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PCM EXPLORER

PRAIRIE CITY

Learn about PPEL

Three informational meetings planned for the Physical Plant Equipment Levy vote March 7

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Three informational meetings are planned for the upcoming Physical Plant Equipment Levy (PPEL) vote March 7 for the PCM School District. The public is invited to hear about the PPEL vote and what it means for the district at 7 p.m. Feb. 16 in the middle school auditorium, 6 p.m. Feb. 23 at the high school learning center

and virtually at 6 p.m. Feb. 27. A Zoom link will be available closer to the virtual meeting date. At the January meeting, the school board approved amending the levy from \$0.67 to \$1.34, an increase of \$0.67. The district said the increase will be offset by reducing the rate of the Management Levy. "The board's plan is to reduce the levy in the management

fund to offset this increase in the PPEL fund. Therefore there will be no change to the overall current school tax levy as a result of this amendment and renewal. Specifically, the increase of \$0.67 will be offset by reducing the management levy from \$1.80 to \$1.13. School finances are difficult to understand. Funds are provided in

PPEL • 3

JASPER COUNTY



Steve Ashing, a reserve deputy paramedic for the Jasper County Sheriff's Office, opens a backpack full of medical supplies and equipment. Ashing is part of the advanced life support pilot program at the sheriff's office, which allows part-time reserve deputies with paramedic-level training to respond to emergency calls in rural areas and assist volunteer agencies. Christopher Braunschweig/PCM Explorer

FIRST RESPONDER INNOVATION

Sheriff's office in Jasper County is using part-time paramedics to fill in service gaps for struggling volunteer EMS agencies in rural communities

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Editor's note: The following story is the first in a multi-part series about Jasper County's efforts to improve emergency care for rural residents and assist the volunteer teams struggling to keep crews full and find new members, many of which may not have the means or time to be certified for paramedic-level care.

When the reserve deputy paramedics of the Jasper County Sheriff's Office arrived on scene to give an overdosing patient a life-saving dose of Narcan to temporarily reverse the symptoms of the narcotics they had consumed, the first words that came out of the man's mouth were: "Thank you."

Emergency response teams throughout Iowa — whether they are employed by a municipality or are

strictly volunteers — have experienced moments like these in some form. But the decline of volunteerism is leaving some rural communities vulnerable to lower response times and, in some cases, less adequate care.

Jasper County Sheriff's Office was thrust into a perfect opportunity last year to address the struggles of volunteer agencies and provide extra assistance by creating the advanced life support pilot program. About \$180,000 in CARES Act funds paid for two part-time reserve deputy paramedics.

The county then received \$7.22 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds, and the board of supervisors was willing to designate \$2 million to expand the program by adding four more part-time positions. As of January, two of those positions have been filled, and they,

EMS • 2

Newton News, Jasper County Tribune, PCM Explorer take home 5 first place awards at INA ceremony



Editor Jamee A. Pierson and associate editor Christopher Braunschweig at the Iowa Newspaper Association contest awards banquet with the many first place finishes the newspapers received. PCM Explorer

PCM Explorer

The Newton News, Jasper County Tribune and PCM Explorer received a total of 19 awards — including five first-place plaques — during the 2023 Iowa Newspaper Association Awards Ceremony on Feb. 2 at the Marriott hotel in downtown Des Moines.

PCM Explorer received the most honors with nine top-three finishes. The weekly newspaper covering the Prairie City and Monroe communities earned first place for Coverage of Education while associate editor Christopher Braunschweig earned first place for Best News

AWARDS • 3

JASPER COUNTY

Food assistance programs brought up at legislative gathering

Dunwell says amendment would only prohibit candy, non-zero calorie drinks

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In addition to the grilling Jasper County's legislators took regarding school choice during a legislative gathering held Jan. 21 by the League of Women Voters, other guests criticized a proposal to stop Iowans from using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits for sliced cheese, white bread and fresh meat.

According to the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, SNAP provides nutrition

benefits to supplement the food budget of needy families so they can purchase healthy food and move towards self-sufficiency. Some lawmakers say the proposal is necessary to thwart fraud and abuse.

Linda Wormley, of Newton, criticized House File 3 at the gathering in Newton, saying the SNAP benefits help those living in small town Iowa. Wormley asked Rep. Jon Dunwell, of House District 37, what he "really wants for rural Iowa." Dunwell agreed with some of the concerns Wormley raised about the bill.

Iowa Capital Dispatch's Robin Opsahl reported in Jan. 26 that food bought with SNAP cards would have to match the approved foods listed in

SNAP • 3

JASPER COUNTY

Lawmakers have not seen 'anything specific' regarding child care legislation

Representatives agreed child care is an issue but government can't solve it for everybody



Preschoolers participate in learning activities at the Newton YMCA in 2022. Lawmakers representing Jasper County agree child care is an issue, but Rep. Jon Dunwell said he has not seen anything specific this year for expanding child care. Sen. Ken Rozenboom said it is a problem that cannot be fixed overnight, nor can the government solve it for everybody. Christopher Braunschweig/PCM Explorer

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Families are waiting for openings at child care center at the same time facilities are searching for workers to care for the influx of children.

Rep. Jon Dunwell told visitors of the legislative gathering hosted by the League of Women Voters of Jasper County that child care continues to be a huge issue at the statehouse. The emphasis last year was on quantity, he said, but part of the issue he wants to explore more is quality.

"Everywhere we look we're trying to figure out how we can get more folks into the child care

(profession), for child care workers," he said. "Some of that has to do with wages, but if you raise wages you raise costs. So it's just trying to balance that out. A lot of what the governor has done is create private partnerships."

In 2021, Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds established the Governor's Child Care Task Force, which is comprised of public and private members. The task force was created to develop a comprehensive strategy and make recommendations to the child care shortage. The task force also opened up more grant opportunities.

Some of the grants offer businesses money to cover the infrastructure costs of in-house day care. However, Dunwell noted

he has "not seen anything specific this year" for expanding child care. Sen. Ken Rozenboom said it is a problem that cannot be fixed overnight.

"Over the last several years — especially since COVID — day-care or child care centers have been closing down," Rozenboom said. "We try to do all sorts of things to do that. But to have government just come in and solve it for everybody, it doesn't work like that."

Fran Henderson, of Newton, told Rozenboom she is not asking government to take over child care. But the conversations Rozenboom and Dunwell have

CHILD CARE • 3