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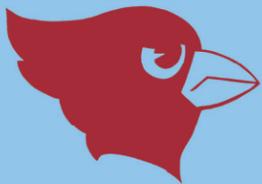
SENTINEL-PRESS

Volume 156, No. 79 ■ 24 pages Plus Supplements ■ Wednesday, February 17, 2010 ■ \$1.00 per copy

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Staffing reductions loom in MCHS District

By KELLY GERLACH

Maquoketa Community School Board members and district administrators are examining every means possible, including expanding early retirement and reducing staff, to pare down an already lean budget.

They'll try to do it all with the least negative impact on students' education.

District Superintendent Kim Huckstadt presented a brief overview of state and district finances as well an overview of preliminary staff recommendations during the board's regular Feb. 8 meeting.

The need for less expenses and increased revenue are not new anywhere in the county, or the state for that matter. Maquoketa's certified enrollment decreased by 30 students this year and will likely decrease by a similar margin next year because of the graduation of this year's large senior class. This greatly reduces the district's state aid, which is based on enrollment figures.

Huckstadt said that because of the declining enrollment and a relatively low allowable growth rate, the district will be on the budget guarantee for only the second time in district history. The budget guarantee would give the district a one-time 1 percent increase in the budget authority, or an additional \$86,255.

"With an operation this size, that's not very much money," the superintendent said.

In the last two years, the district lost about \$830,000 because of cuts in state aid. The loss forced the district to spend about \$800,000 from its cash reserves this fiscal year.

"We're fortunate to have the reserves to absorb the shortfall, so we didn't have to do mid-year layoffs. But because it's not looking like funding is going to be restored and there's the enrollment loss, we have to find other ways to cut expenses and increase revenue," Huckstadt said.

At a previous board meeting, the superintendent was instructed to reduce the budget by between \$600,000 and \$700,000. The superintendent and building administrators have been discussing various staffing scenarios since December. Their findings may come in the form of reassigning duties to existing staff, not rehiring positions vacated by early retirees, expanding the early retirement program and eliminating some positions.

On Huckstadt's list of staffing recommendations, the school board may choose to fill a middle school social studies vacancy by reassigning staff, saving about \$57,000. There might be a reduction in the school media center, with the middle school and high school sharing a media specialist but maintaining a support person in each center. That could amount to a \$72,000 savings.

Due to the early retirement of Mary Flagel, the district could simply eliminate one section of first grade. This would generate \$52,000 in savings. The board could rehire a French teacher for reduced teaching time, which would save an estimated \$32,000 but limit the number of French courses taught.

Also on the list, eliminating a full-time secretarial position at Briggs and Cardinal, as well as one office staffer in the district's Central Office. This would amount to about \$109,000 in savings. Two teacher associate positions would remain vacant at the elementary level, saving about \$30,000 when specific fund transfers are coordinated.

The district could rehire an assistant maintenance person at starting pay, saving about \$9,500. The same goes for a full-time head mechanic position, saving about \$5,500.

As they did last year, district administrators offered to forego their administrator quality stipends and the superintendent would reimburse the district \$6,000, for a total of \$30,500 in savings.

Further recommendations include eliminating an assistant coach in each of the following sports: football, volleyball, boys basketball, girls basketball, wrestling, baseball and softball. This would save about \$21,600.

Eliminating three days for all teacher associates would save about \$9,500. Eliminating a full-time physical education teacher would add about \$40,000 back into the budget, possibly causing the buildings to share the time of another P.E. teacher. An estimated \$8,000 could be saved by eliminating one building technology lead position.

Huckstadt's recommendation list included eliminating up to three special education positions, saving about \$120,000. The superintendent noted that the district still has federal stimulus dollars from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) that would pay to maintain these three positions. However, that money will no longer be available in the 2011 fiscal year.

"We need to figure out what we need to do to keep up to the current standards. We may be able to maintain the (special education) positions with ARRA dollars but it will be gone in fiscal year 2011. If we wait, we'll be delaying the decision as opposed to solving the problem," Huckstadt said.

Maquoketa could save \$18,000 by eliminating the juvenile liaison officer. The Seventh Judicial District pays for 60 percent of that salary.

The superintendent recommended the possibility of sharing a transportation director with another school district, saving about \$13,000. Such a move would save dollars but could also produce additional budget authority through state incentives, he explained.

Increased revenue opportunities for fiscal year 2011 include up to \$200,000 in new money from weighted funding the district may receive by providing



MSP photo by Douglas Melvold

Members of the board of directors of the Ohnward Fine Arts Center display the mortgage that shows paid in full thanks to a one-month fund-raising effort that raised \$25,000. From left are Rich Hall, Ohnward director, board Treasurer Kendra Beck, Vice President Terry Rubel and President Linda Stewart (holding mortgage), former director Patrick Costello, and directors Pam Crawford and Ben Shearer. Absent when photo was taken were board members John Gilroy and Luanne Huckstadt.

Challenge grant, donors pay off mortgage

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

The Ohnward Fine Arts Center is debt free.

A fund drive to raise \$12,500 from the public to meet a challenge grant to retire the remaining debt on the Maquoketa performing arts facility has succeeded and the final \$25,000 owed on a mortgage has been paid off, Ohnward board members said last week.

Money raised from the fund drive met a challenge grant of \$12,500 offered by Edward Tubbs of Maquoketa.

"This is just a great day for Ohnward and for the Maquoketa community," said Patrick Costello, a former Ohnward board member who helped lead a fund drive to pay off the remaining amount owed on the mortgage.

"This has been a dream of mine and the board's," Costello said. "To have this thing paid for tickles me no end."

"This is a big step forward," agreed Linda Stewart, Ohnward board president.

Paying off the mortgage had been a goal of his since he first came on the board, Costello said.

"That people stepped forward and got the job done speaks volumes for this community," he said.

The payoff came after Costello said he wanted to start a fund drive to pay off the remaining \$25,000 owed on the mortgage.

Tubbs, a longtime Maquoketa civic leader and retired Maquoketa banker, offered to contribute half of the amount, or \$12,500, if the Ohnward board raised the remain-

ing \$12,500.

Tubbs said he would match all donations dollar for dollar until the fund goal was reached.

The Ohnward board launched the fund drive in late December to raise the matching amount. By early February, 35 donors had contributed the needed amount, Costello said.

The final payment was made and the mortgage was stamped "Paid."

When he joined the board three years ago, Costello said he was surprised to learn that \$60,000 was still owed on the facility.

He said many residents may have had the mistaken impression that because the facility was built in large part with volunteer labor and financing through grants and monetary donations, that it carried no debt.

Tubbs and John Fagerland, his late business partner at Ohnward Bancshares, for whom the facility is named, contributed \$250,000 to the project in September of 2001. Their gift secured a \$143,000 Vision Iowa grant, giving the project the funds it needed to assure it would become a reality.

But the donations and grants didn't cover all costs, and a mortgage was set up to provide necessary financing.

With the mortgage paid off, Costello noted that Ohnward no longer will have the expense of making interest payments on the mortgage. All money donated to the center can go directly for over-

■ MORTGAGE,
Please turn to page 3

■ REDUCTIONS, Please turn to page 21