

City anticipates new levee work to begin soon

By John Carpenter
Gazette Staff

After the devastating flood of 2008, the question that is continually heard in Columbus Junction every spring is, "When will the new levee be built?"

Hopefully that question was answered last week at the City Council meeting when John Meyer of French Reneker Associates assured the council that his firm was proceeding with the levee project, but have had de-

lays in dealing with compliance and regulatory requirements.

The main issue, according to Meyer, is the mitigation effects that the levee would have on surrounding wetlands. However, Meyer was still optimistic that work on the levee could begin as early as this fall.

The levee, when completed, would extend from the railroad tracks southward along the existing levee that was built in 2008, to the south end of the fairgrounds, then turn west

to the hillside by Chautauqua Park.

This levee would then leave only two unprotected areas, Highway 92 and Collins Road. Meyer suggested that in the event of a flood these two areas could be protected by collapsible wire mesh containers that would be filled with sand and stacked on top of each other.

"Taking care of these two areas, rather than the whole levee area as we did in 2008, would certainly be possible and much easier" com-

mented Mayor Dan Wilson. He also said that the funding is in place and delays due to regulatory issues should not jeopardize the funding. "The delay is not on our part, we are attempting to get the final approval to move."

Also in the works is the relocating of the water plant. Although work on the water plant may not begin until next spring, Meyer assured the council that much of the work has been completed, and progress is being made.

Embracing the American Dream at Grace Chin Store

By Andrea Wilson

(This article is part one of a four-part series focusing on the cultural mosaic of Columbus Community and how this small Iowa town is embracing individuals from all walks of life.)

Ngunza Bik named his new Asian Grocery Store "Grace Chin" because he believes he has God's Grace to thank for it. The second word, Chin, represents the race of his people, the Burmese Chin—a growing cultural group within Columbus Junction. Together those two words, Grace and Chin, represent a life story full of trials and tribulations, but one that has ultimately brought him to small town Columbus Junction to write a new chapter. From the persistent smile on Ngunza Bik's face, it's clear this chapter is one he's very much looking forward to.

With two young daughters, one starting Kindergarten this week at Roundy Elementary and another still in the toddler phase, it's easy to see why this proud father would be seeking a fresh start. The brief details he reveals of his history include the mention of years spent in Burma under duress, years in Malaysia trying to seek citizenship while struggling to make ends meet, and even years living in the jungle when they were without a home. Happily, these chapters have now become Part 1 of his history. Part 2 began with his arrival in Indiana, an opportunity given through a US group dedicated to helping political and religious refugees.

While Ngunza Bik wasn't born in Columbus Junction, he naturally displays two characteristics that fit



Ngunza Bik with his daughter, Nguntin Thluai

in well in the small town: hard work and a friendly disposition. He opens the store seven days a week, closing only from noon-four on Sundays so that he and his family can attend the church service at the United Methodist Church. The rest of the week, he is open from ten in the morning until nine at night.

The Burmese population in Columbus Junction, now totaling over 200, are surely happy that Ngunza Bik has harnessed his entrepreneurial spirit and opened the store. Ngunza Bik explains that after years of eating an Asian diet, it's hard to quickly switch to an All-American style food. And of course, there are

traditional dishes that people like to prepare for sharing and celebration. When asked if he hopes other people of Columbus Junction shop at his store, Ngunza Bik emphatically nods his head. "Every person that lives in Columbus Junction is welcome here. English speaking, Spanish speaking....please come."

The store sells many products common to any American kitchen—salt, vegetable oil, and dish detergent; it's also an opportunity to try new and unique ingredients like chili paste, bamboo shoots or many of the other Thai, Chinese and Burmese style foods the store displays. Grace Chin now joins many of the Hispanic-

focused food markets on Main Street possibly making Columbus Junction the most culinary diverse town in the region.

While Columbus Junction is a small town, it's one with a very big heart. Ngunza Bik knows this. Happy, hopeful, but most all of grateful, Ngunza Bik knows why he is here. "God loves me and so we could come to the United States and live. Now our daughter will have a better life than mother and father."

Ngunza Bik may not know what it means to live the American Dream but with Grace Chin Asian Store, he is on his way to discovering it.

School Board discusses results of public meetings

By Jim Rudisill

A series of meetings held by Columbus Superintendent Rich Bridenstine to explain the district's proposed \$3.5 million long-range plan might be helping boost public support for the plan. Bridenstine told the school board during its regular August 22 meeting there was still opposition to the land acquisition portion, but other components appeared to have support.

The initial proposal was unveiled May 16 and included purchasing a 40-acre site west of Columbus Junction and eventually relocating the school's athletic facilities there. Other parts of the plan included constructing a joint community outreach building with Muscatine Community College, building a new wrestling facility and adding a driveway to the Roundy Elementary Building. The school board approved the plan during a special June 6 meeting and then directed Bridenstine to meet with groups and explain the need.

Bridenstine told the school board this week that he had visited with several groups over the past few weeks and learned the biggest roadblock to gaining public acceptance for the plan was the land acquisition. He said a visit with members of the American Legion made that message clear. "(They) said if that was taken off they could probably expect 100% (support)," Bridenstine reported to the board.

However, after pointing out the current high school is over 50 years old and the problems the district would face when it eventually must build a new school, if the current athletic fields were still in place, he said the opposition appeared to fade. Bridenstine said as schools eventually consolidate, which could possi-

bly mean one county school in Louisa County, Columbus could be in a good position if it had a central campus, either with a new school building or the room to build one.

For the time being, Bridenstine said district officials should focus on the parts of the plan that are supported by the community, such as the community outreach building. That support will be critical to win voter approval of a new revenue purpose statement that will be presented at next month's school election. If voters approve the new statement, the district could then move forward with borrowing on the district's one-cent sales tax revenue to help finance the long-range plan.

Muscatine Community College has already pledged \$600,000 towards the cost of the outreach building and Bridenstine said other less controversial parts of the long-range plan could also help win voter support. The wrestling facility and the Roundy driveway apparently have support, along with a plan that would rotate and slightly move the softball field. Bridenstine said even if the athletic fields are eventually moved, any money spent on the softball field now would not be wasted because the district would need a ball field at the main campus for physical education.

Although Bridenstine said he felt he had won some converts to the long-range plan, he was not predicting the vote. "We hope for the best," he told the board.

In other action, the board approved a resolution supporting a grant application to expand the elementary Beat for Peace team to the junior high. According to board member Polly Prior, the resolution is a requirement of the Washington County Riverboat Commission. She

said the team hopes to obtain grant funding to purchase more musical instruments, which can be used by current members as they move into junior high.

Although the measure was approved, board member Joy Lekwa expressed some frustration over not learning about the proposal earlier. She said she supported the team and expanding it into the junior high was commendable, but she was concerned the idea had not come to the school board first. Bridenstine said he would arrange to have elementary music instructor Paul Corbiere, who has organized the group, attend the next board meeting to discuss the expansion.

The board also approved buying a convection steamer for the junior/senior high school kitchen from Star Food Service, Cedar Rapids, for \$13,662. It will replace a pressure boiler that has a hole in it and is no longer safe to operate.

In other food service action, the board also awarded a food service contract to Hawkeye Food Service, Coralville.

The board also approved a Columbus FFA trip to the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana from October 20-23. The local group will conduct its own fundraising to cover expenses.

Several personnel changes were

also approved by the board. The resignation of Kristen Reed as the high school basketball cheerleading sponsor was accepted. Several new hires were also approved, including Anna Hepker, junior/senior high school football cheerleading sponsor; Machel Milder, bus driver; and Dayle Pretz, Shawna Carrier, Dora Roush, Staci Bright and Traci Orr as extra duty roster personnel. Ashley Hill was also hired for a 4-1/2 hour position as a kitchen aid at the elementary site.

The final personnel action was approval to hire Shauna Bloomer as the junior/senior high school basketball cheerleading sponsor. Board member Sandy Martin initialed questioned the hiring, explaining she thought combining both the junior and senior high school cheerleading responsibilities was too much. Martin said several people had contacted her and suggested the position needed to be split.

However, Bridenstine said administrators had initially been unable to even find someone for one of the positions and he doubted another person would step forward. He said if the position was split, it would likely mean there would be no junior high cheerleading sponsor this year. After hearing that, the board unanimously agreed to keep one position.

Briefly -

Pride of Iowa Marketplace to host CJPM

Pride of Iowa Marketplace will be hosting a CJPM on Wednesday, September 7th at their store at 211 Main Street from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. Sandwiches, hors d'oeuvres and area wines will be provided.

Alzheimer's Henry County Support Group to meet

The Alzheimer's Association Henry County Support Group will meet on Thursday, August 25th at the Winfield Presbyterian Church from 3:00-4:00 p.m. Support groups are free and open to the public. The topic this month will be on Transitions. Facilitators are Angie Ebeling and Peggy Beaty. For more information please call 319-208-0271.

CCHS Class of 1971 plans reunion

CCHS Class of 1971 will be holding their 40th class reunion on October 8, 2011 starting at 5:00 p.m. at the Cedarcrest Country Club in Columbus Junction. Please RSVP to Randy and Nancy Orr by September 24th by calling 319-728-3189 or email Randy_nancy71@yahoo.com also see us on facebook.

City Council meets tonight

The City of Columbus Junction will conduct their regular council meeting tonight Wednesday, August 24, 2011 at 5:30 p.m. location at the New Civic Center / City Hall.

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>.

Emma Beckman Chapter to meet

Emma Beckman Chapter 445, Order of the Eastern Star will have their regular meeting on September 6, 2011, at 2:00 p.m. due to the Labor Day holiday.

Emma Beckman Chapter and Masons to hold supper

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.

FCCLA to sell Volleyball Pink Out Game shirts

FCCLA is planning on selling Pink Power Shirts for a Volleyball Pink Out Game on Thursday, September 29. This will be a fundraiser for the Gary Hamilton family, but I'm waiting to hear on approval after the board meeting on Monday night. I have an order form ready to go as soon as I get permission. Would we be able to have it printed in the paper. I need to have all orders in by September 15 so that we can get them ordered and in.

FFA and FFA Alumni to meet

The Columbus FFA and Columbus FFA Alumni will meet at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, August 4th at Chautauqua Park. All members and interested members are encouraged to attend with their parents/students. Bring a dish to pass, as hot dogs and BBQ pork will be provided, along with drinks and table service. Questions? Contact FFA Advisor Katie McWhirter at 728-2231 x 3621.

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.

County Republican fundraiser set

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.

Lions Club breakfast planned

The Lions Club will serve a community sausage, egg and pancake breakfast Saturday and Sunday, September 3rd and 4th at the Community Senior Center from 7:00 to 11:00 AM. Adults all you can eat - \$6.00, children under 12 - \$4.00. Menu will include milk, juice, coffee, and flavored pancake syrups. Come and support this fundraiser. Funds raised help support annual scholarship awards to local high school seniors as well as free vision screening for local young children and financial assistance for individuals with vision and hearing impairments.

Morning Sun Health Fair scheduled

Morning Sun Care Center, an ABCM Corporation home, is sponsoring their 9th annual Health, Safety and Wellness Fair on Monday, September 12 from 2:00 to 7:00 pm at the Morning Sun Community building. A variety of health-related information for all ages will be displayed and many of the vendors will provide screenings, including blood pressure, cholesterol, bone density and more. Preschool eye exams and flu shots will be available. Food will be served by the Morning Sun United Methodist Women. For more information and a complete list of vendors, visit www.abcmcorp.com or call Terri at 319-572-3017.

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.

**Meet the School Board
Candidates.
Tonight, 6:30 at the Roundy
Elementary Library**