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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21, 2023

## Chatter BOX

### Local events

The Pop the Top car show is 10 a.m. till 6 p.m. Saturday in downtown Arcola. The annual fireworks display will be July 2.

### Lake Land honors

Lake Land College announced that more than 700 part-time students earned academic honors for the 2023 Spring semester. The following part-time students from Arcola have achieved President's List academic honors: Kaleb Byard, Reyli Vega, Emma Vazquez, Ella Chupp, Vanessa Condarco, Isabelle Hensley, Melissas Marcas, Braden Shonkwiler, Maria Torres, Makenzie Thomas, Evelyn Garza.

More than 800 full-time students earned academic honors for the 2023 Spring semester. The following full-time students from Arcola have achieved these academic honors: Abby Goad and Kade Herschberger, Presidents List, Justin Hobgood, Honor's List.

### Quilters meet

Quilters are invited to gather Friday afternoons at 1 p.m. in the Arcola Center to share their time and mutual interests with other quilters. For information contact 217-417-1388.

## City approves TIF funds for new business

The former Arcola Record-Herald office will be getting a make over with help from the city's tax increment financing (TIF) fund. The building was purchased by BM Property Management and will be a staffing office for a John Deere facility in Effingham, according to Bill Wagoner, city administrator.

BM Property will receive a 50 percent reimbursement for storefront renovations up to \$20,000 and a 20 percent rebate on remodeling up to \$25,000. The City Council approved the amounts Monday following approval from the TIF committee last week.

The Council also approved a zoning change request from Juan Garza, who is converting a garage on the Egyptian Trail to a multifamily residence. The planning commission recommended the change from commercial to residential.

In other business, the Council

- approved a bid of \$116,653 from Earl Walker Company for seal coat maintenance;
- approved an ordinance for a variance (set-back requirement) for an addition at 429 W. Jefferson, which was previously OK'd by the Council;

- gave approval for road closures for the Broom Corn Festival parade in September; and
- approved a final pay request of \$8,051.56 to B&T Drainage for the Joint Water Agency water main construction project last year. The amount, also approved by the City of Tuscola, which owns the agency with Arcola, was for soil remediation, decompaction, clean-up, etc.

Also Monday, the Council heard an update on various engineering projects. Included on the list are several grant-based projects. The city applied for a state grant for a \$1.3 million sanitary sewer improvement project and is expected to hear the results of that in July or August. Previously, the city received a \$1.9 million grant to construct nearly 22,000 feet of sewer lines with associated manholes, pavement replacement, etc., as well as a \$1.1 million downtown improvement grant. That grant will go toward disability compliance, curbs and gutters, utilities, etc. The city is also finalizing grant requirements for the Libman Street improvement project, which has received \$1.5 million in various state grants with \$115,880 committed from city funds.

Wagoner reminded the Council that the Pop the Top car show is this Saturday in Arcola, and fireworks will be July 2.

Council members Scott Hensley and Matt Henson were absent from the 7-minute meeting.

# Gentry retires as principal

Angie Gentry tried with limited success last Wednesday to not get emotional as she bade farewell to Arcola Grade School principal. Board President Lucas Shonkwiler thanked her for her 32 years with the district and said, "Your legacy will live on for many years to come."

Other administrators also made comments thanking Gentry for her mentorship and congratulating her on her retirement. During a brief intermission, those in attendance were served cake in her honor.

It was Gentry's final Board meeting as principal and said she was keeping her remarks brief to avoid getting emotional. She is succeeded by Megan Clark, who has been serving as assistant principal in anticipation of Gentry's retirement.

Jr./Sr. High Principal Nick Lindsey said Gentry was a big help to him when he was thrust into his job due to the illness and subsequent death of long-time Principal Lisa Sigris.

Later in the meeting, there was brief discussion regarding the restructuring of classes to cut down on the number of valedictorians. The district has considered giving less weight to the arts, but following feedback, is considering how to make some of the classes honors-level, which could include requirements to participate in various programs or contests.

Lindsey said parents have expressed concerns that the proposed changes could discourage some students from participating in art, music and agriculture classes.

Shonkwiler suggested approving the changes and then taking another look at them next year since they will not go into effect for next year's seniors, anyway. The Board concurred.

Last week's meeting began with an amended budget hearing. Superintendent Dr. Tom Mulligan said the district spent about



RETIRING ARCOLA Grade School Principal Angie Gentry poses with a cake made for her at last weeks School Board meeting. Photo by David Porter.

\$200,000 on technology that he thought would be spent next year, so the budget was amended accordingly. He said he wanted to make sure the district doesn't "end up with an audit finding" from the budget change. The amended budget was approved during the regular portion of the meeting.

Following routine bill payment, the Board approved spending a minimum of \$30,000 next year with Presence Learning, which provides psychology services to the district. Mulligan said he'd like to be able to hire a school psychologist, but they are hard to find.

**IN OTHER BUSINESS,** the Board

- renewed its worker's compensation insurance at a cost of \$37,006;

- approved its catastrophic injury insurance for high school athletes;

- approved several annual agreements including an intergovernmental agreement that allows the district to bill for Medicaid services; Mulligan said the school is reimbursed for some of the services it provides;

- approved a memorandum of understanding with several organizations for a new birth-to-age-3 program if the project is funded. Mulligan said the application deadline was extended, which he said he wasn't happy about since

the Arcola district worked hard to meet the original deadline and an extension could mean more competition for the limited funding. The new program would provide services for children younger than preschool and could be housed away from the district campus. Mulligan has said that such services are much needed in Arcola and would benefit the district;

- gave approval for the disposal, donation or sale of surplus property including old jerseys, instructional materials and dividers that were used during the pandemic; old state banners, which are being replaced, were removed from the list until the Board decides whether to keep them;

- signed off on a content filtering and threat detection service (Go Guardian) at a cost of \$12,200. Mulligan said the service will monitor online activities of students and will alert the administration when there is a violation of school policy on school computers even if the violation occurs at home. Violations could include visiting inappropriate websites or sending inappropriate content from one device to another. Mulligan said he thinks the new service will be "really robust."

During administrative reports, there was an emphasis on improved attendance records and successes in removing students from the chronic truancy list. Mulligan said the regional office of education has commented on how Arcola has made improvements in this area. Gentry said, "A lot of people are doing things behind the scenes" to cut down on truancy.

It was discussed that one of the approaches has been "changing the language" to make the remediation seem less like a punishment.

Following a closed session, the Board appointed Jill Raymond color guard/flag sponsor and hired Kourtney Wilham as a preschool teacher. A leave of absence was approved for Christa McCrate.

## The Arcola Special Olympics team went to Bloomington/Normal and competed at the State Summer Games June 9-11.



Joseline Gauna received a gold in her bocce singles on Friday, June 9 in the State Summer Games for Special Olympics held in Bloomington/Normal June 9-11. She also participated in the opening ceremonies by reciting the athlete oath and declaring the games open. Joseline also participated in the Athlete Leadership interviews in Olympic Town on Saturday. (Joseline is on the right in the group photo). Submitted photos.



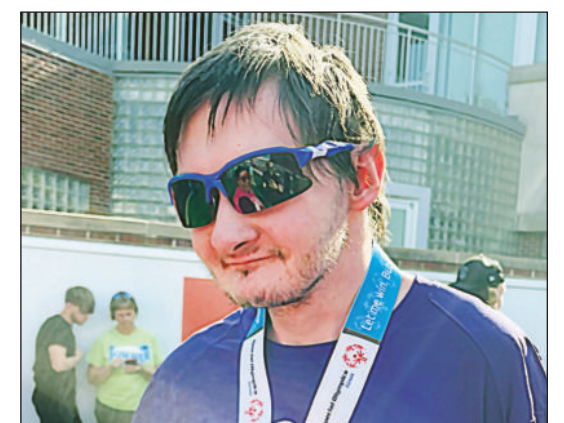
AMY IRWIN received a bronze medal in her soccer skills event on Saturday, June 10 in the State Summer Games for Special Olympics held in Bloomington/Normal June 9-11. Submitted photo.



ERIC PLUMMER received a silver medal in his softball throw on Saturday, June 10 in the State Summer Games for Special Olympics held in Bloomington/Normal June 9-11. Submitted photo.



Cameron Edwards received a 4th place ribbon in his 100 M run on Saturday, June 10 in the State Summer Games for Special Olympics held in Bloomington/Normal June 9-11. Submitted photo.



Steven Lamkin received a fifth place in his mini javelin event on Saturday, June 10 in the State Summer Games for Special Olympics held in Bloomington/Normal June 9-11. Submitted photo.