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- May 27, 2009 special meeting



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Local graduate’s learning system in the running for people-voted award

By KELLY GERLACH

Necessity is the mother of invention. That’s what ancient Greek philosopher Plato wrote in his book “Republic.”

That’s just what happened for a Maquoketa graduate and former teacher who found a need for more online teaching tools. As a result of her necessity and invention, she now needs the public’s votes by Sunday, May 31, to win a \$10,000 business grant.

Emily Starr, daughter of Jerry and Barbara Nelson of Delmar, has created StarrMatica Learning Systems, LLC. It is educational content designed to effectively integrate technology in teaching reading and mathematics in elementary schools.

Starr developed the concept from difficulties she encountered as a teacher. The 1997 MCHS and St. Ambrose graduate taught school for one year at Briggs Elementary School and four years at Ekstrand Elementary in DeWitt.

“At Ekstrand I got an LCD projector and spent a lot of my time online looking for resources and materials there,” Starr explained. “I could not find much reading and math help that I could conveniently use in the classroom.”

So in 2005, Starr began developing what she dubbed StarrMatica Learning Systems. “I wanted something that included my name and sounded technological. StarrMatica was a result of those two desires and a long brainstorming session,” she said.

“I knew there was a real need for this, more than for just students in the classroom. And I knew after five years I wasn’t going to be teaching as a career for the next 50 years.”

StarrMatica works on a subscription basis on the Internet, whether the teacher and children are in the classroom or at home. After paying the annual subscription fee, the user is able to log on to StarrMatica’s online site.

The Jackson County Board of Supervisors this week gave preliminary approval to a proposed zoning change that would permit continued operation of a biodiesel fuel manufacturing operation north of Maquoketa.

The supervisors on Tuesday, May 26, unanimously approved the first reading of the zoning change requested by Gary and Marilyn Drew of Maquoketa for their business, Energy Tec LLC.

The Drews are seeking reclassification of 4.1 acres at the northwest corner of the junction of 233rd Avenue and 92nd Street 3 1/2 miles northeast of Maquoketa from A-1, agricultural, to M-1, limited industrial.

The zoning change, if approved, would allow Energy Tec to expand its production from approximately 50,000 gallons annually now to a maximum of two million gallons per year.

Three neighbors voiced objections to the proposed zoning change during a public hearing that preceded the board’s vote.

The board will hold a second public hearing and consider a second and final reading at its next meeting at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday, June 2, at the Courthouse. Approval of two readings is necessary for the rezoning to pass.

The Jackson County Planning and Zoning Commission recommended approval of a larger scale zoning change in December. The Drews later scaled back the acreage involved and agreed allowable production quantities through negotia-



Emily Starr, a 1997 Maquoketa Community High School graduate, has developed StarrMatica Learning Systems, learning tools that supplement learning for students in third through sixth grade. Her small business is one of 50 in the running for the Intuit Small Business Grant Competition and she needs the community’s support and votes to win.

Online, StarrMatica uses virtual manipulatives, animation, practice activities and games to enhance reading and math curriculums. They can be used with interactive white boards, LCD projectors and personal computers both in the classroom and at home.

The learning system also offers resources for families who homeschool and for parents.

“It offers 60 or 70 activities and games to teach things like place value. (For instance,) StarrMatica uses online dice and spinners as one example to help students understand the place value system and to help teachers teach it,” Starr explained.

■ **STARR,**
Please turn to page 2

Neighbors voice opposition to rezoning

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

The Jackson County Board of Supervisors this week gave preliminary approval to a proposed zoning change that would permit continued operation of a biodiesel fuel manufacturing operation north of Maquoketa.

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tion with Zoning Administrator David Manning.

The supervisors heard from Becky Davidson, whose property abuts the Drew parcel to the west.

Davidson said she favors the production of alternative fuels, but opposes the location of the Drew plant.

She said she understood that one pound of waste product is generated for each gallon of biodiesel fuel produced. She said the market for glycerin, the waste byproduct, is saturated and said she doesn’t know how Drew plans to dispose of the waste.

She also expressed concern that the groundwater in the area may be affected.

Carmin Blake, who resides with her husband, John, north of the Drew parcel, also said she opposes the rezoning and expressed a variety of objections.

She expressed concern whether the Maquoketa and Andrew volunteer fire departments could control a fire if one started at the plant.

She said the plant should be located in an industrial location in Maquoketa, where it would bring tax revenue to the city and would be closer to the fire station.

She also said she is concerned about security around the plant and said the property should be fenced.

Like Davidson, Blake said she also is concerned about disposal of waste and maintaining the water quality.

She also expressed concern that the Drews may install underground gasoline tanks and open a service station at the site.

She also objected to the proposed location of the driveway off 233rd Avenue, saying it was a dangerous location for a driveway. She said the gravel roads leading to the site should be widened and paved to accommodate the increased truck traffic.

She also expressed concern that the Drews someday may sell their business to a large corporation.

“I just don’t want that kind of a mess out there,” Blake told the supervisors. “How would you like to have a biodiesel plant by your back door?”

“I just don’t think it’s the proper thing. There are plenty of places in town for something like this.”

Blake’s husband, John Blake, said he is “dead-set against” the rezoning. He expressed concern about the type of building that Drew would build to house an expanded plant.

Supervisor Jack Willey also read a letter from Jim England, another neighbor, who submitted the only written comment.

England said he was pleased to learn of the restrictions that the Drews had agreed to. He asked that in addition to the limit of two million gallons

■ **REZONING,**
Please turn to page 3