

Opinion

'She's an institution all by herself'



This & That
Troy Hyde

For 32 years, Sarah Patterson has walked up the same flight of stairs to get to the same classroom.

But that is about to change.

Patterson is a few weeks away from retiring as a teacher. What's next, the long-time NCMP Aquagirl coach is not yet sure.

"I don't know. And I love that I don't know," Patterson said. "I just want to take a break. I will probably eventually have a flexible part-time job. I won't close the door on anything."

"I love to write. If I can bring that to a new area, that would be fun. Maybe I will just watch the Today show all morning and take a nap in the afternoon. That would be OK, too."

While her time as a teacher is coming to an end, Patterson also has decided to give up her coaching posts at the school.

Moving forward, it will be hard to mention the NCMP Aquagirl brand without mentioning Patterson's name.

She built the brand from the ground up. Her first team won no more than one dual. She also had a team of 54 swimmers in the early 2000s.

"It's been a great ride. The highs have been some of the best in my life," Patterson said. "The sport has watched me grow up and I've gone through some personal ups and downs, too."

Patterson came to the state of Iowa to swim collegiately at Iowa State Uni-

versity. When she accepted the job in Newton, she thought she may spend five years at most in the community.

"I thought maybe I'd be in this small town for a few years. And here we are all these years later," Patterson said. "I liked the town, I liked the size of the town and once I became the head coach I felt super loyal and I wanted to build something here. You can't really build something in two years or even five years."

Patterson has built maybe the most consistent program in the school. And with it being only one class, she has had to navigate coaching against programs like West Des Moines Valley, Dowling Catholic, Ankeny and Waukee while most other athletic programs at the school have made the drop to Class 3A.

It hasn't stopped the Aquagirls from competing in the state meet every year and even coming home with top-15 finishes consistently each season.

"You don't join swimming in Newton just to be a great swimmer," Newton High School Principal Bill Peters said. "She'll get you there. But you join it because you want to be around a person who is going to make you better. She's that person."

"When you think of positivity, excitement, caring and excellent teaching skills, she embodies all of that. She can push you in a positive manner. That ability to connect with kids and

adults is absolute gold."

Peters knows first-hand what kind of teacher and coach Patterson is. His daughter Dani swam for her a few years back.

"She's an institution all by herself," Peters said. "There are certain educators and coaches who you talk about for years to come and the effect they had on the people around them."

"She meets the kids where they are at and moves them forward from there. She'll get kids to do a lot more than they ever thought they could. That's the sign of a master."

Part of Patterson's decision to step away from teaching and coaching is because she simply wants to slow down. She's just ready to move on from the grind.

"I spend most Sundays grading papers. That's why the 32 years took a lot out of me," Patterson said. "I just don't want to spend 4-6 hours every Sunday grading papers anymore."

"It feels like two full-time jobs some days. I had 30 years with the program. It's time for the next person. I have never been to a high school reunion. I have missed a lot of things. I have missed weddings. It's hard to be gone."

Chris Forsythe spent 21 years as Patterson's top assistant coach. That position transitioned to Jenny Jensen over the course of the last nine years.

Bob LeBlanc and Hannah Scotton have been volunteer assistants under Patterson and Laura Cellucci was the program's diving coach for years, too.

Every great head coach will tell you they are nothing without good assistant coaches. Patterson is no different.

"I can't say enough good things about that group," Patterson said.

"Chris and I grew up together. We were in our 20s as coaches. Jenny was a former swimmer and student of mine. The loyalty they had to the program was fantastic. They'd balance me out if I got too competitive. Jenny balanced out my crazy side."

"I have had so many great managers over the years, too. They are great kids that got nothing in return."

Patterson swam for two years at Iowa State University. She was a high school state champion and record holder, too.

Swimming is different than other sports. And that might be what Patterson likes the most about it.

"My highs and lows as an athlete in swimming, I have always been able to bring those to the coaching table," Patterson said. "I love how you have to work hard in swimming. We will get our butts kicked if we don't work hard. It yields so many life lessons. Swimming is a grind. If you can do it, you can almost do anything."

Patterson had to give up coaching for at least her first year of "retirement," but she didn't rule out someday returning to the grind.

The plan for now though is to not really have a plan.

"I don't think I know what I will miss until I miss it. I know I will miss the relationships with my athletes and the athletes' families," Patterson said. "I am not ruling out coaching again. Maybe not head coach, but maybe it's middle school track because they need somebody. Something not as demanding that is still coaching."

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YOUR VIEW

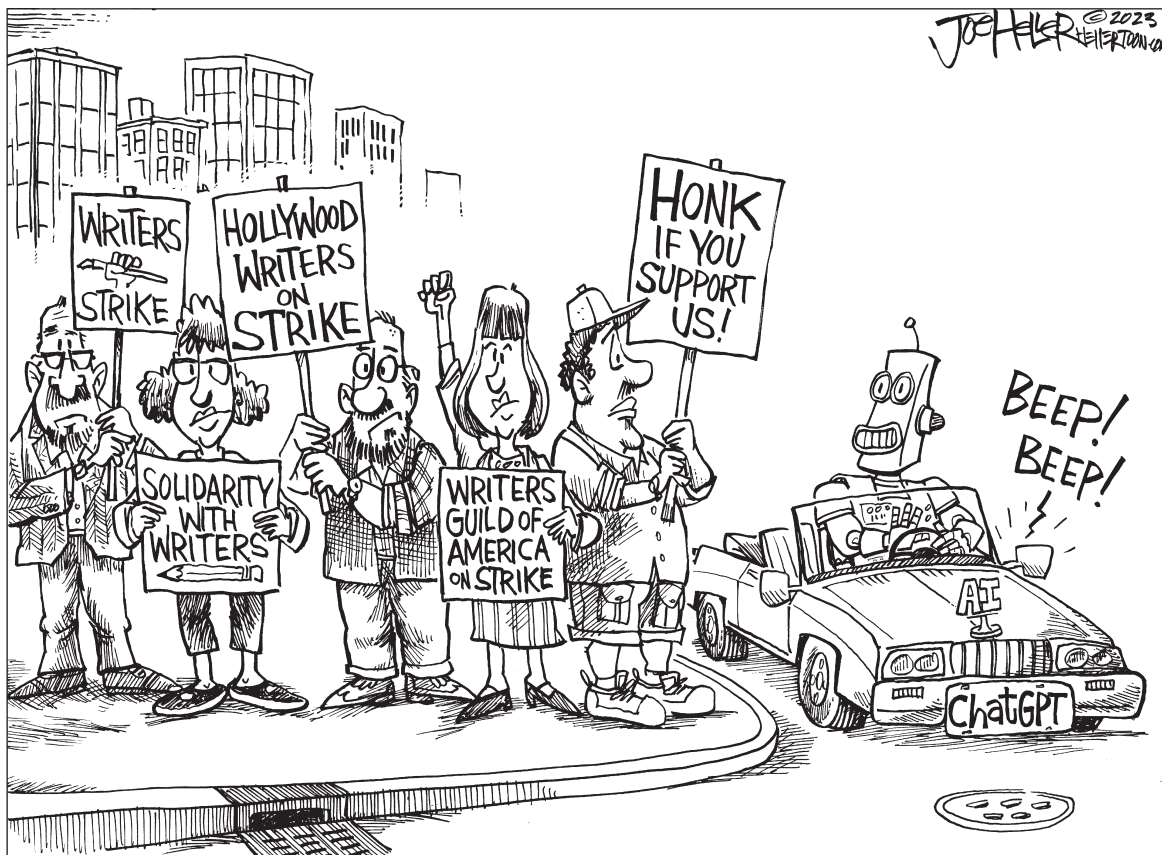
Representatives need held accountable for statements

The column written by U.S. Representative Marianne Miller-Meeks that appeared recently in the Newton Daily News requires clarification of at least one of her statements. The House of Representatives has not defunded "President Biden's army of 87,000 new IRS agents."

According to online articles found in Time.com, Newsweek.com and The Hill.com the House passed along party lines a bill called the Family and Small Businesses Taxpayer Protection Act. The bill would defund most of the money allocated to the IRS as part of the Inflation Reduction Act. This law was previously passed by Congress and signed by President Biden.

The articles go on to say the bill is not likely to pass the Senate and would surely be vetoed by the President if it were to pass. The vote taken by Miller-Meeks was only symbolic and does not defund the IRS as she claims. We need to hold our representatives accountable to make accurate statements and not mislead the public.

Robert W. Holley
Newton



Budget

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reserve funds; Talsma said the secondary roads reserve account is in good shape to supplement the program.

"It is very, very healthy," Talsma said. "So we decided to take a ratcheted approach to where we're going to spend down some of those funds in the reserves and couple that with the property tax dollars to get GRAMS to a point to where it's sustainable, instead of saying, 'We're raising tax dollars by \$700,000.'"

For the past two weeks, the county has hosted public meetings in the small towns to inform citizens of the new plan, which has been discussed and workshopped for months on end. Talsma attended the April 20 meeting in

Kellogg. From what he can tell, feedback was mixed.

"Some people understand it and are deeply appreciative of what we're doing and the fact that we're actually trying to formulate this strategy and start the ball moving forward," Talsma said. "Other people just complain about why their road isn't one of the roads getting stabilized or why their road isn't getting done first."

As the program progresses, the county will hold annual meetings updating citizens about the program in February and March.

The reason supervisors are putting a stronger emphasis on gravel roads is because in years past the maintenance was "put on the back burner" and neglected in favor of other projects or budget cuts, Talsma said. As a result, the granular road maintenance fell behind.

"It's something that we should have never shifted focus from, but the county did. And now we need to re-concentrate back on and double down on them," he said. "Especially now when we've got more people living in the country, you've got higher yields than ever before, which means more tonnage and traffic on roads."

Coupled with heavier agriculture equipment, the more than 900 miles of gravel roads in Jasper County are taking a beating.

The county's tax levy has mostly remained the same or lowered depending on the year, and Talsma has said in the past that this move is deliberate. As valuations increased, it would only be natural for governments to take in more property taxes. The county adjusted its levy

the new valuations.

Which meant the county was working with about the same amount of money it was using in previous years. But fiscal year 2024 is different. The tax levy was still lower, but the dollar amount the county is collecting is higher. Talsma said it is less than a 1 percent increase to the county budget.

"I'm happy with that," Talsma said. "The fact that we're able to implement the GRAMS program, which is pretty substantial, money wise, on top of keeping up with all of that and we're only having to increase our overall dollar asking by less than 1 percent — I'm pretty darn happy with that."

Keeping the budget in line with the increased valuations from the past few years was not feasible so long as the supervisors wanted to continue with its new approach to grav-

el roads. Talsma said inflation, the increased input costs and union-negotiated pay raises certainly played a factor as well.

Completing the new administration building has also been beneficial to the budget. Now that staff have moved in to the new office building and have been operational for almost a year, Talsma said it prevented supervisors from levying millions of dollars a year in capital projects in the annex building.

"We were able to spread that out with the administration building and still be debt free in six years. Instead of having to levy \$1.5 million in property taxes we were able to drastically decrease that to like \$600,000. Shifting to a more long-term, strategic approach has allowed us to accomplish what we wanted," Talsma said.

Funds

CONTINUED FROM 1

also be misconstrued and lead some citizens to believe the three supervisors get millions of dollars to themselves.

But this is not the case. The supervisors do have salaries of about \$40,000 each, but their budget allows more flexible spending amongst other entities and projects related to county business. Talsma also noted some offices do not take as large a piece of the "pie" as others and speculated what to do with them, too.

"We need to find ways to categorize the information that's sitting in front

of us into five or six big areas to add a little bit more detail here, but not so much that it's getting lost," Talsma said. "(Schneider) said this is possible, but they agree (the pie graph listing all the departments) is too much. We need to break it down."

So in addition to secondary roads and law enforcement and conservation as standalone departments, the supervisors consolidated other departments into general county services and specialty county services.

COUNTY IS MAKING OTHER TRANSPARENCY MEASURES

Earlier in April the county board of supervisors held another work session

to discuss the possibility of adding another document to tax statements that would show a diagram of the property tax distribution among the county, the city and the school district for each individual taxpayer.

The information that would be included on the mailer also comes from Beacon, and it is currently available to citizens.

By looking up their individual properties on Beacon, citizens can click on the "Tax Estimator & Forms" tab and find their estimated property taxes, a sales questionnaire, data corrections and tax distribution, the latter of which displays the information in a pie graph.

Jasper County Treasurer Doug Bishop and his office would be assisting with the mailers, which would be received as a completely separate document. The next tax statements will be sent in August. Although there will still be people who will complain about their property taxes to the county, Talsma said the data is helpful.

"We're never going to get 100 percent of it, but I'd like to try and take this next step to try and get more information disseminated and hopefully alleviate some of your guys' issues, some of our issues," Talsma said to Bishop at the past meeting. "We all deal with it when the tax statements come in the mail."