Brown says that once a piece of prime farmland is put into urban development, there is no way to reverse the damage and make it farmable again.

"I think anytime you take prime farmland out of farm production, you're not going to get that back," he says. "The old saying is we're not making any more of it, and that's true. We continue to not only take farmland for industrial use like that, but even the urban sprawl they have around the cities."

"You go up around Ankeny, Des Moines, Altoona for example, and you can just see the urban sprawl," he adds. "They've taken over that prime farmland. So at some point in time that's probably going to have to stop. I don't know when that is, but that land is not recoverable. Once it's put under concrete, that's always going to be, and you've lost that

production."

Brown also argues that changing the shape and layout of a farm could have significant negative impacts on its productivity.

"Not only is it loss of production," he says, "but when you start dividing those farms up, it affects the way they're farmed. You may not have the efficiencies of farming that land that you once had, because of possibly the length of the fields and that type of thing. It can also affect drainage, in some cases, when you start cutting off some of the way that the water runs off those fields."

"There's also that sentimental value that goes along with it. Some of those farms have probably been in the same families for generations, and that's hard to give up."

The landowners, it would seem, agree with Brown. Tensions are running high as the City of Oskaaloosa pushes for economic development while the remaining landowners — the Rempe, DeRooi, Prine and Van Zomer families — continue to fight for their land rights.

Other cracks have begun to appear in the plan for the new regional airport.

Matt Hutchinson, chair of the Pella Municipal Airport Committee, reported at an airport meeting in May that Pella Corporation has submitted a letter to Pella City Administrator Mike Nardini that indicates it no longer supports the proposed South Central Regional Airport. The letter also says Pella Corp. would like the city to redirect its resources to the Pella Municipal Airport.

"While we understand and appreciate the efforts to create a new regional airport capable of meeting the needs of businesses in the area, the circumstances simply do not support continuing in that direction," wrote John Bollman, executive vice president and chief human resources officer at Pella Corporation.

Both Pella Corp. and Vermeer Corporation currently utilize the Pella Municipal Airport for business. In an email submitted to the Pella City Council and Mayor Don DeWaard, Hutchinson wrote that over 80% of the activity that would transition to a new regional airport would come from Pella. He argued that continuing with the regional airport would be costly to the

City of Pella and would spark more litigation.

Hutchinson also wrote that the Pella airport has been neglected for more than 15 years and won't make it another decade without "significant" city investment. Shane Vande Voort, manager of the Pella Municipal Airport, said at least \$1.5 million is currently needed for improvements.

"As Chairman of the Airport Committee my job is to advise the Mayor and Council on airport-related issues, and the recommendation of this committee is for the City of Pella to exit the current 28-E agreement to build a regional airport."

Even with Pella's support for a new regional airport up in the air, City of Oskaaloosa officials continue to move forward with informational meetings and attempts to sway landowners, including offering "overhead avigation easements" to two of them, which would require only their airspace.

The landowners remain unconvinced and say that the change in tactics feels like an attempt to "divide and conquer."

The June 2022 court decision changed the landscape for the SCRAA forever. Without support from Mahaska County and with rapidly diminishing support from Pella, Oskaaloosa is still searching for a way to move ahead with the project — despite protestations from both city and rural community members who do not want a new airport in Mahaska County.

The four families who remain are standing in solidarity with one another. Affected landowner Dave Prine, who has been offered an overhead avigation easement, says that he's standing firm in his opposition to the airport not only because of his heritage as a farmer in Mahaska County, but also for the generations of farmers that he hopes will come.

"I'm sticking with my neighbors," he says. "I don't ever want anybody to say 'Well, if Prine hadn't rolled over, there wouldn't have been an airport.'"

— Associate editor Emily Hawk contributed to this story.

Channing Rucks can be reached at crucks@oskyherald.com.

— NOW OPEN —

Main Street Markt

PELLA IOWA

503 Main Street, Pella

from the Liberty Street Kitchen team.

The World's Finest Specialty Foods and Grocery Products for Your Table.

MARKET

CAFÉ

Grab-and-Go Dishes
Artisan Grocery Goods
Specialty Wines & Cheeses
South Union Bakery Breads
Organic, Gluten-free,
Dairy-free & Vegan Items

Chef-Crafted Cuisine
Sandwiches & Soups
Fresh Salads & Bowls
Dine-In & Carryout
Serving Breakfast,
Lunch & Dinner

Sizzlin' Saturdays

Join us every Saturday this summer for special seasonal features and events!

FREE SAMPLES
Enjoy featured products from across the market, all day long.

GRILLED SPECIALTIES
Grilled-to-order hot dogs and hamburgers, sides and more for purchase on our patio.
11 a.m. - 2 p.m. (weather permitting)

BEVERAGE SPECIALS



For weekly deals and specials, join our email list by scanning the QR code or visiting **MainStreetMarkt.com**

MYTH

You would know if you had syphilis.

FACT

Like many STIs, syphilis can have no symptoms.



Find testing near you:
[gettested.cdc.gov](https://www.gettested.cdc.gov)

Public Health
IOWA HHS

Syphilis is a sexually transmissible infection (STI). It's more common and easier to get than you might think. Not everyone who has syphilis has symptoms, so people often don't realize they have it. If you do have symptoms, they can include a painless sore or rash. Thankfully, syphilis is easy to test, treat and cure! If you're sexually active, make sure that getting tested syphilis is part of your health routine.