

## Ground broken for Louisa Interpretive Center

A ceremony held on Monday, June 13 marked the beginning of construction at the site of the future Louisa Interpretive Center at Langwood. The planned visitor center and outdoor exhibits are still a few years away, but by the end of 2011, the 40-acre farm field will be transformed into a public park with wetlands, a pond, entrance road, parking lot and the start of a restored prairie.

Morgan Grimm, a participant at the Fishing Camp being held at Langwood Education Center and Camp, located adjacent to the site, accomplished the symbolic breaking of ground. Others participating in the ceremony included project donor Monsanto, consultant Shive-Hattery, contractor Cornerstone Excavating, members of the Louisa Interpretive Center Advisory committee, Iowa Department of Transportation, Mississippi River Parkway Commission, Louisa County Conservation Board, Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation, and elected officials.

When completed, the Louisa Interpretive Center will be a place for residents, school groups, visitors and travelers on the Great River Road to learn about the abundant natural resources in the area where the Cedar, Iowa and Mississippi Rivers meet. A unique earth-bermed building will house displays and lead visitors to explore nearby natural areas, as well as the county's four museums.

In remarks read by aide Jared Hershberger, Congressman Dave Loebsack noted that the center "will be a great example of a county and community recovering from flooding but will also help highlight the



relationship between history, the people, the land and our rivers."

Chris Ball, chair of the Louisa County Board of Supervisors told the crowd, "The timing couldn't be better - we are also starting a roads project this year to pave the last four miles of gravel on the Great River Road in Iowa." He also commended the conservation board for its efforts to seek funding for the project from sources outside of county tax dollars.

Over the past year, other work on the project has included land acquisition, archaeological studies, geotechnical investigations, planning

for sustainability and energy efficiency, and detailed schematics of the building. More details about the next stages of the project will be released later this year.

The Louisa Interpretive Center at Langwood is a joint project of Louisa County Conservation Board and Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation. This phase of the project is funded by a \$576,000 National Scenic Byways grant and contributions from local organizations, businesses and individuals.

At the groundbreaking ceremony for the wetlands, pond and other site

development, Morgan Grimm of Wapello (center) represented the youth who will benefit from the Louisa Interpretive Center at Langwood. He was joined by supporters and partners of the project including (l to r): Sherry Humphreys, Louisa County Conservation Board Chair; Jay Schweitzer, Mississippi River Parkway Commission; Jared Hershberger, representing Congressman Dave Loebsack; Al Bohling, Shive-Hattery; Troy Siefert, Iowa DOT; Dan Vogeler, Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation.

## City Council reviews zoning ordinances

By Jim Rudisill

A task force of zoning and other city officials, with help from representatives of the Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission (SEIRPC), should meet within the next month to begin developing proposed changes to the Columbus Junction zoning ordinance.

Mayor Dan Wilson set that timetable during a nearly one-hour meeting June 15 that focused on zoning issues. Around 25 Columbus City, Columbus Junction city officials and visitors met with SEIRPC Assistant Director Jeff Hanan and SEIRPC Planning Director Zach James to jumpstart the discussions.

Wilson said his city began re-examining its zoning rules about one year ago, after getting complaints over poor maintenance of rental units, reports of large numbers of unrelated renters living in the same apartment and other problems, but a March fire in the downtown that claimed two lives gave the effort a new urgency. "We don't want that to happen again," he told the group.

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city adopt a new definition that would be more enforceable. He also said the earlier discussions had pointed to parking issues around rental properties and said addressing those problems should be a priority. A third focus for zoning revisions should be identifying multi-housing units in the community and creating a new zoning map for Columbus Junction.

Hanan said the current map shows most of the community is zoned for mixed housing, even though sentiment among the officials he had talked to favored single-family areas.

Wilson said city staff was still searching city records, but it appeared the zoning map currently being used by the city was never officially adopted; while the most recent officially adopted map was a 1972 version. Hanan said if the city revised its zoning districts and drew a new map, properties within those new districts that did not comply with the new zoning classification could be allowed as legal non-conforming uses. Owners of those properties would need to report their non-compliance to the city to gain that legal definition.

Hanan said those properties would still be subject to other controls, such as parking, rental or building codes. Enforcing those controls however could be a problem for the community. "We could pass all the codes, but we don't have the finances to enforce them," Wilson said.

"If our hands are tied, why are we here?" Linda Pierce, a member of the Columbus Junction Planning and Zoning Board wondered.

"I don't think our hands are tied, we just need to think of a way out of this," Columbus Junction council member Phil Kaalberg replied.

"We will find a way to implement (any changes)," city attorney Tim Wink agreed.

Others at the meeting pointed out state inspectors are available to check electrical work, if a utility becomes involved in a project. A similar program for plumbers has not moved forward as quickly. Other local governments could also be facing similar situations, so discussions with those agencies could be helpful, others in the group said.

Implementation however may require more than just changing the code and developing more effective enforcement. Officials said the city could struggle to identify all the rental units in the community. "We don't know who has rental properties," Columbus Junction council member Hal Prior said.

That mystery apparently extends even to tenants, Columbus Junction City Clerk Julie Heindel said, who explained renters have reported they simply pay cash to someone who comes to the door each month.

Local realtor Paul Duncan said whatever the community develops as a plan, it needs to remain focused on housing needs. "We want to make things better, but we need rentals for many people without families. There may be five people living in a house. We need housing," he said.

Wilson acknowledged that need and said most of the problems likely focused on a few individual property owners who were only interested in profit. "We know a lot of (landlords) and the ones causing us the problem

are only concerned about their check-book," he said.

Wilson said he would ask the city's planning and zoning commission, SEIRPC representatives and others to meet within the next month and begin discussing options for the city. Hanan urged the group to continue working to complete an area wide comprehensive plan update and then base any zoning changes on that update.

In other action prior to the zoning discussion, local resident Keith Milder reported the recent rains had caused another sewer backup in his basement. Milder had reported a similar problem several years ago, but then said the issue appeared to have been resolved.

However, the problem resurfaced following a heavy downpour; but unlike previous backups, Milder said the latest was clear water. He said that indicated the problem was not the sanitary sewer, but storm water inflow. Officials agreed to continue investigating the problem.

## Mark Pugh honored by CJ Fire Department



Columbus Junction Fire Chief, Lynn Mincer (left) presented fireman Mark Pugh with a plaque last Monday honoring Mark's thirty years of service to the Columbus Junction Fire Department. Mark joined the department on May 17th of 1981. Congratulations Mark, and thank you for your dedication to the community.

## Briefly -

### Talent Show at Crooked Creek Days

This year's Winfield Crooked Creek Days celebration will include a Bill Riley Talent Show on Saturday, August 6<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 a.m. in the high school gym. The contest is open for ages 2 years - 21 years with two divisions, Sprouts, ages 2 yrs. - 12 yrs. and Seniors, ages 13 yrs. 21 yrs. Due to a time restraint the number of entries will be limited, therefore acts will be included on a "first come, first served" basis. For more information and to register contact Sharon Jennings at 319-257-6632 or email [smjen@iowatelecom.net](mailto:smjen@iowatelecom.net). Following the talent show contestants may ride on the Bill Riley Talent Show float in the parade, which will begin at 10:30.

### Ice Cream Social and Concert at CJUMC

Nashville, TN Pianist and Comedian Brian Hanson will be in concert Tuesday evening, June 28, 2011 at the Columbus Junction United Methodist Church, 517 2nd Street, Columbus Junction, IA. Doors open at 5:30 P.M. for an Ice Cream Social (free will donation), with the concert starting at 7:00 P.M. Through the vehicles of beautiful piano music, audience participation and a great sense of humor, Brian's concerts are a unique blend of traditional favorites, the best of contemporary praise and worship and lots of laughs along the way. You won't want to miss this special evening. A love offering will be taken. For further information call the church at (319) 728-2669.

### Sign up for Conesville Garage Sales

Anyone interested in selling items during the Conesville Town Wide Yard Sale taking place on Saturday, July 9<sup>th</sup>, needs to sign up at Piper's or call Scott Kropf at 319-631-0244 or contact him on Facebook.

### Cruise Nights on the Square

The Corn Country Cruisers from Washington, Iowa are conducting Cruise Nights On The Square, (Washington, Iowa) on July 9<sup>th</sup>, and Aug 13<sup>th</sup>. All dates are 5:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. There will be a 50/50 Drawing at 8:00 p.m. please enter on southwest side of square/no entry fees. For additional information please contact Randy Farrington at 319-694-5603. The American Legion Post 29 will provide food.

### Early Childhood Board to meet

The Des Moines/Louisa Early Childhood Area Board (formerly Empowerment Board) will be meeting at the First Presbyterian Church, 801 Middle Street, Mediapolis, IA, today, Wednesday, June 22, 2011 at 10:00 a.m.

### FFA Alumni Tractor Ride

The Columbus FFA Alumni will holding their 2nd annual tractor ride on Saturday, July 23, 2011. Registration forms and details can be picked up at the Columbus Junction State Bank, online at [www.hs.columbuscd.com/FFA](http://www.hs.columbuscd.com/FFA) under the "forms" link, or contact Brenda Wilson at 319-212-0529.

### Louisa County Fair dates set

The Louisa County Fair will take place July 24-30, 2011. Kick-off will be Sunday, July 24<sup>th</sup>. Fair will start on Monday, July 25 ending on Saturday, July 30. Hope to see you at the fair!

### Learn about weeds from Extension

Frustrated by a weedy garden or lawn? The public is invited to join the Louisa County Master Gardeners on June 28<sup>th</sup> from 7:00-8:30 P.M. at the Louisa County Extension Office in Wapello to find out which of those weeds can actually be eaten. It's sweet revenge to devour the frustrating plants that keep persisting in your lawn or garden. Kathy Dice, Louisa County Conservation, will be presenting a slide show of common edible weeds, followed by a walk to nearby lawns and gardens to sample a few varieties.

### Historical Society Tractor Ride

Tractor Ride, June 25, 2011 proceeds benefit the Louisa County Historical Society. Registration fee: \$25.00 - includes dinner for driver at ride's end, additional meals \$10.00. Will stop during ride for lunch (on your own). Registration begins at 8:00 a.m., driver's meeting at 8:30 a.m., ride starts at 9:00 a.m. Ride length: 43 miles. To register, send check for \$25.00 payable to Louisa County Historical Society to: Hwy 61, Wapello, Ia. 52653. Questions please call Dick McCormac 319-728-8818 or Dwight Schaper 319-728-8961. Tractors must have SMV emblem, rubber tires, and be able to maintain speed of 10 mph. Drivers must present proof of insurance.

### Legion Auxiliary to meet

Attention: American Legion Auxiliary Members - The dues for 2011-2012 have been raised to \$20, and are now due. Junior dues will remain the same at \$4. Please send your check to: Earlene Lekwa, 213 Springer Ave., Columbus Junction, IA 52738.

### Grandview-Letts Lions luncheon

The Grandview-Letts Lions Club will be serving a luncheon for the 2011 River Junction Tractor Ride at the Letts Community Center on Saturday, July 9, 2011. Lunch will be served from 11:30-1:30 p.m. The cost to eat will be \$9.00 total. The menu includes loose meat sandwiches, baked beans, cole slaw, chips, cookies and bars, and assorted drinks. Come to Letts on Saturday, July 9<sup>th</sup> to view 150 new and vintage tractors, and to support your local Lions Club!

### Open House for school retirees

You are invited to an open house in honor of retirees Kathleen Almelen, Mary Wilson and Cheryl Curtis on Sunday, June 26, 2011. Program begins at 2 p.m. in Columbus Community High School auditorium. Refreshments following in the student center.

### Veterans' Float organized

Iowa State Bank is sponsoring a Veterans float again this year for the 4th of July Parade in Morning Sun and the Chief Wapello Days Parade in Wapello on July 16th. Vets are invited to join us on the floats and support our active duty personnel. Please respond by June 24, 2011 to Iowa State Bank, 319-868-7525 if you can ride on either float. There will be a hydraulic lift with railing to load wheelchairs and people needing assistance. Water and chairs will be provided. Donations for our active duty personnel can be left at Iowa State Bank in Morning Sun and Wapello or sent to Sandra Vanderpol, Family Assistance Coordinator at 7105 NW 70th Ave., Johnston, IA 50131. Please support our Active Duty Personnel.

### This week at the Farmers' Market

Fridays from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the American Legion parking lot, now until October 14<sup>th</sup>. The market offers fresh produce, baked goods, homemade noodles, jams and jellies, and plants. Some vendors accept Iowa Farmers Market Nutrition, WIC and Senior Program coupons. Buy fresh and local and taste the difference. For more information, including how to participate as a vendor, contact 319-728-7971.