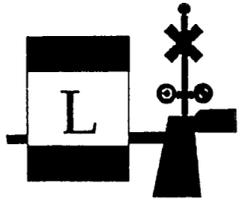


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CITY COUNCIL

Council kicks off revitalization of downtown project

By JEFF ORVIS
Union editor

Action by the Belle Plaine City Council Monday night was the kickoff to what could be a nine-month project to revitalize the city's downtown area. The council gave City Administrator Bill Daily the authorization to enter into an agreement with RDG Planning and Design for the development of a downtown master plan.

According to the company's scope of services statement, the process will include a lot of input from local residents on their vision of Belle Plaine's downtown area, as well as an assessment of the current downtown area and what is needed to improve it. The study would also include market projections and associated economic studies of how the downtown area might grow and prosper in the future.

The cost of the study is estimated at \$25,000. Funding for the study will come from the city's local option sales tax revenues.

Daily told the council that this company has had high praise from some municipalities that have used its services in the past. He said the officials in the city of Clear Lake were especially pleased with the work RDG did for that city.

In other action, the council approved a resolution, which will allow city crews to remove snow from the sidewalks in the downtown area after a snowfall of at least one inch. Property owners adjoining the sidewalks on 12th Street, from Seventh to 11th Avenue, as well as on Eighth and Ninth Avenues from the railroad tracks to 13th Street, the south side of 13th Street and the west side of Seventh Avenue will be asked to pay \$3 per property per removal.

Daily told the council that while the city does not want to get in the snow removal business for sidewalks, if city crews can remove snow from the sidewalks in the prescribed areas when they are clearing snow from the streets in those areas, individual property owners won't have to dump snow from their sidewalks along the curb, thus improving the snow removal process.

The city sent 55 letters to affected property owners and received replies from 31, he said.

The council approved a request from the Belle Plaine Fire Department for the expenditure of \$18,710 in local option sales tax revenue for replacement of the roof at the fire station. Bob Spading told the council that the new roof would have a 40-year warranty.

When the local option proposal was passed by the voters, the revenues were to be divided between the fire department, community center, library and the city's general fund. So this expenditure would come from the money earmarked for the fire department.

The council also passed the third and final reading of an ordinance amending the ordinance governing fines for parking violations to standardize the fines.

Program rescheduled

Due to a change in programming, NBC will air "The Biggest Loser," featuring Belle Plaine High School, on Wednesday, Dec. 6 at 7 p.m. The segment was to run this Wednesday, Nov. 22.



The latest issue of *American Road* magazine features a story about the old Blue Valley Drive motor trail that once ran between Waterloo and Ottumwa. Belle Plaine was one of the cities along its path.

Ron Preston stands in the doorway of the sign-covered station his father and grandfather operated along the Lincoln Highway in Belle Plaine. The landmark station is featured in the current issue of *American Road* magazine.

Remembering the 'Blue Valley Drive'

Preston's station puts Belle Plaine on the map again in recent magazine article

By JUDY SCHLESSELMAN
Union/Star-Press reporter

A long-lost Iowa auto trail and the towns along its path, including Belle Plaine, are featured in the latest issue of *American Road*, a national magazine dedicated to celebrating the country's historic two-lane highways. "Blue Heaven - Or, Saving Sergeant Shaffer" traces the journey of the magazine's executive editor, Thomas Arthur Repp, as he traveled Iowa's Blue Valley Drive (BVD) this summer.

An unofficial tourist route appearing on some maps from 1913 to 1924, the BVD started on West Fifth Street in downtown Waterloo and stretched approximately 120 miles south, passing through Dysart, Irving, Belle Plaine and Victor, then on to Deep River, What Cheer, Delta, Hedrick, and ending in Ottumwa.

Most of the route paralleled, and often joined, Highway 21. West of Belle Plaine, the BVD melted into the Lincoln Highway. Near Victor, it took a short jaunt with old Highway 6, also the Grand Army of the Republic Highway, Repp writes. South of Hedrick, the BVD stair-stepped to Highway 63, ending at the Ottumwa Hotel.

Just where the trail got its name is unclear, Repp reports. Some believe it was touted in attempts to take business away from Iowa's popular Blue Grass Road that stretched across the southern portion of the state between Burlington and Council Bluffs.

Others speculate the trail was named for the blue sky and haze that hung above the soybean and cornfields through which it passed.

If much more is known about the BVD, few people are privy to the details, including Belle Plaine's Ron Preston, city promoter and son of the late George Preston, who in 1990 took his enthusiasm for Lincoln Highway history all the way to the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson.

Ron Preston's attempts to dig up more about the BVD from stacks of old highway books and maps collected by his father came up short.

"I cannot find nothing on this Blue Valley Drive," Preston said. "My dad talked a little bit about it on Johnny Carson, too, about Belle Plaine to Victor to Deep River, but I have never seen a sign, no literature or anything on it."

When the *American Road* staff swung through Belle Plaine on its three-day journey down the BVD, legendary Preston's Station, on the corner of Fourth and 13th Streets, was a must-see stop. It wasn't Repp's first introduction to Preston or his station, though. He had featured the site in his magazine once before, in the early 1990s, Preston recalled.

Repp describes the vintage sign-covered station, at its present location 83 years, as "one of the

most beloved icons on the length of the Lincoln Highway."

No doubt many others share his sentiments. The station once operated by Ron's father and grandfather has been featured in numerous publications, from books about the Lincoln Highway and Iowa roadside oddities, to a calendar published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Paintings of the station have cropped up at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics and in Arizona, said Preston, who spends a large share of his time maintaining the station and promoting local tourism.

Preston said he's never kept count of the people who stop to look around, take pictures and lose themselves in roadway nostalgia, but they come daily, some from as far away as Italy, England, South Africa, Japan and the Netherlands.

They read about old American highways in history books and are eager to see them. "The Lincoln Highway is one of the routes they like to travel," Preston said.

Preston took Repp and his *American Road* photographer on a tour of Belle Plaine, proudly pointing out the Lincoln Cafe, Herring Hotel and the Sankot Garage.

They stopped at the area museum where they learned of Jumbo Well, viewed the boulder marking its location, and saw the memorial Preston placed in tribute to his parents at Franklin Park. All landmarks made their way into Repp's story.

A jaunt south on the BVD followed, Preston leading the way. "I showed how it went down

through the hills at Victor, the back way, and the bridge that's out where it used to go through," Preston said.

He finished his tour by taking the writer west of Victor and directing him to the next leg of the trail.

Repp's story recalls his brief stop in Deep River, the tale of John Philip Sousa's 1906 concert at the What Cheer Opera House, the struggles of Delta, and a fire truck calliope in Hedrick.

He concludes his journey in Ottumwa, interviewing retired Sgt. Donald Shaffer, a native Ottumwan who believes he may have been the inspiration for author Richard Hooker's M*A*S*H character Radar O'Reilly.

Although Repp's journey on the BVD lasted but three days, Preston's quest to learn more about the trail continues. He asked a historian friend who's traveled every main road in the U.S. to try to dig up some new information, and plans are in the works to have a couple BVD signs made and displayed at the station.

Preston is confident Repp's *American Road* story, like others before it, will bring tourists to Belle Plaine. And when they come, he or a couple friends will be here to show them around.

"I promote Belle Plaine a lot," Preston said. "I really do."

American Road magazine is available at most Barnes & Noble bookstores in Cedar Rapids, Iowa City and West Des Moines, and at Wal-Mart.

ACT: Belle Plaine students score well on recent tests

By JEFF ORVIS
Union editor

Belle Plaine students who recently took the ACT tests scored as well as or better than the state and national averages. Their cumulative scores also met or surpassed the best scores of Belle Plaine students over a five year comparison period.

The Belle Plaine Board of Education heard a report from Superintendent Mike Milligan on the most recent scores at Monday's meeting.

While the superintendent said he was overall very pleased with these results, not all of the students in the district can currently achieve these scores. In fact, nearly 14 percent of the student body is receiving special education. The board spent considerable time discussing the district's plan for educating special education students, as well as those who are deemed "at risk" and those who might qualify for a plan under Section 504 of the American Rehabilitation Act.

Local students scored highest in the English section of the ACT tests, with a

score of 22.2, compared to a 21.6 average for all Iowa students and the national average of 20.6. They also topped the state and national averages in math, with a score of 22, compared to 21.8 for Iowa students and 20.8 nationally.

In science, Belle Plaine's average score was 22, compared to 22.1 for the state average and 20.9 for the national average. In the reading portion of the test, Belle Plaine students averaged 21.8, while the state average was 22.5 and the national average was 21.4. But local students nearly matched the state average on the composite score at 22, compared to the state average of 22.1. They were above the national average of 21.1.

The most recent scores for Belle Plaine students topped the scores of the previous four years in English, math and science and equaled the previous high of 22 for the composite score. The reading score of 21.8 was lower than the reading averages in 2001-02 and 2003-04, but were higher than last year's average.

Special needs students
The Belle Plaine district also serves

SCHOOL BOARD

students who are not already prepared for academic success. In fact, approximately 14 percent of the students in the district receive special education. Milligan presented information on how these students are being served.

During the 2005-06 school year, there were 85 students in special education programs in the district, served by seven teachers and 15 associates. That number is down from the 93 students served two years earlier. Total expenses for these programs was \$891,088, compared to \$923,142 in 2003-04.

Besides the traditional special education programs, the district strives to identify students classified as "at risk." Some of them are served by the 504 plan, which is "designed to plan a program of instructional services to assist students with special needs who are in a regular educational setting."

The 504 plan is designed for students

in special education programs, but also for those who are moving from a special education program to a regular education placement.

Students with special needs might include those who have a physical or mental disability that is not temporary. Students diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) might be included in this group.

Don McKinney taught in the Belle Plaine Schools for more than 30 years before he was recently elected to the board. He said he was pleased to see the district formalizing its plan for serving this segment of the student population. He said in years past, the teachers did their best to accommodate these students, but there didn't seem to be the clear-cut plan for assistance from the teachers, administrators, area education agency staff and parents.

Other action

In other action, the board approved a contract with Dennis Kurriger as the seventh grade girls basketball coach and

with Evan Hrabak, junior varsity girls' basketball coach.

The board approved a resolution of intent to continue participation in an instructional support levy. A public hearing on the levy will be held on Tuesday, Dec. 19, at 7 p.m., preceding the regular board meeting. That meeting was changed from the usual Wednesday date due to a conflict with a school concert.

Milligan told the board that the instructional support levy has been a "lifesaver." In the wake of declining enrollment and state aid cutbacks in recent years, the district is currently facing a possible deficit of more than \$366,000. He said in the past several years, the district has cut a principal's position, media specialist, nurse, counselor, cook and bus driver positions, cut the supply budget twice and this year has cut the number of field trips for students.

The district has 172 fewer students than it had in 2000. Through additional budget tightening, Milligan said the district should be okay this year, but added "the problem won't go away."



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