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Hoopeston Area approves co-op sports with R-A as needed

Hoopeston Area will offer Rossville-Alvin the opportunity to co-op sports on an as-needed basis.

The Hoopeston Area School Board on Thursday approved following the recommendation of the district extra-curricular committee that would encourage Rossville-Alvin to co-op sports programs that do not have sufficient numbers for teams.

The recommendation came after a Feb. 4 meeting between Rossville-Alvin and Hoopeston Area. R-A, which currently co-ops sports with Bismarck-Henning, Armstrong-Potomac and Hoopeston Area, would like to co-op with a single district.

In announcing the recommendation, extra-curricular committee chairman Duane Sheppard said the committee reached its decision "just because of student participation." If the districts offered cooperative teams in sports where each school could field a team, some students would not get to participate, he said.

Along with sports, Hoopeston Area and Rossville-Alvin also share educational and vocational classes.

In related action, the board approved joining the Route 1 Conference for the 2004-05 year.

The decision came after the SIA and ICC conferences folded last year.

The newly-formed conference will include Hoopeston-Area, Armstrong-Potomac, Bismarck-Henning, Oakwood, Rossville-Alvin, Salt Fork, Schlarman, Westville, and Chrisman, said high school principal Hank Hornbeck.

Milford and Watseka declined to join the group but Hornbeck said that could change. Shiloh is also interested in membership and Unity and St. Joe expressed an interest but may not be allowed to join.

Hornbeck and other high school principals recently drafted a constitution for the conference and

athletic directors are working on by-laws.

In other business, the board heard from Superintendent Mark Conolly that county superintendents met with State Rep. Bill Black, who painted a bleak picture of school funding. Black's topics included:

- the fact that two state aid payments, totaling \$310,000 for Hoopeston Area, may not be forthcoming.

- the collapse of the property tax formula for state aid, which may happen in 2005-06. "The Catch-22 is nobody has a clear idea of what's going to replace it," Conolly said.

- a piece of pending legislation that will mandate school consolidations to create 1,500-student districts, with 500 students at the grade school level. The legislation is based on the economics of funding schools, Conolly said.

The superintendents' meeting was particularly bleak, Conolly said. "He had no good news for us. I've been to a lot of gloomy superintendents' meetings but this was downright dismal."

Comparatively speaking, Hoopeston Area is in good financial shape compared to other districts. Some districts are broke, others are issuing cash bonds to make it through. To maintain financial health, Hoopeston Area must watch its expenses carefully and must learn to depend less on outside income. "We help ourselves," he said. "We have to protect ourselves."

In unrelated action, the board: rehired building principals. approved purchasing two 71-passenger buses for a total of \$56,728 after trade-in.

approved the summer migrant program at a cost of \$83,695. The program, which is federally-funded, had 82 students last year and hired five

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Letter to the Editor

Mayor talks events during his tenure

I took office in May 2001. In July, Hoopeston was hit with a storm, which cost the city approximately \$25,000 more than was budgeted for tree removal and cleanup. In September 2001, the country was hit with the 911 terrorist attacks. These attacks hindered the economy by slowing down tourism, which affected income from sales tax. This cost Hoopeston an additional eight to 10 percent of incoming revenue. The slow economy and these attacks created a \$5 billion deficit for the state. Illinois has now cut the city's revenue by another 10-12 percent for 2003. Some hard decisions had to be made by the council.

You should thank your aldermen for a job well done considering the financial obstacles they faced. Because the city had to dip into its reserves the previous year to balance the budget, the bonding company wasn't sure it would renew the city's resnet bond. Renewing it saved the city and taxpayers more than \$300,000 over the same period of time because it was renewed at a lower interest rate.

As a result of the first year's problems, the city found itself \$200,000 down in finances for 2002. Aldermen had to make tough decisions to balance the 2002 budget. The water department had to repay a loan of \$1.2 million that was borrowed in the 60s. The payback was \$100,000 in 2002 from the water/sewer fund. The last time water and sewer rates were raised was in 1980 (105%). The state of Illinois recommended in 2002 that rates be raised to three percent annually. Had this been done in 1980, rates would have increased by 60 percent, rather than the 18 percent increase approved last year. Additionally, many people were behind on water bills and one establishment owed \$40,000. Now, most people are current or have short-term payback and there is a lien against the establishment. Other areas to consider for a balanced budget were a telecommunications, cable taxes and employee raises.

The telecommunications tax was implemented to bring in \$60,000 to help balance the budget. The two percent on cable would bring in another \$4,000 the first year and \$16,000 annually after that. The council decided not to give employees raises in 2002, which saved another \$20,000. However, they are paid from \$7-\$19.60 per hour and have free health insurance. Another area that was scrutinized was employee health insurance.

The personnel policy stated the city would pay employee health insurance. In the past it was decided to also pay for family coverage. The cost of the family plan is \$667 per month or \$4.16 per hour. The individual plan is \$360 or \$2.25 per hour. When added to their salary, the range goes to \$9.25 to \$23.76. The council decided to increase the deductible that would save another \$22,000. This year, employees were given the option of

choosing the higher deductible or paying the difference in premiums. Starting in May, new employees pay the difference between individual and family coverage, which will save about \$120,000 annually as old employees retire or resign.

By looking at the country and all the companies that have laid employees off this year, it seems to be a positive event for Hoopeston is that no city employees had to be laid off this year.

I have had two residents and one outsider tell me they have noticed there was no foul odor in Hoopeston last summer and that is a positive event that should have been mentioned. A nice headline in Just the Facts would have read "Hoopeston Odor Free."

I have had complaints that the city bought new equipment this year. We did because the old equipment cost more to repair than it would cost to replace it, including downtime. However, money had been put back each year during the prosperous times to purchase these items. I can't imagine the calls I would have received if the street and alley department didn't remove snow last month. The new truck didn't break down.

Other events that took place in 2002:

- a Schumacher Electric representative sat in the

mayor's office with me, Vicki Steward and Leon Polson and told us there was nothing we could do to entice them from moving to Mexico.

- a boat factory considered coming to Hoopeston but changed their mind. A Danville factory wanted to move a parent factory from Chicago but would not consider Hoopeston.
- a major manufacturing company her turned down a five-year contract to produce a cotton picker.
- the old Stokley plant was sold and fell through. The plant's price has dropped from \$1.3 million to \$600,000.
- the city hired an economic developer to gather information about Hoopeston and put it on the internet. The advisor tried to work with the Hoopeston Industrial Corporation and other entities in Hoopeston.

We have been questioned about a soccer complex. The city approached Marty Dobkins, who in turn approached Kevin Jett about writing a soccer grant. If we could get a grant, it would allow Hoopeston to build five fields here for competition and encourage individuals and families to come here to play, eat and shop.

I received word this week that the city would be cut back on more tax dollars. Photo tax, use tax and state income tax by a total of 13 percent or \$6.75 per person. This is an ap-

proximate \$40,000 loss for 2003.

The best opportunity facing us now is to renovate the corner of Rtes. 1 and 9. This would entice other businesses to come to Hoopeston. However, at a minimum, we need a motel to provide sleeping arrangements during weddings, family and class reunions, funerals and incoming telephone and cable workers and individuals traveling Rt. 1 or Rt. 9

The TIF had properties included in it that was thought to have been annexed; however, while they had been annexed, they were not properly recorded. Therefore, tax dollars were lost on these properties for a number of years. The TIF should soon be corrected and in operation.

In closing, I would like to say thank you to the city council for a job well done and to you, the citizens of Hoopeston, for your support. We have had those who praise us and those who disagree with us but through it all, I feel we will only grow stronger and become

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Police News

Police are investigating a hit-and-run accident reported at 9:06 a.m. Thursday in a parking lot at 517 S. Dixie Hwy. An unknown vehicle hit a parked 1997 Dodge pickup owned by James McCalla of 923 W. Washington.

No tickets or injuries were reported in an accident at 6:06 p.m. Thursday in the alley of the 400 block

Obituaries

DALE - Ruby A. Dale, 79, of Wellington died at 1:15 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 20, 2003 at home. Funeral services will be at 10 a.m. Monday at Brown-Alkire Funeral Home. Burial will be in Floral Hill Cemetery. Visitation was 4-7 p.m. Sunday at the funeral home.

PARKER - Helen M. Parker, 95, of Hoopeston died at 3 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 22, 2003 at Hoopeston Community Memorial Hospital. Arrangements are incomplete at Hamilton-Orr Funeral

of East Thompson.

Police said Gary D. Deck of 525 S. Fifth Ave., backed his 1998 Chevrolet into a pole.

A **38-year-old** Hoopeston man reported Thursday that someone put sugar in the gas tank of his vehicle. The man reported he found a white substance around the inside of the gas cap and into the tank. The vehicle had been running badly for five days, the man reported.

Charles Landers, 35, of 103 Bank St., was arrested at 9:30 a.m. Saturday in the 100 Block of Bank.

He was charged with criminal damage to auto on a report from a 28-year-old Hoopeston woman who

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