

LIVING & LEARNING

Visions 2013



Joliet Junior College Innovation from the Ground Up

Serving Students

- Students on Campus:** 32,069 students enrolled in credit or non-credit courses in 2012, an increase of almost 26 percent since 2008.
- Scholarships:** Through the generous support of the JJC Foundation, students receive more than \$750,000 in scholarships annually.
- Global Perspectives:** JJC offers a study abroad program, welcoming students to Austria, Costa Rica, England, France, Ireland, Japan, Jordan and Spain. International students are also welcome at JJC, bringing a larger worldview to all students.

State-of-the-Art Facilities

- Health Professions:** New Health Professions Center opened in Spring 2013. The 124,000-square-foot Center includes authentic environments to simulate spaces for practical training in nursing, emergency medical, fire science and more. The Center is registered LEED Gold.
- City Center:** broke ground on the City Center campus in downtown Joliet in early 2013. Will serve as the new home of our Culinary Arts program, Workforce Development, GED/ESL, and adult education.

Natural Sciences Expansion: Opened in Fall 2012. A 37,000-square-foot addition accompanies a 23,000 square-foot renovation to expand labs and classrooms. Registered LEED Silver.

Fine Arts: Renovation nearly tripled the space provided for fine arts. New areas include an Art Gallery, Black Box Theater and a recording studio with digital capabilities. JJC's music program received a Steinway grand piano, purchased entirely through a fundraising campaign.

Recognition

- Sustainability:** JJC received an Illinois Campus Sustainability Compact award, the top honor for sustainability from the State of Illinois. The college was one of only eight institutions to earn a gold-level award.
- Top 100:** JJC was ranked among the top 100 institutions in the U.S. that granted associate degrees in 2011. Community College Week made the designation in June 2012.
- Distinguished Budget:** The Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada presented a Distinguished Budget Presentation Award to Joliet Junior College for its annual budget for the year beginning July 2011. JJC has received this award for 10 consecutive years.

Community Connection

Giving Back: In May, JJC hosted its 4th Annual 5K to raise funds toward student scholarships, and collected more than \$35,000 for the feed. In April, Joliet Junior College raised more than \$30,000 in its participation in the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life.

Campus Visits: JJC invited the community to campus for several events throughout 2012, including job fairs, family literacy night, annual College Fair and bi-annual Discover JJC events, fine arts performances, the JJC greenhouse, planetarium presentations and many more.

Career Exploration: Career Services continues to assist students and community residents in finding the right career path, preparing for interviews and meeting with prospective employers.



Joliet • Romeoville • Frankfort • Morris • Online



Morris Daily Herald Special Section — Saturday, February 23, 2013



Need a ride? Call GTS

Availability of public transportation a surprise to some, but it's nothing new

STORY BY:
KRIS STADLISKY,
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY:
LISA PESAVANTO,
VISUAL CONTENT COORDINATOR

For many years, many residents of Grundy County had no idea that public transportation was available to them. And while usage of the Grundy Transit System (GTS) increased by 20 percent between 2010 and 2011, there are still a lot of residents who don't know it exists.

The bus system has been in place for over 18 years, said Sherry Zerbian, GTS Director.

"It was very limited in what it provided and underutilized," Zerbian said.

"People didn't know it was here for the most part."

In 2009 the Community Foundation of Grundy County stepped in. Zerbian, who worked for the Community Foundation at the time, took on the task of finding ways of promoting the public transportation program, working with other stakeholders to find ways to increase services and seeking additional funding.

"It all started with the Community Foundation," Zerbian said. "They kept hearing transportation was a huge issue here."

Zerbian took an transportation like her project. In the process of working on other things for the Foundation, the subject of public transportation came up time and time again.

"I went after this like crazy," she said. "I knew the need in the county. The more I worked on it, the more excited I got."

Once additional resources were available and the program took off, the county needed someone to run the system. Zerbian was a good fit since she led the charge bringing it



Several Grundy County residents utilize the Grundy County Transit System for a ride to Joliet Junior College during the week.



into the public eye.

The 20 percent jump in usage occurred when the county expanded bus service hours. When Zerbian joined the team as director, she was able to increase ridership by another 30 percent during her first year.

In the first seven months of this fiscal year, usage has seen another 20 percent increase over the same period last year.

"People are finding out the service is here," she said.

GTS buses run Monday through Friday between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. within Grundy County. They provide what is called demand/response service early to early in and from anywhere in county limits. Fees run from \$5 for a one-way ride to multi-ride passes at \$50 for 20 rides.

GTS also provides regular weekday running service to and from Joliet Junior College, Lewis-Joliet Mall, Joliet Union station, the unemployment office, the Department of Human Services and the Social Security office. An afternoon run was recently added for JJC students on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

See 'GTS' • PAGE BC



Grundy County Transit System bus driver John Vance Jr., right, helps a passenger off the bus at Joliet Junior College.

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Working on the railroad

High-speed rail
is still being
pursued in Illinois

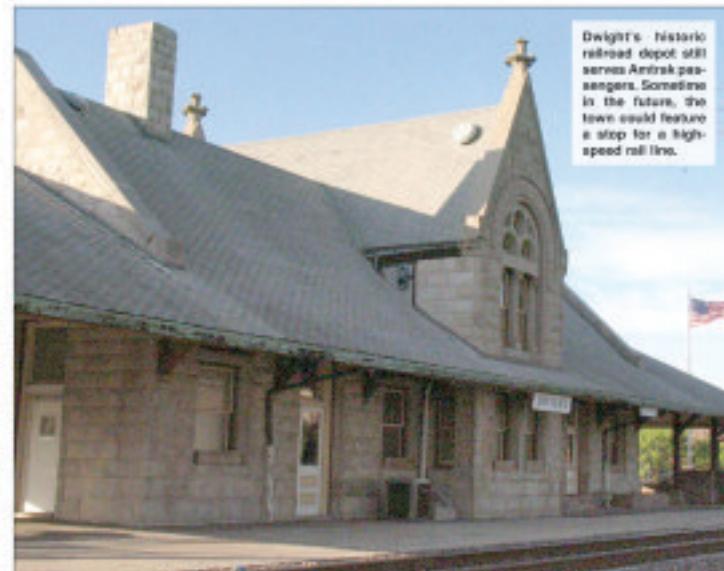
STORY BY:
RYAN WOODEN,
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

PHOTOGRAPHS:
SUBMITTED TO THE HERALD

Traveling south from Dwight on the famed Lincoln Service line that transports people from Chicago to St. Louis and vice versa daily, a train is heading towards Pontiac at unprec-

ulated speeds. The railroad system has seemingly exploded in America with the rise of planes and automobiles, but approaching nearly 100 years later, a mile stretch of track through Livingston County, people are getting a small taste of what America's trains can now again do.

High-speed rail has been a viable form of transit in Asia and Europe for quite some time, but in an effort to rebuild America's own passenger-rail infrastructure, nearly \$8 billion in funds was allocated for high-speed rail projects as part of the 2009 stimulus package. At the



Dwight's historic railroad depot still serves Amtrak passengers. Sometime in the future, the town could feature a stop for a high-speed rail line.

behest of Governor Pat Quinn and several other key figures in the Illinois state legislature, the Land of Lincoln has been one of the most aggressive pursuers of those federal funds.

In 2012, that resulted in the first installment of a high-speed train that hopes to eventually run daily between Chicago and St. Louis. Now, seeing trains blast alongside Historic Route 66 at triple-digit speeds is commonplace.

"I think Illinois is setting an example for the rest of the nation,"

IDOT High-Speed and Passenger Rail Bureau Chief Marian Gutierrez said. "We are the very first state who has a train running at 110 mph using ARRA American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding."

In further discussions with Gutierrez, it became clear that Dwight was going to be a major focal point of development. Apart from being one of the endpoints on the first completed section of the line, Dwight will also get a new train station, and the single-track

segment leading into the village from Joliet will also be upgraded to multiple tracks, allowing more regular train traffic into and out of the city in both directions.

However, the developments don't come without their concerns. Dwight's hopes of eventually becoming a regional transportation hub rely on the line being completed in its entirety and connecting Chicago to St. Louis. As of now, that isn't assured.

"There are two different timelines in place, and the reason for

that is the way the grants were housed in the state of Illinois," Gutierrez said.

"We are scheduled to be done between Dwight and Alton — with the exception of the city of Springfield — by 2015. And then we will run from Joliet to Dwight by 2017."

The currently funded project only covers from Joliet to Alton. So those are the two timelines ... Chicago to Joliet, Alton to St. Louis and Springfield's 16th Street corridor have not been federally funded. They just received the Record of Decision from the Federal Railroad Administration.

That Record of Decision was passed down on Dec. 18, 2012 and gives final federal approval for the previously mentioned stretches of the line; however, that merely positions the state to apply for the federal funding. It's a massive strike in the right direction, but it does not guarantee that the funds will be granted.

That makes village administrator Kevin McNamara a little uneasy, and according him that sentiment is shared by large segments of Dwight's population. However, McNamara admitted that a completed high-speed rail between Chicago and St. Louis was likely, although the rail is still far from universally supported in the village.

"I think the majority of the people I talk to believe it's a government waste," McNamara said.

"But it is likely happening. The Obama administration is very supportive of high-speed rail throughout the United States, and the Quinn administration is very supportive of high-speed rail in Illinois. So, while those two administrations are in office, I think they'll still aggressively pursue high-speed rail."

See Rail • PAGE 2C

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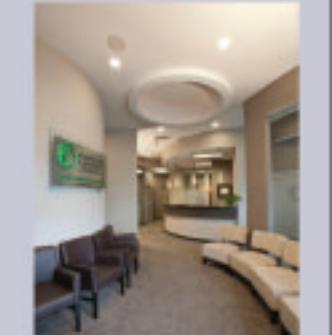
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LIVING & LEARNING

Morris Daily Herald Special Section — Saturday, February 23, 2013

This plow getting stuck in a ditch during the blizzard in 2011 helped lead to the formation of what is now known as the Grundy County Emergency Task Force.



In case of EMERGENCY

Task force in place for more than just blizzards

STORY BY:
JEANNE MILLSAP,
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

PHOTOGRAPH:
FROM HERALD FILES

Grandy County may be in the hole for blizzards the last two years, but in early February 2011, it got socked with such a strong blizzard that even the heavy snowplows couldn't get through. One even ended up in a ditch on Highway 47 near Morris.

That's when the county established the Grundy County Emergency Task Force, then called the Blizzard Task Force, to better prepare emergency crews for just such an event. But it is not just for blizzards. Situations for which the task force would also prepare are floods, tornados and other natural disasters.

"Our first goal was better communication between police and fire and all the townships and municipalities in the county so we could all work together a little better," Morris Fire Chief and task force chairman Tracy Steffes said. "That blizzard was predicted several days in advance, and we had put together an action plan that was successful for us, but there were some problems we had to fix."

Steffes said one of the problems was that there was such a low visibility that even the snow plow drivers couldn't see. He said at one point, he and firefighters would walk in front of their vehicles just to show the drivers where the edge of the road was.

The communication between vehicles was also a problem. In one situation, responders from various governmental

agencies headed for one driver who was stranded and needed rescuing. That was a situation where better communication was needed, Steffes said.

"We had a lot of resources going out to rescue," he explained. "When you have too many, you're putting the rescuers and equipment at jeopardy."

In addition, Steffes said, a situation could be created where responders were too localized, leaving other areas in the county vulnerable.

Two years ago, Grundy County Board President Ron Severson, who was there in the emergency center during the 2011 blizzard, along with Steffes and Grundy County Emergency Management Agency Director Jim Lutz and others, set up the emergency task force.

Lutz said one of the first things the task force investigated was purchase of a kind of a super-truck with all the fixins for weather, such as front-side radar, night vision capabilities, enhanced GPS and a light bar. Chains would be on the tires for better traction. Stranded victims could be rescued and ride to safety in the truck's crew cab.

That ended up not being a feasible option, Lutz said. For one thing, the county is too large for only a single vehicle. It was also difficult to justify an expensive vehicle the county might use once a decade.

"We also weren't as coordinated as we should have been," Lutz said of the blizzard efforts.

So the county purchased refurbished radios for some of the snowplows, fire trucks, ambulances and police cars in each of six county districts, also created by the task force to ensure service to the entire county. With them, drivers can communicate directly with the 9-1-1 dispatcher, with the emergency operations center, and with each other.

"They use them now," Lutz said. "In their day-to-day work."

The task force is now more of an advisory committee, he said, and is examining shortcomings and plans to correct them.

Steffes said the committee is currently considering exploring the option of using John Deere GPS auto-steering capabilities for vehicles. Some farming equipment uses the equipment now, he said. It might be feasible to GPS some of the county roads to be better prepared for a repeat of the blizzard of 2011.

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Board seeks funding increase

State Education Board recommends \$874 million more



SPRINGFIELD — The Illinois State Board of Education recently approved a Fiscal Year 2014 budget rec-

ommendation that includes more than \$674 million, or a 13.4 percent increase, in state funding over the current year in an effort to better support schools and classroom instruction and reverse a trend of cuts that is impacting student learning and the financial health of districts across the state.

The Board's Fiscal Year 2014 budget recommendation would fully fund General State Aid at the 2013 Foundation Level set by the legislature.

"We are basing our recommendation on what is required to fund education as required in state law," said State Board of

Education Chairman Gery J. Chico.

"Current law requires that we allocate funding to schools based on a formula set in statute that requires a \$8,119 per pupil Foundation Level," but the shortage of funds has meant we haven't met that obligation to our schools and more than two million students in these years."

The Board is also calling for \$20 million as districts look to strengthen their existing plans and security measures in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy in Connecticut.

See "Budget" • Page 1C

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Morris Daily Herald Special Section — Saturday, February 23, 2013

A new way to grade the graders

Evaluations of teachers among things changed in local schools

STORY BY:
JESSICA COHEA,
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

PHOTOGRAPH:
BY LISA PESAVento,
FROM HERALD FILES

A school year is never the same from year to year. The 2012-13 year, for kindergarten through 12th grade, at least, has proven that fact nationally, statewide and locally.

Nationally, two major changes in education have been affecting all schools, including those in Grundy County. The biggest change, according to Grundy County Regional Superintendent Paul Nordstrom, is the change in teacher and administrator evaluations.

"They are trying to get a consistency in evaluating teachers," Nordstrom said. "It will give a standard score so anyone who goes in to evaluate the teacher will come up with a similar grade for the teacher."

In the past, the grading system was much more subjective, he said.

This new evaluation system is



known as PERA — the Performance Evaluation Reform Act.

The classroom observation and evaluation portion of the new system is being adapted in part from Charlotte Danielson's "Framework for Professional Practice," according to the Illinois State Board of Education's website, www.ilstate.edu.

"Danielson's system emphasizes research-based practices that promote student learning and explain what teachers should know and do," the website reads. "It also incorporates evidence, such as lesson plans and student work, to support various ratings, and considers cultural and developmental issues that can

affect teaching."

Nordstrom said the object is to create a vehicle that will allow school districts to make job cuts based on skill level and ability rather than seniority.

The other major change happening in K-12 education nationally is the implementation of the Common Core Standards.

Rather than having a statewide set of standards students are tested on via the Illinois Standard Achievement Test and the Prairie State Achievement Examination, students all over the country are now tested on the same set of standards known as the Common Core.

Also within the state of Illinois, students, teachers and parents are filling out a survey known as the Essential Survey.

"It is supposed to guide local and state improvements initiatives," Nordstrom said.

The five essentials being evaluated are: 1. Effective leaders; 2. Collaborative teachers; 3. Involved families; 4. Supportive environments; and 5. Ambitious instruction.

"Research shows that schools strong on the five essentials are ten times more likely to improve student learning than schools weak on the five essentials," according to illinois-essentials.org.

Nordstrom said the survey, once completed, will help schools target resources and make better decisions with more data.

"I can't stress enough the importance of the parents and the family in a child's education," Nordstrom said in regards to survey essential

No. 5. "That's just so important. The family and the parents just have such an influence on a child's life."

When it comes to education in

Grundy County specifically, the biggest recent change Nordstrom notes is the move of Premier Academy from a location on Illinois 47 to U.S. 6 and Ashley Road in early January.

The students at Premier Academy have been attending classes in their new location since they returned from winter break in early January and things seem to be going well, Nordstrom said.

As for the future of K-12 education, changes will always need to be made, Nordstrom and his team and the Regional Office of Education are working on one change specifically that is close to their hearts now.

"Students are required to be in schools between the ages of 7 and 12," Nordstrom explained.

"We are proposing that school attendance be required from the time the child is eligible for kindergarten."

As the requirement stands now, students are eligible for kindergarten if his or her birthday is on or before Sept. 1 of that year.

Currently, students are not required to be in school until age 7, Nordstrom said.

He believes it would help children to be in school longer so he and his team have been talking to state representatives about their ideas.

The family and the parents just have such an influence on a child's life

on a child's life

Paul Nordstrom

Regional Superintendent



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Morris Daily Herald Special Section — Saturday, February 23, 2013

Thinking Ahead

Water supply sufficient 'way beyond 2050,'
but conservation today is still important

STORY BY:
CHRISTINA CHAPMAN-KAN SPERLEN,
STAFF WRITER

PHOTOGRAPH BY:
LESA PESAVento,
VISUAL CONTENT COORDINATOR

Although Grundy County is decades away from serious concern over its drinking water supply, it is never too early to start thinking of conservation.

The "Vital Signs of Grundy County" study was prepared and released by the Community Foundation of Grundy County last fall. It is a "first step" toward collecting and tracking data in Grundy County in 10 topics: economy; employment; housing; health; environment; education and learning; transportation; safety; financial health; and social health.

The document takes a close look at the county's resources to see if Grundy's resources are being used to the best of their ability.

said Julie Buck, executive director of the foundation. It is a tool for leaders and organizations to address the county's current and future needs.

Grundy's water quality and quantity were looked at in the environment category.

"There are three main aquifers the Grundy County communities pull drinking water from," said

Michael Perry, engineer with the Chanda & Associates firm. In Illinois, Grundy handles engineering work throughout Grundy's municipalities.

The three aquifers that Grundy uses are Galena-Platteville, Iaegerston, Galena and St. Peter sandstones, said Perry. All of them are from 700 to 1,800 feet deep.

The Vital Signs document states that according to the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's "Water 2050" report,



Rain barrels collect and store rain water runoff from gutters to be used later for watering gardens, agriculture, drinking and many other applications. The Grundy County Soil and Water Conservation District, located on Route 47 in Morris, has rain barrels available for purchase in several sizes.

the estimated demand from deep wells by 2050 "will give residents in the northern half of Grundy County real reason for concern."

Therefore, action needs to start now for water demand management.

"Currently, there is potential for concern in the long term for these formations if they don't recharge at a rate to keep up with future demand," said Perry. "It is something we have to continue to look at and take action to preserve

unnecessary water withdrawal."

Perry said he believes there won't be a shortage of water in the area until 50 to 100 years from now, but only if nothing changes. This fear has led to a number of conservation practices being required now for new development, such as shower heads that limit the amount of water or toilets that use less water per flush.

There will be more conservation measures, he said, as time goes on to offset the growth demand.

"Ultimately, this region and many other regions will look at water reuse," he said.

In California, Perry said waste discharge water is taken and treated for reuse, such as non-potable use like agricultural or recreational use like watering a golf course. In really dry areas, water is treated and reused for drinking water.

But Illinois is at the base of all the great lakes and has deep wells, said Perry. The thought is if use is monitored and reduced and treated waste water is reused for industrial and agricultural irrigation, there is a chance.

"In my opinion, the combination of these factors takes us way beyond 2050," he said.

Starting the reuse of water locally too early would not be cost effective, though. The cost to treat waste water for reuse is expensive.

But eventually, as the demand for water increases and the availability decreases, the cost of water will go up, and hiring a private company to treat waste water for reuse will be cheaper.

"But I think we are 50 or more years away from that," said Perry.

In the meantime, people can get in the conservation mindset now in their own homes.

Perry said an easy way to go green with water use is to purchase a rain barrel to collect storm water runoff to be reused for watering plants, grass and gardens rather than using city water from a pipe hose.

Municipalities are also being encouraged to require green design techniques for new development such as green storm water techniques so water is reabsorbed into the ground to recharge the aquifers rather than designed to run off into sewers making their way to waterways.

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Morris Daily Herald Special Section — Saturday, February 23, 2013

Budget

Continued from Page B2

The matching grant program would provide approximately \$5,000 per school in a matching grant program for FY14 to help school districts improve school building security.

But, the majority of the Board's increase would go directly to districts through the General State Aid (GSA) formula, which supports general local school district operations. Central to the GSA calculation is the Foundation Level, which is intended to represent the minimum level to adequately fund the education of a single pupil in the Illinois K-12 public school system. That Foundation Level has been set at state at \$6,119 per pupil since 2010.

In the last two years, however, funds appropriated for GSA have fallen short and districts have received full reimbursement. In the current fiscal year, FY13, appropriated funds fell \$118 million short of the amount necessary to fully pay the GSA claim, resulting in payments of just 89 percent

of the amount owed to districts by statutory formula.

"Districts are in dire straits. Right now, 87 percent are in deficit spending," State Board Finance Committee Chairman Jim Baumann said before the board's vote to approve the recommended funding levels.

"Districts have been forced to let go more than 5,400 teachers and aides across the state in the past several years. They've increased class sizes cut music, art, sports and many support services that provide for the robust educational experience that every child deserves."

Thursday's Board recommendation urges the General Assembly to approve an increase of \$745 million for GSA, providing a total of about \$5 billion to fully fund claims at the \$6,119 per pupil Foundation Level.

The Board noted that their recommendation still falls far short of the recent recommendation from the Education Funding Advisory Board, a panel of volunteer experts commissioned by the General Assembly to recommend adequate education funding levels.

The group, using a national funding model, reports that adequate funding would mean an increase of \$8,583 per pupil, raising the Foundation Level from \$6,119 to \$8,022 per pupil, or an additional \$4 billion in total GSA funding above the amount included in Thursday's Board budget recommendation.

"Under the current fiscal crisis, it's not realistic to expect the General Assembly to approve the new EPAB recommendation, but it's important to note that any other GSA appropriation stands in conflict with the minimum recommendation of outside experts as commissioned by the General Assembly itself," said State Superintendent Christopher A. Koch.

"In comparison to what this expert panel says is necessary, we would ask that legislators honor and fully fund the Foundation Level that they adopted in statute so districts can have predictability and receive full payments on their claim amounts."

Districts have received less funding from local tax revenue due to the recession, decline in assessed home values and assessed value

limits imposed by the legislature. Additionally, since Fiscal Year 2006, the state's General Fund allocation for K-12 education has been cut by \$861 million or nearly 12 percent. Seven-year line items have been reduced and 34 line items have been totally eliminated during the past four years.

Meanwhile, districts have been asked to implement new state reforms, such as the more rigorous Common Core standards and new principal and teacher evaluations while also seeing an increase in the population of low-income students now at 48 percent or nearly half - more than 1 million - of all students.

Some of proposed FY 2014 increases or expenses include:

■ \$745 million increase, or a 17 percent increase over last year, for General State Aid (GSA) to fully fund the Foundation Level at \$6,119 per pupil.

■ \$4 million increase for early childhood education, providing a 13.2 percent increase over FY13 levels but still falling short of the FY14 levels. Roughly 10,300 more 3-5 year olds will be served under preschool programs this year.

were served in Fiscal Year 2013.

■ \$11 million increase in the bilingual education line item to help districts meet the needs of the growing bilingual population, about 9 percent of all students, and meet new mandates to provide bilingual preschool programs.

■ \$18.5 million increase for State Assessments, which were cut by nearly 9 percent in FY13. The increase covers the cost of assessments aligned to the more rigorous Common Core Standards being implemented in schools across the state and allows them to prepare for a new assessment system in 2014-15. Additionally, it includes \$2.4 million for a Growth Model, a way to measure each student's progress from one year to the next as opposed to just comparing academic performance by grade levels each year.

■ \$2.9 million increase for School Reform and Accountability Programs, primarily work aimed at improving the state's lowest-performing schools.

■ \$730,000 increase for Teach for America, specifically toward efforts aimed at recruiting and preparing teachers of color.

Rail

Continued from Page B2

McNamara went on to actively wonder whether passenger rail could ever be a viable form of mass transit and if it could ever really deliver on the promised economic growth in and around Dwight. The idea of high-speed rail works well in theory, but the fears seem to stem from whether it's subsidy for subsidy's sake or if it's a real necessity.

As gas prices rise, public transportation becomes a more attractive alternative to driving and flying. Even so, last year 99 percent of the 35 million trips along the Chicago-St. Louis Corridor were by plane or car. If a high-speed rail line can significantly cut into those margins, the benefits to Dwight are obvious even to those opposed to the line.

"We feel we'd be more of a regional transportation hub. We hope that people from Morris or from LaSalle County or Kankakee County would travel to Dwight to catch the train," McNamara said. "Depending on how much time this cuts off between Dwight and Chicago, it could also be more of a commuter stop. You could work in the city and catch the train from Dwight, as it has some positive economic development aspects to it."

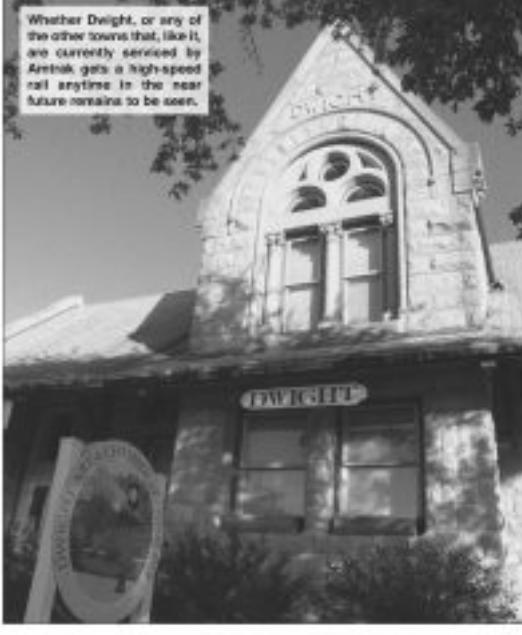
However, that remains a big if.

The construction of the line will create an estimated 6,280 direct and indirect jobs, and it will be a major upgrade over the current rail system. It also could potentially serve as a national blueprint for other future federally funded lines. However, at an estimated cost of \$5 billion upon its completion, it could serve as a potentially disastrous blueprint, as well.

Granted, that depends on how you define success.

"I think we're already giving the car a run for its money," Gatterman said. "As far as airplanes go, unless we develop a train that runs superfast, I'm not going to be able to compete. However, we're not as inimical as airports are for people. So, that is an asset."

"What everyone tends to forget is that rail is the third form of transportation in this country. You have highways and you have airports. We all pay



Whether Dwight, or any of the other towns that, like it, are currently serviced by Amtrak, gets a high-speed rail anytime in the near future remains to be seen.

taxes to subsidize highways, airports and rail... so this is a third form of transportation that people do use."

From 2000 to 2010 — before 110 high-speed trains in Illinois — Gatterman claimed that ridership doubled along the Chicago-St. Louis Corridor from simply adding a stop on the line. Ultimately, rising oil prices are driving people back towards the railways, and a high-speed line will only serve to entice potential travelers.

Current plans estimate that the faster trains will shave an hour off the trip from Joliet to Alton upon completion in 2013, while the Chicago to St. Louis ride could take less than four hours total. That could revolutionize travel.

between the two major cities and could eventually lead to high-speed lines connecting other major metropolitan areas across the country.

In Dwight, that means there could be a lot more 110 mph trains whizzing through town and into their brand new station. Unfortunately for the Illinois Department of Transportation, the residents of Dwight are a little more concerned with economic impact than speed, and while the new trains will deliver faster commute times, the influx of revenue local businesses are hoping for is yet to be seen. It may take a while, too.

There is currently no timetable for the completion of the high-speed rail.

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Maybe (Grundy seniors) take the bus to the (Community Nutrition Network) lunch and they realize they can use it for other reasons. It opens up their world.

Sheray Zerbian

Director, Grundy Transit Systems

GTS

Continued from Page 20

The department has three buses with 14-seat capacities and one light duty bus that seats 12. Thanks to additional federal grants Zerbian has applied for, another bus is coming yet this year, and four more should be available within two years.

Rate reservations should be made at least one business day in advance to ensure seat availability.

Regular riders can schedule up to 30 days in advance, Zerbian said.

Since the entire program relies on local, state and federal funding, Zerbian applies for funding whenever she sees an opportunity. By the time the money is typically received, the program has grown and more resources are needed.

GTS will likely always be some type of a demand/response rural system. It takes a larger population like that of Joliet to have city-wide buses that service more areas more often.

But Zerbian is always seeking ways to expand the system for the county. GTS has the capability to work with other local non-profit organizations and social service agencies to provide transportation for their clients.

One such collaboration is with Community Nutrition Network (CNN), providing senior citizens with bus rides to a local restaurant once a week for a low-cost meal.

"Maybe they take the bus to the CNN lunch and they realize they can use it for other reasons," said Zerbian. "It opens up their world."

GTS also works with We Care of Grundy County, providing rides for residents who don't have transportation to mobile food pantries. GTS provides the service and We Care pays the bus fee.

One project Zerbian would like to see come to fruition is a way for people to get from downtown Illinois up to Chicago by taking rural buses from county to county. Grundy would be the last leg of the journey because the buses provide service to the



A man is dropped off at Grainger Distribution Facility in Illinois by the Grundy County Transit System bus.

Joliet train station.

GTS buses are all wheelchair accessible and drivers are trained to assist riders with walkers, canes or other mobility issues, but public transportation is available to whoever needs it.

"It's for everyone in the county," Zerbian said. "Just like the buses in Chicago — we

just do it differently."

A good public transportation system is vital to a county's workforce and economic development.

Residents who previously didn't have transportation to and from a job can now rely on a bus. Those same people are no longer dependent on other county services,

but are paying taxes and spending money at local businesses.

"Development of this service means companies will have a bigger workforce when they are hiring and more people can get to them to buy products and services because there's a bus that can get them there," Zerbian said.

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LIVING & LEARNING

Morris Daily Herald Special Section — Saturday, February 23, 2013 —



BY THE NUMBERS

Reported events down, citations up in country, data says

PAGE 2D



FIRE SAFE?

Local firefighters aided by technological improvements

PAGE 4D

PRESCHOOL PAYS

Affordable, quality child care leads to more successful students



Children in one of the preschool rooms at Step By Step Child Care in Morris dance to some music before lunchtime.

STORY BY:
JEANNE MILLISAP,
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY:
LISA PESAVATO,
VISUAL CONTENT COORDINATOR

their lives." Kim Tessier, Director of Step By Step Child Care Center in Morris, agrees that a good, quality preschool helps children immensely.

"It's very important for children to go to preschool," Tessier said, "or their first day at kindergarten can be very traumatizing. We work on all the things that will make them successful going into kindergarten."

Recently, though, there has been less help getting children from lower-income families into preschool, and not more, Tessier said, and those are the kids who will benefit most from early education.

A state subsidy program will pay a portion of day care for children who come from lower-income homes, she said, depending on their parents' income.

"Quite a few centers in the area accept it," she said of the subsidies, which are paid directly to the day care centers, "but a few have limited the number they accept."

See 'Preschool' • PAGE 6D

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Morris Daily Herald Special Section — Saturday, February 23, 2013

Will we have a dry gardening season?

U of I Extension educator says lack of snow could pose future problems



URBANA — Gardeners were really glad to see the cooler weather and some rainfall at the end of the 2012 gardening season.

The question is whether 2013 will be any better, said a University of Illinois Extension horticulture educator.

"For a lot of areas in Illinois, the usual fall rain did not materialize, and through mid-January snow has been scarce," said Richard Hentschel.

In a more normal year, plants start the season by using the soil moisture available from the melted snow and spring rains. After those plants will rely on the soil moisture further down in the soil profile. This is why, after a landscape plant is established, gardeners tend not to worry about watering.

"As we approach spring, not only is the deep soil moisture lacking, but any upper soil profile moisture available will be quickly used unless there is adequate rainfall," he explained.

If this weather pattern continues, it will mean another gardening season requiring lots of water and close attention to the condition of all landscape plants."

Hentschel said that gardeners can do some things in the yard that benefit the landscape over. If snow and rain from late winter through spring is not adequate.

"If you have a compost bin or pile, adding organic matter does more than just feeding your plants," he said.

Garden soil that contains 3 percent organic matter will provide one gallon of available water per cubic foot.

Soil that contains 5 percent organic matter will provide one gallon of available water."

Compost can be incorporated easily into a bed of flowers or vegetables either in the fall or early spring before planting.

In perennial beds, it is best to add compost between plants and let it decompose, working itself into the soil profile.

On more permanent landscape plantings, the compost can be applied as if it were a mulch layer, much like using bark mulch. Like the bark mulches, the compost will break down and

find its way into the soil profile.

The third advantage that compost provides is the beneficial change in soil structure. This change allows root systems to grow deeper into the soil, finding more soil moisture as they do.

"When you combine the availability of nutrients, the water-holding capacity of organic matter, and the change in soil structure, it is easy to see how this will help plants, drought or not," Hentschel said.

Plant selection will also be an important part of reducing a planting or bed that lost plants due to the drought, disease, or insects.

"There is a location that has historically been dry in your landscape, plants that have a strong drought tolerance will perform much better than a high-water-use plant," Hentschel said.

"Dry sites typically have a western or southern exposure or are those parts of the yard that are on a slope or in soils having a high percentage of sand. Sand is just a very small rock that does not have any nutrient or water-holding capacity and promotes very rapid drainage after a rain."

Many local native plants have root systems that can take advantage of soil moisture several feet into the soil profile. Lawn grasses have roots that go down to 16 inches in good soil; native grasses will have roots 6 feet or more into the soil.

"How we water will likely be different in 2013," Hentschel said.

Watering restrictions are almost certain and are, for many gardeners, something that has been in place already for a number of years. By respecting those restrictions, a ban on watering altogether can be avoided or at least postponed.

Water properly so as not to waste water, and place it to the best advantage of the plants. Watering at the base of a plant or using a drip hose rather than using a sprinkler prevents water loss into the air or off-target areas.

Allowing the water time to soak in deeply will encourage plants to send roots deeper into the soil, making them more drought-tolerant.

This may mean watering once, letting it soak in, and coming back a second time to thoroughly moisture the soil.

If watering is restricted to every other day, it is not necessary to water on the appointed day if the soil is moist enough, he added. Frequent shallow watering will not promote a good root system for the plants.

"Always water deeply when you do water and then wait until the soil begins to dry out before watering again," Hentschel said.

"Do not use the plants as an indicator and wait until you see them wilting."



Grundy County Sheriff Kevin Callahan says his department has done "a pretty good job" of keeping county roads safe.

Sheriff proves Vital

Study shows events reported down but citations up in county

STORY BY:
RYAN WOODEN,
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY:
LISA PESAVento,
DIGITAL CONTENT COORDINATOR

published a section of crime statistics in Vital Signs that hoped to offer some perspective on law enforcement in the area.

Of course, incorporated areas of the county have their own police departments that contribute to overall safety of the area, but the one constant is the Grundy County Sheriff's Department. The department patrols all the unincorporated areas of the counties, as well as municipalities that have signed contracts for its service.

The predominant role of the sheriff's department is to patrol county roadways. All totaled, four shifts of 16 patrol deputies and four patrol sergeants are assigned to the streets every single day.

"Our major goal is to keep the roadways safe, and I think we've done a pretty good job," Grundy County Sheriff Kevin Callahan said. "We don't have a specific quota, per se, but in a 12-hour shift, it's pretty normal to wind up doing a stop every hour. That doesn't mean writing a ticket every hour, just a stop with the red lights popped."

"I think we've earned a bit of a rep-

tation as a county where you can't get pulled over for speeding, and that sounds bad, but if that means people are slowing down and we're making the roads safer, we're doing our job."

The Vital Signs study showed that the number of events reported to the Grundy County Sheriff's Department is down dramatically over the last several years — from 94,861 in 2008 to 37,907 in 2011. That gives the impression that traffic stops are down, but citations and summonses issued climbed from 1,682 to 2,883 in that same time period.

However, that may have been because of a new dispatch system and a new records system that were implemented in 2008 and changed the way the numbers were reported.

"Previously, we would do individual business checks, and those numbers were being included individually with our reported instances," Callahan mentioned. "Now they're not."

In reality, Callahan stated that the number of actual responses (as opposed to reported instances) was 25,111 in 2008 and 21,867 in 2011.

See 'Sheriff' • PAGE 52

In September of 2011, the Community Foundation of Grundy County published a report called "Vital Signs" that aimed to aggregate a collection of loose data from individual entities designed to give people a better understanding of the general dynamics of living in the area. One of the critical factors in any community is safety, and CGFC

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Grundy Workforce Services works with job seekers in the county on everything from resume writing to interview skills.



Utilities for the Unemployed

Workforce Services helps county residents get hired

STORY BY:
JESSICA COHEN,
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

PHOTOGRAPHS:
SUBMITTED TO THE HERALD

Grundy Workforce Services is a center in Morris where people can visit for assistance with resume writing, interview skills and anything else that may help them advance in their careers or find a new career.

This time of year, during the winter months, GWS tends to see certain types of employees needing help.



A large number of the people seeking career assistance this time of year are those in the trades, said Melissa Plich, workforce development coordinator.

"This is the off season. So they may be laid off," Plich said.

"That's a big influx that we get every year in the county because we're so trades-connected."

General office employees, manufacturing employees and people in the healthcare industry often seek assistance from GWS, as well, due to the large number of positions in those fields in Grundy County.

"Those are the key sectors that have the majority of opportunity in our area," Plich said.

Beyond aiding job seekers with resume writing and interview skills, GWS also provides an online job board and a resource room for job searching.

See "Workforce" • PAGE 50



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STORY BY:
JEANNE MILLISAP,
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

PHOTOGRAPHS:
BY LISA PESAVento,
FROM HERALD FILES



Brooke Sorenson, from Duggan's Family Martial Arts in Minooka, helps bring in boxes of donations to We Care of Grundy County's office in Morris.

We Care can give some produce to its clients, as well.

The number of households served annually through We Care has risen from 1,289 in 2002 to 6,115 in 2012. Gaska believes much of the recent jump was due to the recession and people losing their jobs or becoming unemployed, but it's difficult to estimate how much of the increase in services was due to the economy and how much was due to We Care just having more to offer.

Around 2008, the numbers jumped about 90 percent, she said, from what it had been seeing.

"But we had more to give and better access at the same time," she said, "after we moved into our new building."

In 2007, unemployment in Grundy County was 5.7 percent. In 2008, that number jumped to 7.3 percent. It grew to 12.1 percent in 2009 and has remained steady at 12.4 percent in 2010 and 2012 percent in 2011.

We Care continues to see a big need.

"For every family that leaves because they found a job," Sandgren said, "there's another family who comes in."

See "We Care" • PAGE 60



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Morris Daily Herald Special Section — Saturday, February 23, 2013

ISAT performance levels are raised

New standards will align with more rigorous ODEs

New ISAT levels

Living &
Learning
2013

SPRINGFIELD — The Illinois State Board of Education raised the performance levels of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) for elementary and middle school students during a recent Board meeting in Springfield.

The new performance levels will align with the more rigorous Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Math and prepare for the higher expectations of a new assessment system set to debut in 2014-15.

The Board today took a significant step in changing how we measure a student's progress," said State Superintendent of Education Christopher A. Koch.

"The lower expectations of the previous performance levels did not support our students' dreams by not adequately measuring their ability to succeed after high school. The new, higher expectations will provide more accurate information about a child's development and allow us to provide the appropriate supports and interventions earlier in a student's academic career to ensure he or she is on track to enter college or career-training programs."

The ISATs, used as part of the state and federal accountability system, assess students in math, reading and science each spring but have not proven to be a strong indicator of college and career readiness. Educators have observed a disconnect between the higher scores of the ISAT results, at 82 percent of students meeting or exceeding standards statewide last year, and the lower scores of the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) given to all 11th graders, at 61 percent statewide last year.

By raising the cut scores,

the performance outcomes will better align with the more rigorous and robust standards of the Common Core being implemented in schools across the state and provide more accurate information about students' progress toward success after high school graduation.

The higher expectations of the new ISAT cut scores will cause a downward shift in the number of students who meet or exceed standards.

According to the 2012 ISAT results, 29 percent of all grade 3 through 8 students scored proficient in reading and 26 percent of students scored proficient in mathematics. When using the new performance levels to analyze the ISAT data collected in spring 2013, the percentage of students who meet and exceed standards drops to 66 percent for both reading and mathematics. This drop is a result of raising expectations, not a reflection of student or teacher performance.

The ISAT data collected this spring will be analyzed for school and district accountability determinations using the new levels.

Performance expectations for the science assessments will remain the same until new science standards are finalized later in 2013.

The performance levels of the PSAE, which includes the ACT, also will not change as that test already provides a good indicator of college and career readiness.

The new cut scores lay the groundwork for the state to replace the ISAT in Math and English Language Arts with assessments developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, a consortium of 23 states, including Illinois. The PARCC exam set to debut in the 2014-15 school year and aligned to the Common Core will include a computer-based assessment that will yield more timely results and will be given more than once during the school year.

The effort to raise performance expectations is part of an educational reform agenda across the United States. New York, Michigan, Tennessee, Massachusetts and Kansas have recently changed their performance levels.



Dave Tafta, a firefighter and EMT basic, and Kyle Symons, a firefighter and paramedic, perform equipment checks onboard an ambulance in the bay of the Minooka Fire Protection District.

How safe is your community?

Local firefighters have improved training, technology

STORY BY:
KRIS STADALSKY,
HERALD CORRESPONDENT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY:
USA PESAVento,
VISUAL CONTENT COORDINATOR

to get away from bigger cities and for a feeling of safety. Grundy County, with its top-notch school systems, open spaces and close-by amenities, is home to over 80,000 people.

The county encompasses only 420 square miles, which is small by comparison to other counties. But it's one of the state's most important commercial and agricultural counties according to the Grundy County website, because of the waterways, farmland, railway and industry.

Grundy County has been named the sixth-best county in America to live by Progressive Farmer Magazine.

But large amounts of open space between towns, 45 miles of waterways

and large industry can add an element of difficulty when it comes to responding to emergencies. That's also why emergency responders from various communities and agencies work so closely together.

Codes and standards for fire safety are much higher these days, technology has greatly improved and training is for EMTs and firefighters is high quality in the Grundy County area.

"All these things make us better," Yancey said.

Technology has literally lightened the load of a firefighter's gear, making it lighter to carry which in turn causes less fatigue and offers more mobility.

See Safety • PAGE 50

People move to rural areas in part

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LIVING & LEARNING

Morris Daily Herald Special Section — Saturday, February 23, 2013

Safety

Continued from Page A3

There are also online training programs available to firefighters, so coursework can be completed or a course taken during downtime at the department or at home.

Minooka firefighters, as well as other area fire protection districts like Channahon and Morris, got their training right in Coal City at the Chief Shabbona Fire Training Facility, which opened in 1989. Prior to that, local firefighters had to travel to Champaign.

The Shabbona facility has a 60-foot semi trailer set up to mimic the circumstances that could be encountered in a residential fire. It's a maze of rooms and obstacles that firefighters have to negotiate in the smoke-filled dark wearing their gear.

Shabbona has trained around 300 firefighters at the facility so far, said retired Coal City Fire Chief Hollinger, who was one of the pioneers to bring the training facility to Coal City.

"These are things that offer as close to real life experiences as possible while being safe," Yancey said.

Neighboring fire protection districts offer their facilities to one another for various types of training, said Hollinger. Each department has its own type of programs for training such as hose handling and ladder usage.

Local industry also works closely with fire protection districts and other emergency agencies. Exelon shares its private training facility on Pine Bluff Road, said Hollinger.

"They have a state-of-the-art facility they allow us to use," Hollinger said.

Livestock-Based and Axis Sober Liquid Products also work with emergency personnel to ensure safety at their plants and in the community, said Yancey.

Minooka Fire trucks the pants regularly so they get to know the lay of the land, so to speak. Lyndon has its own internal fire brigade, but outside departments are ready if they need assistance.

"We know what their capabilities are, they know what ours are," said Yancey.

All of these facilities combined are what makes area firefighters better at their jobs, said Yancey.

"We work well together to prepare for when those things happen as they do, so it's not the first time we're together during an emergency," Yancey said. "We understand what their processes are by getting them off the facilities."

Another component to keeping communities safe is the alliance between a department's EMTs and paramedics with the local Emergency Management Systems (EMS). Morris Hospital joined the region as an EMS in 2011.

Morris Hospital's EMS is the hub of a network of fire departments, ambulance services, industrial responders, training centers and hospitals.

If a paramedic is on an emergency call and needs further assistance, EMS Medical Director Dr. Sean Achison is just a phone call away to assist.

Minooka Fire has the capability to transmit medi-



Lieutenant Arnold Noland, of the Minooka Fire Protection District, makes sure his gear is in the ready position while doing a rig check.

cal information to the hospital about a patient as they can prepare equipment and update medical personnel while the ambulance is en route. It's one area where technology has greatly improved patient care.

Achison also goes into fire departments and performs training with the paramedics and EMTs.

"Dr. Achison is very interactive with our people," said Yancey. "He is happy to work with us and talk to our people. That helps."

Equally important for community safety is the fire protection district's Fire and Life Safety Education Coordinator Cindy Wilson. Minooka shares Wilson with the Channahon Fire Protection District.

Wilson's goal is to educate the public in as many areas of safety as possible. She goes into the schools and teaches fire safety to kids using programs like the exit drill contests that children take home and work on with their families.

Yancey loves hearing parents tell him a child cause house reuniting the family it's time to change smoke detector batteries, he said.

"It makes you happy, it means our program is getting out there," Yancey said.

Wilson also organizes community training opportunities such as CPR education, car seat checks, babysitting safety classes and fire extinguisher classes.

"All those things make our community safer," said Yancey. "That's a huge component. We want to get that information out there before something happens, and if it does, people know how to react."

Sheriff

Continued from Page A3

It is a drop, but far from the precipitous drop indicated in the Vital Signs' safety section.

However, Callahan was quick to point out that the improved reporting system is allowing the departments to more efficiently direct its officers to target areas of concern. As for the increase in citations issued, that can most likely be attributed to personnel changes.

"I would say our take on preventive law enforcement and more aggressive patrols has obviously helped," Callahan said. "More aggressive traffic guys obviously write more tickets, and that obviously is a disincentive for people to slow down."

Despite the discrepancy in the numbers, Vital Signs did show precipitous drops in the number of violent offenses and the number of domestic offenses over the course of the last decade. But the number of property offenses has risen dramatically over the decade.

In addition, the number of child abuse reports (per DCFS) has been steadily rising and topped the State of Illinois in each of the last five years. Overall, 322 children were involved in 388 reported instances of abuse in 2012.

In a society where abuse rates are consistent across the board, the number of reported instances may actually indicate some level of success within the system.

"Education is the main thing in combatting child abuse, but from our standpoint, we aren't in the position to provide that," Callahan said. "We have to see those numbers up, but I don't know what more we can do to prevent these issues."

"However, once an issue has been reported, that's when we're able to hopefully prevent it from happening again. In that regard, as much as we hate to see those numbers up, it may indicate

we're all doing a better job or erring on the side of caution when we see signs that indicate abuse. That's not something that we can take credit for by ourselves. Obviously, teachers and doctors and child service agents play a major part in reporting those instances, too."

For Callahan, the last few months have been a difficult transition period following the tragic death of Terry Martorano in December. Callahan has been tasked with trying to continue some of the successful policies established by his former friend and predecessor, while also trying to implement ideas of his own.

"Unless we see a specific increase or trend, we are going to continue to not reinvent the wheel. We'll continue to do the things we have been doing," Callahan said. "We asked the county board to add some staff just so that we can have more visibility during our patrols in the daytime. A lot of our property crimes and residential burglaries have happened in the daytime, and we've always thought that by adding extra officers during the day that we can increase our patrols in the rural areas where we do experience quite a few daytime burglaries."

At the end of the day, Morris' crime index rating (per City-Data.com) continues to be much lower than the national average (307.7 for Morris vs. the U.S. average of 319.1). Those numbers are similarly low in all of Grundy County's communities.

The Vital Signs report paints a similar picture while highlighting a few areas of concern. The report also includes sections on the economy, employment, housing, health, environment, education and learning, transportation, and financial health and social health.

The Community Foundation of Grundy County plans on updating and revising the report regularly — most likely every two years.

Workforce

Continued from Page A3

Businesses are welcome to post online to the GSW Job Board free of charge. Pitch said.

The board can be viewed by visiting <http://www.jc.edu/continuing-education/grundy-workforce>.

"People come here because they are looking at retraining to go into the workforce in a new occupational area if the industry they have been in is declining or has slow growth," Pitch said.

GWS helps job seekers of every age and skillset market or re-market themselves for either advancement in their careers or a new beginning in another field.

Paid with their routine services at the center at 1718 S. Division St., Morris, GWS hosts job fairs, too.

The organization's next fair will be held at the Quality Inn in Morris on

ALL'S FAIR ►►

■ WHAT: Job fair, hosted by Grundy Workforce Services

■ WHERE: Quality Inn, 1715 N. Division St., Morris

■ WHEN: The next fair will be held on Wednesday, March 13 from 1-4 p.m.

Wednesday, March 13 from 1-4 p.m.

The fair is free of charge, Pitch said.

"We are greatly encouraging that you need to have a resume to enter the fair and we are really stressing appropriate dress in order to help people understand what sort of visual impression they need to make for recruiters that are attending," Pitch said.

She is hoping for 20 employers to attend the job fair.

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Preschool

Continued from Page 1b

Last year, Tessier said her center and others received letters from the state letting them know their reimbursements for the program would be quite delayed. That was a huge problem, she said, as the day care centers have financial obligations to meet. Now, she said, they are a good month behind in reimbursements.

"You have to get used to it," she said. "If it stays consistent, we can deal with it."

Preschool and good day care is important in more ways than just education, too, Tessier said. Screenings can catch any potential delays before they become too serious, whether they are cognitive, motor or language.

"The sooner you do that," she said, "the better. You don't want to set the child up for failure before they're even in kindergarten."

Preschool also helps kids learn social skills and get used to new teachers and establishes a friend base. A good preschool also keeps in touch with kindergarten teachers,

Tessier said. At Step by Step, teachers meet with kindergarten teachers every year to make sure the center is up to speed getting kids prepared for school and also let the school teachers know how many are coming down the line to them.

"It's really tough for many parents out there today,



Preschoolers make a necklace craft out of cereal pieces during class at Step By Step Child Care in Morris Monday morning.

she added, especially with child-care expenses. Some are working minimum wage jobs and find it difficult to make ends meet. Some family members watch their kids when they go to work, while other parents split shifts so one can always be at home when the children are.

Single parents can have it the most difficult, she said, because they have no income with whom to share child care. Some parents will even switch to night shift and have teenagers take care of their children when they're sleeping or working.

"I see all my families every day," Tessier said. "They're tired. Most have full-time

jobs, and their kids are here 9-10 hours a day. Then they pick them up and go home to take care of everything that needs to be done at home, then they go to bed, then they get up and do it all again the next day.... I give them all the credit in the world."

Day care providers also point out the statistic that was used in the presidential address regarding looking at preschool spending as an investment that will pay off, not just for the children, but for all taxpayers. Every dollar invested in high quality early education, they say, will save more than \$7 in the long run by lowering crime, reducing teenage pregnancy and boosting graduation rates.

A good preschool program, statistics show, produces students who grow up and are better able to hold a job and form stable families of their own.



Preschoolers at Step By Step Child Care in Morris enjoyed some dancing in their classroom before lunch time Monday.

Kim Tessier

Director, Step By Step Child Care Center

every day. They've lived most have full-time jobs, and their kids are here 9-10 hours a day.... I give them all the credit in the world.

Kim Tessier

Director, Step By Step Child Care Center

We Care

Continued from Page 30

In addition to needing food, many families need help with rent or utilities.

"I think one of the biggest problems in that area has been cuts in the government funding that we receive for emergency rent assistance," Gaska said. "That's put us walking a real tight rope."

In 2008, 302 households were helped with rent payments. In 2011, that figure was 102.

She added that the agency has been able to cope with the increased need in helping with utility payments due to the dollars the Salvation Army bell-ringing brings in during the holidays.

"It's an all-day hustle," Sandgren said. "We will help if possible if the funds are there."

Another trend We Care is seeing are people coming in who are not unemployed, but are underemployed or making significantly less than they used to.

"People assume most people who come here aren't working," Gaska said, "but 75 percent of the people who come to see us for food are working. They are in jobs that pay less than the jobs they used to have or are working part-time.... People might be getting back to work, but at jobs that might



Brooke Sorenson and Jim Duggan carry in donations to We Care's food pantry.

pay a lot less, not necessarily jobs that can support a family."

"And people are traveling farther and farther all the time just to get a job that pays more than \$8 an hour," Sandgren added.

Gaska said even though economists say things are improving, We Care's clientele are still struggling, and not just with food, rent, and utilities. Many have large medical debts after losing health insurance along with jobs.

While some economic indicators say the job outlook is improving, others paint a less encouraging picture," she said. "Here at We Care, all we know is that we are still experiencing a huge need for our services, especially in the area of food. Many of our clients have had their food stamp allocations cut recently. As a result, they need us now more than ever."



Standard Club 55 Making Good Things Happen

Kim Scuderi, Standard Bank's Club 55 Coordinator invites you to meet new friends and share some fun, laughter and great memories while attending upcoming trips she has planned this year. If you have not participated in the trips before we are confident you'll find our trips pleasurable. Take a sneak peak below on what Kim has scheduled so far for 2013.

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- March 22nd
- April 5th
- May 6th
- June 20th
- The Conkie Barn II Dinner Theater
- Four Winds Casino
- Girls Day Out Mystery Trip
- Draize Lane Theater

Over Night Adventures Include:

- June 6th and 7th - Riverside Dinner Theater

If you're not a Standard Bank Club 55 Member, give Kim a call at 815-230-2104 for complete details on how you too can become a member and begin enjoying all the benefits the club has to offer.

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