Mohrfeld will pass 40 years in the greenhouse game in February

Still growing

With his 40th anniversary rolling over in February, Fort Madison’ Matt Mohrfeld is still reaching for the stars. At 60, he’s about a year away from getting a degree in Agronomy that he started, more than 40 years ago. An avid runner, Mohrfeld said his role is more visionary now than day-to-day, and his plans are simply to stay viable.

Mohrfeld’s life seems, and feels, even in a short hour-long conversation, like a race. But not a race to see how much can be done before it ends, but more of a race of ‘what’s next?...a constant drive to...well...evolve.

Matt’s Greenhouse started in 1976 when he took over a two-block area at the bottom of the bluffs on Avenue B that his brother Rich had just purchased.

“There was a stumbling stone. It’s a question about the flower field in response to a basic question, why? And I have a 14-year-old son at home there’s only one way he’s going to learn and that’s by some-body doing it.”

This is highly believable coming from a man who literally at times will run across the state of Iowa with a group of friends, can constantly be seen on Facebook crossing a finish line or barking encouragement to his son, Jacob or another human fish while perched at the end of a swimming pool with a stopwatch.

“I came home from ISU and said, ‘Hey, I’d like to run a garden center there’. So that spring I did, and that’s how it all started.”

-Matt Mohrfeld
founder Matt’s Greenhouse

Budding artists exhibiting at FMAAA

The Budding Artist Exhibition is to many FMAAA faithful, their favorite annual of the year. Something to be said about the intrinsic abandon of young art students. No worries, no teen angst, no distraught on how the work is perceived.....just adventuring fearlessly into the lesson plan of the art educator.

The Fort Madison Area Arts Association feature gallery is hung from ceiling to floor and is always massively impressive.....just sayin’, over 475 pieces of work from Central Lee, Holy Trinity, Richardson, Lincoln, and Ft. Madison Middle School for this K-8 art stunner. The quality of the work overall may make this one the best yet! Seither & Cherry Company is the sponsor for the exhibition and a reception will occur on Jan. 21st from 2 - 4 p.m. for the artists and families. Enjoy reception treats while perusing this collective entourage of kid’s artistic excellence. The next FMAAA Kid’s Early Out Art class occurs January 25th with guest artist Anita Lee from Fairfield.

BY BRIAN RIGGS
FMAAA Director

“I came home from ISU and said, ‘Hey, I’d like to run a garden center there’. So that spring I did, and that’s how it all started.”

-Matt Mohrfeld
founder Matt’s Greenhouse

Don’t forget Social Media! Check us out on the following sites
@pencitycurrent:

SPORTS:
Crusader boys and girls varsity both record wins Friday vs. WACO.
See page 4

Weather

Sunday Night

A chance of sleet before 7pm, then a chance of rain, snow, freezing rain, and sleet before 4pm, then a chance of rain or freezing rain between 4pm and 5pm, then a chance of snow and sleet after 5pm. Cloudy, with a high near 33. Calm wind becoming east around 5 mph in the afternoon. Chance of precipitation is 50%. Little or no accumulation expected. Little or no snow and sleet accumulation expected.

Winter weather mixed bag

FORT MADISON - Here is the updated weather forecast for Lee County from the National Weather Service.

Sunday

A chance of rain, snow, freezing rain, and sleet before 4pm, then a chance of rain or freezing rain between 4pm and 5pm, then a chance of snow and sleet after 5pm. Cloudy, with a high near 33. Calm wind becoming east around 5 mph in the afternoon. Chance of precipitation is 50%. Little or no ice accumulation expected. Little or no snow and sleet accumulation expected.
Mohrfeld to finish college degree with ISU

EVOLUTION - Continued from Page 1

little greenhouse there, the old Auge Greenhouse. Mohrfeld said, “I came home from ISU and said, hey, I’d like to run a garden center there. So that spring I did and that’s how it all started,” he said.

About a year later, Mohrfeld acquired a flower shop near Faeth’s called the East End Florist. Shortly after opening that he closed it and incorporated the customer base into his own greenhouse. Then in 1989 he purchased the “Cushman’s” building on the highway and moved the retail garden and flower shop there. In 1998 he grabbed the property east of the rodeo arena and started a massive expansion for wholesale bedding plants. In 2000 he married his wife Beth and in 2003 Jacob was born. Jacob attends Holy Trinity and swims competitively.

Now, Mohrfeld said he has the fifth largest wholesale greenhouse operation in the state. He credits his start in the wholesale side to Phil Beebe of Wever.

“I first met Phil at one of the seminars there in the late 80’s. Phil was so full of energy and he learned the wholesale side of business, I was also doing some work for Phil and I really started to learn the wholesale side of the business. He was starting to grow beyond his capacity and told me to get into the business and even asked me to take over a route and that sent me off onto this wholesale bedding plant business.”

As a result of a self-described “Conservative-aggressive approach to expansion”, Mohrfeld partnered with Quincy’s Nimann Farms (County Market, Save-A-Lot, Ace Hardware) who is now his largest customer.

“The first year I sold for them, they wrote me a check for $5,000, and last year they wrote me a check for $1 million. That should give you some sense of where we’re at.” Indeed, Mohrfeld said his customer base ranges from just north of St. Louis, Mo., north to Clinton, Iowa and east to just this side of Champaign, Ill., with limited customers to the west of Fort Madison.

The biggest hurdles he’s seen in the past 40 years? “Probably most of them myself,” he said.

“As you grow you have to manage and think and learn. You have to change with the market and the nice thing in my business is it’s an evolution and not a revolution.”

He also said one of the keys to his success - and a constantly developing part of his business - is attracting, retaining and training employees. His company over the past five years has put $2.5 million in payroll back into the local economy. He has a regular staff of about 10 full-time employees, but expands to 60 during the planting season which runs from the beginning of the year until about June, where he says then production and distribution start to overlap.

“You have to build that staff...team if you will... a family, and then keep working, growing that new customer base. We’re just now adding a customer development person. We want to use social media this year to tell our story a little better about our team,” he said.

A Facebook post this past week showed Mohrfeld moving around a whiteboard in his office in a red hoodie with an old digital scoreboard in the background pointing to attributes he’s looking for as he literally broadcasts his new Customer Development opening.

“We had a response to that video in two minutes. Two minutes... and we’ve had at least 12 more come in since then. It was incredible. And I never would have done that had I not gone back to work on finishing my degree. I learned that in a leadership training class.”

Mohrfeld also said he is passionate about keeping the business as energy friendly as possible. He had solar panels erected on a north greenhouse and said that reducing his energy demand and he may look at expanding that in the future as well.

His cessation plans are simple, especially for a man who thinks he may live forever.

“I’m going keep making it an aggressive viable business and surround myself with quality people and see what happens down the road. I have no immediate intentions of retiring, but a very immediate intention of taking on a different role. For the past five years I’ve taken on more of a visionary role than a day-to-day role and that’s going to continue,” Mohrfeld said.

“It’s a question that everybody asks and I tell everyone, ‘Everybody’s going to die but me, but I could be wrong about that’”

Matt Mohrfeld looks over some of the seedling bedding plants in one of his greenhouses north of Fort Madison. Mohrfeld will be celebrating 40 years in business in February.
AGENDA
FORT MADISON CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
Date: Tuesday, January 17, 2017
Time: 7:00 P.M.
Place: City Council Chambers, City Hall

INVOCATION

ROLL CALL
VISITORS AND APPEARANCE REQUESTS
At this time individuals may address the City Council on any matters of City business. Please go to the podium and state your name and address for the record.

PLEASE NOTE: This is not an opportunity to discuss issues with the Council or to get information. In accordance with Open Meetings law, the Council cannot take action on any complaint or suggestion or respond to any allegation.

AGENDA
1. MOVED and SECONDED to approve the agenda, as written.

CONSENT AGENDA
2. MOVED and SECONDED to approve:
   • Minutes of January 3, 2017;
   • Mayor’s reappointment of Ron Welder to the Planning and Zoning Commission, term expiring December 31, 2019;
   • Jody Schulte to the Fort Madison Riverboat Commission, term expiring December 31, 2019; and
   • Charles Vandenberg, Sales manager of Market Street Publishing, LLC. Please go to the podium and state your name and address for the record.

3. MOVED and SECONDED to approve: the following:
   • setting public hearing for Tuesday, January 17, 2017, at 7:00 P.M. to amend Title 10, Zoning, Chapter 19-3(A), Additional Parking Requirements;
   • December Financial Report; and
   • Payment of Claims.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS
3. MOVED and SECONDED to approve the third reading of an ordinance amending Title 10, Zoning, Chapters 2, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25 concerning review of Special Uses by the Planning and Zoning Commission and Meeting Requirements.
4. MOVED and SECONDED to approve the first reading of an ordinance amending Title 1, Administration, Chapter 6, Council, Section 3, Meetings, by changing the meeting time of the City Council from 7:00 P.M. on the first and third Tuesdays of each month to 5:30 P.M. on the first and third Tuesdays of each month and updating the method by which notice of Council meetings is given to Council members.
5. MOVED and SECONDED to adopt a resolution ordering construction, setting public hearing and bid letting for Public Improvement Project 2017-01, Reconstruct 15th Street from Avenue B to Ridgewood.

OTHER
6. MOVED and SECONDED to approve the hiring of a Secretary for the Police Department to fill a vacancy created following a retirement.
7. MOVED and SECONDED to approve proceeding with Phase 1 of the 4th Street Combined Sewer Separation project in the amount of $115,500. (SEE COUNCIL REPORT NO. 2017-05)
8. MOVED and SECONDED to approve the purchase of a 1/4-ton truck and a 1-ton truck from Jim Baier, Inc., of Fort Madison, in the amount of $52,355. (SEE COUNCIL REPORT NO. 2017-06)
9. MOVED and SECONDED to award WWTP Phase 2 asbestos abatement to Environmental Property Services of Urbana, Iowa, in the amount of $26,275. (SEE COUNCIL REPORT NO. 2017-07)

DISCUSSION ITEMS - None

DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORTS

PRESENTATIONS BY LIAISONS TO BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

ADJOURNMENT

10. MOVED and SECONDED to adjourn until Tuesday, February 7, 2017, at 7:00 P.M.
Hounds sweep Chiefs at home

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - The Fort Madison Bloodhounds shook off a shaky start to build a 34-13 halftime lead en route to a 57-20 victory over visiting Keokuk Friday night.

The Bloodhounds, who fall to 3-9 on the season play the last night of the regular season against second place WACO at the Hound Dome Saturday starting at 5 p.m.

Bloodhound coach John Knipe said, "Coach (Michael) Davis has a quick aggressive, relentless team and we just didn't deal with it. We need to take Cresswell out of the game."

Wilson said he wanted to capitalize on that to let his team have a little fun before the game. "I told them tonight to come out and have fun and enthusiasm, " Wilson said.

At one point during the third quarter in the second half the Hounds held the Chiefs scoreless for five minutes at 7 points and outscored Keokuk 16-6 in the second quarter.

It was more of the same in a more physical second half as the Hounds wouldn't let the Chiefs get closer than 15 after a 33-22 lead with just two minutes gone in the third quarter.

Landon Bentley chipped in with 9 points and three other Hounds had eight including Logan Rashid, CJ Richardson and Treavor Kokjohn. Shane Redd-Donald had five points all in the second half off the bench to help put the game away in the fourth quarter.

The Hounds travel to Burlington Tuesday for girls/boys varsity double-header starting at 6 p.m.

Lady Hounds sweep Chiefs at home

FMHS Lady Hounds fall to Keokuk; 7th loss in a row

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - No one's going to call the Holy Trinity girls varsity basketball team quirky.

On Friday the Lady Crusaders came out on top with a 45-31 win over visiting WACO in Southeast Iowa Superconference action sweeping the conference meetings with the win.

The win is the third win in the last six games against double teams to open the game.

At one point during the first half the Hounds held the Chiefs scoreless for five minutes at 7 points and outscored Keokuk 16-6 in the second quarter.

The Lady Hounds, who fall to 3-9 on the season play the last night of the regular season against second place WACO at the Hound Dome Saturday starting at 5 p.m.

Lady Crusaders alternating wins and losses

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - FM Head Coach Charlie Knipe knew his team was in for a fight with Keokuk Friday night, but turnovers and injuries made it more of a battle.

Fort Madison fell to visiting Keokuk 57-20 in Southeast Conference girls basketball action.

The Lady Hounds only managed 6 points in the second half, three in each quarter. Fort Madison was playing without leading scorer Amber Dilsaver and Braxton McGhghy due to injuries and Mercedes Trimble has been suffering from lower back pain.

The Lady Chiefs, who were rated in the top 10 in Class 3A in the state up until losing three in a row before Christmas, pressured the Hounds full court most of the game. The first eight points of the game were scored by Keokuk before the Hounds got the ball under the basket.

"We just didn't deal with their pressure," Head Coach Charlie Knipe said. "We had lots of turnovers and we had two girls hurt. Amber Dilsaver didn't play because she was hurt and Braxton McGhghy didn't play."

Trimble led the Lady Hounds with 10 points and the only Fort Madison player in double figures. Anna Keater had a 3-pointer for her three points on the night and Emily Mitchell, Taylor Shannan and Brittiney Harris each had two for Fort Madison.

"We got beat up on the offensive boards a little bit," Knipe said. "Coach (Michael) Davis has a quick aggressive, relentless team and we just didn't deal with it. We were hoping to contain them and survive and we didn't get it done."

The Lady Hounds, who fell to 3-9 on the season play host to Monmouth Roseville in a jayvee/varsity girls match-up Saturday starting at 5 p.m.