



Wilton-Durant Advocate News

Thursday,
August 27, 2015
Wilton, Iowa
Vol. 121, No. 35
28 pages — \$1.00

Bennett Community School goes solar

By Sarah Tisinger
of the Advocate News

Students will return to Bennett Community School with new energy this fall – solar powered energy. Principal Dave Larson said the school began seriously considering green energy alternatives last fall in order to sustainably reduce utility costs.

“We looked at solar and wind energy, and had about five vendors come in and talk to us. By spring of this year, we decided to go with solar and began taking bids,” said Larson.

Roof installation of the solar panels began this spring by Eagle Point Solar out of Dubuque. The panels, including extra needed electrical work, cost roughly \$363,000 from the school’s general fund. The panels require minimal maintenance and come with a 20-year warranty.

The panels also lack the moving parts and ground coverage that solar power would require.

Larson said last year the school spent more than \$20,000 on electrical costs and more than \$30,000 on heating. In an effort to reduce fuel costs, the school has also installed heat pumps in all classrooms and several other rooms to transfer the means of heating from the boiler – which uses fossil fuel – to electric.

Checking in on real-time productivity from the solar panels is just a mouse click away for the school. Each day, Larson can see how much Co2 emissions were eliminated through the use of their solar panels and which panels aren’t functioning to the best of their ability.

The school board will reevaluate total energy usage after the winter to see how many more panels will need to be added in order for all electricity to be supported by solar power. Since the energy is harvested from the sun, Larson said it’s possible the school could save that \$50,000 in cost per year after the phase two installations.

“You’re looking at a pretty good chunk of money in savings for a district of our size,” said Larson, stressing that the school has already

Bennett welcomes the following new teachers:

Karen Mackey, Preschool;
Stacey Hennings, Sixth grade;
Cindy Bergthold, Art;
Laura Garrels, Para educator

implemented other strategies to become more eco-friendly and save on budget.

“We continue to see less and less state support in revenue. This year, the governor vetoed one-time funding that a bipartisan committee put together. For us, that was \$21,000 that we would have received. For a school our size, that’s big money,” said Larson.

The school has transitioned to liquefied petroleum buses to save on fossil fuel costs, combined the fourth and fifth grade classes, and added 10 minutes to each class day in order to cut two days from the school year.

Larson said in the four years he has served as the principal of Bennett Community School, he has seen great support from the board when it comes to maintaining the building, cutting costs and ensuring the school continues to stay viable. The school employs 31 certified and support staff members and enrolls an average of 95 students pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. Students in grades 7-12 attend Tipton or Durant schools as part of whole-grade sharing agreements.

“Bennett is a small community. Churches use our facility, the fireman do a dinner each year. Schools can be the hub of community activity at times. Still having an elementary school here is, I think, vital to community involvement and view of the town,” said Larson, who urges parents to become an advocate for their children’s schools, which can be a phone call or email to their state representatives.

“There’s comfort for parents in our rural areas and city here that their small children stay close and get a good education here in Bennett,” said Larson.



Bennett Community School installed solar panels last spring to reduce costs of electricity and fossil fuels. Principal Dave Larson said the school spent between \$50,000 and \$60,000 last year on electricity, heating and cooling — an expense that could be eliminated due to the new solar energy. The solar panels (shown above) are located on the roof of the school building.

Contributed photo

Water leak springs more issues

By Sarah Tisinger
of the Advocate News

More members of the public attended the city of Durant’s council meeting Aug. 24, many of which were with the Durant Cemetery Association. It has been determined that a water line from the city main to the cemetery has begun a leak under Third Street.

The line has been shut off to avoid further leakage, but the Durant Cemetery Association and the city of Durant would like to find a way to offer water at the cemetery that is fair to both parties. Carol Schlueter of the Association said the water is mostly used by the cemetery groundskeepers to water new sod or seed, but has also been available for visitors to water plants and flowers or wash away dirt from a headstone.

Looking into the water leak has sprung forth more issues.

During the investigation, City Clerk Deana Cavin confirmed with Scott and Muscatine County Auditors that the cemetery is not within Durant city limits. The water line is unmetered and the Durant Cemetery Association has never paid for water or sewer use. While the council has offered to fill a water tank from a hydrant, Schlueter and another Cemetery Association

member, Harold Petersen, agreed that they would prefer a permanent source of water for convenience for both groundskeepers and visitors.

The discussion led to questioning over who is financially responsible for a solution. In order to find and fix the water line, a portion of Third Street would need digging up – an extensive and costly venture that is not guaranteed to find the leak. A second option would be to add a meter and line from the city, which would allow a water source that is charged through the city of Durant and also alert everyone quicker if another leak should occur.

However, the council does not feel that the city should pay the cost of repairing the water line or adding a meter.

As the cemetery does not receive any income from county taxes, it has been assumed that the \$3,000 paid annually by the city of Durant to the Durant Cemetery Association is the result of an old agreement to allow city of Durant residents to be buried there. According to Muscatine County Auditor Leslie Soule, the city is not obligated to make this payment, as the cemetery charges privately for burials.

The council advised the Durant Cemetery

DURANT COUNCIL
continued on page 12



Founders Day fun—The Wilton Beaver led the Wilton cheer squad and waved to patrons during the Wilton Founders Day parade Aug. 22. For more Founders Day coverage, turn to pages 14-15, 24-25.

Photo by Sarah Tisinger

INSIDE...
Family News 6, 8
Editorial Page 10
Sports Schedules 14-15
Classified Advertising 26-27
Police Reports 17

SPECIAL SECTIONS...
Hy Vee®

