

Scars of 2008 beginning to fade

By John Carpenter
Gazette Staff

Hopefully the scars from the flood of 2008 will soon be only a memory as a number of positive events are occurring on the remaining damaged buildings in town.

In the photo at right, siding is now being installed on the Senior Center. The interior is in the final stages of completion, and an expected opening date of May 1st is planned.

Below left is the former Subway Building. This has recently been purchased by an area contractor and work is progressing on cleaning out the interior and moving the facility back onto its foundation. Immedi-

ate plans for the building are not known yet, but it is hoped that the facility can be rented or sold to a potential business.

Below right is the Columbus Motel. It is the Gazette's understanding that a group of area hotel owners have made arrangements with the lender to take over the business and restore it to a going concern.

With the exception of the bowling alley, which no information is available yet, these three buildings will represent the final phase of our community's recovery. In less than one year since the flood, this is remarkable progress, and exhibits the initiative and pride that exist in our community.



Columbus Superintendent discusses School situation

The warmer days of the last few weeks has certainly been a welcomed sight. It's nice to see people out walking the streets and our students getting ready for the track and soccer seasons. We are now in the 4th quarter of school, and hopefully with no more snow days, the last student day is Thursday, May 28. Here is what's going on in the district:

Financial Health of the Columbus School District: In the weeks ahead, we will be reading and hearing about school budgets. Many school districts are facing tougher times with decreasing enrollment and less money coming from the state. I want to give you information about the state of Columbus' budget.

Columbus is facing many of the concerns other school districts are having. Our student enrollment has fallen from a high of 1,107 students in 2004 to 990 students in 2009. This past year, our certified enrollment fell 33 students.

Most school payments come out of the 'General Fund'. It is this fund that pays salaries, supplies, costs associated with transportation and things like this. 80% of all of the money Columbus has is in this fund and 80% of the general fund goes to pay salaries.

Columbus also has other funds, which by law, must only be spent on specific things. One fund, called PPEL, deals with maintaining school buildings and facilities. As an example, we will resurface the all-weather track this summer. The money for that project will not come out of the general fund. Buying a new bus does not come out of the general fund, nor does the food service costs.

The amount of money our general fund has is driven by how many students we have and what a student is worth. Currently, a student is worth \$5,546. With a certified enrollment of 1,023 taken last year, we are receiving \$5,673,558. Next year, although the current legislative action isn't final, it appears that a student will be worth \$5,656 (an increase of \$110 per child). With a certified enrollment of 990, we will be receiving \$5,599,440.

You may hear from time to time the phrase 'allowable growth'. What is being talked about is what a student is worth. When the allowable growth goes up 4%, it is not a 4% increase in our budget, but rather a 4% increase in what a kid is worth. As an example, with a student currently worth \$5,546, a 4% increase would be a \$222 increase to \$5,768. If a district has no student loss or even student growth, the district receives an increase in funds. If a district loses students, they don't get a 4% increase, and it is even possible

to have less money due to decreased enrollment.

The legislature has set next year at 4%, but the governor is saying that he wants the legislature to only fund 2%, or the \$110 increase stated above. The legislature has also set the 2010-2011 school year at 2%. We'll need to see what finally comes out of the legislature and the Department of Education, as well as the federal stimulus money to have a clearer picture.

We have also had a 1.5% across the board state cut that is imposed on this year's budget. That amount comes to about \$69,000 and will be deducted from what we hoped to receive this year.

Columbus does have some money in reserve as we look at increased expenses next year and the years ahead. The amount at the beginning of the year was around \$716,000. It is important that this amount not go below zero. School districts that do have negative balances for two years in a row run the risk of state closure (Russell School District was closed last year).

To solve our money problems, and to try and stay as healthy as we can, I believe that the district must be proactive. The district has the choice of cutting expenses, eroding the cash reserve of \$716,000, raising taxes, or a combination of the aforementioned.

Class sizes in the district are getting smaller. The elementary school has the largest class in kindergarten with 70 and the smallest class in 2nd grade with 58. Next year, 6th grade will have 66 students and 7th grade will have 71. The last bubble of students has now reached the high school and they are 9th graders.

Staffing at the middle school was also examined. It was found that we do not need as many staff as we presently have as we change our school schedule from a 6-period day to an 8-period day. Last Friday, I talked to the affected teachers. I also recommended to the school board that the 7th-8th grade go from eight teachers to five teachers. Class size in 7th and 8th grade will rise, and be in the low 20's. Currently, some classes, but certainly not all, are below 10 students. Action on that downsizing occurred Monday night, March 16. The downsizing of staff will be done by middle school seniority and certification.

As the middle school reorganizes itself from this downsizing, the remaining staff will be asked to teach more than one daily preparation. A close analysis of teaching certifications was done so that we remain state compliant. More information about this will come to the middle school teachers.

The elementary is less affected

this year than in past years. The elementary in the 2001-2002 school year was a full four-section building with two grades even having five-sections. Today, the PS, kindergarten, and 1st grade are four-sections. The 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades are three-section grades. The last of the five-section grade are now 9th graders. The 6th grade, currently with four teachers, will be going to three-sections.

At the high school, we are losing Mrs. Sandy Martin in the English Department. Sandy's workload is extremely impressive and finding others to do all that she presently does creates challenges. We are talking to our other HS teachers about adding endorsements.

Another concern is state compliance with endorsements and NCLB requirements of having highly qualified teachers that makes us focus on what endorsements teachers have and having them in the correct place. We have taken time to examine every teacher's endorsements so that we maximize our staff. The endorsements of all teachers are now public information and you can look up your student's teachers at this website: <https://www.iowaonline.state.ia.us/boec/controller.aspx>

As the district and the school board members work through this budgeting process for the upcoming year and beyond, it will call for understanding and the realization that our economy is not presently good. Without taking action now, the Columbus School District could well be in trouble.

ACT Testing for Juniors Coming: Columbus again will be using the ACT test as our district's second required assessment. All Columbus 11th graders will be coming to school the morning of Saturday, April 4 to take this test. The ACT is used as the college entrance tests at our Iowa regent schools. If you have questions, please contact HS Counselor Mrs. Chris Wulf at 728-2231.

Distinguished Graduate Program: The deadline, March 31, 2009, is quickly approaching for nominating a distinguished graduate. As you remember, we started a Distinguished Graduate Program at Columbus last year. The purpose of the program is to recognize a graduate who went on to do extra-ordinary things. To qualify, the person must be a graduate of a High School in the Columbus Community School District. This would include Cotter High School, Conesville High School, and Columbus Junction High School, as well as Columbus Community High School and the individual must have an accomplishment of significant achievement or contribution (Example: Career, country, community, or man-

kind). In 2008, Mr. Hal Prior was chosen for the award. It is time to nominate another graduate. Please consider someone who you believe would be a good addition to our list and nominate him or her. Nomination forms can be found on-line: www.columbus.k12.ia.us, or call me at 728-2911. We'll see that you get them.

2009-2010 School Calendar: The school board approved the 2009-2010 school calendar at the March 16 board meeting. A copy of the calendar can be found on our district website (listed above). The calendar is not without controversy and we can certainly look at improving our process. I do want you to know that this calendar has been discussed internally, for a long time, with input from staff, high school students, board, and administration. Parent input comes through our district's School Improvement Advisory Committee. The process, long traditionally used, was followed and the result of that process is the calendar that the board approved.

2009 Swimming Pool Season News: The School Board approved the recommendations of the Columbus Swimming Pool Committee for the upcoming summer season. In general, the dates, hours of operation, and admission rates remain the same as they were last year. Here's the update: Dates for pool operation: Saturday, May 23 - Sunday, August 16; Daily Hours: Mon-Fri 1:00 - 6:00 PM, Sat-Sun 1:00 - 7:30 PM. Adult swim time from noon to 1:00 PM to 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM Monday through Thursday; Admission Rates: Single Day: \$2.50; Single Season: \$50.00; Family Season: \$100.00; Punch Card Pass: \$20.00.

2009-2010 Student Fees and Nutrition Fees: The school board also approved no increase in student fees and no increase in the cost of breakfast and lunch for next year.

Summer Maintenance Projects Approved: The board approved the spending of close to \$500,000 of the 1¢ sales tax money we receive on building and grounds improvements this summer. The improvements include continued roof work at the high school and middle school (\$180,000), new HS lockers along the library wall hallway (\$16,500), removing and replacing the all-weather track with new lane painting (\$90,000), total electrical upgrading and sound improvements in the auditorium (\$120,000), replacing of HS outside doors (\$18,500), electric work in HS gym (\$3,000), brickwork at HS (\$3,200), HS library renovation including removing walls, adding furniture, and replacing carpet (\$20,000), and replacing computer labs and individual computers (\$115,000).

Briefly -

Taste of Wapello

WAPELLO - Louisa County Habitat For Humanity is seeking local cooks to make or bake tasty treats for a new type of fundraiser. Habitat members plan to have area restaurants and deli's, as well as local cooks serving 50 or more items to taste from 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Saturday, April 4, at the Briggs Civic Center. If you like to cook and want to be a part of this event, call Lois Wanfalt at 319-729-2773. This occasion is replacing the annual auction Habitat has held for several years however there will be a silent auction during the tasting hours. Tickets will be for sale soon.

Boy Scout Pancake Supper

Pack 54 Cub Scouts from Letts, Grandview and Fruitland will be holding their annual All-you-can-eat Pancake Supper on Monday, March 30, 2009, from 5-8 p.m., at the L-M Elementary School. The menu will include: Pancakes, scrambled eggs, whole hog sausage, coffee, milk, and orange juice. The cost will be: 7th grade-Adult - \$5.00; Grades K-6 and Seniors (55) - \$3.00; Preschool - Free. Tickets can be purchased from any Cub Scout of Pack 54. Tickets can also be purchased by calling Mary Ann at 563-263-8886, Karen at 319-726-4515, or you can purchase tickets at the door.

Empowerment Board to meet

The Des Moines/Louisa County Caring CommUNITY Empowerment Board will be meeting at the First Presbyterian Church, 801 Middle Street, Mediapolis, IA on Wednesday, April 1, 2009, at 10:00 a.m.

Conesville School Reunion

It's time to start planning the 2009 Conesville School Reunion. Mark your calendar for May 23, 2009, 12:00 noon. Last year was the 50th reunion of the last class (1958) to graduate from Conesville High School. We thought it a good time to discontinue the event but when it was brought to a vote the response was, why would we quit????? Why ~ because to continue WE NEED HELP!!!! This reunion doesn't just happen. It takes a lot of planning and work from willing people to help with invitations, programs, menu and many other things that need to be done. If you are a Conesville graduate, was a student or teacher, spouse of a graduate or have any interest in the school or Conesville Community we want to get you involved. We always have a good time and don't want you to think it is all work and no play because that is not the way it is. It just takes many hands to pull it off. Please call Fran @ 319-728-2139 or Rose @ 319-728-2027 if you would be willing to get involved. We will be meeting soon and need some new ideas and your input for another successful party.

Deliver Meals on Wheels

The Congregate Mealsite is looking for volunteers to help with the delivery of our Home Delivered Meals. Please call Barbara at 319-728-2412, Monday-Friday between the hours of 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

City Council to meet

The City of Columbus Junction will be hosting the regular council meeting today Wednesday, March 25, 2009 at 5:30 p.m. in the New Civic Center/City Hall.

Etude Club Rehearsal

A special chorus rehearsal for all Etude Club members will be held in the United Methodist Church of Columbus Junction on Tuesday, March 31, at 7:00 p.m.

Class of 1989 plans reunion

Attention 1989 Grads from Columbus Community High School. We are asking for your help. We are in the beginning stages of planning our 20-year class reunion. Time has flown by! The first step is to gather classmate addresses, along with email addresses. Please forward any classmate information to Debbie (Buser) Bunting at debbunting@hotmail.com. If there are any questions or concerns, please contact Debbie (Buser) Bunting and/or Jennifer Hills-Dunker at 319-212-0490. Your help would be greatly appreciated!

Heritage Center to close early

The Louisa County Heritage Center will close at 4 p.m. Sunday, March 29. Regular hours are 1:30-4:30 p.m.

Preservation Commission hosts tour

The Louisa County Historical Preservation Commission will meet at 4 p.m. Sunday, March 29, at the Louisa County Heritage Center, 609 N. James L. Hodges Ave., Wapello, to tour the southeastern portion of the county. The purpose of the tour is to check the condition of signs that the Commission has previously placed to designate historic sites and to look at other historic places that may not have been considered for similar signs.

Pancake Supper at Methodist Church

The Columbus Junction United Methodist Church will host a pancake supper on Friday, March 27th, with serving from 4:30-7:30 p.m. The supper is being sponsored by the Louisa County Mission Group, which involves a number of churches from Louisa County. The cost of the meal is \$6.00, with kindergarten and younger eating free. Also, a family of four can eat for \$20. All proceeds after expenses will be used to support the following: The Stork's Nest; Reading is Fundamental, and the Louisa Ministerial Group. This is an opportunity to enjoy some good food, good fellowship, and also help support local missions. So be sure and mark Friday, March 27th on your calendar.

School / Parent Forum

There will be a second Parent Forum for parents of students in grades 6-12, on Thursday, April 2, in the High School Student Center. The meeting will begin at 6:45 p.m. This is a follow-up meeting to the one held on March 9. The purpose of the forum is to gain a stronger link between parents and school staff at the secondary level, to the benefit of our students' education. All parents of secondary students are welcome.

CCHS Alumni Banquet

Mark your calendar now for the Columbus-Cotter-Conesville Alumni Banquet, June 13th. Due to cancellation of last year's banquet because of the flood, we will be honoring two 50-year (1958 and 1959) and two 25-year (1983 and 1984) classes. If you'd like to be involved in planning the banquet, contact Jerry Bell or Jim Howell.

Great Beginnings Fundraiser

On Sunday, March 29, the Great Beginnings Preschool will be having their annual fundraiser. The event will start at 4:30 p.m., at Columbus Junction United Methodist Church with entertainment. At 5:00 p.m., there will be a spaghetti supper (free will donation) followed by a silent auction of three quilts made by the preschool students. The public is invited to come and join us.