

## Pella Schools to offer free breakfast for all

The Pella School Board approved a proposal Monday night to offer free breakfast for everyone in the next school year. Superintendent Greg Ebeling explains that the district has been asked to spend down its nutrition

fund balance, which is over \$1.5 million. The cost to provide breakfast for everyone is estimated to be around \$60,000. During the pandemic, participation in school breakfast was high. At that time, the federal

government was paying for the meals. Since then, participation has dropped off. Ebeling said the district could continue to offer this for the next five to six years and still have a strong nutrition fund balance.

## K-ACT announces Summer Drama Camp

Knoxville Area Community Theatre (K-ACT) is currently accepting registrations for its Summer Drama Camp for elementary school children. The camp is open to children that have completed 1st through 5th grades. There is no cost to participate in this camp. The camp will be held the evenings of June 16, 17,

18 and 19 at First United Methodist Church, 313 E. Montgomery Street in Knoxville. Sessions will run from 6:15 to 8:00 each evening. Children will be taught basic acting skills and theatre concepts while having fun and working as a team. Participants will also have an opportunity to demonstrate their skills for

family and friends during a performance on Thursday, June 19. To register your child, email your child’s name, age, grade just completed and your name and phone number to Lori Pearson at lorip123@gmail.com. Registrations will be accepted through June 10.

## Wabash Railroad Bridge to be demolished

The Marion County Board of Supervisors approved a contract with Boulder of Grundy Center to demolish the Wabash Railroad Bridge, otherwise known as the Dollar Bridge. The bridge recently collapsed and created a potential hazard for the County. Vehicle traffic had been banned for years, but prior to the collapse, pedestrians were allowed to cross the Des Moines River on it.

“If we don’t do this, we are likely facing public safety issues,” Supervisor Steve McCombs said. The bridge’s historic nature forced County Engineer Tyler Christian to consult the State Historic Preservation Office. Part of the County’s covenant with the organization was to continue to provide access for as long as possible. Christian reported there were seven bids received for the demolition project,

with the “wildest range of bids (he’d) ever seen.” Boulder’s proposal was \$268,500 for complete removal of all materials, piers, etc. The project is expected to begin June 9, with 40 working days. The timeline is at the mercy of the river’s levels and flow. “The County’s paying for this. There is no state funding for this sort of thing,” Board Chair Kisha Jahner said.

## Briefs from the Board of Supervisors

The Marion County Board of Supervisors met in regular session Tuesday morning. Here’s a rundown of some of the many actions taken at the meeting. Named Christopher Watkins as acting director of Marion County Development. The search is ongoing for a new, permanent director to take over from Carla Eysink, who recently retired. Named Brent Lanser to Pella’s Building Code Board of Appeals. Approved the rezoning of Parce E of Sunset Acres. A preliminary plat was previously approved that did not include lots 34-36 of the subdivision because they were to be sold to another person. The purchase fell through and it is now part of the full, final plat, which was also approved at Tuesday’s meeting.

Approved a zoning change for land dedicated to the County from Two Rivers Cooperative. This was to fix a clerical error, according to the Board. Vacated an alley in Attica to accommodate a request from the adjacent property owner to build a new house. Approved a resurfacing contract for S-45 in Dallas Township. Norris Asphalt Paving was awarded the contract worth \$1.35 million. “Most of our roads now are well-beyond the 15-year life the overlays were anticipated for,” County Engineer Tyler Christian said. Approved a change order for the Junction 92 project that will decrease the total contract by \$21,000. This includes a change in specification to foam under the concrete floor under the shop. Approved a Compensation

Study request for proposal. A firm is being sought to compare Marion County salaries with others. Approved a three-year service agreement with Terpstra Hoke Associates P.C., for auditing services. County Auditor Jake Grandia called the firm thorough and affordable. “It’s becoming difficult to find firms who will do audits,” Grandia added. The County has worked with this firm for years. Approved the use of the gazebo on the courthouse lawn for a Flag Day program, requested by Daughters of the American Revolution. They also approved a Freedom For Youth Back to Program Bash on Aug. 28. The next regular Board meeting will be May 27 at 9 a.m.

## Marion County EMA training therapy dog

This week, Emily Feagins with Marion County EMA began training with the department’s newest therapy dog, Nova. Nova is the daughter of Crisis Canine Maverick, whose handler is EMA Coordinator Jeff Anderson. Feagins shared this below about the service animals. Crisis Canines of the Midlands is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals and communities during times of crisis through the use of certified Crisis Response K9 teams. Our mission is to bring comfort, reduce stress, and provide emotional support to those affected by trauma, tragedy, or disaster. Our teams consist of certified Crisis K9s, and First Responders trained in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) techniques—together forming a compassionate and highly effective unit for both community outreach and crisis intervention. Our newest K9 in training, Nova, a four-month-old chocolate Labrador

Retriever, being trained to serve as a certified Crisis Response K9 in Marion County. Nova is already highly engaged throughout local schools, participating in safety drills, wellness visits, and educational outreach. Her presence has shown to immediately shift the emotional tone of a room, offering calm and reassurance during potentially stressful situations. The desired impact of this project in Marion County is to meet the emotional and mental health needs of individuals during high-stress events, including natural disasters, school incidents, and other traumatic occurrences. In addition to public support, Nova and her handler will build meaningful connections and promote long-term emotional wellness throughout Marion County. This project represents a compassionate, proven approach to crisis response and public engagement—and we believe Nova will be a life-changing addition to our mission in Marion County.

suicide. Regular, proactive interaction with a Crisis Canine team can help reduce these impacts, offering first responders a safe and supportive outlet for emotional decompression. Moreover, the team will play a key role in public education and stigma reduction. Crisis Canines are a powerful bridge between the public and uniformed responders, helping foster trust, open dialogue, and mental health awareness. Through classroom visits, community events, and presentations, Nova and her handler will build meaningful connections and promote long-term emotional wellness throughout Marion County. This project represents a compassionate, proven approach to crisis response and public engagement—and we believe Nova will be a life-changing addition to our mission in Marion County.

## Future potential projects identified at Twin Cedars

The Twin Cedars School Board welcomed representatives of CMBA Architects to its regular meeting Monday night. CMBA had been asked to do a study to identify possible facilities projects for the future. The district does not have any current plans for these facility improvements, but they may be considered at a later time. Among the Electrical upgrades,

recommendations of projects to consider were mechanical improvements, roofs and more. CMBA met with community members to get their input, as well as reviewing the district’s enrollment and finances. The board will likely hold a workshop to prioritize projects and see which ones fall more under the category of a “want” rather than a “need”.

making the restrooms Americans with Disabilities Act complaint, secured entrances at both buildings, remodeling/updating the high school fitness center and making improvements to the high school entrance are other projects to consider. The high school entrance currently houses an aged trophy case, which community members thought could be updated.

## Twin Cedars, Melcher-Dallas to stick with four-day weeks

The Twin Cedars and Melcher-Dallas School Districts intend to continue to have school four days a week next year. The Twin Cedars School Board held its public hearing regarding the proposed calendar Monday night, with no objections to maintaining the shortened weeks. Melcher-Dallas will hold its hearing and take actions on May 19 at its regular meeting. Superintendent Scott Bridges added that Twin Cedars is eligible for more operational sharing funding from the State to cover qualified personnel expenses. The district hopes to work with neighboring

schools to provide more services. The districts are also exploring a new fund to help cover possible property insurance shortfalls. EMC Insurance, who insures most public school districts in Iowa, has raised its deductibles for wind/hail damage claims. Jester Insurance has proposed a new Storm Protection Fund, which would help districts cover high deductibles in disaster situations. “Participating members contribute to the Storm Protection Fund based on total property values exposed to the 1% wind/hail deductible. Contributions

will be invested in an approved interest-bearing account where they will grow until needed. “In the event of storm damage at a covered location, the SPF will coordinate with EMC to confirm the exact amount of the applicable 1% deductible. Participants retain the first \$10,000 to \$100,000 of each occurrence and the SPF will pay the remainder of the member’s 1% deductible. Retention levels are based on district size and claim experience,” according to information shared with the board. It is expected to be on the June agenda as an action item.

## William Penn, Pella Schools partner on nursing program

The Pella School Board approved an agreement with William Penn University Monday night for a new Certified Nurses Associate program. As part of the recent budget reductions, the district discontinued a previous nursing program. Penn offered to work with the district beginning in the fall, as it is likely to help the university enroll more Pella graduates into its collegiate program. The board also approved a new miscellaneous pay schedule for bus drivers, food service, etc. Drivers and custodians are hard to find, Superintendent Greg Ebeling said. Starting bus

drivers will make \$37 per trip, an increase of \$3 over this year, beginning in the fall. The starting wage for a custodian was raised by \$1 an hour, to \$17 per hour. Other school board notes: Tabled a quote on new shades for the Little Dutch Academy. Shades were installed on the south side of the new building already. The board wants to ensure that the shades on the north side match those already in place. Tabled the Leader in Me contract renewal. The contract had not been received before Monday’s meeting. Approved a logo branding agreement with Creative

Inspirations. Tiffany Van Zante’s venture will pay the district 10 percent of what is earned on Pella merchandise. Approved the budget amendment as presented and published in the Express. Approved criteria when selecting a search firm for a new superintendent. As reported, Ebeling plans to retire at the end of the 2025-26 school year. Among his goals for next year is to help provide a smooth transition to his successor. The next regular board meeting will be Tuesday, May 27, at 5:30 p.m.

## Knoxville, County discuss VA

Knoxville Economic Development Director Glenn Lyons was at Tuesday’s Marion County Board of Supervisors’ meeting to discuss the status of the Veterans District. The City still intends to relocate Young’s Park, to make the land along Highway 14 available for development. Knoxville has already had to turn away a \$419,000 offer for the land from Aldi, due to the park. Per an agreement with the federal government, Knoxville must maintain a park on the former VA land. Much discussion Tuesday focused on relocating the park, with plans for four baseball diamonds and more soccer pitches. Supervisor Jim Mueller believes the City should not limit itself to a number of fields when higher demand may arise in the future. Mueller has experience of this with the Pella Sports Park. Lyons said a larger park was proposed, but the estimated cost was \$12 million. The City estimates that

the Young’s Park relocation would cost around \$2 million and approval to move it would likely take 18 months. The Express sent an email inquiry to Lyons, City Manager Heather Ussery and Mayor Brian Hatch about whether making the land available on Highway 14 is worth the effort. “In terms of Highway 14 frontage development sites, we are in extremely short supply. So, the existing ballfield site makes for a good commercial development site. There simply aren’t any large sites available and Hwy 14 is the only place that commercial developers want to invest in,” Lyons responded. No response was received from Ussery or Hatch. “In terms of Youngs Park, we’d be exchanging those 3.25 acres for more than twice as much land for parks, as well as expanding the number of diamonds and soccer pitches.” The supervisors were asked by Board Chair Kisha Jahner if they wanted to establish subdivisions for more housing development

in the district. Direction given to the City was to continue to pursue what has been done. Regardless of development elsewhere around the campus, Facilities Manager Chris NESTEby said a small piece of land adjacent to the laundry building must be sold with the structure. This is needed to accommodate foot traffic between the campus and Knoxville Raceway. “That triangle has to go with the laundry,” NESTEby said. Lyons also stated, while discussing future infrastructure to expand development, the City may be running low on bond capacity after adding a street in the district and construction costs for the new city hall/public safety complex. “We have the capacity to borrow for the Public Safety Building and Vets Blvd now,” Lyons later clarified to the Express. “We’ll have additional capacity in a couple of years. Our forecasts are very conservative; I think we’re fine.”



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