

This week in local history

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the Bremer County Independent. “Wives liked it too because they could leave the sale and visit the stores or return to their motel any time they liked,” observed co-manager of the sale Arnold Hexom.

Two Waverly-Shell Rock FFA members captured top honors at the annual Iowa FFA state convention in Sioux City, we also see on the front page of this issue. Pamela Walther and Craig McEnany won two of 38 Iowa FFA Agricultural Proficiency awards, which included a cash award of \$100.

Also on the front page we see that 14 W-SR school bus drivers had completed a state-recommended course on school bus safety. Superintendent Glenn Brostrom presented certificates of completion to drivers Paul Litterer, Jerry Linnenkamp, Mary Rustad, Caroline Haag, Louise Arens, Darlyn Kazda, Sharon Arends, Jeff Azeltine, Janice Osborn, Annette Petersen, Loren Pike, Betty Eldridge, Curt Tangen and Marilyn Clark.

This issue also announces that the Waverly chapter of the Order of Eastern Star would be holding its regularly meeting. “Present and Past Mother Advisors and Present and Past Rainbow Dads will be honored,” the announcement reads. “Judi Nuss will represent the Rainbow Assembly and give the Pot of Gold lecture. Sandi Darrah is Worthy Advisor and will present the gifts.”

A regular meeting of the Waverly JC-ettes was also reported, with plans for an upcoming babysitting clinic.

Readers in this issue saw that state park cabins were now available for reservations. The rates were \$50 per week for cabins that held four people and \$60 per week for cabins holding up to eight people. Parks included Backbone, Lake Wapello, Pine Lake and Lake of Three Fires.

In Waverly, the Jaycee Basketball League ended with a win by the undefeated Happel-Hahlweg team, with the Modern Builders team coming in second. On the winning team were Dale Goeke, Fred Grawe, Jeff Bergman, Joe Crawford, Ray Happel, Tom Leary, Terry Goetzinger and Doug Johnson.

Denver fifth graders spent three days and two nights camping with about 6 inches of snow on the ground, we learn in the May 1, 1975, issue of the Waverly Democrat. A snowstorm struck the night before the group left for Camp Ewalu. Some activities were changed because of the snow cover. The young people



FILE PHOTO

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER—“First grade students from Carey Elementary School in Waverly visited the industrial arts room at the high school on Tuesday to learn how to build shelters in conjunction with a social studies unit just completed. The students of teachers Lynn Nebel, right, and Mrs. Winnie Hayes, not shown, were taught by industrial arts instructor Eldon Armstrong, left, and his students on how to build a birdhouse. Finding it more difficult than it looks to drive a nail are first graders Brandy Shipp, left, and Kelly Doyle, right” (from 1985).

slept indoors, girls in the lodge and boys in cabins.

Fifty years ago, the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake was advertising a performance by the Myron Floren Orchestra with admission at \$5 per person. The Waverly Theatre was showing Robert Redford in “Jeremiah Johnson,” “Mean Streets,” with Robert De Niro and Harvey Keitel, and “The Towering Inferno.”

This week in 1975, a 16-inch electric kettle grill at Happy Hours Trailer Sales east of Waverly was on sale for \$44.95; at Botts Discount, Super T-Shirts (“with sayings and pictures on the front”) cost \$2.39; and at Disco Drug, a tube of VO 5 Hair Dressing cost 81 cents and clothes pin bags were on sale for 77 cents.

40 years ago

A hot air balloon would take off from the Bartels parking lot May 1 in observance of Older Americans Month, states an article on the front page of the April 18, 1985, issue of the Bremer County Independent. “Residents and staff members will also release helium-filled balloons, which contain return address cards to be sent back by persons who find the balloons.”



FILE PHOTO

HISTORY DAY WINNERS—“First-place winners in a recent district History Day competition at the University of Northern Iowa included, from left, eighth graders David Taylor, Greg Flege and Jason Palmquist and sixth grader Sven Schuessler. They will compete this weekend in a state contest at Ames, along with eight other W-SR students who took second-place honors in the district contest. In the background is Palmquist’s display on the artificial heart” (from 1985).

Also in this issue was a large ad for The First National Bank of Waverly in which they explained that ATM stood for Automatic Teller Machine and was equal to the term “Bankmatic.” “If regular banking hours don’t fit your schedule, use Bankmatic!” the ad proclaimed. “Withdraw cash, deposit funds to checking or savings, anytime of the day or night.”

In Helen Vanderburg’s Shell Rock column in this issue, she described the graveside service of Travel C. Moffitt at Riverside Cemetery. “Preceding the military service, Piper Duke Schnyder of Des Moines, in the tartan and kilts of the Royal Stuart Clan, led the cadence of the dirge to the skirling of the bagpipes of the soldier’s lament ‘The Flowers of the Forest.’ The march to the site of burial was paced by the piper.”

Vanderburg noted that Moffitt’s Scots heritage prompted the addition of bagpipes to the graveside ceremony.

First-grade students from Carey Elementary School in Waverly are featured on the front page of the May 2, 1985, issue of the Waverly Democrat. The students visited the high school industrial arts room to learn about building shelters, which fit in with the social studies unit they had just completed. Industrial arts teacher Eldon Armstrong showed them how to build a birdhouse.

The top story in this issue is news

that 12 W-SR seventh and eighth graders would travel to Ames to compete in the state History Day contest. First-place winners from the district contest at UNI included David Taylor, Greg Flege, Jason Palmquist and Sven Schuessler.

Forty years ago this week, the Long Branch Saloon advertised its “MEN’S wet shorts contest,” with first place garnering \$50; the Riviera in Janesville was having a Buffalo Feast, featuring 700 pounds of buffalo, as well as wild game meat from raccoon, turtle, pigeons and Canada geese, all for \$5 per adult; and at the Waverly Theatre, patrons could watch “Star Wars: Return of the Jedi” and “The Breakfast Club.”

This week in 1985, a ladies’ haircut and style special cost only \$10 at Rushford’s Family Hairstyling; at Schultz’s Family Store, Golden hamsters were half price at \$2; and a car wash at Conoco Big 10 Mart was on sale for \$2 and included a free bag of popcorn.

30 years ago

Two local residents were part of a counseling group that went to Oklahoma City after the 1995 bombing, part of a group that offered free counseling to public safety workers, we learn in the May 2, 1995, issue of the Bremer County Independent.

“Dennis Liekweg will never forget the cars parked in front of the jail like blockades in a picture straight out of

Beirut,” a front-page article reads.

“[Pat] Boeck, a mental health counselor living in Janesville, and Liekweg, a lieutenant with the Iowa State Patrol living in Waverly, were in Oklahoma City April 21-25, providing mental health counseling to construction employees working at the scene of the federal building explosion,” the article states.

Also in this issue, we read that Janesville college student JL McHenry, who graduated in 1991, competed in the seventh annual “Jeopardy College Championship.”

“JL, a senior majoring in English and political science at Tufts University in Medford, Mass., was one of 15 college students selected out of 3,000 applicants to compete in the two-week tournament,” an article states.

“JL flew to southern California in April to tape the shows. Although she did not win on Monday’s show, JL was the only contestant to get the Final Jeopardy question correct.”

Identical twins Murvin and Merle Paulsen, originally from rural Plainfield but now of Waverly and Clarksville, respectively, had been causing confusion since their births, we read in the May 4, 1995, issue of the Waverly Democrat.

“In school, they were known as ‘Pete’ and ‘Repeat.’ In fact, some still call Merle by his nickname, ‘Pete,’” we read.

“Our teachers had trouble telling us apart, the superintendent never could tell us apart, and on the basketball team, no one knew who to guard,” says Murv.

“Our cousin who lived down the road couldn’t even tell us apart,” adds Merle.”

The two were preparing to celebrate their 75th birthdays.

Also in this issue we see that a contingent of firemen from Waverly’s sister city, Eisenach, Germany, visited the Waverly Volunteer Fire Department.

“Their trip was to promote having more mainstream participation and provide the start of a contact network for people who would want to travel in either direction,” the article states. “After the open house, the department hosted a potluck supper for families of both fire departments.”

Thirty years ago, the Waverly Theatre was showing “Bad Boys,” starring Martin Lawrence and Will Smith, and a held-over “Goofy Movie” by Walt Disney (“It’s hard to be cool when your Dad is Goofy.”).

This week in 1995, the Shell Rock Sportmen’s annual smelt feed cost \$6.50, and at Sports Wave in downtown Waverly, a set of ladies Wilson Prostaff golf clubs (4-PW, four woods) was on sale for \$299.99.

County sets budget after removing wage study

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cause they are not taxed by a city, will see their levy reduced to a rate of \$9.11 per \$1,000 assessed (9.10720, based on the 3.87255 rural basic, plus countywide), from roughly \$9.50 last year (9.49862, based on 3.95000 rural basic plus countywide), a drop of 39.1 cents per \$1,000 assessed.

“So we are reducing the tax levy rate,” Johnson said.

To plug in an example, a \$150,000 home would be assessed from a rolled back base of \$71,147.40, after multiplying the 2024 assessment year limitation of 47.4316%, according to the Assessment Limitation Chart on the Bremer County Assessor’s Property Taxes page. Toward the county-wide levy of 5.23465, a city-dwelling homeowner would pay \$177, according to the Property Tax Calculator on the Iowans for Tax Relief website. A rural homeowner would pay \$307 to the county. The combined levy sheet comes out around June. Tax credits should be taken into account.

Budget details

The county budget proposal is reducing the general fund and general supplemental budgets by a little over \$500,000 next year as proposed, Johnson said.

“So (there is) a deficit there, but we have a healthy fund balance (so) that we’ll be able to withstand that,” she said.

Johnson detailed various expenditures for the coming year, like staffing changes and infrastructure, before getting to the ending fund balance of \$287,000.

Another \$38,000 will go back on the ending balance for a wage study Iowa Workforce Development will do at no charge that was removed from expenses, bringing it to \$325,000. If

the ending fund were to keep dropping, the general fund would then have to supplement it, according to Johnson.

In fiscal 2026 some services are going away and some are being added. Johnson said, “Our mental health administrative services is going away. That also encompasses our general assistance, and that is two employees that will no longer be with us in FY26. General assistance has been moved to our Veterans Affairs where, as an employee in the VA, she will now be 40% general assistance and 60% VA.

“Maintenance, we are adding,” Johnson said. “If the courthouse project goes through Phase 2, we will be adding another full-time person. Next year, it will only be half of a year. And then FY27, it will be the full year going forward.”

“As far as capital projects, courthouse project Phase 2 is set to be bid out here very shortly. And if this board decides to go forward with it, we’ll have it in the budget for next year,” Johnson said.

“Secondary roads has at least four big bridge replacements. About \$111,000 (are) set aside for building,” Johnson said.

Among other expenses for fiscal 2026, Johnson listed health insurance increases for employees and law enforcement separately; funding for the conservation cabin “that they want to get started”; bulletproof vests offset by a grant; sheriff’s vehicles that are offset by the sale of the old vehicles; a land use comprehensive plan update.

Johnson expressed doubt as to the future of county health services.

“Additionally, public health isn’t any certainty yet going forward (as to) how long public health will remain at the county level. That will go

to the state level,” Johnson said.

“And if everyone has been listening, there are changes proposed in our property tax system,” Johnson said. “With the way that taxes will be generated going, I believe, FY27 going forward. Multiple versions are out there. But it will limit the ability of the counties to generate property tax dollars.”

After closing the public hearing and before approving the budget, the Board of Supervisors passed unanimously a motion acknowledging it had approved a 3% across-the-board increase for county staff again on April 22 as required. The \$1,000 stipend for the supervisors’ chairperson continues.

An exception to the 3% maximum wage increase for “step increases currently in place” is noted in meeting minutes from Feb. 18 and Feb. 25. The same motion called for a wage compensation study for considering fiscal 2027 wage increases, as amended.

The approved salary figures were lower than targeted raises the County Compensation Board recommended after meeting on Nov. 18, except for the supervisors rate which was kept even.

Initial Comp Board recommendations had been 4% for the Auditor and County Attorney, 4.5% for the recorder and treasurer, 6% for the sheriff and 3% for the Board of Supervisors.

Wage study

Supervisors Chair Dewey Hildebrandt wanted to know if the \$38,000 planned for the salary study had been removed.

Johnson said she had been told to leave the wage study in the budget but could remove it.

“At this point, it won’t reduce your tax levy,” Johnson said. “Because we

are already at a deficit, it will just add to what fund balance we have remaining.”

Bremer County Human Resources Manager Barb Meeker explained her department will work with Iowa Workforce Development “to see what they can offer us at no charge,” she said, with the tentative due date by fall 2025. “At no charge, it may not be as comprehensive, but it will be a study. (...) So that (will) probably come out of the budget, because this is not going to be an expense.”

Supervisor Bob Brunkhorst said the Board of Supervisors heard from county department heads that spending additional money on a wage study would be “somewhat frivolous.”

“We’ve taken that out. We’re going to do another approach where we work with Workforce Development, and they’ll give us some higher-level numbers for wage compensations for certain areas, and we’ll be able to use those numbers in our budget. We are expecting all the department heads to work on job descriptions, updating those so we can compare those employees on costs.”

Cerwinske on ‘no’ vote

Supervisor Corey Cerwinske voted against the final budget, which passed on a 2-1 vote, in protest of the Supervisors disregarding the compensation board, he later detailed.

“I’m OK with the 3%, I think it’s reasonable, it’s close to what the cost of living adjustment is for Social Security. So that’s why I voted for it today,” Cerwinske said.

However, he voted against the board supervisors’ motion countering the comp board recommendation with the 3% across-the-board on Feb. 28 and Feb. 25, minutes show.

“Overall I think the 3% is workable for our budget, I just don’t think it’s

respectful to the effort put in by the compensation board,” Cerwinske said.

Typically the comp board is tasked with coming up with a fair wage while the supervisors are tasked with budgeting.

Since a 2024 state law change, county supervisors can now dissolve their compensation boards by majority vote as long as they do the comp board’s work.

“We all sat in a room last July and reinstated the compensation board,” Cerwinske said. He contrasted that with the supervisors’ counter offer in mid-February.

“We felt a year ago that engaging more of the population in the budget process was a positive. And then to go in and take their recommendation and not even give them any consideration—going 3% across-the-board to me was kind of a slap in the face to the efforts they put out,” Cerwinske said. “I was pretty vocal when we made the decision to do that 3%, that without having any aggregation between different offices—like the sheriff was proposed 6%, he took the largest cut by far—I didn’t agree with that,” Cerwinske said.

“I’m looking forward to the compensation study we’re working with Workforce Development on. I think that will clear up a lot of the issues I had (with) this budget,” Cerwinske said.

“I’m hopeful that we don’t wait a whole other year to fix those issues, that we look at some changes mid-year,” Cerwinske said.

He noted several counties have gone to handling county department heads’ raises internally, listing Chickasaw and Hardin counties.

“There’s pros and cons both ways,” he said.