

Summer  
tour brings  
ballet, science  
activities to  
Malvern

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Iowa DOGE  
floats concept  
of consolidating  
some counties

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Saturday, June 7, 2025

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WABSH OPEN

# UN-FORE-GETTABLE TIME RAISING FUNDS



JOE SHEARER, THE NONPAREIL

From left, Andy Watson, Frank Sleder and Curtis Stender pose for a portrait holding putters on the Wabash Trace Nature Trail near the Council Bluffs trailhead on Saturday, May 31, 2025. The three are part of a local biking team that organizes the annual Wabash Open fundraiser, a team bike ride involving miniature golf holes spread out across the trail. This year's event takes place Saturday, June 14, and all money raised goes back to the trail.

## Wabash Trace hosting anual bike ride, mini golf challenge

JOE SHEARER  
Council Bluffs Nonpareil

An area bicycling team has been putting the “fun” in fundraising for the Wabash Trace Nature Trail since 2022.

The team's fourth annual fundraising event will take place Saturday, June 14, with Wabash Open FORE, a bike ride and miniature golf challenge.

The Wabash Open is a 10 mile ride that starts at the Wabash Trace Nature Trail trailhead in Council Bluffs and ends at Tobey Jack's Mineola Steakhouse.

Inspired by the Barstool Open fundraiser — where teams go bar hopping across various venues outfitted with customized miniature golf holes — the Wabash Open features 18 holes located throughout the trail between Council Bluffs and Mineola. Each hole is sponsored and designed by a local business

or cycling team.

The event is organized by Team Love Taco, a cycling team made of up 14 riders from Council Bluffs, Crescent and Missouri Valley, as well as Nebraska and Minnesota.

Curtis Stender of Council Bluffs is a founding member, as well as vice president of the Southwest Iowa Nature Trails Project board, and he said the Wabash is a place of great admiration for many on the team.

“The Wabash Trace is like home away from home for our team,” Stender said. “We have had so many fun times and stories to share with people.”

That's why they wanted to give back to the trail and everyone who uses it.

“That's why we are so passionate about raising money for this beautiful trail,” he said. “We

Please see **WABASH**, Page A2

POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY

## Rasmussen requests a hearing on termination

ANDREW SMITH  
Council Bluffs Nonpareil

John Rasmussen, who served as Pottawattamie County's engineer for more than 20 years, filed a grievance to the Board of Supervisors Tuesday after his contract was terminated unexpectedly by a 3-2 vote during the board's May 27 meeting.

The grievance has been classified a confidential personnel record by County Attorney Matt Wilber, who confirmed its existence to The Nonpareil on Wednesday. The classification aligns with grievance procedures in the Pottawattamie County Employee Handbook.

A grievance is defined by the handbook as “an employee's expressed dissatisfaction concerning any interpretation or application of an employment-related policy.” A grievance could be filed if an employee believed county policies have been improperly applied or they consider their treatment to be unfair.

“The board has authority in general to terminate engineers, but whether or not the agenda that was posted was sufficient is a matter that's still under

Please see **ENGINEER**, Page A2

## Communities recover after water trouble

TIM ROHWER  
Council Bluffs Nonpareil

Daily life in parts of Pottawattamie County has been getting back to normal this week following a water crisis that altered normal day-to-day activities — some more severely than others.

Advisories to boil water from a local water source have been lifted, along with a burn ban issued from the county's emergency management office. The highly restrictive “Red Level” water limitations have been eased.

“It's a huge relief,” Avoca City Administrator Tyler Trout told The Nonpareil, adding that the city remains under the less restrictive “Yellow Level” water limitations. “Businesses were hit hard.”

The crisis began in mid-May when high water demand coupled with recent drought conditions

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### Weather

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# Avoca plans event to help small businesses recover

SCOTT STEWART  
Council Bluffs Nonpareil

Area residents are invited to “Pour into Avoca” to support businesses there that lost customers in recent weeks as the region navigated its way through a water crisis.

The special event is planned Friday, June 13, and is organized by Pottawattamie County, the City of Avoca, Avoca Main Street, and the Western Iowa Development Association, according to a news release.

The aim of the event organizers

is to bring in visitors to shop, sip and support Avoca’s restaurants, boutiques, salons and other businesses.

Water shortages followed by boil orders and restrictions have significantly impacted small businesses, organizers said in the release. With the orders now eased, and with a new connection to Council Bluffs water system anticipated to be completed by midweek, those businesses could use an infusion of customers.

“A variety of businesses in our downtown district were affected

to different degrees during the recent boil order, from restaurants, bakery, coffee shop and taverns to salons and personal care providers,” said Amber Mohr, executive director at Avoca Main Street Inc. “Throughout the disruption, our local businesses worked tirelessly to continue offering as many services as possible. Now, they’re ready and excited to fully welcome customers during the upcoming Pour into Avoca event.”

Sales have been down 75% for the past three weeks, Andrea

Radd, owner of Raddberry’s Bakery and Cafe in Avoca, said in the release.

“With the added expenses from bringing in the amount of water needed to keep our doors open during that time, it put us even further in the negative,” Radd said. “Being a new business, the impact this is tremendously hard, and it will take months to recover. It will take the support of our surrounding community members to bring us back to where we were before this all started.”

Avoca City Administrator Tyler

Trout said people have asked how they can help.

“One of the best ways to do that is by supporting the places and people that shape our town,” Trout said in the release. “Whether you dine out, shop local, or enjoy a night on Main Street, your presence makes a difference. Pour into Avoca is a celebration of community, resilience and recovery.”

RSVP and find more information on businesses in Avoca by following the Facebook event at [tinyurl.com/pourintoavoca](https://tinyurl.com/pourintoavoca).

## Engineer

From A1

dispute,” Wilber told The Nonpareil. “Whether or not John’s contract was violated is still a matter that’s under dispute.”

Rasmussen was hired as the Pottawattamie County engineer in August 2004, with contract renewals every year. The engineer plans, organizes, directs and coordinates the administration, maintenance, design and construction of roads, bridges, culverts and special projects for the Secondary Roads department,



Wichman

according to the county’s job description. Iowa code requires the role. Rasmussen’s employment contract, along with nine others for department heads, was up for renewal at the May 27 meeting; This item was labeled in the agenda as “discussion and/or decision to approve and authorize chairperson to sign employment agreements.”

All other contracts were approved with 3.25% raises. Rasmus-

sen’s contract, along with one for Veterans Services Office Administrator Peggy Becker, were singled out by Supervisor Tim Wichman, who was supported by Supervisors Scott Belt and Jeff Jorgensen.

Becker’s contract had been discussed to include a higher raise at one point before the meeting, but the supervisors ultimately unanimously approved Becker’s contract with the same 3.25% raise of the others.

The supervisors then moved on to consider Rasmussen’s contract, their last decision of the day.

“Scott, I would make a motion to terminate the contract of the engineer effective June 30 and put him on administrative leave until June 30 and post the position,” Wichman said at the meeting, addressing the board chairman.

Jorgensen seconded Wichman’s motion.

“I don’t think that’s a great idea at all,” Supervisor Susan Miller said. “I think our engineer has done an extraordinary job of managing the roads and the budgets and the employees.

Miller said there had not been documentation or discussion of any instances that would warrant termination, and she expressed her support of Rasmussen. Shea

agreed with Miller.

“I think he deserves better than that,” Shea said.

When Wilber mentioned that a critique of Rasmussen’s performance or qualifications would allow him to request a closed session, Wichman said he did not want to offer a performance evaluation.

“I just believe we need this county to move in another direction,” Wichman said.

Belt, Jorgensen and Wichman voted “aye” to terminate Rasmussen, with Miller and Shea voting “nay.”

Termination while under contract, as outlined in a copy of Rasmussen’s 2024 contract, must be for cause, such as for violating provisions in the employee handbook. Wichman’s proposed termination date of June 30, slightly more than a month away at the time, is the end date of Rasmussen’s existing contract.

In an interview with The Nonpareil, Jorgensen said he was not surprised, like some supervisors, by Wichman’s motion to terminate the engineer.

“It came to my attention that we just needed to get a fresh look at how the county roads department was being managed,” Jorgensen said. “Tim approached me...and I knew we had issues.”

Miller and Shea declined to

comment to The Nonpareil, and supervisors Belt and Wichman did not respond to requests.

However, Shea did express confusion regarding the board’s direction during Tuesday’s supervisors meeting in the wake of Rasmussen’s termination.

“I, for one, would like to know as a board member what new direction we’re taking. It’s not informed, it’s not discussed, and I don’t know where we’re at,” Shea said. “I’d sure like to be included as a member of this board.”

A listing for the county engineer job was first posted May 28 — one day after the termination decision — on the Pottawattamie County website, as well as on other hiring sites.

Brandon Burmeister, former assistant engineer, was appointed interim engineer during Tuesday’s meeting, responding “reluctantly, yeah” to Wichman, who asked if he was fine accepting the post. Burmeister was unanimously appointed by the board.

“I’d like to thank Brandon for stepping up to do this for us,” Miller said.

Harrison County was recently without an engineer after Steven Struble retired in late February. A 90-day agreement between the Pottawattamie County Supervi-

sors and Harrison County Supervisors allowed Rasmussen to share his services. At the time, Rasmussen said it had been difficult filling the role, though Harrison County now has a working engineer as of Monday.

Brian Moore, executive director of the Iowa County Engineers Association, said that the difficulty in hiring engineers often varies. Moore said the association, which represents all 99 county engineers, has not yet acted to remove Rasmussen — who is still under contract with Pottawattamie County — from his role as association vice president.

“We haven’t had a meeting,” Moore said on Tuesday. “There’s no hurry.”

Wilber said the Board of Supervisors will likely set a date for Rasmussen’s appeal hearing during the next supervisors meeting this Tuesday. He said the hearing would be most likely held Tuesday, June 17, and Rasmussen would have the option whether it be open or closed to the public.

If the session were to be open, Wilber said he would “probably hold a different opinion” over releasing the confidential grievance.

The Nonpareil has been unable to reach Rasmussen for comment.

## Water

From A1

resulted in water towers near Avoca losing pressure.

The pressure loss affected more than half of the local system, prompting a system-wide boil advisory from the Regional Water Rural Water Association.

“The amount of water they were able to pump was insufficient,” Trout said. “When the pressure dropped to below 20 psi, it created air bubbles that could attract bacterial. It created a window to enter the system.”

The boil water advisory was issued because of the potential health risk, but the water system has since confirmed the supplies are safe to drink.

That low water pressure also led county emergency management officials to issue a burn ban to reduce the risk of a fire that would

be harder to combat without adequate access to water for firefighting, said Doug Reed, director of the Pottawattamie County Emergency Management Agency.

The burn ban only applied to the Minden, Avoca, and Walnut fire districts.

Avoca’s boil advisory was lifted last Sunday, Trout said. It came for other communities the following day, he added, and the burn bans were also listed.

The regional water crisis came with a cost to some. Avoca businesses, especially restaurants that rely upon water, were particularly hit.

“Their sales were down 50%,” Trout said.

“Restaurants could not serve water unless the customers asked for it and then that had to be bottled water,” added Amber Mohr, executive director of Avoca Main Street Inc.

A dentist had to bring in wa-

ter elsewhere to care for patients and water fountains could not be used, Mohr said.

Mohr said some community members feel the local water source has taken on too many customers, which contributed to the problem. But Mohr said most were understanding of the circumstances that prompted the crisis.

Mohr also praised how the region’s residents followed water restriction orders.

“If we hadn’t reduced water the way we did, it wouldn’t have gotten the water towers back up again so quickly,” Mohr said.

The plan to provide longer term stability to the system relies upon bringing in water from another source — the Missouri River, by way of Council Bluffs.

Brian Cady, CEO and general manager of the Council Bluffs Water Works, said Regional Water officials had requested two or

three years ago that their system be connected to Council Bluffs.

Water Works officials agreed, and Regional Water extended a pipeline at the association’s expense to the easternmost point of the local system. Once this pipeline is connected to the Regional Water source, that agency will pay Council Bluffs for its water usage, Cady said.

Council Bluffs Water Works will have no trouble supplying that area with water.

“We’re fortunate that our source is the Missouri River,” Cady said. “We have an abundant supply of water.”

Doug Reed, director of the county’s emergency management agency, said the final 3.5 miles of this pipeline connecting to a temporary pump station near Minden is currently undergoing pressurized testing and other essential preparations. It should go online sometime around

Wednesday.

This project had set for a fall completion, but the recent water crisis forced immediate action and the need for a temporary pump station.

Reed said his agency offered to provide one to the site, but it didn’t fit the criteria needed. A pump station from another water source was brought in.

A permanent is set to be installed this fall, Reed said. The pipeline project will go from the Council Bluffs hookup to that pump station then on to the water towers near Avoca.

Trout said this water will serve as a supplement to its regular source from Regional Water.

In the meantime, what’s most important is that everyone is safe.

“We didn’t hear any reports of people getting sick,” Mohr said. “That’s the biggest thing – health and safety.”

## Wabash

From A1

thought the Wabash Open would be a fun way for people to donate to the trail and also bring the community together with local businesses sponsoring the mini golf holes.”

The ride combines fun and fitness, with plenty of costumes, camaraderie and good times to go around. The event’s theme has always been based on classic 1980s movies, and this year it’s “Back to the Future.”

The party vibes are palpable along the trail, especially at Margaritaville — the rest stop and half-way point hangout between Coun-



JOE SHEARER, THE NONPAREIL

Lisa Swanger of Omaha, right, reacts after sinking a shot that would take two strokes off her score on hole 11 during the second annual Wabash Open on Saturday, June 24, 2023.

cil Bluffs and Mineola on the trail. There will three holes hosted there, making it a great spot to socialize, stretch the legs and perhaps crack

open a cold beverage. Tobey Jack’s is hosting a pop-up bar there and will be grilling out, as well.

The leaderboard and after party will take place at Tobey Jack’s Steakhouse. Jake Ryan of Iowa Western Community College fame will DJ beginning at 2 p.m. and announce the Wabash Open winners at 6 p.m. Spare Change, an Omaha-based rock cover band, will perform from 4 to 7 p.m.

Stender said the Wabash Open has raised more than \$30,000 over the last three years, and he said every dollar brought in goes back to trail improvements.

In recent years, the money raised from the event has funded several projects on the Wa-

bash. The team has built tables, benches and grills at Margaritaville, renovated an old trestle bridge on the trail, built an oversized Adirondack chair to serve as a landmark and selfie spot as well as other improvement projects.

Stender said the money raised from last year’s Wabash Open will go toward putting up a new fence to help separate the trail and Margaritaville from private property.

The Wabash Trace Nature Trail spans nearly 63 miles and runs through eight communities across four counties, with many trailheads in between. The northern point of the trail starts in Council Bluffs and runs south through Mineola, Silver City, Malvern, Imogene, Shenandoah and Coin

before ending near the Missouri border in Blanchard.

The Wabash Open hole sponsors, in chronological order, are Tastee Treet, Midwest Adventure Park, Driver Plumbing, Heartland Properties, Interior Re-Styling, Mr. Egress, Doll Distributing, Railway Inn, Xtreme Wheels, Team Dead Last, Team Angry, Team Amnesia, Team Love Taco, Nebel Roofing, Driver Sewer and Water, American Underground, Barley’s and Nuke-Con. The bonus 19th hole will be played at the Open’s after party at Tobey Jack’s.

The cost per team of two to four riders is \$200. The ride begins at 11 a.m. Find more at [facebook.com/wabashttrace](https://facebook.com/wabashttrace).

## THE DAILY NONPAREIL

300 W. Broadway, Suite 712,  
Council Bluffs, IA 51503

IDENTIFICATION  
The Daily Nonpareil (ISSN: 1046-1833), a Lee Enterprises Newspaper, is published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 300 W BROADWAY STE 712, COUNCIL BLUFFS, IA 51503. Periodicals Postage Paid at Council Bluffs, IA. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to PO BOX 2795, MECHANICSVILLE, VA 23116.

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The Daily Nonpareil is a Lee Enterprises Newspaper and is published online daily, and three days per week in print (Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays).

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