

Tyson employees donate over \$17,000 to United Fund

The Annual United Fund Drive recently concluded at Tyson and Columbus Junction area charities will be \$17,484 better off as a result. Tyson employees are traditionally the largest contributor block to Columbus United Fund. The company offers a payroll deduction plan for donors and conducts an annual pledge drive in the last months of the year. Carlota Ramirez headed up this year's drive and saw to it that every employee was given the opportunity to support local non-profit agencies by donating to United Fund. Contributors were entered in a drawing for prizes donated by the Tyson Company and the department with the largest percentage of United Fund contributors is treated to a pizza party. Tyson employees are very generous with their donations, many of them pledging a dollar or more per week.

For over 50 years United Fund of Columbus Junction has worked to help local service organizations fund the valuable work they do for children, families and senior citizens. Fire protection, education, sports, childcare, first aid, youth activities, and recreation are some of the interest areas that are supported.

Donations to the United Fund of Columbus Junction in any amount are immensely appreciated. Tax deductible donations can be mailed to United Fund of Columbus Junction, PO Box 263, Columbus Junction, IA 52738 or dropped off at the Community Development Center at Civic Center. Contributors to the 2011 fund drive will receive a colorful window cling recognizing their generosity.

Now open for business



On Saturday Congressman Dave Loebsack visited the newly completed Letts Library and Community Building. The Letts Library celebrated its 100-year anniversary this year, and was able to mark the occasion by moving into their new home. The building also houses city offices and a community room. Money was raised for the facility in many ways, including private donations, grants, including an I-Jobs grant, and community meals and functions. The new building is truly an inspiring story of how a small town with a can-do attitude can accomplish something that will not only serve the present citizens of Letts, but also generations to follow.

Pictured from left: Karen Koppe, Librarian and City Clerk; Congressman Dave Loebsack; Don Foor; and Jerry Kirk, Letts Mayor.

Mayor Wilson speaks at National Conference

Columbus Junction Mayor, Dan Wilson, was a guest speaker last week at Keep America Beautiful's 57th annual conference in Florida. Mayor Wilson was asked to address our community's response to the 2008 flood. He told of how the area not only dealt with the devastating flood, but of the steps taken to recover, and our plans for the future. He also discussed the community's affiliation with Keep Iowa Beautiful, and Keep America Beautiful, and the shared vision that the community has with these organizations to make Columbus Junction an attractive place for people to visit and live.

"I appreciated the opportunity to speak at this conference and tell the attendees our story of how a community came together to help in a difficult time," said Mayor Wilson, "and I received a lot of nice compliments directed towards our people."

Over 450 people attended the conference, with representatives from all sizes of communities. "Hopefully this conference gave us an opportunity to let more people know who and where we are," said Mayor Wilson.



School Board reviews possible state funding changes

By John Carpenter
Gazette Staff

State Representative Tom Sands met with the Columbus School Board last Monday night to discuss possible changes to school financing under the new legislature. Sands cautioned the Board that an additional across the board funding cut would be a possibility if new procedures are not put in place by the legislature. "I'm hopeful that we can come up with other measures to avoid the cut," said Sands, "but economic growth in Iowa will continue to be slow. This makes finding sources of funds difficult." If allowable growth is not put in place, or limited, Columbus schools could lose up to \$300,000 in funds next year.

Regarding pre-school funding, Sands stated that it could no longer be funded completely by the state. He said that the operation of pre-schools will still be possible through partnerships with schools, churches and other organizations. "Pre-schools can and should still exist," said Sands, "but it cannot continue to be funded solely by state government."

Sands did state that he felt funding for empowerment groups would be safe in the next legislature. Other areas that Sands felt would be looked at by the new legislature are a property tax reform bill; elimination of corporate income tax; a change to individual income tax rates; action on defining marriage as being between one man and one woman; and a possible adoption of an immigration bill similar to the Arizona Law.

Sands encouraged the Board members, as well as any member of the public, to contact him with their concerns. "I will get back to everyone who contacts me when I have an opportunity," stated Sands.

High School Principal Jeff Maeder discussed a recent trip to the state of Nevada undertaken by some staff members to observe a larger school system who are using the SIOP program. Staff members had the opportunity to visit classrooms and discuss the program with teachers. Some comments presented included: Deb Carlson – "I enjoyed the opportunity to learn new teaching strategies and observe the subsequent success." Wendy Watson explained that SIOP was a program to work with students dealing with English as a Second Language. She found that the Nevada school broke down the program into smaller pieces, thus presenting a more relaxed curriculum. The third member of the group to visit the school, Lori Beenen, witnessed the trend to emphasize positives in the students, and downplay the negatives. She felt that sustainability in the program was the key ingredient.

Elementary Principal Shane Rosenberg detailed the success of the Breakfast with Santa event held at Roundy Elementary. He reported that over three hundred parents and guests attended the breakfast. He explained that other activities held that day included the gift of books to students from Santa; guest readers were in classrooms; a candy cane walk was held; crafts were available for students and their guests to work on;

Christmas music was playing; a book fair and coat drive were also held. Comments from participants were read, and suggestions for next year's breakfast were reviewed.

Curriculum Director Tara Paul said that the school is creating an action plan importing SIOP into classroom activities. She also stated that the school is developing training in the Iowa Core for all teachers.

Superintendent Rich Bridenstine informed the Board that community members have met with groups of eleventh graders offering their encouragement and help so the students could be successful in the upcoming ITBS tests. The eleventh grade class scores determines whether the high school will be on the list of schools in need of improvement. Bridenstine stated that the groups plan to continue meeting with the students.

In policy action the board held a second reading on the school's open evening policy; employee use of cell phones; and terms of the board president and vice president. The board did take action on handbook language giving classified employees with more than 15 years of service compensation for unused sick leave.

In personnel matters, the board transferred Stacy Bright to daytime custodian at Roundy Elementary, and approved the hiring of David Wittman as night custodian at Roundy.

Superintendent Bridenstine asked the board to consider the school's start date for 2011. According to state law, schools in 2011 must start on August 29th, unless special steps are

taken. Although the board did not establish a start date, they did approve a date prior to August 29th, thus giving Bridenstine permission to begin the steps necessary for an earlier start.

The board entered into a three-year contract with Jostens for the yearbook. In return, Jostens will provide the school with a camera to be used throughout the year for photos.

The board approved the FFA soil judging team's trip to Oklahoma.

A number of issues under buildings and grounds were presented. A suggestion to use some SILO funds to purchase educational reading software was discussed. It was indicated that if the software was purchased, some physical improvements may have to be delayed. The board approved the purchase of a wrestling mat, and the installation of a keyless entry system in the fitness center, but will discuss the software purchase and other improvements at the next meeting when costs are firmed up.

In final action, the board held an evaluation of the superintendent, in open session as per Superintendent Bridenstine's request. President Marsha Gerot indicated that this evaluation is a state requirement, and must be implemented in three tiers over three years. Six standards were evaluated, and comments from the board on each standard were read. Criticisms of the superintendent were in the area of communication, however the superintendent was shown to be strong in financial categories.

Board member Dan Peters took exception to some of the negative comments, stating, "A lot of what I

Briefly -

City Council meets tonight

The City of Columbus Junction to meet tonight Wednesday, December 22, 2010 at the New Civic Center / City Hall

Heritage Museum holiday hours

Columbus Heritage Museum 122 E Maple Street will be closed Christmas and New Years weekend.

Grandview-Letts Lions Club to hold soup supper

The Grandview-Letts Lions Club will hold their annual soup supper on Saturday, January 22, 2011, from 5-7 p.m. at the NEW Community Center and Library in Letts. The all-you-can-eat menu includes: Chili and Wisconsin Cheese soups, homemade pies, celery, carrots, pickles, crackers and drinks. The cost for tickets is: (Advanced from any G-L Lions member) \$5.00; (At-the-door) \$6.00; (Ages 6-12) \$3.00; (Ages 5 and under) Free.

S.N.A.P. receives grant

SNAP is happy to report to cat owners in the Muscatine County area that it has received a grant for \$2,000 from the Miccio Foundation of Iowa city. It is designated to bring financial assistance to people with large numbers of outdoor cats to spay and neuter them at more affordable prices at participating veterinarians in the program. For more information to see if you are qualified to use the SNAP program call The Barn/Outdoors Cats & Kittens Spay Neuter Program, please call Eleanor Dvorchak at 563-264-2370.

Washington County Conservation Education Center holiday hours

The Washington County Conservation Education Center at Marr Park will be closed for Christmas on Friday, December 24th and Saturday, December 25, 2010. We will also be closed Saturday, January 1, 2011 for New Year's Day. We wish you all Happy Holidays!

KFC Preschool students visit Colonial Manor residents



While kids visited Colonial Manor they put on a Christmas Program for the residents. They sang songs, read books, then walked around and wished the residents a very merry Christmas. Afterwards, the Colonial Manor staff provided snacks (rice krispy treats and apple juice) for the children.

The top photo is of the entire group along with teachers Mrs. Lekwa and Mrs. Chavez and school to career student Vanessa Rodriguez.

The lower photo is most of the children with Mary Holmes—a resident who taught 3 and 4 year old children in a country school for many many years.

heard here was simply untrue." Board member Polly Prior agreed, saying, "All of my dealings with Mr. Bridenstine have always been on a professional level." Board member Sandy Martin emphasized that some of the disagreements are the result of not everyone seeing things the same way. Martin did feel that Bridenstine could try harder to pronounce some of the Latino students' names more correctly. Bridenstine replied that he does work hard on this, but at times it can be difficult.

One criticism that Bridenstine

took exception to was a suggestion that he doesn't attend the PTO meetings. Bridenstine responded that although a group of parents came to a meeting indicating that they wanted to organize a PTO, no one has gotten back to him on their plans. "I have never received any communication from the group, nor have I ever been invited to a meeting," said Bridenstine.

The report will be summarized by President Gerot, and put in Bridenstine's personnel file for review by the state.