



# Tuscola Review

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## Spring musical

The TCHS Drama Club will present Descendants the Musical March 17, 18 and 19 at 7 p.m. and March 20 at 2 p.m. Tickets go on sale March 3.

## White coat ceremony

Lakeview College of Nursing recently held a White Coat Ceremony to recognize students who achieved the transition into clinical practice within their bachelor's degree nursing program. Sophia James of Tuscola was one of the students who was honored by receiving a white coat. James attends Lakeview's Danville Campus. About 20 Lakeview students participated in the event that was recently held at the I Hotel and Conference Center in Champaign.

The College's faculty, who were also wearing white coats, cloaked the students with their new garments. The white color of the coat represents compassionate caring, and the student's receipt of the jacket demonstrates a commitment to this compassionate and humanistic care, according to Carolyn Rauch, an assistant professor at Lakeview College of Nursing.

## Blood drive

Villa Grove High School will host a blood drive from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday, March 11 at 400 N. Sycamore, inside the donor bus. To donate, contact Marci Howard at (217) 832-2261 or visit [www.bloodcenter.org](http://www.bloodcenter.org) and use code 70131 to locate the drive. You may also call ImpactLife to schedule at 800-747-5401. Masks and appointments are required.

## Library activities

StoryTime every Tuesday 10 a.m. on Facebook

Every Saturday is Tech Drop-In from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. Come get help with your devices.

March 2, 6:30 p.m., GoodNight StoryTime  
 March 7, 5 p.m., Crafter's Corner  
 March 8, 4 p.m., Lego Club  
 March 9, 4 p.m., Youth Bingo and 6:00 pm film discussion—The Master  
 March 17, 6 p.m., Cooking with Marla on facebook

March 21, 5 p.m., Crafter's Corner  
 March 29, 4 p.m., Chess Club  
 March 30, 6 p.m., Book Discussion-Satire



KYARA MAULDING, center, pets a goat during FFA Week at Tuscola High School. Against the railing from left are Beckett Peters, Abigail Dyer, Maulding, Ava Hays and Ben Ingram. Photo by Jennie Porter.

## School renovations to begin

Representatives of Omni Energy Partners were on hand at Monday's Tuscola School Board meeting to update the group about renovations being prepared for the three schools. They introduced Joe Sutherland, a Tuscola graduate, as the newest member of their team.

Sutherland said work may begin as early as March 24 preparing rooms for upgrades. He said work-

ers would be taking out ceilings in the East Prairie lecture room, library and STEAM room to speed up work this summer.

The Board and Omni also briefly discussed adding solar panels. The current proposal could save the district \$840,000 over the next 20 years in energy costs.

Board member Darold Spillman noted that the proposal only covers

about half of the district's electric cost and that there was room for more panels on the roofs. Scott Graves of Omni said they can look at that but there's a point when there's a diminishing return on the investment partly because solar would produce the most energy during the summer when school is not in session.

During principal reports, Steve

Fiscus, high school principal, said there are 30 students involved with the spring musical, which will have performances March 17-20. Reserved seating will be available through the GoFan app, but tickets can also be purchased at the door while seats are available.

He also said a career day was **See SCHOOL BOARD on page 6**

## Water line project well under estimate

City Administrator Drew Hoel said her was "very pleased" with the bidding for a new water line to Cabot Corp. The estimate for the line was \$1.5 million including engineering. The bid for construction only came in at \$821,000.

Hoel said market conditions had improved in the city's favor leading to the low bid. The project was necessitated by LyondellBasell's plan to shut down its water plant. Cabot will thus need additional water

from the Joint Water Agency co-owned by Tuscola and Arcola. The Arcola City Council approved the bid last Tuesday as did the Tuscola Council in a special meeting.

The county has pledged \$1 million from its federal COVID relief funds as the project will benefit the western half of the county. Without the new line, Tuscola and Arcola could experience poor water pressure and have difficulty filling their water towers. The line supple-

ments an old 8-inch water line that has diminished capacity over the past 50-some years. Construction is expected to begin as soon as weather permits.

On Monday, the Tuscola Council approved the promotion of Taylor White to Patrol Officer I at a wage of \$22.42 per hour. White has completed his probationary period and police academy training. Part-time park wages were increased to \$12 per hour.

The Council also voted to cede its private activity bonding authority, about \$480,000, to the Eastern Illinois Economic Development Authority, which it does annually. As a home-rule community, the city can bond that amount for a commercial or industrial project, but Hoel explained that most projects need much more than what the city can provide for tax-exempt financing, so it is bundled with allocations from other communities.

## Drew Hoel on public bidding and 25 years of service to Tuscola

By Mike Carroll

Tuscola City officials were pleasantly surprised with the recent bid opening for a new 12-inch water main connecting Arcola-Tuscola Joint Water Agency partners. The engineer's pre-bid estimate for construction of the water main was \$1.3 million in November of last year, increasing to \$1.5 million in December, as costs were skyrocketing. Plus, at the pre-bid conference, there were concerns from many bidders about water pipe availability, due to supply shortages.

The job was submitted for open and competitive bids in January of this year and bids were opened last week. Seven bids were tendered, ranging from a high bid of \$1.34 million to a low bid of \$821,000.

Drew Hoel, Tuscola city administrator, said that this positive bid experience was yet another pleasant surprise about the power of open, competitive bidding. "Sometimes

### FIRST PERSON

the bids come in higher than you think or want, but often they come in lower, like here. And they always represent the market price at the given time."

"Here we had seven bidders wanting the work and that really drove the price down. By aggressive advertising and bidding, we saved the taxpayer more than \$400,000. And that's always a good day at the office when that happens."

When asked if he publicly bid all city works, he replied that, except for legitimate exceptions, such as emergencies, he did engage in public bidding. "Public bidding is required by law because it ensures low price and transparency, and it avoids collusion and corruption."

"But" I asked, "doesn't that create low quality risks?" Drew responded that "You attempt to mitigate the risks of hiring the

lowest bidder who is perhaps someone you don't know and who has a motive to deliver you low quality. You do that by defining the bare minimum adequately. In our latest water main bid, for example, we submitted a 288-page project manual to bidders complete with general and special conditions, blueprints and a materials list, all prepared by our engineer. Secondly, we had a pre-bid conference to ensure the bidders had no problems with the bid package. Third, we required a high bonding capacity with a significant experience/recommendations profile with each bid. This largely weeds out marginal contractors.

"Finally, you have to inspect the construction as it occurs. This further insures compliance and quality. And, of course, you have 10 years from the date of the written contract to sue for substandard performance. So, in my experience, public bid awards to the

lowest responsive and responsible bidder should not pose a quality risk versus other procurement techniques."

"What's the problem with the no-bid techniques?" I asked. Drew said "This quality risk can be even greater when you take quality on faith with an RFP or single source technique where there is no highly detailed bare minimum developed by an architect or engineer. An RFP or single source technique does not guarantee quality above open bidding, and it is open to collusion and corruption, and it almost guarantees that you won't get the best price. So the no-bid techniques present the worst of both worlds."

Drew stressed that "The taxpayer deserves to know how their money is being spent, that it's not being wasted, and that everything is above board. That's why the law requires open public bidding—for the cost of performing the specified



Drew Hoel

After working with Drew on a project, my former partner, Emerson Moore, city attorney for Arcola and other public entities, effusively praised Drew, calling him one of the best city officials he'd ever worked with.

The same compliment was echoed by Tuscola's former bond counsel, the late Kurt Froelich. Froelich worked with cities throughout the state in his busy bond practice. After working with Drew on one particularly difficult project, he opined that Drew was the "best administrator" he'd ever worked with.

Drew's talents include intelligence—he was valedictorian, TCHS class of 87, and an economics grad of the University of Illinois—solid interpersonal and communication skills, impeccable ethics, common sense and a calm, reassuring demeanor. In my experience as city attorney, it was always a joy to work with Drew on a project.

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