

Local resident receives Shining Star Award

By John Carpenter
Gazette Staff

At the 2009 Governor's Conference on Aging Well Expo held last Wednesday, Columbus Junction resident, Polly Prior received the Shining Star Award for her work on restoring the Senior Center from the 2008 flood damage.

Polly was instrumental in lining up funding so that the facility could be rebuilt. According to the nomination material: "When the floods of 2008 took out the senior center, Polly did not waste any time in seeking funding to put everything back in order. She raised \$103,000 from sources such as Alliant Energy, Jumpstart, and Embrace Iowa. Another \$143,000 has been committed to the project through Polly's hard work, but she says she won't count the money until it is in the bank. Polly wants the center to remain a viable part of the community and continues to work towards that goal."

As everyone in the community knows, Polly has become a driving force in many projects, but her drive and dedication truly stood out in her efforts at the Senior Center. "The Senior Center is restored today because of Polly's efforts," said Senior Center Board member Tom Huston, "she never took no for an answer."



Polly Prior in front of the newly restored Senior Center

Congratulations, Polly, this is an award that was truly deserved. Because of your drive, the Center is now positioned to again serve many generations of Columbus Community citizens. Polly was nominated by Dennis Zegarac.

(As a side note: former resident

Jim Paulding was recognized as an Iowa Centenarian at the same ceremony. Jim now resides in Chariton, Iowa.)

Assessor proposes tax valuation settlement to Tyson Foods, Inc.

By Jim Rudisill

A proposed settlement of a disputed property valuation was offered to Tyson Foods, Inc. by Louisa County Assessor Greg Johnson on May 22, following a formal Louisa County Board of Review hearing. Johnson reported he offered the settlement in the afternoon, possibly after company representatives had already left for the day, and had not heard back if the company had accepted or rejected the offer.

Johnson declined to provide any details on the settlement since the company had not responded.

The company notified Johnson earlier this year that it has disputed the \$9,541,356 valuation he set for the company's packing plant property north of Columbus Junction on January 1, 2009. That valuation was set after Johnson received an appraisal from Bob Ehler, a certified general appraiser for Vanguard Appraisal, Cedar Rapids. The valuation was the same as that set in 2007 and 2008, which the company had not disputed.

During the board of review hearing last week, Tyson representatives Robert Cox and Denton Childs did not explain why the company had not disputed those valuations, but claimed several sales of food industry property over the past several years showed the valuation of the Columbus Junction property should have been \$3,610,000. Information on those sales and other supporting appraisal documentation was faxed to Johnson earlier and the representatives insisted that data supported the lower valuation.

The representatives, who participated in the hearing by telephone, also disputed the square footage used by Johnson in his valuation. According to them, the square footage was closer to 291,320 square feet, while Johnson used a figure of 226,000 square feet. Johnson acknowledged his figure was based on the concrete floor space of the company and did not include receiving areas and other less developed space at the plant.

With Johnson's figures the square footage valuation for the plant came to \$42.22, while the valuation per square foot if the company's figures were used was around \$12.39. The two company representatives said that figure was closer to the sale figures cited in their faxed information.

In a telephone call after the formal hearing, Ehler clarified some of the information cited by the company.

Ehler said several of those properties were either old, obsolete or vacant and were not truly comparable with the Columbus Junction property. In fact, Ehler told the board, only one of the plants, an Orange City facility owned by Excel Corporation, was probably the only fair comparable. He said when the sale of that plant was adjusted, it penciled out to be about \$30.78 per square foot.

Johnson acknowledged the difference between his square footage figure and the company's figure could be a legitimate issue; and although he remained confident that his total valuation figure was fair, agreed his figures could be disputed.

"I think I have some good basis for my assessments, (but) it's not an exact science," he said.

Columbus School District Superintendent Rich Bridenstine, who attended the board of review hearing, explained to the board the impact the company has caused to the district. He said the poverty rate for the district is 64%, nearly double what the state figure is; and the district has been forced to hire additional staff to provide language and other services.

Cox and Childs said they felt the company was provided good jobs for the community, but did not dispute Bridenstine's figures.

Bridenstine agreed the company's presence has helped his district maintain its enrollment figures. However, he suggested the company needed to provide more support and hinted that a reduction in valuation - and the resulting loss of property tax dollars for his district - was not a move he supported.

"I believe our school would be the size of Winfield if it wasn't for (the company), but (the company) does not get a pass simply because they say they provide jobs," he explained. "The added services that have to be completed (by Columbus) are phenomenal and I believe the entire community needs to provide that. (The company) needs to support that," he added.

Johnson said the company will likely respond to the settlement proposal within the next 20 days. If it accepts the offer, any further legal action will likely be prohibited under the terms of the agreement. However, if the company rejects the offer, it must then appeal the valuation to either the Iowa Property Assessment Appeal Board or district court before the 20-day period is over.

Ladies at Community Bank raise money for Poppy Day



Last Friday the ladies of Community Bank in town held a "Wear Your Jeans Day." The ladies each donated \$5 for the opportunity to wear jeans to work. The money raised was given to the American Legion for Poppy Day.

FEMA assistance in Louisa County exceeds \$20 Million

DES MOINES, Iowa - As the one-year anniversary of the devastating floods and tornadoes that struck Iowa last May and June nears, disaster assistance approved for residents and governments in Louisa County has reached \$20,907,371, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and State of Iowa disaster recovery officials. This total details funding through FEMA's Individual Assistance and Public Assistance programs, and U.S. Small Business Administration disaster loans.

FEMA Housing Assistance has approved 359 households in Louisa County for \$5,450,977. Housing Assistance provides rental assistance grants to eligible homeowners and renters who cannot or should not live in their disaster-damaged homes and grants to homeowners to make an owner-occupied structure livable.

The State Other Needs Assistance program has approved 105 households in Louisa County for \$323,100. Other Needs Assistance provides grants for those affected with eligible disaster-related special needs and necessary expenses such as personal property, transportation, other essential needs, funeral, dental and medical expenses. Those applying for personal property, transportation and other essential needs must first receive a decline from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) for a low-interest disaster loan.

SBA has approved disaster loans totaling \$10,597,500 in Louisa

County. Under a presidential disaster declaration, SBA provides federal disaster loans to homeowners, renters, businesses of all sizes and private, non-profit organizations to repair or replace disaster-damaged property. Additionally, for small businesses and most private, non-profit organizations of any size, SBA offers disaster loans to help meet working capital needs caused by the disaster, regardless of whether the business suffered any property damage.

The State/FEMA Public Assistance program has obligated \$4,535,794 to the state for reimbursements in Louisa County for government related, eligible expenses in the area of emergency response measures, debris removal and repair or restoration of disaster damaged public infrastructure. Certain non-profits providing essential services also may be eligible for reimbursement under this program.

Statewide, FEMA/State of Iowa disaster grants and SBA loans now total more than \$1 billion to help Iowa renters, homeowners, businesses and governments recover from the tornadoes and flooding that affected Iowa between May 25 and August 13, 2008.

Note that these category totals do not include additional state funds or other sources of federal dollars (Community Development Block Grant funds, for example) that have been allocated to local communities and individuals for the disaster recovery effort.

Briefly -

Colonial Manor Remembrance Service today

You are cordially invited to attend a Colonial Manor Remembrance Service today, Wednesday, May 27th, in the Activity Room at 3 p.m. Pastor Al Coffin will be officiating. We will be remembering: Donna Ball, Ada Chrisman, Nadine Cocklin, Thelma Coon, Harold Drinkall, Jean Galitz, Jo Hammond, Edna Hutchison, Clifford Jacobs, Helen Kaczetow, Jerry Phillips, Dick Pugh, Henry Sexton, Dolly Thornton, and Milo Viner.

Fire Department Open House

Members of the Columbus Junction Fire and Rescue would like to invite you to an open house at the Columbus Junction Fire Department on Sunday, June 7, 2009, from 1-4 p.m. Come and see the renovation of the station after the 2008 flood and view up close the new pumper truck recently delivered. Light refreshments will be served. Please plan to attend this event!

Great Beginnings Preschool now accepting applications

Great Beginnings Preschool is now accepting student applications for the 2009 - 2010 school year. Great Beginnings offers quality care and education for children ages 3, 4 and 5. The school also provides transportation to and from the preschool. For more info please contact the preschool at 728-2669 or Beth Hills at 728-3157.

Main Street Clean-up

Residents of Columbus Community are invited to help clean up the north end of Main Street on June 6th at noon. Bring gloves and hand tools to work with plants, etc. Rain date will be one week later, June 13th - same time. We hope for at least a dozen workers.

Cancer Awareness Ride

A Cancer Awareness Ride will be held on Saturday, June 13th. The ride will start and end at the Circle of Pride Rodeo Grounds. There will be a silent auction, 50/50 raffle, general raffle, game run rode quiz, music and kids' games. There will also be outrageous games at each of the five stops. \$5 fee for those 12 and up. All proceeds go to the University of Iowa Chemo Room. For more information contact Pam Tomfield at 563-299-5852 or Danita Cox at 319-726-5018 or 563-571-8514.

School Board to hold public meeting

The Board of Education for Columbus Community School District will hold a Special Public Meeting on Thursday, May 28, 2009, at 3:45 p.m., at the District Administrative Office, 1210 Colton Street, Columbus Junction, IA 52738.

Extended hours at Museum

The Columbus Community Heritage Museum will be open Saturday, June 13th, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. All Alumni classes and others are invited to visit the museum that day.

Alumni Banquet scheduled

The annual Alumni Banquet for Columbus, Cotter and Conesville schools will be held on June 13, 6:30 PM, at Roundy Elementary School. Tickets are \$10 each and are available from Sherry Pine at the Columbus State Bank (728-2436) and Carol Ann Howell at the Community Bank (728-2226). Since the banquet was cancelled last year, we will honor 50-year classes of 1958 and 1959, and 25-year classes of 1983 and 1984. Please buy your tickets early so we can plan for food and space. If you have questions, please contact Jerry Bell or Jim Howell.

Farmers' Market now open

Fridays 4:30 to 6:30 • American Legion Parking Lot -The farmer's market season has begun! Thank you to everyone—vendors and buyers, who came out in the cold rain last week. (Reminder: the market is held rain or shine). Hopefully we'll have nice weather this Friday! We have a record number of vendors planning to sell in Columbus Junction this summer and will have better-than-ever variety of fresh local products for you to buy every week—from bedding plants to dog treats.

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, June 3, 2009 at 10:00 a.m.

Open House for Sandra Martin

Open House for Sandra Martin, honoring her 36 years of dedication to Columbus Community Schools. Sunday, June 7, 2009, the program will begin at 2 p.m in the school auditorium with refreshments to follow in the student center.



Legion Auxiliary member Earlene Lekwa places a wreath honoring the Unknown Soldier during Memorial Day Services at Columbus City. Please turn to page 10 for more Memorial Day photos.