

New bond referendum may be in the works

By Grace Paustian

Although the \$15.6 million bond for the Durant school building did not pass in March, voters will likely see another referendum coming this fall.

Almost 59 percent of the voters approved of the bond on March 7, but 60 percent was needed for it to pass.

Mr. Drew Lensch, a member of the Facility Advisory Committee (FAC), said he would like to see the proposed renovations to the auditorium and middle school gym remain in the new bond referendum.

Those suggested renovations made up the most significant items in the referendum.

“We saw in the last vote that overall, the community is willing to support our school,” said Mr. Lensch. “Now it’s just a matter of finding a common ground that garners enough support to proceed.”

He also said that the earliest a new bond could be voted on would be this upcoming September.

“My hope is to come up with a new referendum sooner rather than later so that the price will not rise as [construction] prices generally go up as time goes on,” said Mr. Lensch.

According to Mr. Lensch, a failed bond in 2018 did not have enough community involvement.

The main feature was a new high school gymnasium that was mainly for athletics.

“With this past bond, we felt that we did a really good job of touching all aspects of the building,” he said. “We focused on the needs of the school and nothing that went beyond those needs.”

Mr. Lensch went door to door throughout the community leading up to the vote and found that many no voters did not want to see their property taxes raised.

He believes a new approach might be needed next time around.

“Maybe there would be a survey sent out or some type of communication that would go out to residents to see what needs to be adjusted to win the residents’ votes,” Mr. Lensch said.

Mr. Lensch said he has heard multiple complaints about how the school does not contain air conditioning; however, when he talked to students and teachers, they said they do not feel that it is a necessity for the school.

“Maybe as a way to adjust this bond

and maybe get more interest in it, maybe we can add some small air conditioning to a couple rooms like the second floor of the high school where it is probably the hottest,” Mr. Lensch said.

“The smaller things that were included in the bond can most likely be done with maintenance funds over time,” said Mr. Lensch.

In fact, one of the maintenance items on the most recent bond was to replace the elementary school wing windows.

Durant Superintendent Mr. Joe Burnett confirmed that the windows, which are the original ones, will be replaced in the summer of 2024. Some of the windows are more than a half century old.

The project will cost between \$700,000 to \$900,000. The funds for the project will come from the one percent sales tax.

Mr. Lensch hopes community members will really get engaged to learn more about another proposed bond before voting yes or no.

FAC members Mr. Lensch and Mrs. Shanna Schneider were also part of the Step Up Committee, which later formed to promote the bond leading up to the election. It

consisted of 5-10 core members.

Mrs. Schneider also helped manage a Facebook page, which was unaffiliated with the school. It had factual information about the bond for people to be more educated about what they were voting for.

Mrs. Schneider feels that the FAC, which formed in the fall of 2021, was a very representational group. The original FAC had around 50 members.

“We had parents who may not even have kids in the district yet, young parents with kids that are little, parents with kids that are graduating, parents and grandparents who don’t even have kids in the district anymore,” said Mrs. Schneider.

“We had moms and dads and business owners, farmers, and parents that are in multiple other committees and are already really involved in the community already. I feel like we really covered the gamut.

She believes the FAC members all shared a common goal.

“Everyone just wants what’s best for our school and our students and our community, and even when we don’t agree on what that looks like or how to get there, I think we really do all want what’s best for everyone,” said Mrs. Schneider.

2 Durant graduates help to fill teacher shortage

By Ryan Brown

As the nation deals with a teacher shortage, two Durant graduates are devoting their futures to the next generation.

Ellie Dorris, who will be graduating at the end of this school year, is taking her passion in reading and writing to the University of Northern Iowa, where she will pursue a degree in education.

At the same time, a 2018 Durant graduate is returning to fill an English teaching vacancy in the middle and high school.

Dorris, who wants to be a high school English teacher, said that she has always had a passion for the art.

“I have always loved reading and writing, and my love for that grew as I got older,” she said.

Dorris feels that teaching is very

important “so that we [teachers] can help shape the future minds of our world.”

Dorris acknowledges the teacher shortage, but added, “At the same time, I feel like there’s still quite a few.”

Ms. Jean Hessburg, public relations director for the Iowa State Education Association (ISEA), says a significant teacher shortage is affecting Iowa.

She said that there are many factors that contribute to this shortage, including teaching wages which have not kept up with inflation.

Ms. Hessburg believes the education profession should be “revered and supported” because teachers prepare the next generation to live productive lives and become good citizens.

“It is getting harder to attract and

retain educators in Iowa because of continued hostility by a very vocal minority of the community and because of the same hostility demonstrated by our elected leaders,” Ms. Hessburg said.

Mr. Curtis Lilienthal, who just recently graduated from Loras College in Dubuque, has accepted a job where he will be teaching eighth grade and freshman English at Durant. Mr. Lilienthal said he actually didn’t consider the field until late in his high school years.

“As I kind of got older, it [English] started to grow on me. I kind of noticed that I was a better writer than I kind of thought I was, and I really improved those skills,” he said.

Mr. Lilienthal said it was when he

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Photo by Mackenzie Oberlander
Senior Ellie Dorris plans to go into the teaching field after she graduates.

Therapy dog provides comfort

By Mayson Eddy

Since the beginning of the school year, Durant has had a new therapy dog to help students and teachers throughout the building.

Isabel, who also goes by the name Isa, is a short-haired St. Bernard owned by Mrs. Jessica Drake, an education consul-



Photo by Mayson Eddy
Students in Mr. Cronk’s class visit with Isa, Durant’s therapy dog.

tant for the Area Education Agency (AEA).

Isa loves attention, she’s lazy, she loves to be in the middle of everything, she loves to be petted, and she is calm, which are great qualities for a therapy dog, according to Mrs. Drake

Mrs. Drake got the idea for a therapy dog from a previous St. Bernard she owned years ago.

“She was such a good dog that I would bring the dog into my classroom and noticed that the dog was a great thing to have in the classroom because the dog helped me and the kids,” she said.

Once she got Isa, she wanted to make her a therapy dog, and there are many perks to having a therapy dog at Durant.

Therapy dogs are very helpful when dealing with mental health struggles, according to the Alliance of Therapy Dogs.

Petting a therapy dog can help by lowering cortisol levels, which is a hormone associated with stress. But on top of that, being with a therapy dog “can increase
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3 alumni serve their country

By Garrett Pearlman

In the last five years, Durant High School has proudly sent several graduates into the military, including Kenneth Salemi, Jordan Craig, and Keagen Head.

Salemi is now stationed in Greece with the U.S. Navy; Craig, a member of the Iowa National Guard, is awaiting deployment to the Middle East; and Head is a sophomore at the University of Iowa enrolled in the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC).

Salemi is a 2022 graduate, and his training took place in Great Lakes, Illinois, which is in the Chicago area. The training seemingly took forever to him, but he would still go on to call it pretty fun.

“I was stuck in a concrete room with 80 other guys who smelled terrible,” said Salemi, talking about his barracks.

“No windows to see outside in the whole building.”

“Every morning our instructors would just flick on the lights, and then it would just be chaos until we went to chow,” Salemi said.

Salemi is ranked an E-3 Seaman, working as a Master-at-Arms, which Salemi often simplifies to military police, so people can understand it. He is stationed in Souda Bay, Greece, which is about an hour away from Athens.

“I’m a patrolman; I do everything a police officer in the civilian world does,” Salemi said.

“But we also have, for example, harbor patrol. They get in little boats and ride around with some big guns. There are quite a lot of specialties the Navy has for our job.”

Salemi enjoys all of the adventure that the Navy has provided him.

“I was just in a small town in Iowa, playing sports and working on farms, and now I’ve been sent to the other side of the world to one of the most historic places in Europe,” said Salemi.

“I’ve made friends with some Finland and Sweden guys, and they already want me to fly up there. The adventure is crazy.”

Salemi feels like he’ll only be in
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