

TAXES: Declining enrollment, minimal increases in aid behind rate drop

Continued from page 1A

both chambers and was signed by Gov. Kim Reynolds last week set the SSA increase at 2.5%.

Because the district was required to publish its budget and estimated tax levy before state lawmakers had finished setting SSA, Kelleher said the budget the board will consider for approval next week is based on that initially-proposed 3% increase. Now that the budget and tax rate have been published, changes cannot be made to it.

"It's not a significant impact from 2.5% to 3%, but it will increase our challenges in becoming more efficient," he said.

The \$13.01 rate is lower than the estimated levy rate

of \$13.28 the district first published in mid-March to comply with the new state law. Kelleher said this is because state law also dictates that the final levy rate can be lower than the first published proposed rate, but not higher, so the Dubuque district — along with many others across the state — published a rate in mid-March that they expected might be higher than the final number.

"What (the Legislature) did was trying to create more transparency, more awareness around the levy rate, but they failed to meet what they needed to do in order to accomplish that ... by not setting the SSA (increase) in a timely manner," he said. "This made for much

"What (the legislature) did was trying to create more transparency, more awareness around the levy rate, but they failed to meet what they needed to do in order to accomplish that ... by not setting the SSA (increase) in a timely manner."

DISTRICT CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER KEVIN KELLEHER

more inaccurate information going out than what we usually provide."

The drop in the levy rate is based on several factors, including declining enrollment and minimal increases in state aid.

Kelleher said the district's spending authority is calculated based on enrollment and the level of per-pupil state

funding. As enrollment falls and state aid does not keep pace with inflation, the district's spending authority falls, meaning the tax levy rate will fall as well because "there's less dollars to get," said Kelleher.

When the current levy rate of \$14.51 per \$1,000 was approved last April, school board members were in the process of placing on the ballot an up-

to-\$150 million general obligation bond to pay for a new middle school and other district projects.

District officials said the bond — which ultimately failed to pass in November — would have required no increases to the district's tax levy rate. If it did not pass, officials predicted the drop in the tax levy rate the district is currently seeing.

Kelleher said the district's budget does not account for the increase to teacher compensation that was also included in the bill setting SSA and restructuring the AEAs. Under the new law, the starting salary for incoming teachers and the minimum salary for Iowa teachers will be raised from \$33,500 to \$47,500 in year

one, then to \$50,000 starting the next year. Minimum pay for teachers with 12 years or more of experience will be \$60,000 in year one, then \$62,000, per the new law.

"State funding, we believe, will (fund the increased salary) for anyone that is below the \$47,500 mark and the people with 12 years experience who are below the \$60,000," said superintendent

Amy Hawkins. "But this does not fund our entire salary scale ... and not everybody in our system will be getting a raise as high as some because of this."



Amy Hawkins

REPORT: Dubuque County experiencing mental health provider shortage

Continued from page 1A

Dubuque County. Some of those stays could be prevented with proper outpatient treatment, experts said.

In 2021, Iowa's rate of preventable stays was 2,330 per 100,000 and the U.S. rate was 2,681. Corrigan said the COVID-19 pandemic might have prevented individuals from seeking care in a timely manner due to fear of contracting the disease as well as stringent restrictions in health care facilities.

"I think there might have been delayed care during that year due to the pandemic," she said. "Oftentimes, if you seek care early enough, you can avoid hospitalization for certain things."

Dubuque County fares better than the state and national rates of primary care physician and dentist availability,

but worse than the state and national rates for the number of mental health providers. Local data states one mental health provider is available for every 530 Dubuque County residents, compared to 500 in Iowa and 320 nationally.

"I'm not surprised that we are experiencing a shortage of mental health providers," White said.

She said that need was outlined in the recent county community health assessment, and county leaders continue work to retain and recruit those providers.

Corrigan said Dubuque County overall has seen increased access to mental health care in recent years, and the area continues to be a major hub of providers as surrounding rural counties face more severe provider shortages.

Included in those rural counties

is Grant County, Wis., where health department Director Jeff Kindrai said it can be challenging to access health care due to provider shortages.

"We have probably seen some improvement over the years, but it's difficult to recruit, and even recruiting positions such as nurses is challenging," he said.

Kindrai also noted lower flu vaccination rates in Grant County. Data shows 43% of Medicare enrollees there received a flu vaccine in 2021, compared to 52% in Wisconsin as a whole and 46% in the U.S. He commended the rate of low-weight births in Grant County, which sits at 6%, compared to 8% at the state and national level.

In the report, Jo Daviess County, Ill., was worse than the national av-

erage for provider availability. Lori Stangl, Jo Daviess County Health Department director of clinical services, said that wasn't surprising. While her department works closely with health care providers in Illinois, it also refers people across the river and elsewhere for care.

Rosecrance, a mental health provider based in Rockford, Ill., also now provides services in Jo Daviess County at a satellite clinic, Stangl said.

"They do it over the phone and then they do the in-person as well," she said. "That was one step toward trying to provide a little bit more of those services within our county."

Stangl also noted concerning alcohol-impaired driving death rates in Jo Daviess County highlighted in the report. From 2017 to 2021, 38% of vehicle crash deaths in Jo Daviess County involved alcohol, compared

to 28% in Illinois and 26% nationwide.

"I don't have the specifics, but I do know alcohol has been a huge problem in our county," she said. "It's come up on many community needs assessments as a problem."

Most of the data in the report was gathered in 2021 and 2022, with some from 2023. Because the data is primarily from the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Corrigan said some factors might be affected.

"As we emerge from the pandemic, I think we're going to learn more and more about the effects on overall health, and it's going to take a while because our complete data sets are always a year or two behind," she said.

Maia Bond is a Report For America corps member.



Jeff Kindrai

BUSINESSES: Cassville coffee shop serves up sandwiches, soups, quiche

Continued from page 1A

Josh McGinnis owns the company. "We knew we wanted to open in Iowa, but it was a matter of finding the right building."

The new lounge space will provide sitting areas for people to socialize and consume RiverBluff's various products. Among the offerings will be THC-infused cocktails created by on-site mixologists and a new THC-infused Bluff THC Soda Pop, which is made in partnership with 7 Hills Brewing Co. The soda pop includes Delta 9 hemp-derived THC and flavors including grape, lime and punch and are compliant with Iowa's laws for per-container THC dosage.

The interior of the space follows RiverBluff's green theme. That color scheme extends to a full-size motorcycle bolted to the wall above the bar — a remnant from the property's previous resident that now, too, is green.

"There is still some decorating, but most of this was beautiful when we walked in," Gansemer said.

The business' grand opening celebration will span three days, April 5 through April 7. As a promotion, the first 15 people through the door on all three days will receive free RiverBluff merchandise, Gansemer said.

"This (type of business) has been in our head for four years," Gansemer

said. "(THC) is medically helpful. It's versatile. It's recreationally helpful."

RiverBluff Collective's new retail and lounge space is open 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For more information, visit riverbluffcollective.com or search for the business on Facebook.

CASSVILLE COUPLE OPENS COFFEE SHOP

Ron and Rachel Schergen believed they needed a new lease on life.

Living in the Chicagoland area while raising three kids, the couple decided a slower lifestyle in a small town fit them better. So, about a year ago, the Schergens moved to Cassville. Last month, they opened Driftless Coffee Co. downtown at 101 W. Amelia St.

"We jumped in head first," said Rachel Schergen. "The focus is small-town vibes, strong customer service experiences and craft drinks."

Driftless offers coffee, cold brew and artisan teas along with a breakfast and lunch menu.

"Coffee is great, but we also have a passion for tea," Schergen said. "We want to expose people to various tea flavors, and I think we have been successful so far in that."

Meat-lover or veggie quiche is included on the breakfast menu, alongside avocado toast and a variety of bakery items. Lunch options in-

Business tips sought

Do you have an interesting story idea or news tip to share about a local business? Ideas can be shared with business reporter Grace Nieland at grace.nieland@thmedia.com or 563-588-5647.

clude salads, sandwiches and a soup of the day.

The Schergens said a signature dish so far has been a take on the classic Rueben sandwich called "The Rachel." It's topped with turkey, cole slaw, swiss cheese and a house dressing that will remind consumers of both a Russian and thousand island dressing, Schergen said.

"Our food leans toward healthy options that are grab-and-go and relatively easy for people to order takeout," Schergen said.

Driftless Coffee Co. is open from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily. For more information and a menu, visit driftlesscoffeeco.com or the businesses' Facebook page.

LIFELONG CREATIVES OPEN BED AND BREAKFAST IN MAQUOKETA

Through the various business undertakings of Naser and Patricia Shahrivar, there has been a common denominator: art.

For the lifelong creatives, their

newest venture in Maquoketa is no different.

D'Arte Manor Gallery and B&B combines the Shahrivars' experience operating a hospitality business with providing a place to display their art, for which they have received various accolades over the years.

The Italianate Victorian brick home on Maquoketa's Second Street sits near downtown and offers six comfortable bedrooms decorated with the couple's creations.

"It's a perfect place to have a gallery," Naser Shahrivar said. "We love the house. It is a beautiful home."

The Shahrivars' work has taken them around eastern Iowa, all while continuing to produce their art and creative work, which includes portraits and landscapes by Patricia and abstracts and small-town panoramas by Naser — including of Iowa towns such as Manchester, Guttenberg, Elkader and Dyersville. Many of these pieces are on display in D'Arte Manor, which means "Art" Manor in Italian.

Before starting their most recent adventure in Maquoketa, the Shahrivars renovated and then operated Old Brewery Bed & Breakfast in Guttenberg for nearly 20 years. After that, the couple purchased three downtown buildings in Central City and rehabilitated them and turned them into a gift shop and art gallery.

Their movements are inspired

by their art, which is partially why Maquoketa proved to be their next destination.

"We came to the Maquoketa Art Experience to a show," Patricia said. "The town and people are wonderful and very welcoming and friendly. Everyone said we should move here. ... We wanted to be a part of the artist community here. There's never a dull moment. They have so much to offer in this community."

When the home on Second Street went up for sale, they knew it was meant for them.

All the rooms in the bed and breakfast have queen beds and are themed, Patricia said. One room on the main floor is dubbed the "Traveling King's Room" and has a whirlpool bathtub. Another room is the "Arts Master Room" and features a bay window. Yet another room follows a "Cinderella" theme.

Guests are treated to a homemade breakfast menu that varies throughout stays and includes blueberry waffles, omelets, muffins, French toast, bacon and other offerings.

A grand opening is slated for 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, April 6.

To book a room at the home, located at 311 S. Second St. in Maquoketa, call or text 319-551-8343 or email artandgiftcenter@hotmail.com. For more information about the Shahrivars' art, visit e-artpro.com.

TELEGRAPH HERALD

801 Bluff St.
P.O. Box 688
Dubuque IA 52004-0688
TelegraphHerald.com

Subscriber/delivery services: 800-562-1825 or 563-588-5620

Dubuque and tri-state news
563-588-5663 or 563-588-5648
Sports 563-588-5783
Classified advertising
800-562-6014 or 563-588-5600
General information
563-588-5655
Email THonline@thmedia.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Home delivery: \$487 per year.
To subscribe, contact us at 563-588-5620, or for self-service, visit us at telegraphherald.com/subscribe

Telegraph Herald
(USPS537-000 ISSN 1041-293X) is published Tuesday through Sunday by Woodward Communications, Inc.
801 Bluff St., Dubuque, IA
52001-4661

Postmaster: Send address changes to: Telegraph Herald, 801 Bluff St., P.O. Box 688, Dubuque IA 52004-0688. Periodicals postage paid at Dubuque, IA.

Mike Fortman • Publisher,
563-588-5740

Amy Gilligan • Executive Editor,
563-588-3823

Todd Benz • Director of Sales,
563-588-5623

Matt Connolly • Director of Digital
Operations, 563-588-3819