



FARMER JOINS 1,000-POINT CLUB

Jackson County Central junior Maci Farmer scored her 1,000th career point in a 90-30 win at Redwood Valley last Thursday.

Story, B1



JACKSON COUNTY PILOT

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132ND YEAR/ISSUE 4

School, business leaders lay foundation for new approach to learning

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN
Publisher

Jackson County Central school administrators huddled with local business and industry leaders last week to cooperatively lay the foundation for a new approach to education.

School officials discussed plans to expand career and technical education opportunities at JCC, while local business and industry leaders offered input on what trainings and skills would be most beneficial for students as they look to enter the workforce. It's all set to come together in what school officials are

calling the "Husky Path," a new approach to learning designed to get students thinking about possible career paths earlier and even to get a jumpstart on skill development for those careers.

"The goal is for students to explore different careers while in high school and even to discover a career path while in high school," said Krista Nelson, work and learn coordinator with the Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council, who is serving as a liaison between JCC and local business and industry leaders.

That goal will be ac-

complished, Nelson said, through hands-on experiences at school.

"Hearing about careers is totally different than seeing what they're about," she said.

That hands-on exploration begins at the middle-school level. JCC Middle School Principal Chris Naumann said the middle school's midmester program is designed to give students exposure to a smattering of different career areas while also fostering development of key skills applicable to any career.

"At the middle school, it's about hands-on explo-

ration, trial and error and figuring things out," he said. "We want the students to try as many things as they can so when they get to high school, they have a little better idea of where they want to go and what they want to do. In this, we also focus on the development of critical thinking, communication and the pride in doing a good job."

As students transition to high school, they have access to courses that align with the Minnesota Career Fields, Clusters and Pathways model developed by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

See **LEARNING** on A3



PHOTO BY JUSTIN LESSMAN

Barry Schmidt, superintendent of schools at Jackson County Central, explains how a proposed addition to the high school would open up new opportunities for hands-on education.



PHOTOS BY JOSHUA SCHUETZ

Jackson County Central FFA members Ashlyn Bohl (from left), Lily Johnson and Meta Tewes set up a popcorn bingo activity ahead of the January "Farm to School Program" at Riverside Elementary School.

FFA MEMBERS BRING THE FARM TO SCHOOL

by JOSHUA SCHUETZ
Staff Writer

The Jackson County Central FFA Chapter is bringing the farm to school.

The local chapter recently relaunched its "Farm to School Program" for local elementary students. JCC FFA Chapter President Meta Tewes said the goal of the program is to help younger students learn not only where their food comes from, but also how different crops are used in various products they use in their daily lives.

The program had been in place in early 2020 but was shut down for a time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In recent months, Tewes and other FFA members — with input from chapter advisor Laura Biden — re-designed the program and prepared an all-new curriculum for their younger peers.

"It's been going on for quite some time," Tewes said of the program. "When I ran for president, there was quite a bit we wanted to change and, for me, it

See **FFA** on A3



Meta Tewes (left) presents a lesson on popcorn to a rapt audience of second-graders last week.

Caucuses launch political process

Local DFL, GOP to meet Tuesday

by JOSHUA SCHUETZ
Staff Writer

The first step in the political process begins next week as local Democrats and Republicans gather for precinct caucuses.

Caucuses start at 7 p.m. Tuesday. The Jackson County Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party meets at the Lakefield Multi-purpose Center; Jackson County Republicans will gather at the Jackson campus of Minnesota West Community and Technical College.

Pizza and politics

Jackson County Republican Party Chair Richard Koch said the caucuses are an opportunity for like-minded people to get together and decide which candidates they want to see in office.

"You indicate where you're at by going to one of these," he said. "In this state, there's no registration for Republicans or Democrats."

Though the caucus starts at 7 p.m. sharp, Koch said those interested are invited to come an hour early to eat pizza and talk politics.

Straw polls for governor and attorney general will take place after the caucus begins. Koch said the straw polls help indicate where different candidates are at in their races.

"It's always interesting to find out how our candidates are doing locally, who's running and what their level of support is,"

DFL CAUCUS

DATE: Tuesday, Feb. 1
TIME: 6 p.m. registration, 7 p.m. caucus

PLACE: Lakefield Multi-purpose Center
CONTACT: Dale Cuperus

GOP CAUCUS

DATE: Tuesday, Feb. 1
TIME: 6 p.m. 'Pizza and Politics,' 7 p.m. caucus

PLACE: MnWest Jackson campus
CONTACT: Richard Koch

Koch said for those looking to get involved in politics, the caucuses are a good place to start.

"We want people to attend and participate or observe," he said.

Start of the cycle

Jackson County DFL Associate Chair Dale Cuperus said the caucuses are especially important because they signal the beginning of the political process, including the election of delegates to go to the county conventions.

"The main thing is the election of delegates for the county convention," Cuperus said. "And all

See **CAUCUSES** on A3

2022 LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Weber, Hamilton expect debate over bonding, tax reform issues

by JOSHUA SCHUETZ
Staff Writer

Local lawmakers are expecting trench warfare and heated debate during the 2022 legislative session, as discussions about bonding, jockeying over projects, disagreements over what to do with the state's projected \$7.7 billion budget surplus and questions about tax policy all come home to roost amid an election year.

The session begins Monday in St. Paul. Local state Rep. Rod

Hamilton, R-Mt. Lake, said the bonding year presents a chance to get funding for important projects in his district, particularly infrastructure repair and upgrades to municipal facilities.

"Most of the projects deal with wastewater infrastructure," said Hamilton, who represents western Jackson County in the state Legislature. "Minnesota West (Community and Technical College) asked for help with improving their law enforcement training cen-

ter and we know several cities have asked for help with upgrading their facilities."

Hamilton, who has announced he will not seek re-election this fall, said bonding years always bring controversy, as everyone looks to secure funding for projects in their districts. Still, he indicated there is real possibility for progress on local projects and some tax reform issues.

"My colleagues and I are pushing for tax relief for small businesses," Hamilton said. "This is going to be a short session, but it will mean a lot."

Local state Sen. Bill Weber, R-Luverne, said the

See **WEBER-HAMILTON** on A2

Rosen, Olson expect bonding, tax reform to take center stage

by JOSHUA SCHUETZ
Staff Writer

Despite needs in the areas of public safety and mental health, local lawmakers say bonding and tax reform will likely take the lion's share of the spotlight at the 2022 legislative session, which begins Monday in St. Paul.

Local Rep. Bjorn Olson, R-Elmore, said while tax reform is something the Legislature is looking at

this year, getting any major policy changes done will be an uphill battle due to the upcoming elections.

"If you're looking for big policy changes, you won't see them this year," said Olson, who represents eastern Jackson County in the state Legislature.

Regarding the state's projected \$7.7 billion budget surplus, Olson acknowledged it's good for the state financially, but said it means the state has taken too much

from taxpayers. "It's built on individual and business income taxes," he said. "My view is that people who paid into this should see some of that money come back."

Olson said he supports tax reform and providing support to businesses that are seeing a tax increase because of the expanded unemployment insurance. At the same time, he's pushing to get projects in Jackson County done.

"I've co-sponsored a bill to help the county pay for a new law enforcement center," Olson said. "You will see projects that people really want to have done

See **ROSEN-OLSON** on A2

BUSINESS BRIEFS

Local, area businesses featured

Local and area businesses in the business of helping locals get physically and financially fit are featured in the latest edition of the Livewire, Jackson County's largest circulation newspaper.

See the Sunday, Jan. 23, edition of the Livewire for the 2022 Health and Financial Fitness section.

The Livewire is delivered free of charge to nearly 10,000 homes and businesses across five counties in southern Minnesota and northern Iowa. Extra copies are available for free pickup at the offices of Livewire Printing Co. in downtown Jackson. The Livewire may also be read for free online at livewireprinting.com and jacksoncountypilot.com.

Businesses are ticket outlets for annual Father-Daughter Dance

Local businesses are outlets for tickets to the Jackson Women of Today-hosted Father-Daughter Dance.

The dance will take place from 6 to 8 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 12, at the Jackson National Guard Armory.

Billed as "an evening for young ladies preschool through eighth grade to share with a special gentleman in their life," the theme of this year's dance is "Love You to the Moon and Back."

Reduced-price advance tickets are available now at Tootie's Boutique and Cosmos and Clover in Jackson, as well as Z'bakery and Dudley's Garage in Lakefield.

CVB director encourages local businesses to be part of guide

Production work is under way on the all-new Jackson County Visitor and Information Guide, and local businesses looking to make a great first impression on visitors and new residents are encouraged to be a part of it.

This year's guide will be printed in full color on high-gloss paper, making for what Corey Christopher, director of the Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureau, said is a high-end, magazine-like publication.

Christopher said the guide is a valuable tool in the promotion of the Jackson area, adding each year, his office distributes thousands of copies of the guide to tourist information centers around the region, area chambers and convention and visitor bureaus and in potential employee packets and welcome bags. Additional copies are mailed in response to information requests he receives via Web searches and partner tourism sites and phone calls.

Businesses interested in being a part of this year's guide are encouraged to call 847-3771 or email info@livewireprinting.com on Feb. 16.

Registration now open for '22 Jackson Farm and Home Show

Local and area businesses and organizations interested in being a part of the 2022 Jackson Farm and Home Show are encouraged to register with the hosting Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce now.

The 40th Jackson Farm and Home Show is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 26, at the Jackson County Central High School in Jackson.

Vendor and sponsor registration is open now, with both due by Feb. 7.

In addition to vendors, the show will feature food, entertainment, educational forums, cash drawings and door prizes.

Business promotion opportunity available for a very limited time

Businesses can beat back the winter blues in January and February with high-impact advertising at steeply discounted rates through Livewire Printing Co.'s full-page advertising blowout.

A limited number of full-page ads as much as 85 percent off regular prices will be offered the first two months of the new year in the Livewire and the B section of the Jackson County Pilot and Lakefield Standard. Position, placement and color will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis. To reserve space, call 847-3771 or email info@livewireprinting.com.

LEARNING: New model

Continued from A1

system and the Minnesota Department of Education.

"Last year, we began aligning classes to career pathways and building off what we're doing at the middle school," said Keri Bergeson, JCC High School principal. "We'll begin introducing work-based learning programs next year and would like to eventually develop for-credit internships for our students."

That's where local industry and business leaders will really be needed, Bergeson said.

While career pathways run the gamut — from agriculture to business, arts and communications to health science and human services — the initial focus for JCC will be in the area of engineering, manufacturing and technology, a nod to the area's vibrant

industrial base.

Key to the development of that specific pathway at JCC will be a planned addition to the high school building in Jackson designed to serve as a flexible learning space for career and technical education. The proposed 5,500-square-foot addition — which will be paid for with excess voter-approved bonding dollars — will open up opportunities for training in areas ranging from automotive to construction, electrical to plumbing, manufacturing to computer-aided design and more.

"The new space will really foster that hands-on education we're moving toward," said Barry Schmidt, superintendent of schools at JCC. "We're excited to embark on this journey."

FFA: Farm to school

Continued from A1

was bringing this back because it's good for the kids and they have a great time with it."

The program is offered by grade, so each month, a different elementary grade gets to learn about a different crop, food or plant. The first program was in December and, fittingly for the season, involved Christmas trees. First-graders at Riverside Elementary School in Jackson got to learn about tree farms, the lifecycle of a pine tree and how to grow one. Afterwards, they got to make their own Christmas trees.

Tewes and the FFA members lead the programs.

"We lost fall this year because of COVID, so I've been trying to make up for it by creating our own lessons," Tewes said. "We do a presentation for the kids, then we read a book and do a craft activity or a game."

Last Wednesday, FFA members went back to Riverside to teach second-graders about popcorn. Last Wednesday's game was "Corn Byproduct Bingo," which gave students filling out bingo cards the opportunity to learn about different things that can be made with corn.

So far, the reception from students has been resoundingly positive.

"It was hard because we had to live up to the expectations of previous years' lessons," Tewes said. "One kid said, 'This is the best

day ever,' and that reassured me that we were doing something good for them."

February's lesson, which is for local kindergartners, will be about floral arrangements. Students will get to create their own floral arrangement from craft materials.

Students aren't the only ones impressed. Teachers are also happy about the program's return.

Second-grade teacher Rachael Mitchell said it was great to see her students learn about agriculture, adding it's an opportunity for high school students to mentor their younger peers.

"I really hope it continues, because it's great to have our high school students teach the little ones," Mitchell said. "Those kids look up to the high schoolers and it was wonderful to have them there."

Tewes credited her fellow FFA members and Bidne for the program's success.

"I want to give a shout out to all the students involved with this, because they're missing out on school to teach these classes," Tewes said. "I also want to thank Laura Bidne, because she does so much to make the program successful by organizing everything, getting what we need ordered and doing head counts. It's really a team effort."

Plans put in place to pay for street improvement projects

by JUSTIN R. LESSMAN
Publisher

City officials have devised a plan to pay for \$1.9 million in street and utility improvements in east Jackson without increasing taxes.

Members of the Jackson City Council last week signed off on the plan, which calls for pairing a cash contribution of \$200,000 with a bond issue of around \$1.7 million to cover the cost of the much-needed improvement of Emily Street and the portion of Riverside Drive running from State Street to Ashley Street.

Jackson City Administrator Matt Skaret said the debt repayment on the \$1.7 million bond would add about \$55,000 to the city's annual tax levy. However, the decertification of a Tax Increment Financing District at the end of this year will add around \$129,000 in tax capacity to city rolls, Skaret said, meaning the city could increase its levy by an additional \$83,000 and not raise the overall tax rate.

The project will also add an average of an additional \$1.15 per month to the water portion of utility bills and \$1.78 per month for sewer.

In other action from last week's council meeting:

COUNCIL EYES PAY

Council members instructed Skaret to gather more information relative to council salaries.

At present, the mayor is paid \$5,300 per year, while council members earn \$4,200 annually, with each receiving \$25 for local board of equalization meetings, \$50 for half-day meetings and \$100 for full-day meetings.

The last time salaries for council members were adjusted was 2015. Prior to that, it was around 2002.

Council members last week discussed possibly adding per-meeting pay to a base salary in order

to encourage meeting attendance.

"It would emphasize the importance of showing up," said council member Marcus Polz, who added any increase would help compensate for the time commitment of the job, as well as potentially help draw more interest in the positions themselves. "I don't think any of us is here for the money," Polz said, "but it is a time commitment. And, with it being an election year, you really want to draw people, as it's nice to have a pool of people from which to choose rather than just seeing unopposed races."

Council members said they would continue to research the issue with a goal of having a plan in place by October. Any change to the pay structure would take effect in January 2023.

MEETING MOVED

The council moved the regular meeting originally scheduled for Feb. 1 — the date of precinct caucuses — to Jan. 31.

The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. at Jackson City Hall.

TRUCK SOLD

Council members approved the sale of a 2001 Ford F250 pickup truck to John Peterson of rural Jackson in the amount of \$6,550.

The truck, which was used by the city parks department, had previously been declared by the council as surplus property.

"It got a lot of interest," Skaret said of the truck, "and we got what I think is a very good price for that truck."

CLOSED SESSION

The council adjourned into closed session, citing attorney-client privilege pursuant to Minnesota state statute. Members of the public and press were barred from this portion of the meeting.

CAUCUSES

Continued from A1

party platform resolutions are submitted at the caucus and, if approved, they go on to the convention. It also gives people a chance to learn about the different candidates running for office in a given election cycle."

The Minnesota DFL Party has instituted a vaccine and mask requirement for all DFL caucus events, so participants must show proof of vaccination — or a negative COVID-19 test — and mask at the caucus. Those who do not wish to do so or feel uncomfortable attending in person can stop by to fill out a form and letter stating their intention to be a delegate and drop it off.

Registration for the DFL caucus begins at 6 p.m., with the meeting to start at 7.

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Application deadline
is Wednesday,
February 9, 2022
at 4:30 p.m.

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