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Nelson starts retirement with projects

By KELLY GERLACH

Zzzzzzzzzzzzz.

It's 4 a.m. on a school day and Jerry Nelson remains fast asleep in his bed on his farm south of Maquoketa. He's not listening to the latest weather reports, not speaking on the phone with representatives from area school districts, not driving his red pickup truck on some of Maquoketa Community School District's back roads doing a safety check.

Nelson does, however, still have a bunch of projects lined up, repairs and installations to catch up on at home. He'd only retired five days earlier and already he'd shopped every home improvement store in the Quad Cities to purchase equipment and parts for those projects.

"It'll take me at least a month straight to get all those done," said Nelson, 62.

He's never without a project. He does not rest.

"I can't sit still in front of a computer. I can't sit in front of a TV for more than an hour. My garage is heated and I've got projects out there to work on," he explained.

Now that he's officially retired as director of support services for the Maquoketa school district, Nelson has more time to do it all.

Nelson officially joined the Maquoketa Community School District on July 6, 1987, as supervisor of transportation, maintenance and grounds. His wife, Barb, already taught at the high school.

He hit the ground running because that was the year the district constructed four new classrooms and shifted ninth grade to the high school building. It was also the year Delwood students began attending classes in Maquoketa as part of the districts' whole grade sharing agreement.

The district completed at least 10 sizeable construction projects in Nelson's almost 23 years, including building additions and improvements at Cardinal, Maquoketa Middle School and Maquoketa Community High School.

JERRY NELSON

His first maintenance crisis, he recalls, was an architectural glitch when the first elevator was installed at the middle school. It occurred during his first year on the job.

"I didn't know much about elevators then," he said, "but after the first snow, it didn't work anymore." He obtained a copy of the specs, which were designed for a cable elevator, not a hydraulic elevator with a computer processor. Thanks to that architectural error, snow ruined the processor, but it was fixed at no expense to the district.

Nelson said he learned best from the experienced staff that worked before him and with him. For instance, he mentioned construction crews digging in the former high school courtyard to build a new classroom during that same first year on the job. The crew dug into a tile line. The architect trivialized the tile line, said it wasn't benefiting the school, but district maintenance man Jim Frank said it was crucial to the school's drainage system.

"Sure enough, about a week (after classes started), it rained and we had an inch of water in the classroom," Nelson recalled. "Jim knew so much. I was so fortunate to work with him for three years."

He felt the same way about homemade packed lunches at noon with Tom Coakley and Jim Brady. "Those two guys were 15 or 20 years older than me but I picked up the knowledge you can't be taught."

Nelson's dogged determination to keep students safe, well fed and happy is what saw him on county roads at 4:30 or 5 a.m., particularly in the winter.

"We're not only just a school district but foster parents," Nelson said, noting that the decision to postpone or cancel school has become easier over the years. "Twenty years ago we tended to go to school more but both parents are working now and there are just so many kids home alone…"

■ **NELSON,**
Please turn to page 2

Proeschel makes career change in March

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

Mark Proeschel, who has been executive director of the Maquoketa Area Family YMCA since it opened, has resigned effective in March, Proeschel confirmed last week.

He and his wife, Donna, will move to Madison, Wis., where they will work in the nursing home field.

Both will work for Continuum of Care, a company that owns and operates senior living facilities in Madison, suburban Middleton, Wis., Albert Lea, Minn., and Dubuque. Facilities include nursing homes, assisted living and Alzheimer's units.

Donna Proeschel began duties Monday, Jan. 18, as activities director overseeing that function at all four locations.

Mark Proeschel will supervise the staff serving the 70 assisted-living units at Oak Park Place in Madison. He will continue as YMCA director in Maquoketa until he begins duties in Madison on March 12.

In his current position, Proeschel is employed by the Scott County Family Y of Davenport, which operates the Maquoketa Area Family YMCA and the city's recreation programs under a management agreement with the city.

Proeschel said the Scott County Family Y has begun the process to seek a replacement.

MARK PROESCHEL

Proeschel began duties as Maquoketa Area Family YMCA director on Aug. 13, 2007. The facility opened in late October of 2007.

After more than 37 years with the YMCA organization, the move for Proeschel also will represent a career change.

"I've decided to try something new and different," he said.

"It's been a wonderful experience being involved with so many wonderful volunteers, staff, board members," he added. "It was a great experience completing the building and getting it opened and starting to build a YMCA culture in the Maquoketa area."

Proeschel said he wanted to remain in Maquoketa to see through the YMCA's annual Partner with Youth campaign to raise funds for scholarships.

He said the future is "very bright" for more recreational activities to be organized and offered.

"I think this will be a wonderful job for someone to step into and take this Y to another level in membership programming and having a positive impact on the Maquoketa area."

While memberships to the Maquoketa Y never reached the 1,100 level initially set as a target and economic conditions have further eroded membership numbers, forcing some cost-cutting measures, the YMCA continues to offer a variety of exercise programs.

The annual Partner with Youth appeal has exceeded its fund-raising goal all three years it has been held.

And city recreation programs not held at the YMCA have seen increases both in program offerings and numbers of participants.

A native of Wilmar, Minn., Proeschel began his YMCA career in Australia, where he and his wife lived for seven years.

Since then he served with YMCAs in Minneapolis and elsewhere in Minnesota and later in Sioux City, Iowa. He was director of the Siouxland YMCA when he accepted the Maquoketa position.

He and his wife have two daughters and have been members of the Maquoketa Rotary Club.

City Manager Brian Wagner this week praised Proeschel.

"The city was fortunate to have had Mark as its first executive director," Wagner said. "He had a lot of experience in knowing which programs or methods would work and which wouldn't.

"He's always been upbeat about the Y and its future and he fit the community well. I hope that his successor will have similar traits," the city manager added.

Wagner said he was told the Scott County Family Y will use a hiring process to select Proeschel's replacement similar to the one used when he was hired.

Wagner said he has been asked to serve on an interview committee for potential candidates. He noted that the selection of whom to hire will be made by Scott County Family Y officials, not the city.

The city's three-year management agreement with the Scott County Family Y expires in June.