

Hopefully 2009 has a drier diaper than 2008

By John Carpenter
Gazette Staff

I sit down every year at this time and try to reflect on the past year. These reflections will bring back memories of happiness and sorrow; optimism and pessimism; longing for the past and excitement about the future. And looking back on 2008 is no different, other than I feel a higher sense of these emotions.

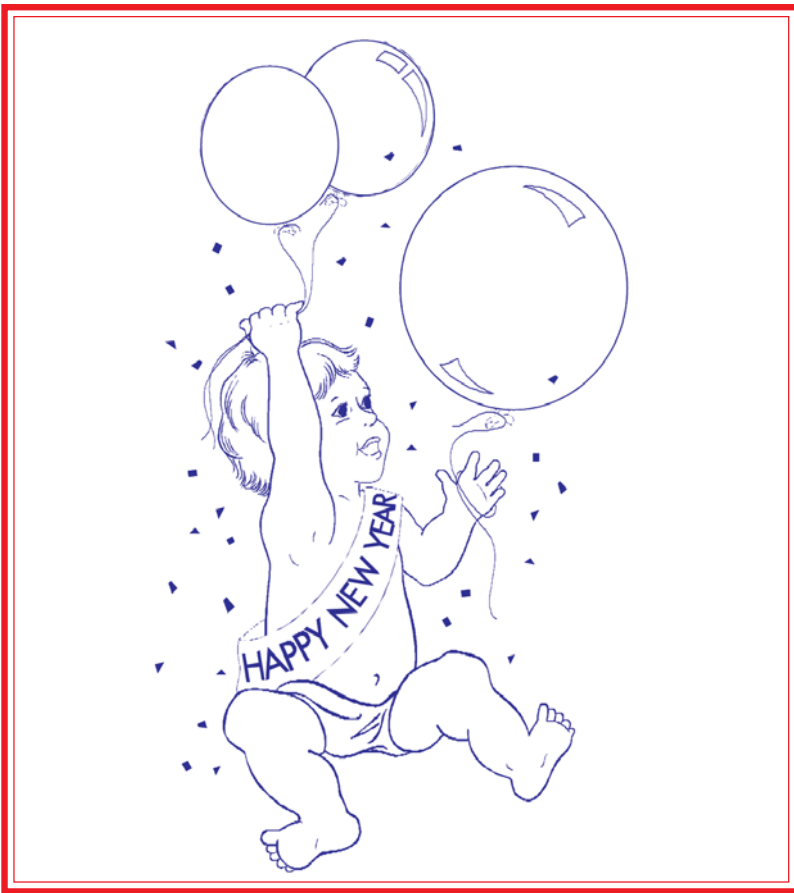
As in past years, we took sorrow in every obituary we published, especially those of the young. In February the community grieved the loss of two young boys in a tragic accident, then in September we tried to understand the devastation that a local family experienced in a murder/suicide. Along with these losses, we said good-bye to many of our friends. But conversely, we were pleased to publish the news of many births and marriages. Every birth signaled to us the continuation of life in our community, and each marriage announcement gave us an opportunity to celebrate a new family beginning its origins in our midst.

There were economic twists this past year. As the year ended we saw a downturn in the economy, with some of our residents experiencing a loss in retirement funds and investment values, some manufacturing jobs were lost, and as throughout the nation, retail was down. Although the farm economy remained strong throughout the year, a year-end decline in commodity prices has caused some concern. But there were positives. The Community Foundation awarded over \$58,000 to area organizations, the United Fund gave out nearly \$20,000 to community groups, sales tax in the county remained strong, and we saw the establishment of a new health facility and a multilingual law firm in town.

But there's no question that weather was the big player this past year. We entered 2008 experiencing the 4th wettest year on record in 2007. Then to add to this, the new year began just as the old year ended, with more precipitation. Ice, snow and bitter cold continued to batter the area throughout January, February, and into March. As snow melted, the ice prevented the water from soaking into the already water-logged soil, so the water headed to the streams and rivers. And then to top things off, the same situation was occurring in towns north of Columbus Junction, increasing the already overloaded Iowa and Cedar Rivers. In early June this all came to a head as Waterloo, Cedar Rapids, Iowa City and other northern towns experienced record flooding.

It was evident that this water would come our way, so city officials began emergency plans. The community responded in full force, and built a levee in an attempt to protect the town. But as we all know, on June 14th the water came. Record flooding covered all of the east side of our business district, severely damaging every building in its wake and curtailing travel.

Although this was disastrous, good things did happen. We saw a sense of community spirit that will be long remembered. We discovered what a caring and independent community we are. Clean-up and rebuilding work began almost immediately, with nearly everyone in town helping in some way. There were many reports from outside agencies marveling at the response of our citizens, in both the flood fight and the clean-up efforts. We became a model for other towns in that we did not wait for help, but took the matter on ourselves. And from these losses most



of the businesses have returned, even better than before. Admittedly, some of the businesses and organizations that were in the flood area are still struggling to rebuild, but we can take pride that most are back and operating.

Yes, 2008 was a difficult year, one that we will talk about forever, and no one knows what 2009 will bring. Undoubtedly page 5 of the Gazette will publish more obituaries of lost friends, more of our young will probably be placed in danger in the Midwest, it will take some time before the economy recovers, and weather will still be an issue. But on the positive side, we will celebrate more births and marriages, family reunions will again be held next summer, the community will come together to cel-

brate Columbus Day, Family Night, the Hispanic Cultural Festival, the 2009 Fair, and a new group of students will graduate this spring and begin their lives. Like every year, 2009 will be mixed with both good and bad. But we can take comfort in knowing that we will prevail in spite of what is thrown at us. As this past year has shown, we know that we are not in it alone. We are a proud community that can come together, regardless of race, religion or political differences, and overcome any adversity.

So, to everyone, have a safe and happy New Year's holiday, and take pride in what you accomplished in 2008. Take a moment to raise a glass and toast yourselves on New Year's Eve, you deserve it.

Briefly -

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, January 7, 2009, at 10:00 a.m.

Etude Club to meet

Etude Club will meet on January 6, 2009, at 7 p.m., with Lorie Hauenstein as hostess and Earlene Lekwa presenting the lesson on "Country Music's Happy Songs." The Spring Show Committee needs to know what each member plans to contribute for the program, which will be presented to the public on April 14, 2009.

Conservation District to meet

The Louisa County Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioners will meet Jan. 2, 2009, at 4:30 p.m. at the NRCS Office in Wapello. Topics on the agenda will be election of officers for 2009 and an update on cost share projects. For more information please contact the office at 260 Mulberry St. STE 2, Wapello, or phone 523-6411.

City receives additional FEMA funds and discusses Motel and Subway issues

A nearly \$32,000 payment from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the possible renovation of the flood-damaged Columbus Motel were the highlights in a flood recovery report presented to the Columbus Junction City Council during its regular December 29 meeting.

Officials said the payment covered expenses the city paid for repairing the sewage lagoon and other damage to the water pollution control system. The city received an initial FEMA payment of around \$148,000 last month. City officials said most of the city's \$250,000 in reserves had been spent fighting this summer's floods and have said they hope most of that revenue will eventually be recovered.

Mayor Dan Wilson and council member Mark Huston also reported they had been told an effort would be made to repair the Columbus Motel, which sustained heavy damage during the flooding. The two officials said they had met about two weeks ago with two representatives of the bank that holds the lien on the property and had been told a repair effort would soon begin. "They said (repair work would begin) in a week, but obviously it hasn't, but it should be shortly," Huston told the council.

The news on the Subway Restaurant however continues to be disappointing. Wilson said there had been little progress in getting any repairs started on the building and suggested it might be necessary to begin applying more pressure. "(It might be) time to give them a call and ask what they intend to do with the building," Wil-

son said.

Huston reported a possible sale might be pending, although he did not have any knowledge a deal had been closed. He indicated if a sale is moving forward, it might be completed before the council's next meeting.

While the generally positive recovery news was welcomed by the city officials, this week's rise in the river levels tempered the optimism with a big dose of caution. "This weekend the river went up and we need to (remember) things," Huston said.

Wilson agreed and suggested a team be formed and possibly begin meeting in March to review the city's past flood prevention and control efforts and possibly develop new procedures in case of new spring floods. Council member Phil Kaalberg questioned the March meeting schedule. "Is that soon enough?" he asked.

Wilson said he would begin assembling a team that could meet sooner. "We'll do some things so hopefully we won't be taken by surprise," he said.

In final action, the council agreed to present a snow removal proposal to Fredonia. Columbus Junction provided snow removal services last year to its neighbor. Under the new proposal, Columbus Junction will charge \$100/hour/truck for the service, with a minimum charge of \$100. Columbus Junction streets will receive service first and a contact person must be designated by Fredonia. Fredonia city officials will also need to determine when the Columbus Junction crew will be called.

Recent thaws create potential ice jams

Ice jams occur when warm temperatures and heavy rain cause snow to melt rapidly. Snow melt combined with heavy rains can cause frozen rivers to swell, which breaks the ice layer on top of the river. The ice layer often breaks into large chunks, which float downstream and often pile up near narrow passages other obstructions, such as bridges and dams.

During thaws, runoff from snow melt increases the flow of water in rivers. This increased flow raises the water level, which pushes up on ice sheets covering the top of the river. If the ice sheets break apart, it moves downstream in a surge large ice chunks. In places of restricted water flow (such as shallow bends in a river, an intact ice sheet, or around bridges), the ice can pile up and an ice jam will form. The jam may then buildup great enough to dam the river and cause flooding.

Pictured at right is the Iowa River from the bridge. It shows the ice thawing with 42 degree temperatures last Monday. Currently some flooding is occurring in the Oakville area as a result of ice jams.



Iowa Workforce Development offers assistance for laid-off workers

Des Moines, Iowa – Iowa Workforce Development offers assistance for workers who have lost their job due to a lay-off or business closing. From unemployment benefits to job search workshops, Iowa Workforce offices are here to help you during this time of uncertainty.

"We want to make sure that everyone knows about and has access to these important resources during this difficult time," said Elisabeth Buck, director of Iowa Workforce Development. "Our goal is to help Iowans land on their feet."

Individuals affected by a lay-off often qualify for important retraining benefits and education benefits in addition to unemployment insurance. These benefits provide an important economic safety net for Iowans in need.

In addition to unemployment, regional workforce offices offer a wide-range of workshops on a rotating basis. These workshops help to meet the immediate needs of Iowans in transition. The topics include dealing with job loss, financial management, applying for financial aid, resume development, job search methods and tips on keeping a job in today's environment.

Many IWD offices have resource centers that provide information on how to create different types of resumes and cover letters. Word processing software and IWD staff are also available to assist you with the preparation of a resume or cover letter. Services are designated for the novice and for the more advanced

user. Job seeking and skill videos and career information are available to help prepare the job seeker for the process of finding and landing that new job.

The state jobs database is available at www.iowajobs.org. This self-directed job search system allows the job seeker to view over 14,500 current job openings listed with Iowa Workforce Development all across the state. The user-friendly system allows jobseekers to search by keyword, location and more. For those in need of additional search assistance, Iowa Workforce Development staff is available at 55 offices across the state.

For more information, visit www.iowaworkforce.org or call your local office.

City crews deal with salt supply issues

So far this year the city has had sufficient salt to keep the roads clear of ice. "Originally we were only able to receive one shipment of salt," said Mayor Dan Wilson, "but we have since received a couple of more loads. This would generally put us in pretty good shape, but with the December we have experienced we have used more salt than anticipated."

Forecasts have indicated a wetter than normal January, but the key will be the temperature. If the area can avoid freezing temperatures when precipitation comes, possibly we will be able to get by with the supply we have on hand. But motorists are urged to exercise caution this winter as salt will be used sparingly.

Museum Musings

This column is brought to you by the Louisa County Historical Society with museums in Wapello and Columbus Junction.

Our call for help in early November resulted in a number of old school yearbooks being brought in to the Museum. Harriet Jones of Columbus City loaned us the entire set of Cotter yearbooks, Vivian Tillmann of Wapello loaned us 1936 and 1937 Wapello yearbooks and Royce and Charlotte Bonnichsen of rural Columbus Junction gave us several Louisa-Muscataine yearbooks. Thank you so much! We are in the process of scanning the pages of each yearbook so they can be returned to their owners and we will have permanent digital copies.

We have had several items donated throughout the year. The one that has probably received the most comment is a girl's Oakville letter jacket. The main body is purple and made of a very soft fabric. Of course this year anything from Oakville is of interest after so much was lost due to summer flooding.

We continue to hear oohs and ahs from young people, especially after they visit the Pleasant View School.

Young boys seem to be especially interested in the military ribbons and medals on exhibit inside the main museum.

A note: Someone left a cell phone and some change at the Heritage Center awhile back. If you are missing one, stop by and see if this might be yours.

Upcoming Events

The program committee is busy scheduling programs for the upcoming year. We will be announcing the programs soon in the local newspapers and on our Website at LouisaCountyHistory.com.

There is no admission charge for the programs offered at the Louisa County Heritage Center, although donations are accepted. Same with tours of the Heritage Centers in Wapello and Columbus Junction. Stop by during open hours and take a look! If you want to bring a group, it would be appreciated if you call first (319-527-5247). Regular hours at 609 N. James L. Hodges Ave., Wapello are 1:30-4:30 p.m. Sundays and Wednesday through Friday. At 122 Maple St., Columbus Junction, the hours are 9 a.m.-noon Saturdays and 1-4 p.m. Sundays.