

Pocahontas RECORD-DEMOCRAT

Official County Newspaper

Wednesday, October 19, 2022 • Volume 142, Number 42

\$1⁰⁰



WEATHER
WESSELS OIL COMPANY, INC.
 Palmer, IA
 1-800-426-0016

DAY	HI	LOW	PRCP.	SNOW
Oct. 10	76	34		
Oct. 11	77	46	0.09	
Oct. 12	No Observation Reported			
Oct. 13	48	26		
Oct. 14	48	23		
Oct. 15	64	25		
Oct. 16	46	23		



Pocahontas Fire Department members visited with PAC kindergarten students for Fire Prevention Week. Here, firefighters are seen talking with students. photo courtesy of Tiffany Klaassen



PAC kindergarten students (above left) are seen with a Pocahontas fire truck Oct. 13. photo courtesy of Tiffany Klaassen. PCS students (above right) watch and react as Pocahontas firefighters crawl into the room to demonstrate how they would enter a burning building. photo by Erin Sommers



EMS Advisory board members think tax funds are necessary

By Erin Sommers
 pokyrnews@gmail.com

Editor's note: This article is the second in a four-part series about the proposed EMS essential service tax, which will be on the Nov. 8 ballot.

Pocahontas County Supervisor Louis Stauter isn't typically the guy you go to for new taxes.

But for the past 18 months, Stauter has been serving on a committee to determine how much in tax funds the county should ask for to support Emergency Medical Services.

"Everybody knows I'm not for wasting taxpayers' dollars," Stauter said during a recent EMS Advisory Board meeting.

This is one cause that Stauter has come on board with, though. "It's a service we need in the county," he said.

Stauter has run the numbers to put the cost of the income and property tax increases into context for Pocahontas County voters. For a single person who makes the county average taxable salary of about \$32,000, the increase in income tax would come out to about 5 cents a day or \$18.60 a year. For a two-income household with the county average income of just less than \$54,000, it's 12 cents a day or about \$43.80 annually.

On the property tax side, the owner of a \$100,000 home would pay 17.5 cents a day more in taxes. That comes out to \$5.34 a day or \$64 a year.

For farmers, the average cost comes out to about 33 cents per acre in additional property taxes. "That's a pretty cheap insurance policy," Stauter said.

The supervisors created the EMS Advisory Council earlier this year, naming representatives of each town, plus Pocahontas Community Hospital CEO James Roetman, PCH EMS Director Patrick Mooney, Pocahontas County Emergency Management Agency Director Russ Jergens and two members of the Board of Supervisors, including Stauter, as the inaugural members. If Pocahontas County voters approve the ballot measure Nov. 8 to designate EMS as an essential service, it will fall to the EMS Advisory Board to budget

the money collected for EMS. That money will be distributed to the city EMS services that are still operating and to PCH for its EMS crews. The money can also be used for education, Mooney said, and to reach out to students in the county to garner interest in working the EMS field.

Judy Krips, who serves on the Havelock City Council, said she likes that idea.

"I really hope to see it offered in our school system and across the state," Krips said. "I feel it's needed with the lack of volunteers."

Krips volunteered for the EMS Advisory Board to learn more about the process of funding and support EMS programs in the county.

"It's very important to be able to provide those types of services to people in this community," Krips said.

Polly Zaugg, who represents Plover on the board, agreed. She volunteered to join because of "the need (for EMS) for the health and welfare of the people of Pocahontas County," she said.

"I think it's very important that more people know about it, why it's getting funded."

Zaugg had to call for an ambulance a few times while working for Pocahontas County Home Health Care Agency.

"It was a lot of tension and really scary," to make that call and wait for the ambulance to arrive, she said.

The key, she and other board members said, is to fund EMS programs so that the ambulance continues to be available when county residents need emergency care.

Palmer Councilman Marvin Alig said he looks at the population of the city, which is between about 130 and 150 people, and the age of those residents. Palmer has at least eight or nine residents who are more than 90 years old. His mother is one of them and she recently needed ambulance services, he said.

"It is very essential for our community to do it," Alig said of the EMS tax. "The way we're going about this is the best, affordable and efficient way to ensure our ambulance service is viable for the long term. ... I think people

will get behind it, as long as they know about it."

Funding EMS services hasn't been as straightforward as community members might think. Fonda City Clerk Angela Duitsman said that city's service looked like its budget was in the black each year, but that was a little deceptive. There was no money set aside for major purchases or repairs.

Fonda officials thought the service there would close this fall; a number of residents recently applied to join the service and keep it running.

"Even if the Fonda ambulance will be saved, we still need to pass this because it will give us the funding," Duitsman said.

She has warned Fonda residents that even if the EMS tax passes, that doesn't guarantee Fonda will always have an ambulance. The tax isn't about EMS services in any one community, but it will provide funding to continue to have emergency responses for all county residents.

"It's crucial that we do everything we can to keep all of our services alive in this county," PCH EMS Director Mooney said. "Every minute, the chance of survival decreases."

Pocahontas County residents all assume EMS programs have been tax-funded already, Jergens, the EMA director, said. It hasn't been. But it is essential, despite not having that official designation.

"With all the plans we have in place for mass casualties or any incident, this is a major component of that," Jergens said. The number of volunteers just keeps decreasing, Jergens said. Volunteers need more training and have to put more time into their service, and have to work harder to raise more money for equipment that has become more and more expensive.

"It's one thing to get volunteers to volunteer," Jergens said. "When it takes money out of their pocket ... times are tough."

Board members said the feedback they've received from community members has been positive, generally.

They do have a concern,

At the Rialto

Playing Oct. 21-27 is "Barbarian" Rated R, Running time: 1 hr. 42 min. Starring: Georgina Campbell, Bill Skarsgård, and Justin Long.

A woman staying at an Airbnb discovers that the house she has rented is not what it seems. Schedule subject to change.

COMING SOON:

"Don't Worry Darling" — R
 "Lyle Lyle Crocodile" — PG
 "Amsterdam" — R
 "Ticket to Paradise" — PG-13

AUCTIONS

Hay Auctions
 First and Third Saturdays of each month
 November 5 & 19 @ 10:15 a.m.
 @ the Fonda Sale Barn
 Hammen Auction Company
 Jerry Hammen ~ 712-299-2523

though. The question about the EMS tax will be on the back of the ballot. Voters have to remember to turn that ballot paper over and answer yes on the question, because a blank vote counts as a no vote. At least 60 percent of ballots must have a yes vote for the tax to pass.

"The positive comments we get are great," Jergens said. Comments, though, aren't enough. "We have to vote."

Board members also reminded voters who cast absentee ballots of the rules governing those. Mail the ballot so it is received before 8 p.m. on Election Day, Nov. 8. People who cast absentee ballots may also hand deliver an absentee ballot to the county auditor during business hours or any time up until 8 p.m. Nov. 8.

Voters may also designate someone to return the ballot under one of following circumstances: The designee is an immediate family member; the designee is a member of your household; or the voter is disabled and the voter has designated someone to return the ballot.

Absentee voters may also surrender the absentee ballot at their precinct polling place on Election Day and vote a regular ballot. Voters who are unable to surrender their absentee ballot may cast a provisional ballot at the polls on Election Day.

For Fire Prevention Week, a lesson in firefighting equipment for students

By Erin Sommers
 pokyrnews@gmail.com

During an assembly in the Spirit Center at Pocahontas Catholic School, the lights dimmed.

Students looked around, and then began to murmur and giggle as firefighters in full turnout gear began to crawl into the room from the two side entrances.

Firefighter Jon Bellows explained to the students what they were seeing.

"If you were in a fire, these guys are going to be the ones looking for you," Bellows said, encouraging the students to see the crawling firefighters as friends and not something to be afraid of.

A similar scene played out for Pocahontas Area Community Elementary School students last week, too, as Pocahontas Fire Department members shared information for Fire Prevention Week.

A child trapped in a house that is on fire needs to keep a few things in mind, firefighters said. One, Bellows said, is to stay low to stay out of the smoke. Two, they should start making noise.

"You need to be somewhere we can see you," Fire Chief Jim Malacek added.

Malacek also reminded students what they should do if their own clothing catches fire: stop, drop and roll, while Bellows talked about what they should do if they're in a burning home. One tip was to check a closed door, to see if it's hot on the other side.

The other important thing, Bellows said, was to get out of the house, if it's safe to do so, and then stay away from the burning home. "Once you get out, stay out," Bellows said. "These guys will do their best to save everything in your home."

The Pocahontas Fire Department responds to about 35 to 40 calls annually, Malacek

said, some in town and some in the country. Some of those calls are fires, while others are medical calls for help at accident scenes. Malacek also showed students two big pieces of equipment which make up the Jaws of Life.

"This is basically like a giant set of scissors," Malacek said. One part of the equipment can be used to open metal or wood, splitting apart the materials to reach someone stuck inside. The other half cuts through vehicle materials.

The department has different hose nozzles, a smaller one for outdoor fires, a larger one for buildings, Malacek said. Two firefighters are needed to operate the hose with the larger nozzle, he added.

In town, firefighters can hook into fire hydrants to get water for extinguishing fires; in the country, different sources of water can be used, Malacek said.

Workshop highlights need for impartiality and chain of command for school boards

By Erin Sommers
 pokyrnews@gmail.com

An attorney for the Pocahontas Area Community School District declined to provide guidance to a board member whose attempt to address a petition at the September meeting was curtailed last month.

Board member Dustin Thompson asked at the end of the September meeting if the board could discuss or create a committee to look at the petition, which has called for the removal of Superintendent Joe Kramer.

Thompson read from the meeting minutes during the Oct. 10 PAC meeting, which started with a two-hour workshop with Katherine Beenken, the district's attorney, and Tammi Drawbaugh, who works for the Iowa Association of School Boards. Thompson walked through the events, which started with a motion to close the meeting and a second, then his question about forming a committee. At that point, Board President Paul Berte asked Thompson for clarification and, after hearing Thompson's answer, said voting to create a committee would violate Open Meetings laws, because the vote wasn't included on the September agenda.

"It was quickly moved to close the meeting and quickly seconded," Thompson said. I wanted to discuss what we

could do with that. ... Did I do something wrong?"

Beenken said she couldn't give an answer to that.

"It would be inappropriate for me to answer," she said. "I'm just not going to give direct legal advice in an open meeting."

Beenken said she owed the district confidentiality, and she said a district policy only authorizes three people to contact her directly to ask for legal advice.

Berte asked Beenken what an average number of special meetings would be for a district. Some community members have criticized the PAC board for the number of special meetings the board has held.

"Is there such a thing as a normal amount of special meetings in a year?" Berte asked.

Not really, Beenken said. Before COVID, she said she might see a district hold one or two special meetings annually. Since the pandemic, though, districts across the state have had many more special meetings.

Drawbaugh, who served on the Muscatine School Board for 15 years before joining the Iowa Association of School Boards, told board members need to be wary of talking with employees or members of the public about certain types of school-related issues. The problem, Drawbaugh said, is the potential for a board

member to create a conflict of interest by expressing an opinion on something that could ultimately be appealed to the school board.

"If I cannot be objective, I cannot support all of you as a team," Drawbaugh said. "I left you high and dry."

Drawbaugh didn't explain why a board member would be required to recuse themselves, other than to say that knowledge of a situation could create a conflict of interest.

"I have to be neutral," she said, speaking as a former board member. "I can't know these details. It's hard. Sometimes it's your neighbor, a friend. I don't think board members should ever decide on their own if they should recuse themselves."

Beenken said board members can find it difficult to adjust to the role of adjudicator.

It's easier, she added, "to show impartiality when you aren't (driving) the conversation. ... Individually you don't have much power. The board has power."

That can be a difficult role for people who choose to run for school board, she said.

"Traditionally, board members are wired to be doers," she said. "You have volunteered for every opportunity around. It's how your wired. When you come together at the table, you're not doers anymore."

Does that mean the board members are no longer helpful? No, Drawbaugh said.

"You are focusing on directing the school," she said, adding that means supporting the structure and accountability. Drawbaugh and Beenken also emphasized the need for board members to respect the chain of command as laid out in district policies. If an employee has a problem, there is a path to resolve it that doesn't lead directly to the school board, Drawbaugh said.

"You have one employee," she told the board. "It's your superintendent. You are required to evaluate your superintendent one time a year by law."

If an employee does have a problem and takes the problem to the supervisor, and the supervisor takes the problem to the superintendent and the superintendent doesn't act on the issue, that's something that the board can bring up during the superintendent's evaluation, Beenken said.

Pocahontas Community Healthcare Foundation Event



Funds raised will be used to purchase a Lucas 3 Chest Compression Unit (above). Comedian/Magician, Lee Cole, put on a show with tricks and jokes (left). photos by Joel McCartan.



CEO/Administrator, James Roetman, (above) addresses the crowd. Blacktop Band (left) ends the night at the PCH Foundation Annual Fundraiser. photos by Joel McCartan.

