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The Rempes: A legacy that can't be bought

Proposed airport could take nearly three-fourths of 120-acre farm

EMILY HAWK
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Editor's note: This is the third 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.

At 93 years old, Florence Rempé is as hardy as the crops that have grown on her family's Century Farm for more than 100 years.

Her wit is quick, her mind sharp. She knows the story or has a memory attached to each photo in the family photo album as she reminisces with

her daughter Sandra and her son Jack at her kitchen table.

Florence recently moved from her farm in Leighton to Independence Village in Pella just last year. A lot has changed as she's gotten older, but the love and pride for the family farm is apparent in Florence's voice.

"You remember the good things, but boy, we had to work too," she says.

The Rempé farm is one of four farms that would be affected by the proposed South Central Regional Airport. If the project comes to fruition, the airport's runway will run right through the middle of the farm — taking 87 of 120 acres out of commission.

Like the family photo album, the land has been telling its own story for the last 142 years.

"The horses [in the photos] really make you think about how far back the farm goes," Sandra says.

The farm was purchased in 1881 by Florence's great-grandparents, Joseph and Susan Stephenson. A year into their new home, Florence's grandfather, Floyd Stephenson, was born. Floyd lived and farmed the land his entire life, except a time when a farming accident and old age inhibited his ability to work.

"He lost his hand in a corn shell accident," Florence says. "Those kinds of things happened too with horses and livestock. It really can be kind of dangerous."

Florence's grandmother Rosa helped support the family while Floyd recovered by farming and

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Ayrton Breckenridge | The Herald

Florence looks through the family photo album with her daughter Sandra and son Jack at Independence Village in Pella.



Photos Ayrton Breckenridge

Colson Davis, 6, runs through water during the 2023 Sweet Corn Serenade in Oskaloosa, Iowa on Thursday, July 27, 2023.



Sam Rozenboom, 5, competes in the Ohana Pedal Pull during the 2023 Sweet Corn Serenade in Oskaloosa, Iowa on Thursday, July 27, 2023.



Sawyer Plate, 5, competes in the Ohana Pedal Pull during the 2023 Sweet Corn Serenade in Oskaloosa, Iowa on Thursday, July 27, 2023.



John Golnick eats corn during the 2023 Sweet Corn Serenade in Oskaloosa, Iowa on Thursday, July 27, 2023.



Sheryl Evert of Altoona paints Quinn Strover's, 2, face during the 2023 Sweet Corn Serenade in Oskaloosa, Iowa on Thursday, July 27, 2023.

Corn, soybeans enter homestretch

CHANNING RUCKS
STAFF WRITER

Local producers are gearing up for the homestretch of this year's growing season. With only the month of August still standing between the crops and the harvest, experts hope that moisture levels will hold steady long enough for the area's corn and beans to finish strong.

The area's corn crop seems to have survived this summer's dry spell not too much worse for the wear, thanks to milder summer temperatures than usual. However, the National Weather Service is forecasting a hot week ahead, with the heat index reaching as high as 101 degrees on Wednesday, July 26. High temperatures are set to continue through the end of the week, leaving the state's moisture levels continuing to toe a fine line.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that, as of July 23, the state's topsoil moisture levels are rated 13% very short, 42% short, 43% adequate and 2% surplus. Subsoil moisture condition rated 17% very short, 46% short, 36% adequate and 1% surplus.

"Obviously, we want those to be adequate or above adequate," says Clarabell Probasco, a field agronomist with the Iowa State Extension Office. Probasco covers several counties in southeast Iowa, including Wapello, Jefferson and Davis. "The fact that we've got a pretty big percentage as low or short, and then a pretty big percentage is adequate, and we're just now getting ready to start into August, which is one of our drier months, can raise at least some concerns about having good enough moisture levels to keep pushing this crop through the really hot month of August for us."

Alex Fynaardt, an agronomist at Key Co-op in New Sharon, says that further north the situation looks better.

"At least locally here in northern Mahaska County, moisture levels are actually fairly decent," Fynaardt says. "I feel pretty good about going into this heat that we've got coming towards the end of the week, for now. We will start to see some heat stress as the week goes on, but I feel better going into

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Willie Van Weelden: A Mahaska County celebrity

CHANNING RUCKS
STAFF WRITER

OSKALOOSA — Willie Van Weelden, a lifelong resident of Mahaska County, is being remembered as a friendly face who made a big difference in his community through public service, volunteer work and faithful involvement with popular community events.

After Van Weelden's death on June 10, 2023, at the age of 77, his family and members of the Oskaloosa community are remembering his love for the place he called home.

Van Weelden had a passion for his local community and spent his life trying to keep it alive and thriving.

"He liked to do everything locally in the community," says his wife, Bonnie Van Weelden. "He said if we didn't do that, we would lose the companies, stores that we have, and

we'd be a ghost town. And so he just liked to really encourage them to do things and thought they were doing really good things too."

Willie Van Weelden was involved with several local boards and organizations throughout his life. He served as a Mahaska County Supervisor from 2002 to 2018, served on the Southern Iowa Fair Board and was a member of the Oskaloosa Rotary Club. He was also the president of the Mahaska County Conservation Board, drove William Penn University athletes to their games and announced for the Pioneer Days Parade at the Nelson Pioneer Farm.

He was also a fixture at Oskaloosa's annual Sweet Corn Serenade. Deann DeGroot, executive director of the Mahaska Chamber and

See **CELEBRITY** on A2



Provided photo

Willie Van Weelden (right) cuts sweet corn at Oskaloosa's annual Sweet Corn Serenade festival.

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WEATHER

Today:
▲ High of 88, ▼ Low of 65
Slight chance of storms early then clear.

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INSIDE

Pella's Curry, PC's Eekhoff receive all-state softball recognition.

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We can show ANY area listing!!



106 Solar Dr., Oskaloosa • \$229,000
3BR/2BA • Well Cared For!!

Listed by Bruce Peiffer 660-7853



205 Solar Dr., Oskaloosa • \$140,000
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NEWS

CELEBRITY

CONTINUED FROM A1

Development Group, says that he volunteered at the event for over 30 years.

"He always liked to go," Bonnie Van Weelden says. "He cleaned the corn and got it all ready. He'd work there all day. A couple times he judged the pie contest, which he thought was fun ... He just loved seeing all the community come out, and it was just a fun time for family."

Willie Van Weelden did similar work at the Southern Iowa Fair, working in the concession stand and enjoying the local atmosphere. In the fall, he announced for the Nelson Pioneer Farm's Fall Festival Parade. Nelson Pioneer Farm director Margaret Spiegel estimates that Van Weelden announced for the parade for 15 to 20 years and says that his personal touch livened things up.

"Willie was fantastic at our parade," Spiegel says. "After he'd been doing it for so many

years, he knew the regulars who usually brought their equipment, and if somebody changed equipment, he'd say 'Oh, last year they brought this instead of this one this year.' He was able to go on the fly and be able to really make the parade dynamic, and he kept the announcements a lot of fun. He was able to add personal anecdotes because he knew everybody, and so he really added a nice, fresh and personal touch to our Fall Festival Parade."

When the winter months rolled around, he reveled in the city's famous "Painting with Lights" display on the square.

"He really loved the lights that have been up the last few Christmases on the square," says his daughter, Jennifer Baham. "When I would come back to visit, we'd always take drives around the square to look at all the lights and see what was happening in the town."

Through his work as a public servant, Van Weelden was involved with some major decisions for Mahaska

County. One of his lasting contributions was his vote to build the Environmental Learning Center. Mahaska County Conservation director Chris Clingan says that Van Weelden's support was vital, and the ELC might not exist today without him.

"There's no doubt in my mind that we wouldn't have this facility if it wasn't for Willie Van Weelden," Clingan says. "It was after his time being spent on the board of supervisors that he joined the conservation board, and I remember him telling me that it really opened his eyes to what all we do. He didn't realize what all we did when he was on the board of supervisors, until he got here and he realized everything that we do and all the services that we provide."

Van Weelden was part of the committee that hired Clingan to serve as the county conservation director. Clingan says that though he was intimidated by Willie during his interview, as their relationship progressed, Willie became a

source of insight and advice as he got comfortable in his new role.

"He kind of helped guide me through, so it was very, very helpful, and I really appreciated him."

Not only did Van Weelden serve the public, his three daughters, Baham, Melissa Bowen and Valerie Terpstra, say that he invested a lot of time into teaching his grandchildren about Mahaska County, the local community and the natural habitat here.

"I lived in Minnesota for several years, and we moved back to Oskaloosa about 11 years ago," Bowen says. "My kids just always marveled because everywhere we went, they're like 'Grandpa knows everybody.' My little boy — a couple years ago, so he's like five or six — he's like 'Grandpa's a celebrity.' I said 'I don't know about that. Maybe in Mahaska County.'"

That's the enduring legacy Van Weelden has left behind.

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

STRETCH

CONTINUED FROM A1

this heat this week than I did a year ago at this time."

The USDA reports that 79% of the state's corn has silked, or entered the crucial stage of pollination. Probasco and Fynaardt both say that pollination has gone well in their coverage areas. Now, all that remains to be seen is if the corn crop receives enough moisture to produce to its fullest potential.

"For corn, I feel really good about the way pollination happened this year," says Fynaardt. "We're probably not completely through it yet, but for the most part, we dealt with cool nights and, honestly, even cool days for the most part, where we didn't have a lot of adverse weather. We had full sun, but it wasn't 95 degrees and arid. Outside we had some humidity, and at night we cooled off to the 50s, and that's perfect weather for pollinating corn."

"We should at least have decent pollination," he adds. "Whether we can keep that crop and those ears together from here is to be determined. Whatever we get from moisture in August will determine what that does."

Soybeans, on the other hand, are just entering their most critical stage. The saying goes that soybean yields are made in August. With 81% of the state's soybeans blooming this week according to the USDA, the plants will be setting their pods soon and determining how many beans they will be able to grow in each one, based on the moisture resources that are available.

"Those flowers are transitioning from a flower to a pod on the plant, and those rains help get those pods abundant across the plant and less pods aborted," Probasco says. "If we have really systems, Ford's F-Series pickups are the top-selling vehicles in the U.S."

The company says in documents posted by government safety regulators Friday that a rear wiring bundle can come in contact with the rear axle housing. That can chafe the wiring and cause a short circuit, which can turn on the parking brake without action from the driver, increasing the risk of a crash.

Drivers may see a parking brake warning light and a warning message on the dashboard.

Ford says in documents that it has 918 warranty claims and three field reports of wire chafing in North America. Of these, 299 indicated unexpected parking brake activation, and 19 of these happened while the trucks were being driven.

The company says it doesn't know of any crashes or injuries caused by the problem.

Dealers will inspect the rear wiring harness. If protective tape is worn through, the harness will be replaced. If the tape isn't worn, dealers will install a protective tie strap and tape wrap.

Owners will be notified by letter starting Sept. 11.

Owners with questions can call Ford customer service at (866) 436-7332.

right now," she adds. "This hot period could stress out the plant a little bit, where we might start to see some of those flowers or those early pod development stages start to abort here and there, so timely rain would really be key in August to kind of help that plant push along and keep those pods filling, and keep them from aborting."

Probasco says that besides the heat, producers need to be watching out for spider mites in their soybean fields, so that plants only have drought stress to contend with and not hungry insects.

"Spider mites are a big one that might raise concern when it gets really high temperatures, and it's really dry conditions, and there's really low humidity," she says. "That's kind of where spider mites start to thrive in our crops."

Other signs of drought stress, according to Fynaardt, include a yellowing of the soybean plant and the plant's leaves flipped upside down during the heat of the day to shield it from the sun.

In the end, he says, farmers can only wait and see what the weather does from here on out.

"For now, I think we're just kind of sitting back. There's not a lot we can do from here," Fynaardt says. "We've put all of the inputs into it that we're going to, and from here it's not up to us. We'll just watch and see what we're going to have."

The National Weather Service forecasts a high of 96 degrees Wednesday, with the heat index reaching as high as 101 degrees. Thursday the high is 99 degrees, with the low set at 75 degrees overnight.

Friday has a 30% chance of precipitation, mostly after 1 a.m., and a high of 99 degrees throughout the day with a 20% chance of precipitation before 1 p.m. Friday night shows a low of 72 degrees with a 40% chance of rain throughout the night. Saturday shows a high near 93, with a 30% chance of showers before 1 p.m.

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



Photos by Ayrton Breckenridge | The Herald

Florence Rempe looks on as Sandra Rempe shares a photo of Joseph and Susan Stephenson riding into town with their horses, Pet and Babe, in 1916.

REMPES

CONTINUED FROM A1

selling homemade butter, eggs and strawberries in Oskaloosa. They eventually rented out the land when Floyd needed more help as he got older — the only time the land was ever farmed by someone outside of the family.

But, like all farmers do, they persisted.

"My grandmother was really inventive," Florence says. "There was a hill with a good water supply. She had a tank, and the cold water ran into it while she was milking [dairy cows] to cool the milk."

A small cave, still present today, was used to keep the milk cool and store crops from the garden. Rosa also taught herself how to develop pictures. The Rempe family photo album is filled with memories she captured and developed herself.

"I don't think very many people did that back in those days," Florence says.

Rosa's resourcefulness extended to her home. Built in 1919, the three-bedroom farmhouse was ahead of its time. A set of drawers in the wall between the kitchen and the dining room gave access to napkins and silverware from both rooms. The house also had an indoor bathroom, something unheard of in rural Iowa at the time.

After 104 years, the home is still standing. The Rempes currently rent the home out to a local family.

"We think a lot of that house," Sandra says. "Of course, it's older now, but if there's an [airport] hangar and runway nearby, that house is going to be lonely."

Florence grew up on a farm nearby with her parents, William and Helen Van Maanen, and younger sister, Francis (Pete) Watson. She remembers visiting Grandpa Floyd and Grandma Rosa to help with chores, play with kittens and savor the best fried chicken she's ever eaten.

"I thought it was a wonderful place ... I had a whole farm at home, but it was a lot more fun being with my grandparents," Florence says.

Throughout the years, the Stephenson home became a social hub with other farming families in the area. The Rempes were close with their neighbors, including the Prines and other families affected by the proposed regional airport. Susan Stephenson's parents, Elizabeth and John Bovell, are buried in



The first Stephenson family house, where Joseph (left) lived with his wife Susan and son Floyd.



Local girls pose for a photo outside the Stephenson farmhouse during the Mahaska County 4-H Championship in the early 1900s. Florence Rempe, along with her grandma Rosa Stephenson, her mother Helen Van Maanen and her daughter Sandra Rempe, were all local 4-H leaders.

the Prine cemetery.

"They were a very cohesive neighborhood, and invited each other to weddings and socialized a lot together," Sandra says.

Florence and her late husband, Allen Rempe, began farming her grandparents' land in the 1960s. These days, the land is farmed by Florence's son Jack and his wife Tami. They use a no-till farming technique to grow corn and beans, a method that decreases the amount of soil erosion tillage causes in certain soils. The corn and beans are then sold to make sweetener, animal feed, starch, citric acid, lye seed, ethanol and other products that people use every day.

"They're not taking land that Old McDonald had in the old days — not that they should take his land either. But this is a business," Sandra says. "This is how they make money for their families. This isn't a hobby farm."

Like Dave Prine, the family has received offers by mail for their land from an SCRAA representative based on appraisal reports. Within the last year, Oskaloosa City Manager Amal Elthair has approached the Rem-

pes directly with the biggest offer yet, Jack says — but no amount of money could ever sway them.

"We've all been sticking together quite well over the years," Jack says. "It's been a long time. It's been a long battle."

For the Rempes, there are some things you just can't put a price tag on, including some of the best farmland in Iowa. According to the Mahaska County assessor's office, land on the Rempe farm has a Corn Suitability Rating, or CSR2, between 79.37-84.85. The rating scale, developed by Iowa State University, runs from 5 to 100, with 100 being the most fertile for growing corn.

According to Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, it is widely accepted that Iowa's soils are some of the richest and most productive in the world.

"To have some of the best land in the world to be taken out of commission — That's sobering," Sandra says.

Emily Hawk is the associate editor of the Ottumwa Courier and the Oskaloosa Herald. She can be reached at ehawk@oskyherald.com.

Ford recalls 870K F-150 pickups in US

F-150 electric parking brakes can turn on unexpectedly

AP

DEARBORN, Mich. — Ford is recalling more than 870,000 newer F-150 pickup trucks in the U.S. because the electric parking brakes can turn on unexpectedly.

The recall covers certain pickups from the 2021 through 2023 model years with single exhaust systems. Ford's F-Series pickups are the top-selling vehicles in the U.S.

The company says in documents posted by government safety regulators Friday that a rear wiring bundle can come in contact with the rear axle housing. That can chafe the wiring and cause a short circuit, which can turn on the parking brake without action from the driver, increasing the risk of a crash.

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BEACON INFORMATION:
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 35.21 Acres with CSR2 of 83.66
 39.00 Acres with CSR2 of 66.18
 39.97 Acres with CSR2 of 83.39
DUE DATE FOR OFFERS:
 Thursday, August 24, 2023 at 4:00 P.M.
Auction Date: August 28, 2023, at 10:00 A.M.
Closing date: December 1, 2023
Farm is open for 2024 crop year.
 For more information call Duane Heyveld at 641-780-6558 or Attorney Fred J. Kreykes - Phone 641-628-2383 email fred@kreykesandchaplin.com.
 More information available at www.kreykesandchaplin.com