

News

Registration

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understand that it is register now, pay later,” DeHaai said. “We can’t take the money in until July 1 because it is the next fiscal year. On July 1, a reminder will be sent out to pay book fees, etc.”

ple, especially for those who have registered children in the past. For any questions, the secretaries at each building are available to help out when needed.

“Unless you have anything to change, it is really just verifying all of your information and clicking submit. It isn’t like the old days when you had to put in everything,” DeHaai said. “It really helps

us plan so we know, for example, do we have a lot of kids coming into kindergarten next year.”

The district will also have laptops available during conferences for parents and guardians to register students.

“It takes less than 10 minutes and it is easier to do it on a laptop than on a phone,” DeHaai said. “Our secretar-

ies will be able to help them with any questions they may have. You can get it done, check it off of your list and not have to worry about it.”

Free and reduced meal applications will not be available until July but those who qualify also qualify for free or reduced book fees. For any questions about the program, contact the school secretaries.

“It is easy, it is confidential and it helps our district to report all of the free and reduced meals,” DeHaai said.

For more information or to have any questions answered, contact the school at 515-994-2686 or visit with the district during conferences.

Contact Jamee A. Pierson at 641-792-3121 ext. 6534 or jpierson@newtondailynews.com

EMS

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resource, but it may end up costing the county a lot of money.

ESSENTIAL SERVICE LEVY IS AN UNEXPLORED OPTION

The sheriff of Jasper County has frequently called the county’s ALS program a solution, not the solution, noting he is open to other alternatives. Volunteer agencies in the county may yet have another option in the future thanks to a bill introduced in the legislature almost two years ago.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds signed into law a bill that would allow county boards of supervisors to ask residents in a referendum to vote for or against an essential service levy. If approved, a \$0.75 levy would be imposed on property owners, which would go towards EMS agencies in the county.

While it may seem like all agencies would be in support of the levy, Wyma is worried about the distribution of funds and does not want to see the small towns surrounding Newton to be short changed. Plus, Sully Rural Fire Department and Ambulance is not operated by the city; it is operated by a board of trustees.

“That’s going to be governed more by cities,” Wyma said. “Right now, fire is the only essential service. A city in Iowa does not have to provide EMS, but they do have to provide fire services. The city can technically govern the fire side. We keep fire and EMS separate re-

garding the financial side, but all our members are expected to perform in both roles.”

Jasper County has not put the public measure on a ballot. However, the Baxter Rural Fire Department is currently working to establish its own local essential service levy with the city. Hansen is also worried about the distribution of funds if the county passes its own levy, and that it might supersede the Baxter levy.

Ultimately, Hansen’s primary concern is providing adequate patient care to his fellow residents. By establishing the levy in Baxter, the chief knows the funds will stay local. Hansen could only speculate as to why the essential service levy has not been presented as an option. He figures it is up to the cities to decide.

“I have pushed our emergency management people and told them, ‘Why are we not doing this? Why haven’t we done this?’ This essential service bill has been passed for two years now,” Hansen said. “It’s up to the county or the townships or municipalities to move it further down the path, from my understanding.”

Gerald Malone, the EMS director of Monroe Fire and Rescue, was critical of the program in large part because the essential service levy is in place already to assist departments in Jasper County. The board of supervisors, he said, could have put it up to a vote in 2021 or 2022.

“But they failed to do so,” he said. “We have a lot of departments in this county that are

established, obviously, with fire service and ambulance service. I think that would have gone a long way if they put that on the ballot to vote that in to have EMS as an essential service. These towns wouldn’t be struggling.”

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS IS GETTING MORE DIFFICULT

EMS agencies also have been struggling to recruit new volunteers for years.

In order to volunteer for the fire and EMS department in Sully, a individual must be a certified EMT. Wyma said certification classes can cost up to \$2,500 and take up hours of a person’s time. Although the department can reimburse applicants who pass their certification, it is still a huge commitment.

The state has made it challenging for volunteers to get accredited, Wyma said, and at times it feels like there are too many hoops to jump through. While she understands the importance of some of those requirements, it can also dissuade people from wanting to go through all the processing and paperwork.

“People have to come up with that money ahead of time, and that’s kind of a hinderance,” Wyma said of the certification courses. “People don’t necessarily want to go and take an EMT course. We would have 50 members, probably, if everybody could just drive or go fight fires.”

Some of the small town agencies in Jasper County split their crews into fire and EMS. Wyma said some

agencies fear they will not have enough volunteers to cover one or the other. If there are so few medical volunteers, there won’t be enough people — or, by extension, enough care — to adequately respond.

“I fear, at some point, if our community is not covered with necessary services and resources, members will not want to volunteer causing a downward spiral,” Wyma said. “The dedication is strong with community support and our excellent department. We are committed to continuing this relationship because we have an awesome community.”

Community support certainly goes a long way when it comes to fundraising, which is required of most agencies. Still, the lack of volunteers is prevalent throughout the state and most of the country. Hansen said it gets tougher and tougher every day to get people to volunteer.

“It’s becoming ever tougher to just volunteer your time,” he said. “You can’t just say, ‘I want to come help you.’ Well, are you certified in this? Have you done this? Can you do this? Can you do this? You can’t just volunteer your time anymore. Finding volunteers is just tough.”

Historically, many volunteer departments look to their own family members to don the firefighter’s helmet or drive the ambulance. Malone said it may be easier for cousins, sons and daughters or any other relatives to join because of the environment they’re brought up in.

Monroe is no different.

“We have quite a few family members,” he said. “I think the Jenkins family has one, two, three, four on the department right now. A father and three kids.”

SOME WORRY THE ALS PROGRAM IS NOT THE ANSWER

More than 30 people volunteer for Monroe Fire and Rescue, and six of them — including Malone — can provide advanced level care. For the most part, Malone said the Monroe squads rarely ever require a reserve deputy paramedic on scene to assist or provide primary care.

“Some departments do have a problem with their EMS responses, but I don’t think that was the answer to it,” Malone said. “A lot of us feel that way.”

In Malone’s opinion, the sheriff’s office should be a policing force rather than an EMS service. Any business or organization can try to provide multiple services, but Malone said “you can’t be a cook and fix tires” or “you can’t run the bank and fix hair.” There is a follow-up phrase to the old saying “jack-of-all-trades.”

Malone said, “One person cannot provide every service. You’re overburdening that system. No disrespect to the people they have been working for them because they are experienced. They work for Newton Fire Department. But they could have done things a lot differently, I believe.”

Jasper County has set aside \$2 million to expand the county’s ALS pilot program, which was launched thanks in part to CARES Act money. Malone said a lot of money was given to the sheriff’s office to create an EMS service “out of one that was not there” and when there are actual EMS agencies in the county.

By having a law enforcement agency respond to EMS calls,

Malone said it may get confusing for patients who see a uniformed reserve deputy as opposed to a paramedic or EMT, even though they are providing the same service. Personally, Malone does not think Jasper County needs a county-based EMS service.

In 2022, the county’s reserve deputy paramedics assisted in 158 EMS calls. Most of the rural volunteer agencies respond to 100 to 140 EMS calls a year. Malone said a majority of Monroe’s 911 calls are not necessarily calls that need to be handled by advanced life support services, but rather by an EMT.

Malone said a volunteer with paramedic-level experience is able to respond to 90 percent of Monroe’s calls and be on scene. He estimates 20 to 25 percent of the calls in Monroe — a population of about 2,000 — require that type of service. To say the least, Malone is apprehensive about the county’s program.

“To get to a call that ends up being a non-ALS call is not worth the risk to the public when you’re driving across the county at an excessive rate of speed to get there,” Malone said. “I think (county residents) would have been better served to staff the departments that are already in the county.”

Jasper County Sheriff John Halferty has heard these concerns in the past, and he has credited those agencies for all the work they have done meeting the needs of their community. But he sees medical calls rising at the same time volunteerism is declining. Something needs to be done.

“We have to come up with ways to respond quicker with adequate care, and support — I can’t say that enough — support our volunteer services,” he said.

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