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— M A Q U O K E T A —  
**SENTINEL—PRESS**

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MSP photo by Kelly Gerlach

**Students tour station during Fire Prevention Week**

Andrew firefighters know that their department's new fire truck and its various compartments hold at least 21 kindergarten students, shown here. Andrew students in kindergarten, first, second and third grades rode fire trucks around town this week as part of National Fire Prevention Week activities at the Andrew Fire Department. Kids learned fire safety tips, viewed the department's newest truck and sounded the sirens as they rode in the shiny red trucks.

**Mayoral candidates participate in forum**

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

Clean-up of the downtown fire debris, street repair and economic development were among the topics discussed this week by Maquoketa's four mayoral candidates during a forum at City Hall.

The event was held Tuesday night, Oct. 6, and was sponsored by the Maquoketa Area Chamber of Commerce.

Incumbent Tom Messerli and challengers Paul Hahle, Jason Hute and Jim Seward answered questions and gave opening and closing statements during the 90-minute forum.

A similar forum for the six City Council candidates was held the following night. The election is Nov. 3.

All four candidates listed clean-up of the debris from the January 2008 South Main Street fire as their top priority if elected.

Asked what lessons have been learned from the fire and what can be done to avoid a similar situation, Messerli said the city looked into requiring downtown property owners to carry insurance for clean-up of hazardous materials.

He said, however, the state law forbids cities from requiring the coverage.

Noting that the city has been criticized for lack of prompt action on the clean-up, Messerli said the city could have refused to get involved in taking over the properties and the clean-up project and instead had the Iowa Department of Natural Resources deal with the property owners.

Instead, he said the city chose to work with the property owners and



PAUL HAHLE



JASON HUTE



TOM MESSERLI



JIM SEWARD

has obtained grants that will pay most of the project, which has delayed the project.

Messerli said he doubted that if a similar disaster struck again whether the council would take on the project again.

Hahle, a former councilman who stepped down two years ago, said he has wondered whether the city took the best approach with the DNR.

He said he often worked with the DNR during his years in management with Alliant Energy.

"I never found them unwilling to take a serious look at alternatives to correct a problem," Hahle said. He said he found that 80 to 90 percent of the time would "do things the way we wanted to do them."

Hute said the council learned from the fire that the city's firefighters needed updated equipment and the council supplied it.

He said the city also needs contingency plans for large-scale events such as the fire to help the city deal with the situation if it occurs.

Noting that the cause of the fire was suspected to be electrical re-

lated, Seward said the city should take preventive measures, including electrical inspections.

Asked what they would like to see done with that area of Main Street after it is cleaned up, Seward said he would like to see it developed into a downtown park.

"If we're going to promote growth, we need to bring in more stores and have a place for workers downtown to congregate and eat their lunch," Seward said.

"It would be really pretty to see some green there for enjoyment and recreation."

Hahle said he would like to know what residents would like to see done. He said green space "isn't bad," but added that it doesn't help promote business activity downtown or put a building on the property tax rolls.

"We need to get some kind of group together, decide how to proceed and make it happen," Hahle said.

Development of the fire site should be done in conjunction with a streetscape project the City

Council will be considering in coming months, Hute said. He said a streetscape would have to be done in stages because of the cost.

Messerli advocated returning retail businesses to the site. He said the city needs to replace the revenue the businesses were generating for the city. One of the businesses, Breitbach's Floor Covering, has reopened at another location. The other two, Sue's Hallmark and Jackson County Home Furnishings, did not re-open.

Messerli said there has been interest and inquiries from businesses in the site.

Improvement of the city's streets is another area of concern.

Hahle said many streets need repair. He noted that there is a process for setting priorities, but he added that some streets are in such bad condition they need immediate attention.

Hute agreed that the Street Committee should continue to set priorities for street maintenance and

**■ CANDIDATES, Please turn to page 2**