



SCHNEEKLOTH HEADED TO STATE

Carson Schneekloth scored 8.65 on balance beam at the section gymnastics tournament to place fifth and advance to this weekend’s state tournament. Story, B1



JACKSON COUNTY PILOT

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BARNYARD BUDDIES

Photos by Dan Condon



Above: Samuel Wilfahrt gets a close-up look at a chick during Tuesday’s FFA barnyard at the Jackson County Central High School. Left: Logan Bretzman reacts as the chick he’s holding makes its way up his arm.



Left: Teagen Swenson, Ariana Nissen, Levi Hotzler and Riley Truman pet a chicken as Jordann Schneekloth talks about the species. Right: Mia Adkins (from left), Joseph Ramirez and Emmett Weires all get their hands on a chicken during Tuesday’s FFA barnyard. The barnyard took place in conjunction with National FFA Week.



County is No. 2 in wind energy production and its tax revenue

Second only to Mower County

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN  
Publisher

Jackson County produces more wind energy than all other counties in Minnesota but one.

And it receives more wind energy production tax revenue than all other counties in Minnesota but one. In 2018, wind energy production from wind tur-



Lu Nelsen

bines in Jackson County totaled more than 1.8 billion kilowatt hours, second only to the 2 billion kWh produced in Mower County. Total wind energy production tax revenue funneled to Jackson County in 2018 totaled a little more than \$2.2 million, about \$170,000 short of the nearly \$2.4 million that flowed into Mower County.

Nearby Murray County was a distant third in terms of both wind energy production and wind energy production tax revenue, with Nobles, Lincoln, Rock and Cottonwood counties rounding out the top seven in each category. See **WIND ENERGY** on **A3**

Top 10 counties for wind energy production, wind energy production tax revenue, 2018

County	Tax revenue	Wind energy production (millions of Kwh)
Mower	\$2,375,055	2,017.8
Jackson	\$2,202,936	1,853.2
Murray	\$1,323,936	1,173.1
Nobles	\$1,113,006	954.2
Lincoln	\$1,084,569	944.2
Rock	\$825,431	712.6
Cottonwood	\$748,116	659.5
Freeborn	\$679,523	566.3
Pipestone	\$572,715	602.1
Stearns	\$378,954	315.8

Source: Center for Rural Affairs



PHOTO BY JUSTIN LESSMAN

Randal Thom hugs one of the seven dogs he has left following the Feb. 10 shooting of one of his favorites, a male Alaskan malamute he had named Donald Trump.

DID POLITICS PLAY A PART IN DOG KILLING?

Story of death of dog named after president makes major headlines

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN  
Publisher

Randal Thom isn’t saying his dog named Donald Trump was shot dead over a political rivalry — but he isn’t saying it wasn’t.

“That’s something my friend put out there,” Thom, of rural Lakefield, said of an online post by

See **DOG KILLED** on **A3**



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Randal Thom claims his dog, Donald Trump, was shot four times by a neighbor and left to die in a field hundreds of yards away from the neighbor’s building site.

Search is on for superintendent

Meyer to Hinton following 11-year tenure as Husky

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN  
Publisher

The search is on for a new superintendent of schools at Jackson County Central, as Todd Meyer has accepted a position with the Hinton School District in northwestern Iowa.

Meyer, who has been with the JCC School District since 2008, was one

of four finalists for the superintendent job in Hinton. He was also a finalist for superintendent positions in Dodge Center and Algona, Iowa.

His last day at JCC is June 28; he begins his duties in Hinton on July 1.

Rhonda Moore, chair of the JCC Board of Education, said the search for Meyer’s replacement has already begun, adding the board’s goal is to have a new superintendent in place by July 1.

“The board is currently consulting with the

Minnesota School Boards Association to create and facilitate a process that will aid us in hiring a new superintendent,” Moore said Monday evening. “We will be working closely with JCC administration and staff members as we maneuver through this transition. We understand how people throughout

See **SEARCH** on **A3**



Todd Meyer



PHOTOS BY JUSTIN LESSMAN

BEAUTIFUL BEADS

Brynn Erickson gets her bead in just the right place during an after-school program at the Jackson library last week.



## BUSINESS BRIEFS

### Local financial institutions to host FFA members as they say ‘thanks’

Local financial institutions play host to members of the Jackson County Central FFA Chapter this week as they look to thank community members for their support during National FFA Week. JCC FFA Chapter members will serve free coffee and cookies today (Thursday) at 9 a.m. at Bank Midwest and Fulda Area Credit Union in Jackson and First National Bank in Lakefield as a thank-you to the communities of Jackson and Lakefield for their support. National FFA Week runs Feb. 16-23. A special supplement honoring local FFA members is included in this week’s edition of the Jackson County Pilot.

### Jackson area business set to host first-ever ultimate chamber mixer

A Jackson area business is hosting a mixer for several area chambers of commerce next week. Round Lake Vineyards and Winery will host what is being billed as “the area’s first-ever ultimate chamber mixer” on Tuesday, Feb. 26. Representatives of member businesses from the Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce and Worthington Area Chamber of Commerce, as well as the Iowa Great Lakes Chamber of Commerce, the Spencer Chamber of Commerce and the Spirit Lake Chamber of Commerce in Iowa, are invited to attend. The event is designed as a networking event to give associations and their members the opportunity to connect with each other. The mixer will run from 5 to 8 p.m. at The Cellar at Round Lake Vineyards and Winery in southwestern Jackson County. Appetizers and a free cocktail will be provided. A short program will take place at 6 p.m., with door prizes awarded at 6:30. Tours of the facilities will take place on the hour at 5, 6 and 7 p.m.

### Local congressional rep will serve on small business subcommittees

Jackson County’s representative in Congress will serve on two subcommittees specifically concerned with issues facing small businesses. Rep. Jim Hagedorn has been appointed to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Small Business’ Rural Development, Agriculture, Trade and Entrepreneurship and Contracting and Infrastructure subcommittees. He was also appointed to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture’s Livestock and Foreign Agriculture and Nutrition, Oversight and Department Operations subcommittees. The appointments were announced last week. “These assignments give me an opportunity to promote pro-growth agricultural policies and advocate for small businesses, along with their employees, in Minnesota’s first district,” Hagedorn said. “Small businesses and our farmers share similar goals. They want policies that reduce the cost of business, access new markets and offer patient-centered health care solutions. By limiting government intrusion into the lives of southern Minnesotans, we can help small businesses and farms grow and thrive.”

### Local businesses, development groups eligible for grant funds

Local businesses and economic development organizations are eligible to receive grant funds through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture’s Good Food Access Program. The MDA is currently accepting grant applications for projects designed to improve access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables, for underserved communities in low- and moderate-income areas. The grants are designed to help organizations such as business and economic development organizations, regional public health organizations, foundations and community development financial institutions provide needs-based technical assistance to eligible food retailers, such as grocery stores, corner stores and farmers markets. The MDA will award up to \$150,000 in this round of GFAP Technical Assistance Grants. Applicants may request between \$5,000 and \$75,000 and must contribute 25 percent of project costs. Grant applications are due by 4 p.m. on March 14.

### Businesses sought as vendors for 38th annual farm and home show

Businesses interested in being a part of the 38th annual Jackson Farm and Home Show are encouraged to reserve booth space now. The show will run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, March 16, at the Jackson County Central High School. Deadline to reserve booth space and be included in all advertising of the event is this Friday. The show is annually sponsored and hosted by the Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce.

### Local businesses may qualify for MDA biofuels infrastructure grants

Local businesses may eligible for a share of up to \$650,000 in Biofuels Blending Infrastructure Grants through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. The MDA plans to award up to \$650,000 in Biofuels Blending Infrastructure Grants this year to help spur economic growth and environmentally friendly practices in Minnesota’s biofuel industries. The grants are part of the Agricultural Growth, Research, and Innovation Grant Program, which supports the advancement of the state’s agriculture and renewable energy industries. Minnesota-based organizations eligible for the AGRI Biofuel Blending Infrastructure Grants include for-profit businesses, local units of government and Native American Tribal Communities that are biofuel producers, petroleum fuel blenders or distributors or businesses for which blending and supplying fuel are central to operations. “We’d like to see projects that will develop new or enhanced markets and that will help to increase sales or provide greater access to biofuel blends,” said Kevin Hennessy, MDA grant administrator. “The grants can be used for equipment purchases and associated installation costs. Up to 35 percent of the eligible project costs can be covered by the grant program with a maximum possible award of \$199,000.” Equipment must be installed in Minnesota and be compatible with the biofuel-petroleum blends to be mixed, stored or dispensed; projects must continue to operate until the expiration of the grant contract. Applications are due no later than 4 p.m. on Friday, April 5.

## Council acts on dilapidated house

### City may attempt to sell property after lot cleared

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN  
Publisher

The Jackson City Council is taking matters into its own hands with regard to what city officials say is the most dilapidated house in town. Council members on Tuesday voted to take ownership of 120 E. Maple St. and demolish what’s left of a house at that address. “This house is a disaster,” said Jackson City Attorney Brad Anderson. “It’s fallen into a heap. It’s gone, and there’s no going back.” Anderson said he has been in contact with the owner of the property, who is current on paying the mortgage, insurance and property taxes, but otherwise has little interest in doing anything with it. He did say the owner, who lives in Mississippi, was willing to deed the property to the city. Once under city ownership, Anderson said, demolition could take place. Council members agreed with Anderson’s suggestion that this route was preferable to declaring the property a nuisance, abating it and attempting to assess the costs back to



Brad Anderson

the property — a process he said would take time and was unlikely to result in the city ever recovering any money. “This is the most peaceful way of dealing with it and the least expensive,” council member Brandon Finck said of taking ownership of the property. The council awarded the contract for demolition to Edlin Excavating, which submitted the lowest of three quotes for the work — just a hair more than \$7,000. Jackson City Administrator Matt Skaret said once the the house is demolished and the property cleaned up, the city could put the lot up for sale. “While the lot is likely too small for a new house, it could make a nice lot

for one of the neighbors or somebody else who wants some extra green space,” he said. The city’s zoning ordinance does not permit an accessory building such as a garage or shed to be the principal building on a lot, Skaret said, but a neighbor could buy it and combine the parcel with an existing adjoining lot. Council member Dave Cushman said he’s not too concerned with turning a profit. “This is a cleanup, not an investment,” he said. “This is cleaning up our town.” And abating a potential safety hazard, added council member Jeff Gay. Finck agreed. “It’s really being a good neighbor to the community,” he said.

## WIND ENERGY: County is No. 2

Continued from A1

respectively. The data and rankings were released last week by the nonprofit Center for Rural Affairs. In 2017, 18 percent of Minnesota’s energy needs were met by wind power, according to the center’s study, placing the state seventh nationwide for total share of energy generated by wind. The state had 3,699 megawatts of installed capacity in 2017, the center reported, and produced enough energy from wind to power more than 1 million homes. Last year, nearly \$13 million in tax revenue was generated from wind projects in the state. Jackson County laid claim to more than 17 percent of that. Lu Nelsen, policy associate at the Center for Rural Affairs, said the economic benefits wind farm development bring to counties in which they are located are many — among them direct payments to landowners who host turbines, employment opportunities in the area during construction and operation of a project and new tax revenue streams to local government agencies, which helps keep property tax levies in check. “Many people wonder what their community will get out of wind development,” Nelsen said. “New tax revenue from a wind farm is something that

benefits an entire community.” Indeed, Jackson County is riding a second consecutive year of essentially flat property tax levy increases — 0.9 percent from 2018 to 2019 and 0 percent from 2017 to 2018 — with county commissioners often crediting wind energy production tax revenue as a primary driver of their ability to keep levy hikes at a minimum. Jackson County Auditor-Treasurer Kevin Nordquist said he expects the local share of wind energy production tax revenue to remain about the same in 2019 as it was in 2018 — right around \$2.2 million. Tax revenue from wind projects in Minnesota is derived from the state’s wind energy production tax. The tax is assessed on a wind energy project based on its total capacity of energy production. Small-scale wind energy systems with a capacity of 0.25 megawatts to 2 megawatts pay \$0.12 per megawatt hour, while systems with a capacity between 2 and 12 megawatts pay \$0.36 per megawatt hour. The largest systems, those with a capacity above 12 megawatts, pay \$1.20 per megawatt hour. Nearly 350 wind turbines are currently generating wind power in Jackson County, Nordquist

said, meaning average tax revenue per tower amounts to around \$6,300. Of the \$2.2 million in wind energy production tax revenue expected to come back to Jackson County in 2019, Nordquist said, 80 percent will flow into county coffers, while the other 20 percent will go to townships. Of the county’s estimated \$1.76 million in wind production tax revenue for 2019, Nordquist said around \$780,000 is earmarked for capital improvement plan projects, \$630,000 will go toward the debt service payment on the county’s new public works facilities and \$350,000 is allocated to what he termed “property tax relief.” Nelsen said what is happening in Jackson County in terms of wind production tax revenue helping to keep property taxes levies low is something he anticipates seeing more of in the future on a statewide scale. “As Minnesotans move toward a renewable future, increased tax revenue from wind projects will be a tool for small towns across the state,” Nelsen said. “Communities can make use of new revenue generated by projects to fund critical functions like schools and emergency services without raising local taxes.”

## DOG KILLED: Story makes national headlines

Continued from A1

Melanie Llewellyn alleging one of Thom’s neighbors shot and killed the dog because of its name. “He’s a Democrat,” Thom said of the neighbor, “and he doesn’t like that I like Trump. That is what it is. I’m not sure if it’s that, or he just doesn’t like me and my dogs. But that’s out there.” Jackson County Sheriff Shawn Haken isn’t saying that either, despite several regional and national news media outlets last week reporting Haken saying the dog was not killed over politics. Haken on Friday would not comment on the possible motives behind the killing beyond a news release his office issued last Wednesday stating facts regarding the incident have been “misrepresented” on social media sites. “Unfortunately, people are now posting multiple threats of violence toward citizens in the area and justifying the threats based on these inaccurate posts on social media,” the release stated.

### ‘No kill shot’

The sheriff said the shooting happened on Sunday, Feb. 10 — Thom estimates at around 8 a.m. Thom said the dog — along with another — both Alaskan malamutes, apparently escaped from their outdoor pens by climbing up a snowdrift that had formed as a result of high winds and jumping the fence. Thom was away from home for most of the day Sunday but, when he returned and found one loose

dog around the home place — but not Donald — he said he began to worry. He said he called the sheriff’s office in Jackson and learned the dog had been killed. He said he later learned one of his neighbors was responsible. “He told me where I’d find him, and I did — at about 8 that night,” he said. The location was in the neighbor’s field, Thom said, about 350 or 400 yards from the neighbor’s building site. “His body was still warm,” Thom said of the dog. Thom said the dog had sustained at least four gunshot wounds — none of which was near any vital organs. “There was no kill shot, so he just laid there in the cold and suffered,” Thom said. Haken said his office investigated the circumstances of the dog’s death and found the person who eliminated the dog was “legally protecting their livestock on their private property at the time.” State statute allows any owner or caretaker of livestock to kill any dog not under human restraint or control found chasing, injuring or “worrying” livestock on the premises. The neighbor does own livestock, Thom admitted, though he wondered how much issue his dog was causing from hundreds of yards away.

### ‘Multiple death threats’

Shortly after the sheriff’s office completed its investigation, Haken said,

things turned nasty. “Subsequent to the Jackson County Sheriff’s Office completing its most recent investigation regarding the circumstances of the dog’s death, individuals decided to post inaccurate and incomplete information on social media,” the sheriff’s statement read. “In response to these posts, multiple people have been making threats of violence toward some Jackson County residents. The Jackson County Sheriff’s Office is continuing to assess and investigate the threats of violence made as a result of these inaccurate social media posts.” On Friday, Haken said his office continued to investigate “multiple death threats made by social media and phone calls to multiple Jackson County residents.” He declined to offer further specifics, as the threats remain under investigation. Haken also declined to identify the person responsible for shooting the dog or any other details of the incident, saying additional charges may yet result from the investigation. A phone call Friday afternoon to the home of the person Thom believes killed his dog revealed the phone had been disconnected or was no longer in service. Haken said his office has received more than a dozen complaints from Thom’s neighbors over the past three years or so regarding his dogs. Reports have ranged from dogs running at large on a roadway, running at large

in a county park, running at large onto neighbors’ private property, biting a person who required medical attention, attacking pet dogs, killing goats, killing chickens, killing turkeys, chasing cattle and chasing deer. Thom was convicted of a petty misdemeanor related to dogs at large in 2015, has been served two potentially dangerous dog notifications regarding two of his dogs and currently has misdemeanor charges from incidents related to his dogs pending in court. A ‘bittersweet’ legacy Thom owns seven other dogs. He has raised Alaska malamutes and Pomalutes for more than 40 years, making it a practice in recent years to donate two pups from each litter to a wounded veteran or family who has lost a soldier in combat. He himself is a U.S. Marine Corps veteran. As of late Friday, an online fundraiser for Thom had collected more than \$3,600 from 120 donors. Thom said he plans to donate the funds above and beyond the \$500 needed to cover his dog’s cremation to the veterans and Gold Star families to whom he donates pups. Among those future pups will be descendants of the one he just lost. “Donald will have two litters come this spring,” Thom said. “That will be bittersweet.”

