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Two area fair queens take part in Iowa State Fair Queen contest

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Spilling the GCOMMUNI-TEA With Amy Peterson

Welcome to the first article in a three-part series about how local people view assets and challenges in this community. For this week, we asked senior citizen Willie Richards, young, working mother Leticia Paulsen, and former tiny town mayor Mary Schebaum to tell their stories of community and share their perspectives. This series asks members of the Emmet County community several questions that were included on the Survey of Rural Towns this year: what are the assets you see in Emmet County? What are the challenges facing Emmet County? Do you feel in 10 years that Emmet County will be better off or worse off? In this series, we will include several individuals' stories and perspectives each week over the next several weeks, along with a photograph of the person. In September, we interview business owners, influencers, and community volunteers about the present and future of the community in a second series called Rural Revelations. If you would like to be part of the series, contact Amy H. Peterson at 712-330-2593 or apeterson@esthervillenews.net, or call the newspaper office at 712-362-2622.

Deer Creek II: a million dollars closer

Million-dollar tax credit will draw more attention to Estherville's Deer Creek II, but many factors will determine timeline

BY AMY H. PETERSON
STAFF WRITER

Late last week, Governor Kim Reynolds announced that the Deer Creek Apartments II is a recipient of a Workforce Housing credit which, with a sales tax refund will amount for \$1 million to develop and build the second building on the site of Deer Creek Apartments. Steve Boote,

CEO of Eagle Construction, Inc. and Talon, LLC, based in Sioux Falls, the constructor and developer of Deer Creek, said while the support from the state is encouraging, but it is not the only factor involved in deciding whether to build a second apartment building on the downtown Estherville site. The \$1 million represents Estherville and the Deer Creek

project's share of \$38 million in workforce housing tax credits to develop new housing opportunities in communities across the state. \$20 million of the \$38 million was allocated for small community projects. The 59 housing projects are expected to create 2,000 housing units. Gov. Reynolds said, "When

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Mary Schebaum visits the bronze statue of her former canine "brother," George the Boxer. Schebaum's father was Jerry Payne, namesake of the dog park and lover of all animals, particularly Boxer dogs.

Photo by Amy H. Peterson

Mary Schebaum Former small town mayor says unity must be part of community

Mary Schebaum is a daughter of the late Jerry Payne, namesake of the Jerry's Pawsome Dog Park in Estherville. She returned to Estherville from her longtime home in rural Missouri to be close to her mother and try to get her out of the nursing home. This was early 2020. The pandemic restrictions happened, and Schebaum felt her mother was likely better off in the nursing home to wait it out, thinking it would be a few weeks or a couple of months. Instead it stretched on for most of that year. Mary grew up visiting Estherville even after the family moved to Iowa Falls, and in 1983, she returned to work at Bud's Cafe and finish high school. She relocated a few times before landing in Missouri.

"Both sides of my family live in Estherville: my mom's side and my dad's side. So my roots are here," Schebaum said.

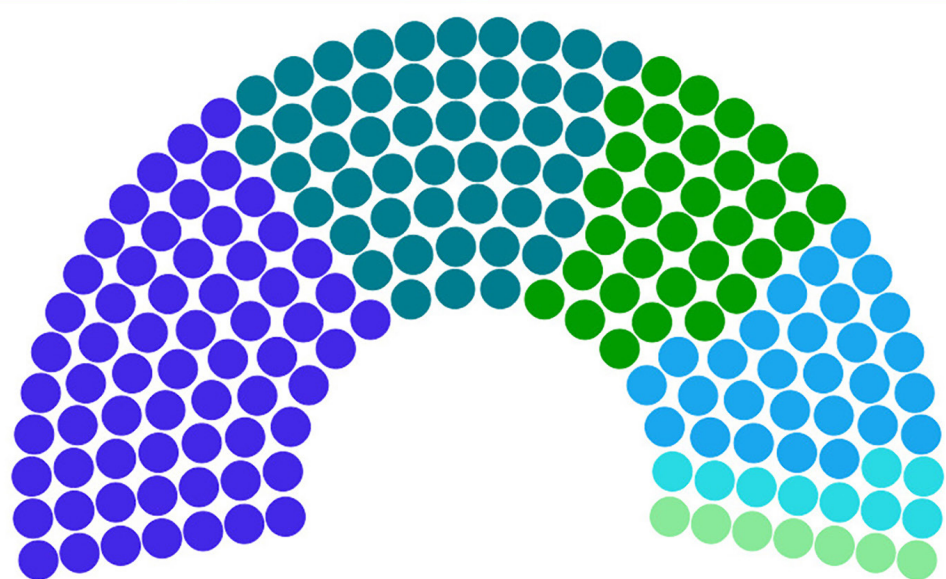
As she searched for a place to live in 2020, Schebaum noted that the majority of available rentals in Estherville said, "No

Pets." This would not work for Schebaum, who, while living in the tiny town of Westboro, Missouri, was somewhat of a Pippi Longstocking, attracting a menagerie that included dogs, cats, Pugsy, the possum, Birdie, the squirrel, a fox family, and the neighbor's drama chickens. Neighborhood goats completed her mowing back in Westboro. On social media, Schebaum reports on her adventures in the 'Ville and in the 'Boro, though in recent months, she's completed her move from Missouri. A self-described hillbilly, Schebaum works at Casey's West early mornings and meets numerous people, some of whom have become part of her human menagerie.

Schebaum was mayor of Westboro, with 78 living in town and about the same number with rural Westboro addresses. The next town is Tarkio, with 1,200 people. Hence, in moving to Estherville, Schebaum

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Rural community assets Survey asked people top assets of their community



Category	Percentage	Seat change
Natural resources, land, outdoor recreation, location & tourism	64	0
Committed people, volunteers, engaged workforce, effective leaders	48	0
Events, arts, education and culture	32	0
Local businesses, a thriving downtown, variety of business, development & ag	28	0
Infrastructure, buildings, housing, broadband and tech	9	0
Healthcare	7	0



Road construction on Highway 9 continues to inconvenience Estherville residents and visitors, but with a little patience, it will all become a distant memory

Drone photo courtesy of Ross Moeding, taken August 12

Clock is ticking on highway completion

Navigating the Estherville area with both Highway 4 and Highway 9 torn up is challenging, but Iowa DOT says contractor has incentive to limit detours to 56 days

BY AMY H. PETERSON
STAFF WRITER

Road detours should be limited to 56 days. That's the limit the Iowa Dept. of Transportation contract has given the contractor on Highway 9 to detour traffic away from the work area on Half-Mile Hill. Dakin Schultz, District

Transportation Planner for the Iowa DOT, said, "The Highway 9 contract has an incentive/disincentive component whereby the contractor is allowed 56 calendar days to place Highway 9 on detour. If the contractor completes the work to a satisfactory condition to open Highway 9 to traffic in under 56 days, they

receive an incentive amount of \$8,000 per day under the 56 days. The same is true if they exceed the 56 days specified; they are disincentivized by a loss of \$8,000 per day. This is done to minimize disruption to the public."

Cedar Valley Contracting site foreman Dean Herbst

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considers herself to have relocated to a city. As a former mayor and also an ordained minister, Schebaum said it's important to get the word out about community events and a need for volunteers to the entire community. Schebaum said she would knock on doors to ask people to help with a certain task, to donate to a fundraiser or contribute to a project. "You just have to do things - make them happen, but you want to make sure that every single type of person is involved, feels welcome, and come together to work on it. You've got to let people know what's going on," Schebaum said. Schebaum was mayor of a town that was, by all measures, poor. "It's poor there. If we wanted anything, we had to work for it. We had to figure it out. How are we going to make this happen for us? How are we going to be able to do this? We've got to think outside the box," Schebaum said. What is the box, and how can a community get out of it? "You can't just go with what you think is 'normal,' or what you have always believed is the only proper way," Schebaum said. Schebaum said Estherville has many assets, not the least of which is the West Fork, Des Moines River. "I see people tubing down by my apartment all the time. That could be one way to raise money for a project - have people register for an afternoon of tubing. It's easier than canoeing or kayaking when the water level is really low, as it gets sometimes," Schebaum said she believes Estherville's diversity is its strength. She said Estherville and Emmet County have many positive aspects, but there is more that needs to be done, and unity is what will spark the needed changes. "It's called growth. You have to have growth in order for something to succeed - as a community and in all of life," Schebaum said. Growth, Schebaum said, will come from old families and newer residents of the area coming together. "You have multiple ethnic groups here now in Estherville, which I love. When I was little and used to visit here, you didn't see that very much. It's blossomed in the last 20-25 years. The parks & rec has come a long way during these years, and it's cool to see. When I did get back here over the years, I'd always see a change for the better," Schebaum said. Diversity is where the unity part of community starts, Schebaum said. She suggests bringing together existing events like the monthly community dinners and Wesley's Kitchen lunches for a unity dinner with local cuisine from various local cultures. A winter festival with a revival of the classic snow sculptures and a food festival might bring people out in the winter, Schebaum said. Challenges Schebaum sees include attracting or building back retail stores for downtown and building relationships with community members so there are enough volunteers for events and initiatives. "Back in Westboro, our city council didn't have much money, but we encouraged people to spearhead projects, and we'd support those projects as much as we could. If they wanted to have an event for the town kids like an Easter Egg Hunt, or maintain the ballfield - we'd waive the water and electric bills for the ballfield to make hosting games less expensive. Now people will camp there for a whole weekend [for a tournament]," Schebaum said. "There are a lot of different directions in which people could change their mindset and make things a lot better," Schebaum said. Schebaum lives in Estherville with her rescue dog, Snickers and two rescue cats who moved from Missouri with her, and a cat named Maisie whom she found by the river and bottle fed from the time she was about four days old.



Leticia Paulsen with sons Tayven and Brantlee

is great, but its schedule is limited. The Regional Wellness Center is great, but there's only limited hours, and if they're too young, you have to be there with them," Paulsen said. In the summer, Paulsen's sons make use of the city aquatic center. They played baseball this summer, and will play youth football this fall, traveling to Graettinger as there is no league in Estherville this year. But as the years pass, Paulsen sees little for the boys to do outside of school activities. "That's what I'm afraid of. If we don't get something for the kids to do, then I'm afraid that they're going to get bored, and they're going to get into trouble, and it's going to create a bunch of chaos. Then people are going to say things like, 'Well why are all of these kids getting into trouble?' It's because they don't have anything to do," Paulsen said. The upside of raising children in Estherville, Paulsen said, is that the town is manageable, unlike a major city. "I love the fact that we're not a huge city. For the schools, and even here at the college, the classes are smaller so you can get more of the one-on-one attention from the instructor or teacher. People are more friendly here than they are in the city. If you need something from your neighbor, you can just go them to ask. It can be fast paced living here as anywhere, but most of the time it's not," Paulsen said. For Paulsen, the fast pace comes from making it to the end of a workday, then picking up her sons, shuffling them to and from sports, activities and appointments, running errands, and taking care of the necessities of food, bathing, and sleep with maybe a few minutes at the end of the day for herself. In ten years, Paulsen's sons will be out of high school and presumably off to their next adventure. Asked if she believes the Emmet County community will be better off in that time, Paulsen said, "I don't think so. Just because so many businesses have left, and if we don't start doing more things for our community to come together - no, I don't think so, personally."

William Richards

76, south side of Estherville

Willie Richards came to Estherville from his Sioux City home 35 years ago after his back took a hit and he was disability rated to transform his career from the fast pace of a major health center's emergency room and from serving those in addiction, adolescent care, and mental health treatment and others living in residential care. Iowa Lakes Community College had a rehabilitation services program at the time, and, he said, the relocation was right away a calming change, positive for his well-being. He worked with special needs clients in the Emmet County area until his retirement. "As we call them, 'special' people seem a lot happier. It's amazing how they seem happy, joyful all the time," Richards said. Richards is widowed with grown children, and a grandfather and great grandfather who cares for the younger generation, too. "I can let them run around and play out front without having to worry," Richards said. As a person of smaller stature, Richards said living in the rural area means he's less worried about someone coming up on him, breaking into his home, and also feels he has friends and neighbors he can depend on. Speaking on the sense of well-being living in a small town, Richards said he appreciated that he can ride his bicycle everywhere in clement weather, and that his errands don't require him to travel long distances. Richards said one challenge he sees in Emmet County is that of keeping up with the time. "The rural areas don't get enough credit for all the things they do. They put in long hours. They're always working. The farmers, if they don't have what they need out in the field they improvise

Rural Community Challenges
Top challenges identified by rural people surveyed

Category	Percentage	Seat change
Housing shortage	67	0
Downtown is dead	51	0
Not enough volunteers	51	0
Losing young people	50	0
Lack of childcare	44	0
Need to recruit new residents	40	0
Not capitalizing on tourism opportunities	40	0
Nothing to do here	39	0
In-fighting and conflict	37	0
Can't reach everyone with news and announcements	37	0
Crime and drug abuse	25	0
Poor internet service	24	0
Health care lacking	16	0
Pandemic and economic crisis	7	0
Other	14	0



William Richards

with their equipment. Or if someone here doesn't have something and the local stores don't have it, somehow, some way, they get it. They pretty much take care of a lot of their own needs unless they can't find a part or something like that," Richards said. The idea of self-sufficiency and people showing up to help is mirrored in the results of the latest Survey of Rural Challenges. In the survey, people were the number one small business asset. Caring people, loyalty, relationships and engagement were mentioned as assets in small town, small businesses. Richards said as an older person, he appreciates the group of friends who regularly check on him. During our interview, Richards received a phone call from a friend living around the corner who was just checking in. His son in law was around, visiting for a few minutes then driving around on errands. Having experienced heat stroke in the past, along with growing mobility challenges, Richards said he doesn't venture far from air conditioning in the summer. As Richards sat in his front yard on a recent, breezy morning, he indicated a vacant double lot across the street and said a deer family was raising a new baby in the area.

"We have a doe, or mama, and a fawn who's still nursing. A buck comes around or they run through to the other side," Richards said. Respondents to the Survey of Rural Challenges mentioned natural resources, land, outdoor recreation, location and tourism as the most common assets of those in the survey. The survey provided open-ended questions to rural residents to collect their opinions on the assets and challenges of their communities. "Living in a small town gives me the ability to look out for other people. You don't have to be so concerned about yourself, you know?" Richards said.

Youth tackle football takes hiatus

MYFL (Midwest Youth Football League) football for grades 3-6 in Estherville is on hiatus this year. Kassie Chavez told the Estherville News that she tried to find someone to take over the program upon her relocation, but she was unsuccessful. Though there may be a volunteer willing to try to bring the program back in 2024, it may be too late for this year. Chavez said, "It was hard to find children for third through sixth grade who wanted to play the last few years, along with finding officials for the games." Chavez was with the program for four years and said many parents were willing to be head coaches, but assistant coaches were more difficult to recruit. As the season progressed, some parents did help with coaching. Chavez said most of the boys currently playing for Estherville Lincoln Central High School came up through the MYFL program. The requirements for coaching include passing a background check and taking the Heads-Up concussion training, a 20 minute video followed by a quiz, which provides certification for two years. The first week of practice began Monday. In addition to Estherville, nearby communities in the league include Algona, North Union, Graettinger-Ruthven-Ayrshire-Emmetsburg (RAGE), Spencer, Jackson, Milford, Spirit Lake, Pocahontas, Windom and Worthington. Estherville Lincoln Central is offering football camp for students entering third-sixth grade this fall on August 14-15 from 6:30-8 p.m. at the high school practice fields. Football camp for students entering 7th-8th grades will be held August 16-17 from 6-8 p.m. and on August 18 from 2-4 p.m. at the high school practice fields.

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