

Supervisors discuss cameras to deter speeders

ROBIN DELANEY
editor@dailydem.com

Smile, you're on candid camera, but if you're speeding, you may not be smiling long.

During their workshop Monday, Lee County Supervisors discussed Sheriff Stacey Weber's desire to put speed monitoring cameras on Highways 27 and 218. Supervisor Chairman Garry Seyb said that initially, when Weber brought the idea to him, he was opposed. However, he says he has since studied the traffic patterns and speeds of motorists and changed his mind.

"People know I am not the slowest guy on the road, but even not being the slowest, there are people passing me at unbelievable speeds," Seyb said. "Even with my cruise control set, they were flying by me."

Weber said when he first took office he reviewed the DOT statistics and he vowed to reduce the number of lives lost on roads within the county. He said people mistakenly refer to



Weber



COURTESY OF THE LEE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Photos like this one appear periodically on the Lee County Sheriff's Office Facebook page, and other agencies post them as well. It shows this driver was clocked by the officer at 111 mph.

SEE CAMERAS, PAGE 11

Pavilion announces shows for upcoming season

JOE BENEDICT
Editor@dailygate.com

Everyone is ready for spring and summer warm days and the release of the schedule for the Rand Park Pavilion helps remind everyone that it's just around the corner.

The schedule stretches from spring into the fall with a variety of acts set to go. The first show is set for 3 p.m. on Saturday, May 6. It will feature the Keokuk Middle School and High School Jazz Bands. The show is being sponsored by the Keokuk Music Boosters.

A second May show at the venue will be held at 1 p.m. on Saturday, May 20. The Joyful Noise Piano Studio recital will be held there, sponsored by Christina Boltz.

Moving into the summer months, at 7 p.m. on Saturday, June 3 Troublesome Ridge will bring bluegrass music to echo through Rand Park that day. The band has been together since 2014 and plays traditional and modern bluegrass music, according to its Facebook page. This show is sponsored by the Rand Park Pavilion Commission.

A gospel worship night will take place starting at 6 p.m. on Saturday, June 17. It is sponsored by Ben Hendricksmeier and Music Ministries — Church of the Full Gospel.

On Friday, June 23 the



JOE BENEDICT/EDITOR@DAILYGATE.COM

The horn section of the band Jukebox Reloaded works on a Huey Lewis and the News cover during the band's performance last year at the Rand Park Pavilion. The band is returning this season, along with many other great shows set from May to September

Relay for Life will be in Rand Park.

The next day, Saturday, June 24, the Juneteenth Celebration will be in the park and the KARE and New Bethel Church sponsored event generally has some musical entertainment to go with it.

The Rand Park Pavilion will sponsor the show on Saturday, July 8 when Same Day Fire Company will

take the pavilion stage at 7 p.m. The rock band plays favorites that many will enjoy. This show is sponsored by the Rand Park Pavilion Commission.

Some talented musicians out of Fort Madison will be next, with Garrett-Hardy playing at 7 p.m. on Saturday, July 15. This show is sponsored by the Rand Park Pavilion Commission. July continues to be packed

with entertainment at the Pavilion, when the very next weekend, on July 22, Big Guitars & G Strings will perform. The band is ready to rock and perform various favorites from the 60s-90s and beyond. This show is sponsored by the Rand Park Pavilion Commission.

SEE SHOWS, PAGE 11

What the passage of SF 75 means for Keokuk

ERIKA BARRETT
dgcnews@dailygate.com

Most Keokuk residents can glumly recall Oct. 1, 2022, as the day Blessing Hospital shuttered its doors — the first time an Iowa hospital had closed in 22 years. However, last week, the Iowa legislature passed Senate File 75, allowing for a new hospital designation, rural emergency hospital (REH), to be licensed in the state. SF75 awaits the signature of Governor Kim Reynolds. Once signed, the bill may increase the likelihood

of a hospital reopening in the city.

Worried about the risk of rural hospital closures across the country, which has risen to over 30%, Congress created an REH designation in December 2020. Federal regulations were finalized in late 2022 and implemented until Jan. 1, 2023. Now in place and enacted, state legislatures can create state licensing and codes for REHs.

Though Blessing Hospital was the first to close in the state in over two decades, 22 rural hospitals in

Iowa are at risk of permanent closure.

In an interview with the Des Moines Register, Chris Mitchell, president and CEO of the Iowa Hospital Association, said the Keokuk Hospital closure has been an ominous warning to other communities and was at the center of lawmaker discussions to get SF75 pushed through.

"We have a lot of elected officials across the state who have rural hospitals in their communities wondering, 'what happens if I get that



ERIKA BARRETT/DGCNEWS@DAILYGATE.COM

The exterior of Keokuk Area Hospital. Owned last by Blessing Health Systems, the hospital permanently closed October 2022.

call next?" Mitchell said. Though approving

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RECOGNIZED

Homer Sherrill recognized for tenure with McNamara's Band.

P2



FIRE CALL

Rural departments respond to fire.

INSIDE TODAY

NOTABLE



In Hamilton, students of the week were named. See that and more Hamilton news on page 9 today.

DEATHS

Carolyn E. Herron, 82, Keokuk: Page 5
Janet L. Mann, 77, Hamilton, Ill.: Page 5
Judy A. Kolvis, 79, Keokuk: Page 5
Terry Farmer, 70, Carthage, Ill.: Page 5
Michelle D. Henze, 55, Hamilton, Ill.: Page 5

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Chimney flue overheats, starts fire

CHRIS MILLS/MISSISSIPPI VALLEY PUBLISHING

A chimney flue got overheated and set alight materials surrounding the pipe late Saturday afternoon at a home on 253rd Street in Lee County. Montrose and Argyle firefighters responded to the fire, along with Lee County EMS. There were no injuries reported.

SHOWS: Many dates set

FROM PAGE 1

The pavilion continues to rock into August when on Saturday, Aug. 12 Jukebox Reloaded takes the stage. If you want to see a band with a horn section, this is the one. It lends itself to playing hits from Huey Lewis and the News and Chicago. This show is sponsored by the Rand Park Pavilion Commission.

As we start to think, "Oh, no, here comes fall again," the music continues.

At 7 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 9 the Sprucells will perform. The area band performs chart toppers from today going all the way back to the 1960s. It is sponsored by the Rand Park Pavilion Commission and Weichert Realtors — The Peevler Team.

Wrapping up the season at the pavilion this year will be local favorite the Bullis Rutter Big Band. They will play at 5 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 24. This show is sponsored by the Keokuk

Community Fine Arts Council.

As this is an outdoor venue, weather sometimes plays a part in the shows, and causes some cancellations. If a show has to be called off, the pavilion commission does its best to reschedule the bands to a later date.

Shows are free, though donations are always accepted and appreciated. Bring a lawn chair and come enjoy the shows.

CAMERAS: Sheriff sees many speeders

FROM PAGE 1

Interstate 27 when it is not an interstate at all.

"There are cross streets and we are losing people at those cross streets from the collisions that are happening there," Weber told supervisors.

Weber said he has even gone to driver's education classes at local high schools to tell students of the dangerous associated with speeding on these roads.

"And I specifically talk about the intersections on Highway 27. They scare me because when you pull up to that road and you look left you expect that car to be doing the speed limit, but I can assure you that 52 percent of the cars you see will not be."

Further, he said 18% of that number will be traveling speeds 20 or more above the posted speed limit.

Weber said having the speed cameras is no different than using other forms of technology, such as the body cameras that come on when a deputy pulls his gun out of his holster.

"Well geniuses, get on the DOT website. There are cameras all over now, they're just not aware of it."

Weber said he has tried other approaches, including parking an unoccupied sheriff's car in a median by Armstrong's because of complaints of motorists going by at high rates of speed.

He said it slowed some down for a few

days.

"You're not going to give me four deputies to man things 24/7 and the Iowa State Patrol, their guys go home at midnight here, so it's their highway, but who is left to patrol it? It's us, Lee County."

Weber conducted his own test and set his cruise control at 65 mph, then counted the number of motorists that came right up on him and passed him.

"I worry for the people traveling in my vehicle because the ones that are coming up behind me are traveling on such a high rates of speed. They don't expect you to be driving 65 miles an hour."

Weber said he realizes that Lee County is the first Iowa county many motorists enter from other states and that he doesn't want their experience to be of a citation.

"But I am tired of standing over dead bodies on this stretch of road," Weber said.

"Better that they remember us for a citation than for an accident," interjected Supervisor Chuck Holmes.

Weber said moving forward would mean a 7-year contract with a company that provides and monitors the cameras and mails the citations. In return, the company retains 18% of the fines associated with the citations, but local sheriff authorities will review the video daily and have discretion as to whether that motorist should be cited.

"We do that now.

It's up to us whether to issue a citation or give a warning. I think it's a blessing to get pulled over by a deputy because an ass-chewing is free," Weber said. "Most people are good about it and they just forget to watch their speed."

Seyb said the remaining revenue could reduce the county's tax levy, but could also go to the driver's education programs at Lee County's three high schools and help the efforts of Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

Seyb said local residents need to understand that the cameras will not cost taxpayers anything; all the video will be reviewed locally to determine whether a citation is warranted; and that a citation will not go against a person's personal insurance because the camera can't necessarily prove who was driving at the time.

Weber said that when he was conducting his own tests he found that almost all of the excessive speeders were from other states and not Lee County residents.

"This is about protecting Lee County lives from them."

Because the discussion occurred during a work session Monday and was not on the agenda, no action was taken, but Seyb said the 7-year contract with the company and further discussion will likely be on an agenda at a future meeting.

BILL: Rural Emergency Hospitals approved

FROM PAGE 1

licensing is a crucial milestone, hospitals in the state can only apply for the designation once the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals creates REH regulations and rules, which could take months.

Some view the REH designation as a last hope for rural hospitals. As they stand, rural hospitals are unprofitable because of whom they service: the poor, uninsured, and the higher-rate insured through public payers like Medicare and Medicaid.

Low payments from private health plans and delinquent patient accounts are the primary causes of financial losses at rural hospitals; however, the losses on individual Medicaid patients are generally larger than patients with private insurance.

Additionally, escalating labor, medical equipment, and utility costs have increased the pressure on hospitals. According to Mitchell, Iowa hospitals' operating margins were -5% in January.

Critical Access Hospitals, a designation the government created in the 1990s, helped with Medicaid and Medicare reimbursements. Unfortunately, Keokuk did not apply for the designation and missed out on the reimbursements, a costly error.

However, the new REH status will make hospitals eligible for different and better reimbursements, incentivizing hospitals to keep their doors open. REH can be reimbursed 105% by Medicaid and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

Moreover, hospitals under the new designation would receive a monthly facility payment (MFP) of \$272,866 per month in 2023, totaling \$3.2 million. The additional amount will increase each year by the same year as the hospital market basket (a selected mix of goods and services that tracks the performance of a specific market)

increases. MFPs are at the discretion of the REHs, but are intended to be used to create a sustainable healthcare presence in the community.

Additionally, an REH offers more flexible staffing and services and access to technical assistance, including physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and clinical nurse specialists. Doctors would not be required to be on-site to provide medical direction.

Federal regulations have outlined requirements for hospitals to qualify as an REH, and state regulations will soon follow. Currently, all candidate hospitals must have 50 beds or less and be located in a federally defined rural area.

Once a hospital becomes an REH, the following conditions apply to the location:

Annual per-patient average of 24 hours or fewer spent in the hospital

24-hour emergency services

Maintain a transfer agreement with a Level I (Iowa City) or II Trauma Center (Quincy)

Eliminate acute inpatient services but maintain a fully staged Emergency Department with a lab, radiology, and pharmacy

The day Blessing Hospital closed, former Chief of Small Rural Hospitals for Blessing Health Kathy Hull said the hospital could maintain its licensing and consider reopening if it became an REH.

"The door stays open because of legislation," Hull said. "Within one year after legislation is put in place, Blessing can reapply to convert their hospital into an REH."

However, work must be done to ensure the hospital is fit for patient care. A third-party review estimated up to \$20 million of renovations needed for the deteriorating building. Additionally, many parts of the hospital are not up to code and would need to be updated.

Hull estimated building an REH in a new location would be around \$30 million, including equipment and space for five to ten observation beds, a lab, and an x-ray

machine.

Another possibility surfaced in January when Blessing Health Systems signed a letter of intent with Insight, a health network headquartered in Flint, Michigan, to acquire the hospital.

"The closure of Keokuk Hospital has created a significant gap in healthcare services," stated Insight Chief Strategy Officer Atif Bawahab. "We are determined to help fill the need for reliable quality healthcare services in this eastern Iowa community."

In mid-February, Insight CEO Dr. Jawad Shah visited Keokuk and saw the hospital. During the visit, Dr. Shah said the main challenge would be purchasing a license for the hospital, an unnecessary process if the hospital were still open.

In a press release announcing the letter of intent, Insight listed a series of things needed before opening a hospital: "the approval of a certificate of need, essential regulatory support, and financial support by the state of Iowa."

Licensure is now added to the list.

Although Insight and Blessing signed a letter of intent, and Insight looked at the hospital, those events do not guarantee purchase. Presented before a finalized legal agreement, most letters of intent are not legally binding.

If purchased, it's uncertain if Insight will apply for the REH designation. In the February interview, Shah said what hospital operations will look like when the facility gets licensed and reopened depends mainly on the community's needs. "The community requires an emergency room," he said.

If Insight does not follow through on its letter of intent, perhaps Blessing might keep Hull's wish and apply for the designation. If not, maybe another healthcare company will step up. At the very least, the highway roads are still in good condition for the drive to Southeast Iowa Regional Medical Center.

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