

Council assured that water projects are moving forward

By Jim Rudisill

A growing uneasiness among Columbus Junction officials over the status of two major water projects was considerably reduced last week, after a representative of the projects' engineering team assured the council that his firm was moving forward with project planning.

John Meyer, president of French-Reneker Associates, Fairfield, acknowledged his firm had not kept city officials well informed about progress on the projects, but insisted the firm had been working. "It has not been a project on the back burner," Meyer said about relocating the city's water treatment plant. In addition to relocating the plant, which flooded in 2008, to higher ground along Collins Road, that project also included drilling a new well and installing water mains.

That work, in addition to an upgrade of the Iowa River levee east of the community, was awarded to French-Reneker last year. At the time the water plant relocation contract was awarded, Meyer had indicated the company hoped to have a spring bid letting for the work. After that failed to materialize, city officials began questioning the projects' progress.

At one meeting earlier this year, council member Phil Kaalberg said he was concerned the more than \$3.5 million in federal and state grants provided for the treatment plant work could be in jeopardy if the city did not move forward soon enough on the projects. Other officials later reported there was at least two years set aside for the projects' planning and design phases, but council members continued to express concern over the slow progress.

The lack of apparent progress on the treatment plant also carried over to upgrading the levee east of Columbus Junction. The city was awarded nearly \$700,000 towards that project. Meyer blamed delays on resolving compliance and regulatory issues, but indicated some progress had been made. "(The levee) design is about 75% complete," he told the council, explaining a major issue that still needs to be resolved concerns mitigation of wetlands.

He said there were identified wetlands along the levee corridor and the Army Corps of Engineers (COE)

needed to decide the amount of mitigation needed because of the impact the levee work would have on the existing wetlands.

Meyer said the current mitigation proposal would likely involve creating a new wetland on nearby property owned by the Louisa County Fairground Board. He also pointed out two open areas along the levee, near Collins Road and the Highway 92 corridor would require planning for temporary closures.

Meyer suggested a collapsible, wire mesh unit that could be filled with sand and stacked on top of each other as a potential system. Officials said a similar system was recently used in Davenport and could be stored for future use by Columbus Junction. "You could close (the openings) in less than a day," Meyer said.

While the levee improvements will provide enhanced flood protection, one thing that will not change is the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) flood designation for areas inside the levee. Meyer said to earn a different classification the levee would need to be certified by the COE, a process he and city officials did not see happening.

Meanwhile, the treatment plant design work is about 60% complete. One issue remaining with completing those designs is resolving questions over a possible water test that was taken sometime in the past, which indicated unsatisfactory levels of combined radium. Meyer said a file kept by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) mentioned a combined radium test that exceeded acceptable levels.

However, there is no actual testing report included in the file and no other documentation that confirms the test had actually ever been taken. Because of the possible test result, Meyer said the DNR might require additional equipment that could drive up the cost. While both state and local officials try to locate any report on the radium test, work on the engineering design is slowed down.

Meyers said the delays will mean both projects will have to wait until next spring to be bid. In the meantime, he agreed to begin meeting monthly with a committee of city staff and officials to report on progress. The council also agreed to move forward with drilling a test well to con-



Mayor Dan Wilson swears in new Council Member Bernabe Rodriguez



Keep Columbus Beautiful Volunteers recognized at the Council Meeting, l-r: Jesus Lizarraga, Alexjandra Valenzuela, Nitza Castillo (with the Community Development Center), Katherine Seitz, Abbey Acosta and Dylan Perez.

firm if the planned location of the new well has suitable water.

Meyer estimated drilling the test hole could cost up to \$8000. If the drillers install casing for the test well, that could drive the cost up to \$25,000. Meyer acknowledged the cost, which would not be included in the reimbursable grant expenses, was high, but asked the council to compare it to the projects overall cost. He said ensuring the new well has a good water source would require the test well. Council member Mark Huston agreed. "We have to know there is water there before drill the (new) well," he said.

In other action, the council agreed to spend \$15,000 to conduct a feasibility study on installing fiber optics lines to all Columbus Junction prop-

erties. Local businessman John Carpenter said he, Mayor Dan Wilson and others had met with Randy Foor of Louisa Communications on the proposal. Carpenter told the council that city residents are currently paying higher rates for telephone, Internet, cable TV in comparison to other nearby communities, primarily because there was no competition to the current provider.

He said the study could be used to obtain grants and other funding to eventually install the system and help drive down local fees. Officials said they expected the study to be completed in about six months.

In final action, Wilson recognized the work of several young volunteers and also swore in newly appointed council member Bernabe Rodriguez.

Briefly -

CCHS Class of 1976 plans Reunion

Members of the CCHS Class of 1976: Reserve the dates of Friday and Saturday, September 16th and 17th. We will be having our 35th class reunion! Letters will be sent to you and you can get updates at <https://sites.google.com/site/cchswildcat1976>.

Community Club to meet

The Columbus Community Club will meet this Thursday at the Senior Center at Noon.

Early Childhood Board to meet

The Des Moines/Louisa Early Childhood Area Board will hold a special meeting at the ISU Extension Office, 317 Van Buren, Wapello, IA, today, Wednesday, August 17, 2011, at 10:00 a.m.

Spaghetti Supper at Masonic Lodge

Emma Beckman Chapter 445, Order of the Eastern Star, will be serving a spaghetti supper to the Masons and their families prior to the Mason's regular meeting on September 15, at the Masonic Center. Serving starts at 5:30 p.m.

Open House at Great Beginnings

All upcoming new students and parents are invited to join us for the Great Beginnings Preschool Open House on Monday, August 22nd from 4:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m. This will be a perfect time to visit the school, talk with your child's teacher and have your child meet new classmates. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the church office at 319-728-2669. It's not too late to enroll in GB Preschool - please stop by at our open house! We look forward to seeing you on Monday!

County Republicans fundraiser

The Louisa County Republicans will host their annual fundraiser on Saturday, August 27. The fete will be held at the American Legion Building in Columbus Junction. A social time will be held at 6 p.m., with the meal served at approximately 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$25 per couple and \$15 for singles. Tickets are available from Republican Central Committee members and at the door.

Louisa County Tractor Ride

The 7th annual Louisa County Tractor Ride will be held on Sunday, August 21, 2011, sign in at 8 a.m. at the Wapello Elevator. The ride will be a total of 51 miles with a 10 m.p.h. minimum. Roll out is at 8:30 a.m. Lunch will be at Letts City Park and it will be provided by Elder Implement and served by Louisa County Cattleman's Association. For more information contact Lee Harris at 868-7872, Dan Harris at 850-8188 or Dwight Schaper at 728-8961.

Music Boosters to meet

Attention supporters of all things musical at Columbus Community Schools, you are invited to kick off this noteworthy year by attending the music boosters meeting on Tuesday, August 23 at 6:00 pm in the High School Music Room. You will have an opportunity to meet the teachers and hear first hand what is in store for our students during the 2011-12 school year. There are some changes in store so it is important that you attend if you have an interest. If you have questions please feel free to contact Kim Carson or Jennifer Lowe.

School Board to meet

The Board of Education for the Columbus Community School District will meet on August 22, 2011 at 6:30 p.m. in the Roundy Elementary School Library. The school board will convene at the High School Main Office beginning at 5:30 p.m. for the purpose of doing a walk around the Junior High and Senior High Schools to view summer improvements and cleaning. After viewing the secondary buildings, the board will go to Roundy and view the summer improvements and cleaning. The board intends to be at the board table to start the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Additional SEIBUS service

Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission is pleased to announce that SEIBUS will now be offering additional Medical Shuttle service to Iowa City. This service will be on Wednesdays. SEIBUS will also continue to offer their Medical Shuttle service to Iowa City on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The fare for the new day will remain the same as the current Iowa City routes \$30.00 round trip. Reservations are required and should be 24 hours in advance. Please call 1-866-753-5107 for additional information.

Shellbark Club to meet

The Shellbark Club will meet at Johnnie B's in Wapello on Thursday, August 18 at 11:30 a.m.

CCUMC Sweet Corn Supper

The Columbus City United Methodist Adult Fellowship, Columbus City will be hosting a Sweet Corn Supper Saturday August 20th from 5 - 7 p.m. at the Masonic Lodge, Columbus City, Iowa. Menu: Buttered Sweet Corn, Maidrite Sandwiches, Salads, Chips, Desserts and Drinks. Public is welcome - Free Will Offering. Bagged sweet corn (12 ears) also available for take out.

This week at the Farmers' Market

Fridays from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the American Legion parking lot, now until October 14th. 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 Nitza or Mallory at 319-728-7971.

Howell Reunion Planned

A two-day schedule of events is being planned for the 75th annual Howell Reunion on September 3rd and 4th. Members of the Howell family are invited to attend a catered lunch beginning at 11 a.m. followed by a social time and fun golf outing on Saturday the 3rd in Bettendorf, Iowa, at the Palmer Hills Golf Course Pavilion (which is the previous site of the John and Ida Howell Dairy Farm.) Then, on Sunday the 4th, a potluck lunch will be held starting at noon at the Chautauqua Park cabin in Columbus Junction. Any questions, please contact Jay Moore at 319-728-4050.

New use for former City Hall



The former City Hall in Columbus Junction will soon be home to a new service. An organization, "Center for New Community" will begin operating out of the building providing necessary information for new immigrants of all cultures and nationalities.

In the Center new arrivals can receive printed information, in their native language, as to where they can obtain necessary services such as medical care, school information, and housing. The center will be operated by Carlos Rich, and is part of the Midwest Immigrant Health Project. More will be reported as the center becomes organized and further information becomes available to the Gazette.

For more information, visit www.newcomm.org, or contact carlos@newcomm.org.

New teachers welcomed



Pictured above are the new teachers in the Columbus Community School District. Back Row: Robert Brown (HS Chemistry and Physics), Charles Mausser (JH/HS Instrumental Music), April Kelly (JH/HS Art), Jason Liegois (JH Language Arts). Front Row: Eric Field (HS English), Cindy Conrad (Elementary Administrative Assistant), and Debbie Lara (JH Special Education). Submitted photo.

Meet the School Board Candidates

The Columbus Gazette will be teaming up with the Columbus Education Association to host a "Meet the School Board Candidates" Forum on Wednesday, August 24 at 6:30 p.m. at the Roundy Elementary Library. There are five candidates running at large for 2 seats. This will be your opportunity to ask questions and learn of the candidates' views on issues relating to the school. A Pre-arranged format will be used and details will be announced that evening.