

More postseason awards handed out

Arrows Baseball players recognized SEE SPORTS

Sci-fi rock star

Find out more about Clifford Simack SEE PAGE 7A

Council looks at trends, ideas to help Lancaster grow

Southwest Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, Growing Lancaster make pitches

BY DAVID TIMMERMAN
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If there was one overriding theme to the June Lancaster Common Council meeting Monday night, it would be the future of the community as the alderpersons received presentations from two different organizations on what is in store for the city, and what things should they look at to make it grow.

Troy Maggied, director of Southwest Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission gave a blunt assessment of the trends for Lancaster and the region - population growth in the area is small, and not enough to replace the retiring 'baby-boom' generation, but there is a real opportunity to attract new people to the area.

In the 2010s, Grant County increased in population by 730 people,

to 51,938. At 1.4 percent, this was the biggest county increase in the region, double that of Green County, while Iowa County mostly held steady, and Richland, Crawford, and Lafayette counties all lost population.

For the City of Lancaster, the population increased by 39 people.

Maggied then also showed trends in births and deaths in the county, as well as the 20-year trend that county schools have seen a decline in enrollment by 18 percent from 2000.

"There are not new people to take the spots of retiring people (in the workforce)," Maggied stated. He said that while people may talk about individuals leaving the workforce for a number of reasons, the differences in size of generations is the biggest factor of why employment is so tight in the region.

"We believe this is the real issue," Maggied stated.

The impact of this event is going to be felt for the next decade in southwest Wisconsin, as more and more of the baby boom generation, retire. Maggied pointed to the combination of effects like school districts like Arena consolidating into Spring Green, or Dodgeville closing the Ridgeway school, while business after business has to put out 'help wanted' signs because they are constantly looking for employees.

He added that it is impacting local governments as well. Maggied referenced that Grant County is looking at having to provide at least 2 percent wage increases next budget cycle in order to attract and maintain employees, as it is already dealing with a number of job openings. Maggied

pointed to the fact that under state-imposed levy caps, the county is nowhere near increasing their budgets by that amount, as they are only allowed to increase the levy by the value of new construction, which is far below 2 percent.

Maggied said that there is an opportunity at this time to deal with this, however. "I think we are going to have an influx of people to the Midwest," Maggied told the council. People who wish to be in a rural setting, people who wish not to deal with extreme temperatures or high rents, will be looking at places like rural Wisconsin in the coming years.

That is in addition to those people who grew up in the Midwest, looking to come back.

"I'm interviewing people who want to come back here," Maggied stated.

He proposed three prongs for the region to make itself more enticing to individuals and businesses that wish to move in.

The first prong is to compete for new residents. That means having an identity and making it visible to potential residents, and have programs that offer ways for people to move in. Maggied pointed to Shullsburg, which has spent the past 30 years rebuilding and improving its downtown, and has business and residential programs to bring in both. Sections of their website detail the programs they have going on.

The second is to collaborate with existing partners. Maggied noted that the county, and different communities can work together to bring in business and residents.

Future | SEE 12A



Mt. Hope Dairy Days
It would not be Dairy Month in Grant County without the Dairy Day event in Mt. Hope, which was held Friday evening. Dairy puns and holstein costumes were in abundance, as was candy and smiles. The Merry Mixers 4H Club recognized their 100th anniversary with their float.
Photos by Audrey Posten



School-run daycare has successful first year

Double the projected enrollment, Southwestern follows trend of district childcare programs

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For rural communities across the state of Wisconsin, a lack of spaces in daycare is a pressing issue, with a number of communities simply not having enough daycare options for the demand. For young families looking where to live and where to take their children for school, finding adequate daycare, and being close to where they are, is very important.

In looking for ideas on dealing with this issue, there may be an example close by that offers a solution.

Southwestern District Administrator John Costello has only one real change he could make with the district-operated daycare program that just finished its first school year of operation.

"I wish we would have had it up sooner."

The southern Grant County School District that encompasses Hazel Green, Kieler, Jamestown and the southern portion of the county, began looking at the possibility of operating a daycare four years ago, as the offerings for families did not fill the demand in the community.

"They needed to find daycare in other places outside of the community,"

Costello noted of families.

Not having that connection with those children early on, or families who may need daycare that also have children of school-age, can mean that the school district loses those families through open enrollment.

"We lose those kids over time," Costello stated, adding that those families open enroll their children to a school near where their other children can have daycare, and then establish the children in those districts.

"We lose 1-to-2 kids every year because of this (lack of childcare)," Costello said.

Costello took tours of school districts in northern Wisconsin that have established their own daycare facilities. Cambria-Friesland, Schiocton, Antigo are some of small rural districts running daycare programs.

"You are seeing it more and more," Costello said of the trend of districts running their own daycare programs.

Originally, Southwestern was going to have the daycare program up and running for the 2020-2021 school year, but like a number of plans, COVID forced a delay.

The district got things running last August, with an expectation that they

would have 50 children enrolled in the first year. Within the first few weeks, they had 85 enrolled, and currently there are 110 children enrolled, with a waitlist.

The district was able to scale up to four rooms for the daycare, along with giving time to share activity room space with the school operations. Because of limitations on how many children can be in a physical room, compared to the size of the converted classrooms, Costello added that they are currently working on splitting a room so they can accommodate more kids.

"I would love to meet the needs of daycare," Costello said.

Space is the number one issue for the daycare program, as they had been able to attract staff to fill the need. Costello stated that the daycare staff are treated like support staff for the school district, and thus receive salary, benefits, and paid time off in their positions.

The daycare currently employs 10 people.

Many daycare facilities in rural areas do not have the budgets to offer benefits, and with increased demand for workers, have a tough time to compete with rising wages in other sectors.

Costello gave credit to the Little

Wildcat Daycare Director, Racheal Ramaker, who has worked in daycare in the past in Potosi, and noted that in their studying of daycares, it is important to have a strong lead, especially at the beginning.

That leadership meant that they could deal with some early turnover of staff, find part-time people in the community, as well as utilize high school students who have taken childcare classes. "That gives them flexibility," Costello said of staffing.

Operating a daycare was not as a big a leap for Southwestern, as they already established communities programs outside the traditional school setting. Four years ago they established a Community Center, which includes a wellness center and is staffed.

"I believe the school district is the identity of the community," Costello said of creating programs outside the school setting. "The community and school together creates success for the students."

Costello added that the community has been very supportive of the programs they have added.

While the district had to use their general fund to pay for the \$120,000 to

renovate the rooms, they had another place to go to potentially help cover costs of the program - Fund 80.

Fund 80 is a funding source school districts can utilize to help cover any number of programs that are deemed for the community good. Falling outside the state-imposed revenue caps, it is an outside levy that can cover anything from senior education programs, summer recreation, and also childcare programs.

Southwestern began using Fund 80 for its community center four years ago.

It is that community center that is at least 90 percent of the district's \$60,000 Fund 80 levy, as the daycare program is practically self sufficient, but Costello noted how important it was to have that funding available if needed when starting the program.

Another portion of the district's Fund 80-funded programs are joint middle school athletic programs it shares with parochial schools within the district.

The daycare program has practically broken even for the first year, not only covering the salaries of the 10 staff, but also paying the district \$36,000 a year in rent for the space it uses.

Southwestern | SEE 2A

