

Local Focus

dh Readers' comments at dailyherald.com

Edgar: State needed a tax hike

I wish he was still governor. Jim Edgar was the best governor this state ever had. I can't remember even a hint of scandal when he was governor. He would have probably done something about the excessive spending a long time ago before a financial crisis could ever materialize. — posted by **Dan in Lombard**

I hate the idea that the government's answer to all their problems is to raise taxes. Geez, I wish I could live my life solving my financial problems just by telling my employer to raise my wage. — posted by **Donkey Rider**

Not surprising Edgar sees it this way. This is the same guy who made a "temporary tax increase" permanent in 1990. — posted by **BigDave53**

Now that they took the pressure off with a tax cut do you really think they will cut spending or will they just borrow more and kick the can down the road? They should have first cut spending and then raised taxes. The spending cuts will never happen now. — posted by **Timeout**

Early training



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Connor Lougheed, 4, of St. Charles presses his camera against the plexiglass to take pictures of trains on display by the Midwest Division of the Train Collector's Association at the St. Charles Public Library on Saturday. Connor came with his dad, Steven, and Connor even got to run a train via a remote. In addition to the display, the group offered a "tune-up corner" where visitors could bring in their model train items that weren't working right to have them diagnosed or fixed. The display continues today.

Fox Valley theater troupe at home under new name

Sydney Poss was excited to have her picture taken with St. Charles Mayor Don DeWitte, and the mayor felt the same way. "I'd be honored to have my picture taken with you," he said.

Sydney, an 8-year-old third-grader at Fearn Elementary in North Aurora, was one of the stars of the moment Tuesday at the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Mainstage Theater at Pheasant Run. It served as the debut for Fox Valley Repertory, the new name for Noble Fool Theatricals.

Moments earlier, Sydney had belted out "Part of Your World" from "The Little Mermaid" in impressive fashion.

And she did it right on the heels of another excellent number from 15-year-old St. Charles East student Gabriella Marzetta, who sang "Home" from "Beauty and the Beast."

I could get used to spending my weekday afternoons in such a pleasant setting, with such talented people onstage. That would include the cast of Fox Valley Repertory's first production, "Leaving Iowa," which opened Saturday and runs through March 13.

Attendees were treated to a hilarious 15-minute segment of the show, which focuses on a young man's reflections of his family vacations as he looks for the perfect place to spread his father's ashes.

We've all been on these long family trips by car, so it brings back all sorts of memories when the young son and daughter drive their father crazy with requests for stops along the way.

When the daughter promises she'll be quiet and just read if her dad will stop at a tourist site, the dad promptly calls her bluff, saying, "It's a trick."

When the dad shows a crack in his armor, with the words kids love to hear — "We'll see" — the humor reaches new heights. Plain and simple, this short segment indicates it will be funny and heartwarming.

Artistic director John Gawlik has a good thing going with Fox Valley Repertory, a name that emphasizes an expansion upon the Noble Fool emphasis of comedy to also bring dramas



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Portraying a family on a road trip through Iowa, Katherine Banks begs her father, Don Forston of Stickney, to stop at the Ghost Caverns. The mom is Diane Dorsey. All are in the cast of "Leaving Iowa," the latest production from the Fox Valley Repertory.

and musicals to the stage.

"We have about 500 people involved through the course of a year," Gawlik said. "We have a staff of eight, and about 100 part-time and contract workers. Most of the actors and stage designers will change with every play."

Gawlik said none of it happens without support from the community; he thanked the St. Charles Chamber for hosting this get-together. As more people see what is taking place onstage and learning about where so many young people are learning this challenging and gratifying craft, Fox Valley Repertory will continue to prosper.

The number of productions, workshops and theater academies for young students has increased dramatically for this group, and it will be in the forefront of a summer arts festival in St. Charles that residents are sure to find entertaining.

Pushing for turf

While fundraising events and grants are remaining steady for two local high schools pushing for artificial turf on their football fields, the St. Charles Baseball Association has achieved that goal, albeit on a much smaller scale.

The infield of a diamond at the Eastside Sports Complex is prepped and ready for the installation of artificial turf in the spring, completing a \$200,000 project that the baseball association funded on its own for the park district field.

"They have talked about it for awhile," said Dennis Ryan, St. Charles Park District's superintendent of parks and planning. "The challenge is always in the spring

for baseball, and the baseball association wanted the flexibility of having the synthetic infield on one diamond to eliminate some rainouts and not have to lose a whole day if there is some rain in the mornings."

Paul Jones and Len Asquini of the St. Charles Boys Baseball Association spearheaded the campaign to get the turf installed, and football and soccer boosters at Geneva and West Aurora high schools are hoping they can be as successful with their projects — which will cost much more, of course.

West Aurora learned earlier this month that it had secured a \$25,000 grant from the U.S. Soccer Foundation for the turf installation, as it moves close to the \$1.3 million needed for its project.

She deserves thanks

When everyone in attendance is having a great time Saturday night at the third annual Dancing with the Geneva Stars event at Eagle Brook Country Club, remember to thank Carolyn Hill for making it happen.

It seems like Hill works year-round in organizing this event, and there is a lot to organize and coordinate.

The dancers feel like they make a major time commitment to participate in this important fundraiser for the Geneva Cultural Arts Commission and the Geneva Academic Foundation, and rightly so.

But it doesn't compare to the time the planning committee puts into it, with Hill being the motor that keeps things running.

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Piano festival hits right notes

BY ELENA FERRARIN
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Pianists usually play alone or with an ensemble, not in tandem with 11 other pianos.

That's why American Grands XVI, a large-scale piano performance that took place in Elgin on Saturday, was a special event not just for audiences, but for performers as well, longtime music director Larry Dieffenbach said.

More than 500 pianists, ages 6 to 78, performed three shows throughout the day at Blizzard Theatre in the Elgin Community College Art Center.

Two shows were sold out and one had just 20 seats open in the 660-seat theater.

The eclectic repertoire, played on 12 pianos ranging from 9-foot concert grand piano to 5-foot, 10-inch grand pianos, included pieces by classical composers like Schubert and Tchaikovsky and "Eleanor Rigby" by The Beatles, and even pop singer Elton John's "Crocodile Rock."



RICK WEST/rwest@dailyherald.com

Laine VanderHei, 8, of St. Charles, left, and Callie Feikert, 10, of Elgin were among 500 pianists Saturday at American Grands XVI in Elgin.

The production originated at the former St. Charles Music Festival and has been held at ECC since 2003.

This year, Cordogan's Pianoland in Geneva, the sponsor since the inception of the festival, was honored with the world premiere of "Piano Land," written by Utah-based composer Kevin Olson, formerly of Evanston.

The piece was the evening's favorite for pianist Beth Lawniczak, of St. Charles.

"It's unique, it's rhythmically different," said Lawniczak, director of music for Bethany Lutheran Church in Batavia. "The third movement (of the piece) is called 'Evening Traffic on Bass Clef Boulevard' and it sounds like car horns with the way you play dissonant chords."

Some of the pianist duos

comprised relatives, such as mother-daughter duo Pam Conroy and 13-year-old Lauren, of Barrington. Lauren's uncle Dan Conroy of Cary and his 10-year-old son, Riley, came to watch them perform at American Grands for the fourth time.

"It's fun to see them all up there," Dan Conroy said. "We've seen them practice over and over, and seeing them onstage together is great."

Pianists turn in an application to perform in the American Grands, and a group of about 50 piano teachers helps assign the music and coordinate the performance, Dieffenbach said.

"It's a logistical challenge, but with computers and technology, it works," he said.

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