

City Council okays new city entrance signs

By Jim Rudisill

By the time summer travelers begin passing through the community, the Columbus Junction Development Commission hopes to have new welcoming signs along Iowa Highway 92, commission spokesman Tim Wink told the city council during its February 27 regular meeting.

Wink said the commission had been struggling for several months to find someone who could provide some assistance in planning and acquiring new signs after seeing successful efforts in neighboring communities.

"Wapello has nice stone signs and Crawfordsville has a nice brick and stone sign (and) we are interested in a sign too," Wink said.

However, the efforts to develop a sign had led to several dead ends, until local contractor Andy Carpenter agreed to begin working on the project. Wink said he had used Carpenter on two of his own masonry projects and had been pleased with the results.

"I have a lot of confidence in Andy and his skills," Wink said.

According to Wink, the commission's design would include two outside brick pillars, each topped by a stone cap. The height of the pillars is still undetermined, but they likely would be at least two feet wide. A 10' x 3' stone slab, with "Welcome to Columbus Junction" in recessed, darkened letters cut into it, would be inserted between the pillars. The commission recommended each sign be lighted.

"We're trying to order a sign that is very low maintenance," Wink said.

He estimated the cost of each sign would be between \$2,500 and \$3,500.

One problem the commission has encountered is selecting a location for the signs. Wink said present entry signs are located in low areas and have been raised to provide travelers with a view. Because the new signs will be heavier, raising them will not be feasible, Wink explained.

To help select a proper site, Wink said the commission wanted to build a mock-up of the brick and stone structure and place it at potential locations along the road.

"We're still (trying) to find a place where it looks the best," he said, adding the commission had looked at several locations.

These have included the site where the old sign currently is located, while others have been the Roundy property further to the west, the Wiele property, Cummings property and field owned by Carpenter east of the old sign.

"On the east side of town we have talked about using the present sign location," with other possibilities an area adjacent to the fairgrounds.

Wink said one problem with several of the sites is they are lower than the highway and signs might not be easily seen from the roadway. The mock-up, which would cost around \$300, should help with site selection. After the mock-up is used for that purpose, officials said it could be used for other activities throughout



Sketches of the new entrance signs being considered.

the year.

The council approved building the mock-up and move forward with developing the signs.

In other action, the council approved its 2008-09 budget following a public hearing. There were no comments presented on the budget proposal. According to the published notice, the city is proposing to spend \$1,275,881 next year. That compares with proposed spending this year of \$1,272,355. The total tax levy for non-agricultural ground would be around \$11.64 per \$1000 valuation.

The council also received an update on Louisa Development Group (LDG) activities from executive director Angie Sanders. Sanders said she was currently working on several housing initiatives and a grant application to staff local museums on weekends. Sanders said if the grant application is approved, it would help finance weekend staff personnel for museums in Morning Sun, Wapello and Columbus Junction.

Sanders also presented the LDG's 2008 membership guide. The guide included the group's 2007 membership roster and major 2007 accomplishments. She also distributed a flyer on the LDG's speaker series. Lori Denney, former general manager of the Comfort Suites Hotel and Conference Center in Burlington is scheduled to speak on March 12 in the Letts Community Center. Her speech, Customer Service Solutions, will begin at 7 p.m. and will be the third of six planned presentations.

The speech is free to LDG members and \$5 for non-members.

The council also received a monthly report from Community Development Executive Director Mallory Smith. Smith said activities have included preliminary discussions with Mexican and Iowa State University Extension officials to establish a program that would assist Mexican nationals working in the area to earn the Mexican equivalent of a GED. Smith said the community development program had also been working on the community's Hispanic Cultural Festival, translating services, community health center effort and other activities.

In final action, Civic Center Foundation chairman Steve Sents updated the council on plans to erect

a donor board in the civic center. Officials said the donor board had been promised as a way to recognize contributors who donated a certain amount to the construction of the civic center. The council did not take any final action on approving a sign, but assured Sents it would support the effort once council members determined how it would finance the project.

Officials said the city revenue from the voter-approved local option sales tax or funds donated by the Roundy Foundation might be possible sources to finance the board.

A final decision is expected at the next meeting.

Enjoy a meal out and help out

Conesville Firemen Fish and Wing Fry

The Conesville firemen will be holding their annual Fish and Wing Fry on Saturday, March 15th starting at 5:00 p.m. The cost for adults is \$7.00; 12 and under \$4.00. The public is invited to come and have a good time.

St. Patrick's Day Buffet

Wear your green, bring your gold and enjoy an evening of food, music, and chatter. Our annual St. Patrick's Buffet will be held Saturday March 15th, 2008 at Ainsworth Opera House, 284 Railroad St., Ainsworth, IA. from 5:30 pm to 7 pm. cost is adult \$9 and children \$5 for all you can eat. Buffet meal of corned beef and cabbage, Irish stew, new potatoes, colcannon, casseroles, salads, desserts, Irish soda bread, Irish brown bread, and drinks will be provided. This is a fund raiser for the Opera House. "St. Patrick's Day is an enchanted time - a day to begin transforming winter's dreams into summer's magic."

Presbyterian Pancake Supper

The Columbus Presbyterian and Morning Sun Presbyterian Churches will co-host a pancake and sausage supper Saturday, March 15th at the Columbus High School Student Center, with serving from 4:30-7 PM. Cost of the meal is \$6.00, with kindergarten and younger eating free. All proceeds will be applied to various Louisa County mission projects. This is an opportunity to enjoy some great food, good fellowship, and also help support local mission. So be sure and mark Saturday, March 15 on your calendar.

Legion to hold Fish Fry

The American Legion will hold a fish and chicken fry on Saturday, March 8th at the Legion Building with serving from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. There will also be a pork loin and furniture item raffle. The furniture item was built and donated by Mark Shear. The public is invited.

Lone Tree Presbyterian Catfish Dinner

The Presbyterian Church in Lone Tree will serve a catfish dinner on Friday, March 14th from 4:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. The menu includes catfish, baked potato, baked beans, cole slaw, rolls, beverage, and bar/cookies. Tickets are \$8.00 for adults and \$4.00 for children ages 10 and under.

Louisa County Longbeards banquet

The Louisa Longbeards Chapter of NWTFF is hosting their ninth anniversary Hunting Heritage Banquet on Saturday evening, March 8, 2008. The event is being held at Briggs Civic Center, Wapello. Doors open to the public at 5:30 p.m. for viewing auction items. A rib-eye supper will be served at 7 p.m. Merchandise to be auctioned includes framed pictures, a rocking chair, knife set, afghan and pillow set, etc. Raffle tickets will be available for a chance on guns and merchandise at the banquet. Purchase your Sportmen's Tier Raffle ticket before March 1 to receive an extra \$20 worth of general raffle tickets. To renew your turkey membership and purchase banquet tickets, contact Todd Shutt, 210 Pleasant Street, Wapello, Iowa 52653. If you have any questions, Todd's phone number is 319/572-1522 or e-mail is t_shutt@hotmail.com.

Briefly -

World Day of Prayer

World Day of Prayer will be held on Friday, March 7, 2008 at 2:00 p.m. at the Salem Welsh Presbyterian Church.

Alumni Banquet scheduled

Continuing the custom of holding the Columbus - Cotter - Conesville Alumni Banquet on the second Saturday in June, the 2008 Banquet will be held at Roundy Elementary School on June 14, 2008. Make your plans to attend the banquet and to schedule your class events to coincide with the date.

Community Foundation to meet

The Board of Directors of the Community Foundation of Louisa County (CFLC) will hold its monthly meeting Tuesday, March 11th at 5:00 pm at State Bank of Wapello, 206 North Second Street. Louisa County residents interested in philanthropy are encouraged to attend. CFLC is a non-profit organization encouraging quality of life improvements in Louisa County through endowment building, granting and technical assistance. CFLC is affiliated with the Community Foundation of the Great River Bend. For more information contact Angie Sanders at 319-527-5182 or cflc@louisacomm.net.

Grandview/Letts Lions blood drive

The Grandview/Letts Lions Club is holding a blood drive on Thursday, March 20, 2008, from 1:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at the Grandview Community Bible Church. Anyone who donated on or before Thursday, January 24, 2008, is eligible to donate. Make sure to bring your I.D. and eat before donating. To make an appointment for donation, please call Jack Carter at 319-726-4252.

Great Beginnings Sunday Fun Night

Great Beginnings of the United Methodist Church is having "Sunday Fun Night" on Sunday, March 9 starting at 5:00 p.m. At 5:00 p.m. will be a variety show, followed by a spaghetti supper (free-will donation), and a silent auction. **The public is invited.** Any questions call the church office. The money raised will be used to supplement supplies for the preschool.

Blood Drive at Grimm Brothers

The Mississippi Valley Regional Blood Center announces a blood drive at Grimm Brothers Plastics on Thursday, March 13th, from 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at the Hemobile in 1 Quality Court. To donate call Linda Wilson at 319-523-6000 to sign up. Walk-ins welcome. Donors who last gave blood on or before January 17, 2008, are eligible.

Half Hour Club to meet

The Half Hour Club will meet on Tuesday, March 11th at 1:30 p.m. at the home of Arlene Buckman. Dick Peterson will give the program. Judy Chapman will be co-hostess.

Preservation Commission to meet

The Louisa County Preservation Commission will meet on Wednesday, March 5, 2008, at 6 p.m. Location of the meeting will be the Louisa County Historical Museum located in the former library at Columbus Junction. Besides new and old business, we will tour this new facility as many of us have not done so since its opening.

Conservation District to meet

The Louisa County Soil and Water Conservation District Commission will meet March 6, 2008, at 4:30 p.m. at the NRCS Office in Wapello. Topics on the agenda will be an update on fall cost share projects, discussion on long-range goals and the District building project. For more information please contact the office at 260 Mulberry St. STE 2, Wapello, or phone 523-6411.

Legion to host birthday party

The American Legion Auxiliary will be hosting a birthday party for the American Legion on Tuesday evening, March 11, at 7 p.m. We invite all Auxiliary members, Legionnaires, Sons of the American Legion, and their spouses to the party. TAG students from Roundy Elementary will demonstrate flag folding. It's a birthday party!

School Board to hold budget workshop

The Columbus Community School Board will hold a special meeting/budget workshop II on Monday, March 10, 2008, at 6:30 p.m., at the Roundy Elementary Library.

Senior Center needs roof help

The Senior Center building needs a new roof. This project will be done this spring. If anyone wishes to donate toward the new roof, you may drop off your donation at the Senior Center with Judy Stirling. The Senior Center is owned by the Community At Large - we need your help. - Senior Center Board

Craft/Crop for Kids

Ainsworth Elementary Support Organization will be holding its 4th annual Craft/Crop for Kids on Saturday, March 8th, 2008 in the Ainsworth Elementary Gym. Any teen or adult who is interested in spending the day working on scrapbooks, stamping cards, sewing, knitting, beading, or any other craft project is welcome to attend. Vendors will be on hand with various make and take items, items for sale, and consultation. Participants may also bring unused scrap-booking or craft supplies or tools they no longer need or want for our "Garage Sale" table. Ask for a number when you register. Hours are from 9:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m., and participants are welcome to come and go as they please during those hours. The cost is \$15.00 per person, which includes lunch, snacks, and table space. Bottled water will be available for purchase or participants may bring their own non-alcoholic beverages. Tables will be provided for anyone registered by Thursday, March 6th. Profits from the event will be used to help fund field trips and purchase materials for classrooms that are not part of the school's regular budget. For more information or to register as a participant or a vendor, please call Brenda Bean at 319-657-3151.

Grant money available for downtown second story rehabilitations

If you own a building in downtown Columbus Junction and would like to rehabilitate your second-story into a suitable rental apartment, you might be able to do it with the city and state's assistance.

On Friday, February 29th, Dan Eberhardt with Southeast Iowa Regional Planning (SEIRP) met with a group of downtown business owners who had expressed interest in a "Second Story Grant."

The "Second Story Grant" is the Project Based Housing Program through the Iowa Finance Authority. The Iowa Finance Authority has a State Housing Trust Fund that helps ensure decent, safe and affordable housing for Iowans through this program. Grant money is available on a first come, first serve basis for this program. Since this program started in November, funds are now available for a more limited time.

Individual businesses or building owners cannot apply for this grant - only cities, counties or non-profits. The City of Columbus Junction has agreed to look into being the applicant on behalf of the downtown building owners.

The City of Columbus Junction, in collaboration with Louisa Development Group (LDG), would like to invite interested downtown Columbus Junction building owners to visit with SEIRP about this program in mid-late March.

If you are interested, please contact LDG at 319-527-5182 or the City of Columbus Junction at 319-728-7971 to find out more details. LDG is also available to work with other member-cities on this program. Please call the above number or email ldg@louisacomm.net if you would like to schedule an appointment to discuss this program.