Serendipity has Smith back in Fort Madison

Editor's Note: This the next installment of our ongoing series looking at people who grew up in Fort Madison and have either stayed or moved back to the area and are making contributions to area communities.

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - One of the worst kept secrets in Fort Madison is that high school wasn't Greg Smith's cup of tea.

But now the Fort Madison High School Principal says his most valuable message to students is to not burn bridges because you never know where life's going to take you.

Smith, who attended Fort Madison High School in the 70's, says coming out of high school, a career in education wasn't even on the radar. And staying in Fort Madison was probably not in the cards either.

"I got out of high school and my only choice was the military because I wasn't going to college and jobs weren't anything I was interested in at that point," Smith said. "The military sent me to California, so I was out there at 18 years of age and just fell in love. California is the place for young kids and still is today in my opinion."

After working through his military service and being discharged in 1979, Smith went about finding work in California and bounced from job to job working in security positions because of his experience in the military police corp. But eventually he moved back to Fort Madison in 1985 and got a job at the prison and helped out his parents. He said he liked the job but missed California so he moved back out to the west coast.

"The worst decision I've ever made," Smith said. He said again he moved around from job to job but it wasn't the same as it was as a young kid and he missed the feeling of community and self he had in the midwest and today.

FM man starts early mayoral bid

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON - A newly announced candidate for mayor of Fort Madison says the city has become stagnant and he wants to help restart growth.

Chris Sorrentino, who has taken out a petition to run for Mayor and already has enough signatures to satisfy the 30 he said were required to get on the ballot, said he wants to usher in an era where the city goes back to the basics, stops what he terms as "stupid spending" and bring the residents back into control of government.

The truck driver came to the forefront of local politics when he tried to fight an amendment to city code that prohibited him from parking his tractor on city streets or on his property. Despite his efforts the amendment was passed.

But Sorrentino said that setback isn't what prompted him to seek office.

"I've been very impressed with a lot of the feedback I'm getting from people," Sorrentino said. "It was the feeling that the city had become stagnant and people needed to come back into control."
Sorrentino: City needs to rebuild trust with residents

**CANDIDATE** - Continued from Page 1

Friday, “I feel that everyone is amply ready for a change. The residents I’ve spoken with have lost faith in the city’s government.”

Sorrentino said one of his main platforms is doing what is necessary to help the school district get a new elementary school built.

“Last November when we put the school on the ballot, you went to the ballot and you were voting for a new school and a new park. We don’t need a new park and there wasn’t enough discussion on it so people didn’t know what they were voting for and voted against it.”

He said the city council needs to be more engaged in the process because quality and contemporary education are a critical part of bringing jobs to the area. So the city council should have been holding meetings to help the school district get that measure passed.

“It needs to happen like that because at the end of the day regardless of who’s on the council and who’s the mayor, the city belongs to the citizens. They elect us to represent them and to do what’s right for them and by them. So they need to have a very big voice in what goes on.”

He said there is enough room on the new middle school property to have an elementary school and a high school on the property, which would save on transportation and help traffic flow.

“It’s tearing our city apart. If you go to Central Lee, there is a campus where everything is in the same location. Buses come in and they’re gone and that’s what needs to happen.” Sorrentino said.

With Fort Madison and Lee County still struggling with unemployment and dilapidated roads, Sorrentino said he’s frustrated with the lack of progress in a town he wanted to come live in.

“I’m disgruntled. When we moved to Fort Madison, I was living in Burlington. I’m not a big city guy. I’ve lived in metroplex cities and rural areas and I like smaller towns. The first time I visited Fort Madison, I came down with a buddy of mine and drove through here. And I looked around and said this is Fort Madison and he said, ‘Yeah, this is a podunk little town’ and I said, ‘I love it!’”

He said he would also advocate for youth programs so they have places to go and have activities and get to know each other again. We need to include our fire departments and local police to help get these types of programs going.

Other platforms would be increasing programs and aid for people with criminal records who are trying to get on the right track.

“Let’s have programs to give them reinforcement to keep them out of those ways of life.”

The economy is another area that Sorrentino feels is lagging behind other communities and without a lot coming in from outside the city, he said the city needs to be more responsible with its spending.

“Avenue G, since the theater opened, is starting to draw more traffic, but it’s local traffic,” he said. “But there is a lot of stupid spending on the city’s part. Unnecessary spending. Things need to be prioritized. There’s nothing to draw tourism here. We have our few events like the Rodeo and a few fishing tournaments but other than that nothing to draw tourism.”

We have a fort that’s in disarray and we have a riverfront that is just sitting there. We need to do something with that. We have a number of slips on the river that are sitting dormant. Those should be brought back up and put to good use, especially in the summer. Boaters have Burlington and Keokuk, but there’s nothing in the middle.”

He said one of the other things he’d like to see is once a month have a family day in Riverview Park, where families come out, fish, have games, maybe even twice a month, but he feels there’s just not a lot going on down there.

“We need to start drawing families back together. That’s not going to kill the city financially but other spending has to stop. One example is the city voting yes and spending an obscene amount of money on historic street signs for the historic downtown area, but they won’t redo the roads. And now they’re wanting to spend a half a million on that intersection. Unnecessary spending. They would never do that.”

But after watching the last two years and Fort Madison falling apart and nothing being done, a lot of it was mind-boggling as you watch what’s going on because you don’t know how to respond. You just sit there and go, ‘Really?’”

Signature papers for those seeking elections can be taken out anytime from the Secretary of State’s website, but are turned in between Aug. 28 and Sept. 21 for the fall general election.

Early announcement

Fort Madison resident Chris Sorrentino has decided to make an early announcement of his run for mayor. Signatures papers aren’t due to be turned in until late August.

They elect us to represent them and to do what’s right for them and by them. So they need to have a very big voice in what goes on.”

- Chris Sorrentino

FM mayoral candidate

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From the Front/Local News
he said people from California have opinions of people from the midwest and typically they are opinions of being hardworking, honest and truthful.

"I just started thinking, you know, they’re right. I’ve never had a problem with those people. It wasn’t what was going on out there. Lots of back door stuff going on. I came back because I never had a bad experience here."

But when he again moved back to southeast Iowa, he said it was very slow going and the re-acclimation took some time, but the one thing that started happening that solidified his decision was the people. People start talking to him about his childhood and his parents and he quickly realized that this was the right move.

Then Smith decided to get a degree and ended up teaching elementary school as a second grade teacher, before moving to the local Area Education Agency. That’s where Smith found his way into administration. Former Superintendent Ken Marang had asked Smith to write up a job description for a curriculum director for the Fort Madison Community School District. Marang couldn’t find anyone during interviews that he was comfortable with and then told Smith he wanted him to take the job. That’s where Smith found his way into administration.

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When Marang encouraged Smith to pursue an administration certificate. After several years as the curriculum director he got a call from Marang again to consider working for the Fort Madison Community School District. Marang couldn’t find anyone during interviews that he was comfortable with and then told Smith he wanted him to take the job. That’s where Smith found his way into administration.

All the while Marang encouraged Smith to pursue an administration certificate. After several years as the curriculum director he got a call from Marang again when the former FMHS principal left for another position.

Marang told Smith he wanted him to take the job, but Smith said he would do it only if Marang would let him have the curriculum position back after a year if it wasn’t working out.

Clearly, the move worked out for everyone and now Smith uses that position to try to help other kids see the future and execute it with a bit more focus than what he went through.

"Being in education is the perfect scenario. This is one of the most important four years of kids’ lives,” Smith said. “I come back home and have this connection to the community and the high school makes it even more so because everyone knows who you are. At the end of the day, people do know you and have a respect for the job you do. It’s a really a love affair, I’ve fallen in love with Fort Madison all over again.”

Smith is actively involved in many organizations in Fort Madison including Kiwanis, the Fort Madison Chamber of Commerce, among others including a new committee formed to look into a regional education center for Lee County.

"Here you have the ability to maintain a feel of community,” he said. “You don’t lose that. Granted, now I walk down the street and don’t know half the people. I couldn’t say that 20 years ago, but the people that are coming in have the same mindset. The one thing I hear from people over and over again is, ‘When I got married and decided to have children I wanted to bring my kids back to a place where I knew the community was going to show them what a good kid looks like.’"

“I do think, like I do, that they see something they really enjoyed as a kid. You don’t know as an adult if you’re going to keep those values and those things that are important to you...but come to find out I think we do. They are so much of a part of who we are. I don’t know that it’s like that everywhere. It’s safe here, people care about you here and I just love that. I wish more people would catch on to that.”

Smith said he hears all the time from students who are just excited to get out of Fort Madison when they are done with school and students don’t necessarily want to hear stories about coming back to the area, when all their thoughts are about seeing the world.

Smith said he doesn’t try to show them the values of staying here and raising a family.

He said his tactic now with students is to ask why they want to leave. He says his experiences may be able to help them reduce the amount of time they spend trying to figure out what they want to do.

“I think its a good thing to go and come back. But if we can help them not waste 10 years. 5 years is ok to go out and see what’s out there, but 10 is too much,” Smith said. “It’s grand that you go out and see something else, because in the long run, if and when you do come back, it helps perpetuate what we have here.”

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Great River Regional Waste Authority would like to remind you to properly dispose of your Household Hazardous Waste, Construction Waste and Electronic Waste. Call GRRWA’s Household Hazardous Waste Regional Collection to schedule your appointment Monday - Friday 8am - 4pm.

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FM Chamber members are #ChamberStrong

PCC STAFF

FORT MADISON – The Fort Madison Chamber of Commerce’s Member Benefits Committee continues to visit member businesses as part of their #ChamberStrong campaign. The goal of the program is to personally visit every Chamber member every two years to thank them for their membership and support. The most recent visits took place Thursday. Members that were visited were Boulders Inn & Suites Fort Madison, Fort Colony Family Restaurant, Sunnybrook Fort Madison, and Shotenkirck (pictured on page 6).

Members have access to various networking opportunities throughout the year, professional development opportunities, use of the Chamber facilities, use of the Chamber bulk mail permit, workshops, and more. For more information about becoming a Chamber member, visit their website at www.ftmadison.com or call the office at (319) 372-5471.

Boulders Inn & Suites Fort Madison is #ChamberStrong

Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

The Fort Colony Family Restaurant is #ChamberStrong

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Sunnybrook Fort Madison is #ChamberStrong

Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC
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The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company, the world’s largest marketer of branded consumer lawn and garden products, is seeking a Maintenance Electrician for the Fort Madison, Iowa location.

The Maintenance Electrician will perform detailed mechanical, instrumentation, and electrical troubleshooting, repair, and preventative maintenance on plant process, utility, and packaging equipment. This position will perform multi-discipline maintenance and electrical work and maintain appropriate documentation.

This position requires a High School Diploma/GED, PLC Technician and Electrical Educational Courses. Candidates should be able to demonstrate the technical skills required to install/service a variety of systems in addition to program, repair, and maintain programmable logic controller systems (PLC) used in a high speed industrial packaging facility. Individual must be committed to maintaining a safe and clean work environment and complying with regulations and policies. This position must be available to work any shift and overtime as needed.

Minimum five years’ experience in an electrical maintenance field in a manufacturing environment. Minimum one year experience in a manufacturing or warehouse environment and past SAP experience. For expanded job details and to apply visit http://www.scottsmiraclegro.com/careers and search for Req 2221.

Scotts is an Equal Opportunity Employer

HELP WANTED

The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company, the world’s largest marketer of branded consumer lawn and garden products, is seeking an Inventory Coordinator for the Fort Madison, Iowa location.

The Inventory Coordinator (Warehouse Stager) is responsible for the inventory management of multiple production components. This includes physical counts and inventory reconciliation before, after and during production campaigns.

This position requires a High School Diploma/GED, strong math skills, and the ability to follow directions provided in verbal or non-verbal format. Candidates should be able to demonstrate a willingness to learn multiple job assignments, able to utilize Microsoft Office and Google Chrome, safely operate a forklift in a manufacturing environment, excellent prioritization skills and the ability to perform multiple simultaneous tasks, with interruptions. This position must be available to work any shift and overtime as needed.

Minimum five years’ experience in a manufacturing or warehouse environment and past SAP experience. For expanded job details and to apply visit http://www.scottsmiraclegro.com/careers and search for Req 2124.

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Business News

Shottenkirk FM is part of the #ChamberStrong campaign.

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Send your business news, press releases, and story ideas to Chuck Vandenberg, PCC Editor at editor@pencitycurrent.com or call (319)371.1670.

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528 sq. ft. • 5,600 sq. ft. lot
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2,260 sq. ft. • 6,784 sq. ft. lot
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FMHS students were Dancing in the Streets (or, rather, the school gymnasium) this weekend during their annual Dinner Theater performances.