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— M A Q U O K E T A —

SENTINEL-PRESS

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Downtown mess to be gone soon

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

Clean-up of Maquoketa's downtown fire site got under way Monday, April 26, as crews from G&B Construction of Burlington arrived to begin the task expected to take two to three weeks.

A large excavator started picking through the rubble Monday afternoon, pulling metal pieces from the pile that will be salvaged.

Workers on the site were attired in white work outfits and wore masks to filter out any asbestos particles.

One worker sprayed a continuous stream of water on the debris and on the items plucked from the pile by the jaws of the excavator.

The water is a requirement of the clean-up job, as it will help prevent any asbestos particles from getting into the air.

The first truckloads of debris that will be disposed of are expected to leave the city Tuesday, April 27. The material will be hauled to a landfill near Milan, Ill., a 104-mile round trip.

The Maquoketa City Council awarded the G&B firm a \$268,550 contract in March to demolish the remains of the four South Main Street buildings that were destroyed in the January 2008 fire and haul the debris to a landfill approved for material containing asbestos.

Once the clean-up operation shifts into high gear, 10 or more



MSP photo by Douglas Melvold

The jaws of an excavator get ready to chomp down on some of the debris as clean-up operations at Maquoketa's downtown fire site got under way on Monday, April 26. The machine operator spent much of Monday afternoon picking through the pile of rubble, pulling out metal pieces that can be salvaged. As the machine did its job, workers at the edge of the pile used a fire hose to spray a steady stream of water on the pile. Hauling of the debris and demolition of the remaining walls was expected to occur as the week progresses.

trucks will haul large bins filled with the material to the Milan landfill, shuttling back and forth.

Monday's operations attracted a

few observers, including reporters from at least two area television stations and several onlookers.

Karen Breitbach, co-owner with

her husband, Dan, of Breitbach Floor Coverings, one of the three

■ **CLEANUP,**
Please turn to page 3

Preston, East Central could become one

By KELLY GERLACH

A petition to reorganize the Preston and East Central community school districts is circulating on a fast track to collect about 600 signatures by May 2.

Sitting shoulder to shoulder with fellow residents concerned about the future of their school districts, more than 200 people attended an informational meeting in Miles Thursday, April 22. Residents gathered in an implement building to learn more about a proposal to combine the two small school districts.

When the meeting ended 90 minutes later, the organizing committee found enough support to proceed with the plan to obtain the necessary signatures for a petition. That petition would then be presented to the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency, which will determine if reorganization would produce a viable new school district.

If determined viable, public hearings would be held in the two districts and the measure would be put to a vote in September. The measure requires a simple majority of votes in both districts to pass, then the two districts could become one as early as the 2011-12 school year.

A petition open house will be held Thursday, April 29, to collect the required signatures. The open house will be held from 5 to 9 p.m. at the

Kunau building in Miles.

Reorganization committee members will answer questions from the April 22 meeting. Residents of East Central and Preston school districts who are 18 years of age or older will be able to sign the petition.

Signatures will be accepted now through Sunday, May 2.

Before any of that could happen, however, patrons of both districts had to initiate proceedings, starting with last Thursday's public meeting.

"We all share a common love for our children, so we want this to be a positive experience," explained parent Dick Keeney when the meeting began.

"We (the 50 or so people leading the reorganization movement) all agree that whole grade sharing with Northeast is an option. We met with both school boards (Preston and East Central) and think they should continue to explore whole grade sharing, but we still are not quite ready for that step. If it's financially feasible to keep pre-K through 12 here, we want to combine our districts."

East Central and Preston district residents began researching reorganization a number of months ago when both districts' grim financial pictures became evident. They contacted Richard Gaumer of Ottumwa, an attorney with experi-

ence representing school districts dealing with whole grade sharing. Gaumer attended Thursday's meeting, explaining the basic concepts of whole grade sharing and reorganization.

Gaumer told the assembly that they are the ones who can initiate the reorganization process. He said school boards cannot initiate the process; it must come in the form of a petition signed by 20 percent of eligible voters in each of affected districts. That's 338 signatures from East Central and 250 from Preston.

Signing the petition does not obligate a person to vote in favor of reorganization, Gaumer emphasized. It simply indicates that the person wants to further explore the option, he said.

He said the petition must give a legal description of the proposed new district.

Residents must decide if they want five or seven members on the new school board. They must determine if board members will be elected at-large or by director districts. Director districts are used to determine residency, so a candidate would have to live in the director district relating to the open seat.

The petition must also include a name for the new district.

"This becomes perhaps one of the most passionate discussions," said

■ **DISTRICTS,**
Please turn to page 28