



On April 21, students from Turtle Lake-Mercer School welcomed guests from Gateway to Science STEMZone. According to the school district, students kindergarten through sixth grade enjoyed exploring and learning through the hands-on stations provided by Gateway to Science STEMZone. (Photo provided by Turtle Lake-Mercer School)

High Notes

Eight TL-M musicians advance to state festival

BY PHAIDRA YUNKER

Hundreds of young musicians crowded the halls of Washburn High School April 10, their voices and instruments spilling out of classrooms as Region VII's Solo and Ensemble Music Festival took over the building. By mid-morning, the parking lot was overflowing. Parents, grandparents and community members streamed through the doors, forming lines in the hallways as they waited for a chance to squeeze into classrooms where young musicians performed. In the lunchroom, students crowded around tables, grabbing food between performances.

For festival coordinator Randy Hall, the busy scene was exactly what he hopes for each year.

"We call them festivals because it's not a contest," Hall said. "We're unlike

any other event, and we have one shot at going to state unlike any other activity."

"The students aren't going up against other towns or even other people," he said. "It's all individual. It's about doing your best."

Hall has managed Region VII's music festivals for more than 20 years. He began teaching music at Washburn High School in 1996 and retired eight years ago, though he still substitutes often. Organizing the festival, he said, is a yearlong effort.

"I have to start planning right when school starts," he said. "March and April are festival time, so I have to book judges early. It takes a lot of time. It takes a ton of people."

This year's festival drew about 240 entries and roughly 320 students from across the region. Students in grades

7-12 performed solos or participated in ensembles, many playing their pieces for the first time in front of an audience and a judge.

Senior vocalist Inaia Way said singing in front of a judge pushed her in a new way. Way performed I Attempt from Love's Sickness to Fly by Henry Purcell and said she especially enjoyed "the high notes."

One element that sets a music festival apart from a contest is the structure of the performances. After each solo or ensemble plays, the judge offers immediate feedback in the room, sometimes having students work through specific measures or focus on a musical concept while the audience watches. The format is designed to be instructional as well as evaluative.

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County commission hears road updates, approves permit

Crack sealing, telecom permit discussed at March 3 meeting

BY KELLI AMELING
Associate Publisher

The McLean County Commission addressed road conditions, county finances and routine business during its regular meeting held Tuesday, March 3, at the McLean County Courthouse.

According to the meeting minutes published in the McLean County Independent on April 16, Chairperson Curt Olson called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m. with Commissioners Steve Cottingham and Steve Lee present.

Commissioners approved minutes

from the Feb. 3 and Feb. 18 meetings before turning to department updates. Road Superintendent Jim Grey reported that crack sealing had begun on County Road 41 and said he and Assistant Road Superintendent Travis Verke recently completed training on the John Deere Operations Center, a webbased system that will allow the county to better track equipment use and maintenance.

Grey also indicated plans to hold another used equipment sale later this year, with additional information to be brought to the commission at a later

date. At the request of Commissioner Lee, Grey provided an update on road conditions and recommended keeping current road restrictions in place.

The commission approved a permit for West River Telecommunications to install fiber cable facilities along the south side of McLean County Road 20, to serve a residence at 404 Nineth Ave., Southwest.

Knutson also addressed questions and complaints related to property tax discount deadlines, explaining that

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