

Family gives to clinic project

In the name of their parents, Carl children give to Fennimore project

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City, daycare announce expansion in Lancaster

\$2M project will eventually lead to former ShopKo building to host 200 in three years

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"We need more childcare everywhere."

Renee Troester, owner of Snug As A Bug Child Care in Cuba City knows that the demand for childcare in rural Wisconsin is huge. Someone who has been in the industry for more than two decades, her current business isn't even taking names for the waitlist anymore because, between the existing families she serves expected to add at least 14 new children to their ranks in the coming year, and the children already on the waitlist, by the time there is an opening those children

will probably be already school-age. "I know that our area is in a daycare crisis," Troester said. That is why, when a parent she knows from the Lancaster area came to her and asked her if there was any way to get something going in this city, Troester began exploring, and working with the City of Lancaster is announcing this week her plans to refurbish the former ShopKo Hometown building into a new childcare location. On the heels of last week's announcement that the city's second largest daycare facility - Giggles and Wiggles - will be closing at the end of this month, news that there will

be another operation coming to the area is welcome news to parents of young children. And they will not have to wait long for the new operation either. Expected to open in very early 2024, it will start out with 75 slots for children, and within three years hopes to expand to 200. Things are aligned for that timeline - Troester has already lined up a loan that will utilize the federal Small Business Administration program, has plans for the building already created, and contractors lined up for the construction work on the building. Troester said that her current

operation runs from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. with before-school and after-school, as well as all-day care. She noted that they are exploring possibly opening a little earlier in Lancaster due to the number of families working at factories. **City involvement** When that parent approached Troester about wanting her to look at Lancaster, she put her in touch with Lancaster Mayor Stuart Harper and City Administrator David Carlson about ways to work with the city to make the project happen. "Child Care is as fundamental to economic development as business

growth and housing," said Mayor Harper in the announcement of the project. "We are very excited that Snug as a Bug Child Care is making the commitment to growing Lancaster." Knowing that childcare has been in a precarious spot for the past few years - not enough slots in existing facilities, while those facilities deal with a climate where it is difficult to find staff or, in the case of Maple Street Kids, are in the midst of trying to find a new building since the Lancaster Community School District is looking to vacate the 1925 school they are currently in - the city has been looking at ways to retain existing facilities, while expanding how they could in order to fill the estimated need of 150-200 more slots. Troester met with officials and told them she would need to work with them in order to make this happen. "They have been really helpful," Troester said. Part of that help will come later this month, as the Lancaster Common Council will review, and look to approve a grant application to the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) for at least \$200,000 to help fund the \$2 million daycare project. City Administrator David Carlson said things came together Monday when the city could sit down with representatives of WEDC (which is an independent authority which had been the Wisconsin Department of Commerce) to finalize seven months of work in figuring out how to get support for the project. Carlson said in meeting with WEDC, the idea is the project would fit into either the community development investment program, or the vacant sites program. "They feel pretty comfortable its going to fit into one of those," Carlson said of the response they received on the idea of the application. The City of Lancaster would act as a passthrough, much like it does for the Arrow Ridge Apartment project, and thus the council needs to approve the application before it is submitted to WEDC. The grant is part of what Carlson hopes can be up to \$500,000 of assistance in the \$2 million project. The city is also exploring funding programs through Southwest Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, as well as utilizing the fact that the former ShopKo Hometown building is currently in a city tax-incremental finance district. The city has utilized TIF districts in the past, paying back property tax funds in the Sunrise Valley redevelopment, as well as in the hotel project. Carlson noted that there has not been a request for TIF funding yet.

Ruberg pleads not guilty to vehicular homicide

A 33-year-old Cassville woman pleaded not guilty to a vehicular homicide charge in Grant County Circuit Court. Erin Ruberg pleaded not guilty to homicide by intoxicated use of a motor vehicle and a citation for failure to yield the right of way from a stop sign resulting in death. Ruberg is charged in connection with the death of Gerald Dukett, 52, Cassville, in a crash on Wisconsin 81 at Settlement Road in the Town of Cassville June 8. According to the Grant County Sheriff's Office, Dukett was driving east on 81 around 1 p.m. as Ruberg's vehicle came to a rolling stop at Settlement Road and Grant County Y and then went south on Y. Ruberg's vehicle pulled out in front of Dukett's vehicle, and Dukett's vehicle struck Ruberg's vehicle on the passenger side, with both vehicles ending up in the ditch in the southeast corner of the intersection. Dukett was ejected from his vehicle, the Sheriff's Office said. Ruberg suffered minor injuries, and was arrested after field sobriety tests, the Sheriff's Office said. Cassville Police, Fire and EMS, the Grant County Highway Department, and the Wisconsin State Patrol Technical Reconstruction Unit assisted the Sheriff's Office. Wisconsin 81 was closed for about five hours. Further court hearings will be conducted by a new judge, Iowa County Circuit Judge Matthew Allen, who is being substituted for Grant County Circuit Judge Craig Day after Ruberg filed for a substitution of judge, according to court records.



BITTERSWEET MOMENT FOR NEW JUDGE

Riniker reflects on mother during swearing-in

Tuesday morning, there were tears of joy, and tears of reflection in the Grant County Courthouse second floor courtroom, as the previous and new tenants of the space stood behind the bench. Aug. 1 was the start of the new term for newly-elected Judge Lisa Riniker, who won the April election to succeed Judge Robert VanDeHey for the bench. Riniker raised her hand to be sworn-in by Judge Craig Day, who will be moving up to the third floor courtroom, while Riniker will be moving from her first

floor District Attorney Office into the second floor courtroom. After she took the oath of office, and her husband, Josh Kiley, helped her slip on her robe for the first official time, Riniker could only think of one person, her mother Carol, who had passed away weeks after she won April's election for the post. "My mother meant the world to me, and not

Riniker | SEE 3A

Motorcycle strikes deer

Tracy Wagner, age 64 of Boscobel, and his passenger Kathleen Wagner, 58, also of Boscobel were riding a 2018 red Harley Davidson westbound on Hwy 133 outside Muscoda and had been thrown from the motorcycle after striking a deer. Tracy Wagner had severe injuries and was taken by Med Flight to UW Madison Hospital and Kathleen Wagner was transported to Gunderson Boscobel by Muscoda EMS for treatment of her injuries. The Grant County Sheriff's Office was assisted at the scene by the Muscoda Police Department, Muscoda Fire, Muscoda EMS, and Med Flight. The motorcycle was removed from the scene by Wegner's Towing.

The only location "This is never would have happened without the ShopKo facility," Carlson said, noting that there was not any other building that offered flexibility for this to happen, and new construction would have meant a smaller operation. It also allows for the timeline to allow the daycare to open early in 2024. Troester said she looked at a number of buildings in the community, and the former department store was the only one that allowed her to get to this size. "There were not any buildings I could grow into," Renee said. That was a big sell, as the business in Cuba City had to move several times in

New daycare | SEE 4A



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New daycare

FROM PAGE 1A

order to expand. A purchase agreement has been signed and accepted for the building, with some details being worked out on what will happen with the unused space in the building. Troester said that she is working with the city, the seller, and others about opportunities that could be in the unused space in the building.

Troester's history in childcare

Smack dab in the middle of a family with 15 children, Troester joked that she grew up taking care of kids, and it showed her a career path growing up.

"This is what you are going to do," Renee said.

She started a licensed daycare in her own home, which she ran for a decade before converting a home into a dedicated daycare in 2011.

That first facility housed 25 children, and since then, Troester has expanded and moved to different buildings twice more, first to 37 children, and now her current operation is licensed for 62.

With before school and after school care, as well as all-day children that only come certain days of the week, the families of 75 children are currently attending the Cuba City location.

With the Lancaster location, the plans are to only utilize 51 percent of the building for childcare, which means if there were any need to expand further, she would not have to try and relocate.

"We will have huge opportunities," Troester noted.

The current operation works closely with Head Start, and has spots designated for some of their children in the facility.

Troester noted that unlike most childcare operations, she has been fortunate to have ample staffing in Cuba City, utilizing students from UWP during the summer, as an example.

"We are one of the few that don't" Renee said of staffing shortages that have

affected a number of daycares. She said they have been able to get staff due to having a good reputation in the community.

Troester has a director she has worked with for five years who will move to operate the Lancaster facility when it opens, and will have an assistant director to oversee the staff.

Troester noted that things will be a little tighter as funding from the state for childcare operations begins to go away.

During the pandemic, the Federal Government gave states funding to assist childcare operations, with Wisconsin getting approximately \$400 million, which went into programs like Dream Up and Partner Up, as well as Childcare Counts.

"During the pandemic childcare was finally recognized as an essential business," Troester noted.

That funding is going away, with the State Legislature only placing \$90 million in the new budget.

Troester said she utilized the funding options for her Cuba City location, but has already planned about the phase out of the funds.

Where do other projects stand?

The city had been working on multiple fronts in order to find ways to expand daycare operations in the community, as well as retain existing ones.

One of the other outside firms that had been looking, recently expanded into Dodgeville, and is likely to not enter into another capital project at this time.

Maple Street Kids continues to explore different spaces in order to vacate their current location within the 1925 school building sometime after the summer of 2024.

Unfortunately, they would not be able to apply for a grant through WEDC like Snug As A Bug because that program is only available to for-profit businesses, and Maple Street Kids is a not-for-profit.



Lancaster Lions give \$5k to Lancaster Community Schools

The Lancaster Lions Club recently donated \$5000 to the Lancaster Community Schools toward the purchase of new ovens in the high school kitchen. With this donation the Lions wish to show their appreciation and thanks for the use of the school's facilities for their pasty sales which are the club's major fundraiser. Pictured is Laurie Simmons, Director of Food Service for the Lancaster Community School District, accepting the check from Lancaster Lions Club Pasty Committee Members Lee and Ruth Rupnow.

Governor barnstorms state spotlighting need of childcare funds

If there is one thing on Gov. Tony Evers itinerary this week, it is to spotlight the need for the state to continue to support childcare.

The governor spent Tuesday and Wednesday touring child care and early education centers in Bruce, Menomonie and Weston to continue urging the Wisconsin State Legislature to invest in affordable, accessible child care.

Evers highlighted the assistance programs have had in allowing childcare facilities to expand over the past two years. Milestones Early Educational Community has received \$745,756 in Child Care Counts funding, and as of June 2023, the program

had 105 kids enrolled in care. The Woodson YMCA Aspirus Child Care Center has received \$921,789 in Child Care Counts funding, and as of June 2023, the program had 166 kids enrolled in care. Carlton Childcare has received \$77,131 in Child Care Counts funding and as of June 2023, the program had 24 kids enrolled in care.

Gov. Evers has made it a priority to address Wisconsin's workforce challenges, including by investing in efforts that support affordable, accessible child care, like the Child Care Counts Program. In his 2023-25 biennial budget proposal, Gov. Evers proposed making the Child Care Counts Program

permanent with a more than \$340 million investment to continue supporting Wisconsin's early care and education community, as well as the working families who depend on this care to get to work and put food on their tables. Unfortunately, despite the state's historic surplus, Republicans in the Legislature decided against putting any funding toward Child Care Counts, meaning the program is set to end in January 2024. According to a report from The Century Foundation, without these funds, 2,110 child care programs are projected to close, resulting in over 87,000 children without child care in Wisconsin and the loss of over 4,880 child care jobs. Additionally, the lack of access to child care could impact Wisconsin's economy by half a billion dollars in lost revenue.

Through action he took on the biennial budget last

month, Gov. Evers ensured ample state resources are readily available to help stabilize the state's child care industry and address the state's longstanding workforce challenges.

In his veto message, Gov. Evers indicated he is giving the Legislature a second chance to come back and complete their work on the biennial budget with a meaningful plan to bolster the state's workforce, including making the substantial investments necessary to stabilize the state's child care industry and ensure child care is affordable and accessible to keep parents in the workforce. With historically low unemployment and historically high workforce participation, the Legislature failing to address the state's impending child care crisis could seriously exacerbate the state's existing workforce challenges.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The River Ridge School District will strive to provide a safe, challenging environment for each individual student by promoting excellent staff development, encouraging meaningful parent involvement, and earning strong community support through honesty, integrity, and open communication.

MEET OUR SCHOOL BOARD:

- | | |
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| ADAM GUTHRIE , Clerk | MEGAN KUSSMAUL |
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WHAT'S HAPPENING?

- Online Registrations August 7th - 11th via JMC Family Portal (**computers only • no cell or tablet**) Pay for fees online! If you need help with registration, contact the office to set up an appointment.
- Open House – August 30th from 3:30pm – 6:30pm. School fees will not be collected at this time.
- First Day of School – September 1st
- School Picture Days – September 12th & 13th

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This Fall **Back To School** Will Also Mean **Back to Student Meal Rates** for Nutritious School Meals.

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| Increased school funding for education | Discounted fees associated with college applications |
| Increased grant funding opportunities | Increased technology and network funding |
| Reduced or free nutritious meals | Discounted fees for SAT, ACT and AP testing |

SUBSTITUTES NEEDED

We are seeking licensed substitute teachers and substitute support staff, including aides, cooks, secretarial, and custodial staff. Applications are available at rrsd.k12.wi.us or at the District Office

RIVER RIDGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
11165 County Hwy P | Patch Grove, WI 53817
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SUMMER OFFICE HOURS:
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