

NEWS

Clow Valve provides \$5K boost to OHS robotics

OSKALOOSA — A \$5,000 grant from Clow Valve is powering up the Oskaloosa High School robotics program, helping students build more robots, explore bold ideas, and connect directly with local industry leaders in automation.

The grant, awarded this month, will provide critical funding for robotics parts, 3D printing materials and new laptops to support a growing number of students enrolled in the school's robotics class. It will also help launch a second competitive team, a goal that Oskaloosa robotics teacher Cory Sheeley has been eyeing since participation in the program nearly doubled after transitioning from an extracurricular activity to a daily class.

"We need to buy a couple more laptops so we can code," Sheeley said. "Now that we have more kids in class, we're going to be building more robots."

The program has grown in student interest and involvement. Last year, seven students participated in the team. This year, 15 are enrolled in the class, with projections as high as 20 for next year.

"Kids are more apt to do things during the school day than they are after school," Sheeley said. "Now that it's in my classroom, kids see it all the time. They're getting to participate without having to give up sports or other activities."

Clow, which uses robotics in its own operations, recently hosted students on a field trip to tour its automation facilities. The visit gave students an up-close look at real-world applications of the technology they are studying in class.



Photo provided by Oskaloosa Community School District

Oskaloosa High School robotics team teacher Cory Sheeley accepts a \$5,000 grant check to help power their next big build. With new funding in hand, they're ready to bolt into next year's competition season.

"They invited us in, and they're going to pull us in again before the end of the year," Sheeley said. "We're going to get to code and play with one of their robots. I think the kids are going to love that."

The partnership also opens the door for mentorship and technical collaboration. Clow engineers expressed interest in helping students with robot design, camera programming and movement tracking — all critical skills for competitive robotics.

For students like sophomore Cecil VanWeelden, the experi-

ence of securing the grant has been just as valuable as the money itself. VanWeelden was part of the team that helped develop the grant proposal.

"I feel really accomplished," VanWeelden said. "It shows that not just my hard work, but the hard work of multiple people on our team, benefited us with \$5,000, which is pretty good."

That funding, he said, will help the team replace worn-out parts and try things they hadn't been able to afford in the past.

"We might be able to buy parts we couldn't use before,

either because they were too expensive or just didn't seem worth it," he said. "Now we can fund new ideas."

Senior Oliver Smith agreed, calling the grant a milestone that brings the team closer to the community and gives them more creative flexibility in design.

"It allows us to fund more adventurous ideas and consider different options when it comes to building," Smith said. "It gives us the resources to explore those more 'innovative' ideas, which could turn into something great."

BRIEFS

ISU Extension to host 'Lillies all Summer'

OSKALOOSA — The Mahaska County Master Gardeners are hosting Kristi Evans, president of the Iowa Regional Lily Society and Lily Judge as a speaker on May 13, 2025 at 7 p.m.

She will present "Lilies all Summer". Her presentation will be held at the Mahaska County Extension Office, 212 North I Street Oskaloosa. Kristi is from Albion and has grown lilies for many years. She grows many types of lilies, including Asiatic, Orientals, trumpets, tigers and others.

This event is open to the public and for anyone wishing to learn about the topic both adults and youth. There is no fee to attend, due to Iowa State University Extension and Outreach — Mahaska County and Mahaska County Master Gardener support. Prior registration is not required, but appreciated. To register please call the Mahaska County Extension office 641-673-5841 or email Suzette Striegel, Mahaska County Extension Horticulturist at striegel@iastate.edu.

More information about this event, Master Gardener training and other horticulture events can be found at the Mahaska County Extension Office; 212 North I St.; Oskaloosa Phone 641-673-5841 and; www.extension.iastate.edu/mahaska/yard-garden.htm.

Mahaska County auditor retiring

OSKALOOSA — Jody Groenendyk, elected Mahaska County Auditor last November, announced she is retiring.

Groenendyk sent a letter notifying the Mahaska County Board of Supervisors of her intention earlier this month. Her last day as auditor will be Friday.

"I've been with the county for thirty and a half years, certain things have just fallen into place and I have the opportunity to retire. And I have decided that I'm going to do that while I'm still healthy enough to do what I want to do, move on to my next chapter."

Supervisors Monday morning decided to appoint a replacement, who would serve out Groenendyk's term until the next general election in November 2026.

To appoint a replacement, supervisors first need to publish a notice of intent in the newspaper, to allow people to apply for the position. Publication starts a clock, and supervisors then have between four and 20 days to appoint a successor.

They would make the

appointment in open session.

In the meantime, Mahaska County Treasurer Shauna Hol will assume responsibility for the auditor's office.

Groenendyk, 57, has worked in the auditor's office for more than 27 years. She served at Mahaska County Recorder from 2022 to 2024, when the state Republican Party persuaded her to run for auditor.

Oskey school board passes certified budget, slightly lower levy rate

OSKALOOSA — The school board approved a certified budget for Fiscal Year 2025-26, which brings the property tax levy down 19 cents from where it had been proposed.

The final property tax levy rate is \$13.91 per \$1,000 of taxable valuation. The levy had been proposed at \$14.10.

Finance Director Sarah McGriff called it a "fair, conservative budget for this district. Don't have any major cushion built into this, no fluff."

The school board passed the certified budget, 6-1. Board member Clint O'Day voted against it.

Superintendent Mike Fisher said the tax levy rate is a good level for the Oskaloosa district, and is still lower than some of the neighboring school districts.

"You know, it's a tension, because the two most valuable resources we have are the taxpayer dollars and our children," Fisher said. "And so we want to honor the top, be good stewards of taxpayer dollars, but also honor what our kids need."

Before the 19-cent reduction, the property tax levy proposed by the district represented a nearly 17.6% increase in the school district's rate for residential property taxes. At a previous public hearing on the proposed, concerned residents urged the school board not to do it, that they were taxed enough as it is.

"I do appreciate you bringing it down," board member Amanda McGraw said. "When you see that big of a hike, everybody gets alarmed. I mean, we all should be alarmed at that."

Although lowered some in its final version, the \$13.91 levy rate still marks an increase from last year.

After the meeting, O'Day said that's why he voted against it.

"It all ties back to the levy increase," O'Day said. "I just feel that we should be doing more as a school district to manage our funds better without passing along increases to the public, to the community."

Oskey city council approved SCRAA appointments

JEFF WILFORD
STAFF WRITER

OSKALOOSA — A divided city council approved the appointments of Mayor David Krutzfeldt and council member Bob Drost to the South Central Regional Airport Agency, with numerous city officials acknowledging how divisive the airport issue has been.

The council voted 5-2 to approve Krutzfeldt's appointment, and 4-2 to approve Drost's. Council members Ronda Almond and Lisa Ossian voted against both.

Drost abstained from voting on his own appointment.

An anti-airport group, Stop the Airport, spoke out against the appointments, saying they would represent a conflict of interest for each Drost and Krutzfeldt. The group filed ethics complaints with the Iowa Office of Ombudsman and other state agencies. The complaint with the ombudsman's office is still unresolved.

"I just want to, I guess, say that I'm just starting to get just a little tired of pitting each other against each other," council member Charlie Comfort said. "I'm just disappointed by the divisiveness that's just permeating the community right now."

Before the vote, several people from Stop the Airport spoke against the appointments.

Nick Ryan urged the council to not only remove the appointments from their agenda, but to include a proposal to withdraw from SCRAA altogether on all future agendas "until the coffin

is nailed shut on this boondoggle once and for all."

Almond said she had applied to be appointed to SCRAA "because I feel like we need an honest, neutral individual that represents the community," and still believe she should be on the board.

Drost, in particular, took exception to some of the claims of airport opponents. First, he said the appointments weren't pulled from the last council meeting's consent agenda two weeks ago because of public uproar, but because he asked for them to be removed so he could still vote on the consent agenda while abstaining from the vote on his appointment.

Drost also denied he was acting unethically.

City Attorney David Dixon told the council he didn't believe the appointments were a conflict of interest. The 28E agreement between Oskaloosa and Pella that governs SCRAA outlines the conditions for elected officials to serve on the board.

Once tasked with securing the land for, and then building, the proposed South Central Regional Airport, SCRAA had its teeth pulled after the group announced last July that it could not get all the land it needs and put the project on indefinite hold. Pella and Oskaloosa agreed to a revised 28E agreement that stripped the group of any independent decision-making authority, and it is now primarily responsible for managing the 379 acres of farmland it already owns.

Mahaska Health, WPU hold skin cancer awareness event

OSKALOOSA — The Mahaska Health oncology care team hosted a skin cancer prevention event last week at the William Penn University Campus Health Center.

The event was a collaboration between the oncology and family medicine teams, and the William Penn Athletic Department.

The oncology care team at Mahaska Health hosts an annual event focused on raising awareness to reduce the number of cancer diagnoses in our community. This year, Mahaska Health partnered with William Penn University to provide students with information on skin cancer prevention. The goal of this event was to promote actions that reduce the risk of developing skin cancer, while also increasing awareness of skin cancer risk factors, sun protection, and early warning

signs of skin cancer.

"This initiative reflects the strength of community partnerships in supporting student success beyond the classroom, providing students and faculty with valuable information on sun safety, cancer prevention, and overall wellness," shared Abu Ibrahim, Assistant Athletic Director for Sports Medicine at William Penn. "We're grateful to Mahaska Health for making this event possible."

The Mahaska Health team provided free educational materials, sunscreen and lip balm, answered student questions and offered insights into skin health and cancer risk. By partnering with local organizations like William Penn University, Mahaska Health continues its commitment to community wellness and empowering individuals to take care of their health.



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