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Introducing ELC's new teachers for 2023-24 school year

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ELC volleyball wins first tournament of 2023

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LOCAL MAN ASKS DeSANTIS MILLION-DOLLAR QUESTION

Ethan Masters, 21, of Estherville, asked Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, currently second in the polls behind former president Trump for the GOP nomination, why he, a young, second-time general election voter, should vote for DeSantis during the candidate's retail stop at Estherville on Friday

BY AMY H. PETERSON
STAFF WRITER

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, Republican candidate for president, stopped in Emmet County Friday on a tour sponsored by his political action committee (PAC), Never Back Down. The Never Back Down bus tour has criss-crossed Iowa and New Hampshire ahead of the upcoming caucuses and primaries. Iowa's Republican caucus is scheduled for Jan. 15, 2024.

DeSantis made a retail stop at J&J Ag Solutions in Estherville late Friday afternoon.

Lydia Hall, communications director for Never Back Down, told the Estherville News the team had not anticipated so many people would fill the shop. They skipped the tour of the store and went right to remarks by DeSantis after he shook hands and took selfies

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Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis met with Emmet County and area residents at J&J Ag Solutions Friday afternoon.

Photo by Amy H. Peterson

IUB pipeline hearings continue

CO2 hearings taking place in Fort Dodge

BY AMY H. PETERSON
STAFF WRITER

There are two sides to the continuing issue of CO2 pipelines in Iowa: opponents say CO2 pipelines are risky for surrounding communities, intrusive to landowners not only in the construction phase but also for years afterward in tile destruction and crop-growing disruption, and more negative than positive. Supporters say transporting CO2 from ethanol plants to faraway underground storage will provide financial security

to the ethanol industry.

Today marks Day 8 of the Summit Carbon Solutions permit hearing in front of the Iowa Utilities Board in Fort Dodge. The state of Iowa accounts for more than one-third of Summit's planned 700 miles of pipeline that would connect 13 ethanol plants across the state.

The Cardiff Events Center is the site of the hearings that could last weeks or even months. The hearings had been scheduled to begin in October and were more recently moved up to the August date.

Gov. Kim Reynolds has appointed all three members of the IUB: Erik Heiland, Joshua

Byrnes, and Sarah Martz. The format is similar to a trial held by a judge, with no citizen's jury but the three board members serving as the judicial panel.

Members of the public are allowed to attend the hearings in person, but there are numerous rules, including no food or drink, including water bottles, no standing, and law enforcement dogs and metal detectors inspect each entrant to the event center. No attendee may bring a phone, laptop or any other electronics – not even pen and paper to take notes.

In addition to law

Turn to **HEARING**, Page 3A



Welcome back to school

Teacher Nick Hogan, right, was one of the teachers and community members who greeted Estherville Lincoln Central Middle School students on the first day of school last Thursday, Aug. 24. Middle school students were greeted with the school song as played by the high school band and the ELC mascot made an appearance.

Photo submitted



Welcome to the third article in a three-part series about how local people view assets and challenges in this community. For this week, we asked local leader Jason Bendixen and local residents Christina Zufall and Shawna Wille 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.

New business owner sees future of Estherville as bright as the sun

Jason Bendixen, Sun City Spa

Jason Bendixen left Estherville as a young person, traveled the nation, may have sown a wild oat, then returned to Estherville to work at Jacobson-Westergard.

"When I was working at Jacobson-Westergard, I was mostly involved with things going on with the company and didn't really look at what was outside of that," Bendixen said.

As the Estherville News reported earlier this summer, Bendixen has opened Sun City Spa with his wife, Sara as majority owner and Jason managing the shop.

Bendixen said the wealth of support for entrepreneurs and businesses is one of Estherville's many assets.

"The grant programs available here are amazing. We spent \$20,000 plus improving the inside of Sun City and we got \$10,000 back. They had the same thing for an exterior

facade grant, and one for home exteriors. Lexie (Ruter, Estherville Area Chamber Director and Economic Development Director) and Penny (Clayton, Estherville city administrator) are great at finding money. They're continuously working for the people of the community," Bendixen said.

Earlier this month, Bendixen joined the first class of Lead the 'Ville, a comprehensive educational program in which 12 participants build a leadership network among current and emerging leaders, learn about community issues, and become familiar with the rewards of serving one's community, as well as practicing leadership skills. The first of nine sessions took place just over two weeks ago.

Bendixen said the key is placing good people in the right leadership positions to make things happen. Those leaders already exist in a plethora of organizations Bendixen

listed as assets to the community: Iowa Lakes Community College, Avera Holy Family Hospital and Avera Medical Group Clinic, the new swimming pool and splash pad, and organizations committed to improving the community: Rotary Club, Kiwanis, Knights of Columbus, WA-TAN-YE, Girl Scouts, 4-H, and FFA among them.

"Emmet County Extension is another one—they're a heck of a resource that very few people utilize," Bendixen said.

Bendixen also said after experiencing the east and west coasts and living in Sioux Falls, that safety is a strength of living in Emmet County.

"You feel safe, you know? We have one of the best police departments and fire departments and emergency medical around. Especially with our emergency management leadership, I feel very safe, and I think most people do."

Turn to **COMMUNI-TEA**, Page 9A



Jason Bendixen

Supervisors to meet with architect to cut Courthouse addition costs

BY MICHAEL TIDEMANN

The Emmet County Board of Supervisors at their Tuesday, Aug. 29 meeting set a date of 2 p.m. Sept 6 to have Supervisors Jeff Quastad and John Pluth meet with CMBA Architects of Spencer to find a way to cut costs on what the county hoped would be a \$1.4-million west addition to the Courthouse.

With Christensen Construction of Estherville providing the only bid of \$1.9 million, \$500,000 over the original project estimate, the supervisors are looking for a way to cut costs. Quastad said Steve Christensen of Christensen Construction had found ways to cut \$407,800 from the cost of the building originally intended to provide

better Courthouse handicap access.

The county has \$1.4 million in American Rescue Plan act money for the project. The county's Local Option Sales and Services Tax would be one way to make up the \$100,000 shortfall.

With significant chances, the project would have to be rebid. Some of the cost-cutting suggestions include:

- Using existing Courthouse gas lines and sanitary sewer instead of installing new lines.
- Incorporating existing building footings.
- Substituting roof insulation and eliminating spray foam.
- Use textured panels instead of masonry.
- Eliminate decorative columns.

- Shorten windows.
- Eliminate the southwest canopy.
- Shorten walls.
- Eliminate blinds.

Quastad questioned eliminating spray foam and the columns and City of Estherville Administrator Penny Clayton, present at the meeting, said the city has new commercial building standards and the Estherville City Council would have to review the revised plans.

Supervisor Lisa Hansen said she would want the west addition facing to match the existing brick exterior, and Supervisor Tim Schumacher agreed. "I'm not ready to throw everything out just because of a budget requirement."

Turn to **COUNTY**, Page 3A

SEE PAGE 10A

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COMMUNI-TEA, Continued from Page 1A

Bendixen said.

Some people don't realize how different it is in a small community to have access to city council members, county supervisors, and other public officials.

"If you go to a meeting, they'll ask, 'what can we do for you?' and are curious about what you'd like to see in the community," Bendixen said.

With so many rays of sunshine in the community's assets, Bendixen saw one main challenge facing the Estherville area, and it's one faced by numerous rural communities: keeping younger adults aged 18-35 in town.

"It is tough. It's tough all over. Everybody who grows up in the small town wants to run out to the big city. But what I see is a lot of us coming back. They've been to the city and done that, then it's time to draw up and invest in your family and yourself, and they're in a position to invest in the community. I'm not the only one who came back," Bendixen said.

For the young people growing up here, Bendixen said it's important to set an example of investing in the community. Bendixen brings his grandsons to get the younger generation involved in volunteering.

"They know the different aspects of it and they kind of know what it takes to bring an event like that together so they can bring new things to town and keep events like Sweet Corn Days going," Bendixen said.

Bendixen said he sees things getting better all the time, and Estherville will definitely be



Friends Christina Zufall and Shawna Wille said there are ways Emmet County can open opportunities for people to thrive. Photo by Amy H. Peterson

better off in 2033 than it is now.

"There's a lot of good people in this town. Our challenge might be replacing the old guard; there are a lot of community leaders like [here Bendixen named a few community leaders, but the Estherville News has declined to list names] who are getting up there. They've provided huge benefits to our community, and we need to get the knowledge out of them before it's too late. There will be some big shoes to fill," Bendixen said.

At Sun City Spa, the Bendixens offer various treatments that add a glow to the

user's skin, but also have properties that enhance the light from within. Bendixen said volunteering in the community can provide a similar glow.

"You should get a natural sense of pride and ownership by volunteering, and this community is very good at recognizing people's contributions. No one turns down a pat on the back, do they?" Bendixen said.

The Estherville News will continue interviews with people in the community in a series beginning with next week's issue: Rural Revelations.

make Estherville welcoming to people at all levels of income and life situation. The stories and comments could be summarized to state that small towns should face the reality that there will always be lower-income people in the community. Someone needs to work for the bosses: to work in the service industry, to clean up after others, to serve as the base of the community's economy.

Additionally, until treatment for mental health and substance abuse improves, there will always be those who struggle with employment, income, housing, and the necessities of life. There will always be those who cannot afford to fix up their homes, who won't own a home, who will always owe someone something.

The consensus of these lengthy discussions was that people who struggle, who will likely be low-income on a long-term basis, deserve respect and compassion and, as long as they're not disrupting others, the opportunity for quiet enjoyment of the property they rent, during their walks in the city, and while going about their other lawful activities.

Zufall said a medication mixup was at the root of an organic mental health crisis not long ago, and she's currently working to regain her footing after the setback. Wille said

trauma and loss have been at the root of some of her difficulties. None of it is an excuse, but a welcoming community that encourages recovery, with a level of available housing that's affordable at a starter level, and safe and clean, would be a start to providing a hand up to members of the community who have taken a number of difficult hits and strive to do better.

Zufall and Wille's observations mirror data from the nonpartisan Brookings Institute, that rural main streets cannot achieve economic revival without bridging social divides.

The Institute's report of the same name states, "First and foremost, rural communities require access to economic opportunity and a reasonable quality of life to thrive."

These opportunities come in the form of community connections, social connections, and location-specific amenities. These factors help people in all sectors of the community connect with it even if they aren't able to reach upward economic mobility.

In a nutshell: if the community offers opportunities at all levels and encourages healing and recovery, people will thrive within their current economic situation. An individual or family could thrive despite their level of income and assets. Money may not be everything, but with excessive fines, expenses, and costs, it becomes scarce more quickly.

Researchers Hanna Love and Mike Powe state that revitalizing small communities should include revitalizing abandoned properties in disinvested neighborhoods, a commitment to public art and public placemaking that's open to everyone, public markets and events with items and experiences available at all price points, and a commitment to helping people bring a vision for a small business to reality at all economic levels.

Christina Zufall and Shawna Wille share ups and downs of small town life

Last weekend, there was a (calm, substance-free) party at a basement apartment in downtown Estherville. Several people stopped by to enjoy homemade salsa with chips, Halloween candy, and the possibly early but definitely festive fall decorations and lights all around the home. Artfully chosen and placed lighting made the space perfect for photography and for socializing with a soft focus.

Zufall, Wille and some of their other guests spoke at length about improvements they might suggest to

make Estherville welcoming to people at all levels of income and life situation. The stories and comments could be summarized to state that small towns should face the reality that there will always be lower-income people in the community. Someone needs to work for the bosses: to work in the service industry, to clean up after others, to serve as the base of the community's economy.

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