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OSLAD grant earmarked for city center, better parks

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

Better parks and playgrounds in the City of Braidwood have become a priority at city hall.

Last September, the city voted to keep the 1% grocery tax that the state discontinued on Jan. 1, 2026. The council decided the revenue would be earmarked Braidwood Park District. Subsequently, an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) was established between the city and park district.

Mayor Todd Lyons has his heart set on

a city center, planned for city-owned property located behind Casey's General Store on Main Street. Hitchcock Design Group of Naperville was contracted last September to assist in planning the city center. The firm also helped the city in applying for an Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) grant to fund the city center.

In January, Braidwood was approved for the \$600,000 OSLAD grant to subsidize the city center. But there are others who say that the funds would be better used to improve existing parks or anticipated infrastructure expenses.

Parks need help

Josh Bolatto, Commissioner of the Braidwood Park District, knows the city's parks are in rough shape. Bolatto addressed the city council at the Feb. 10 meeting.

"Whenever I talk to people they want nice parks, they want nice playgrounds," Bolatto said. "It's true that our playgrounds have not been updated for a very long time."

Bolatto pointed out that the last update was at Goodrich Park in the late 1990s.

"Playground equipment is extremely

expensive," Bolatto said. "Everything has to meet so many requirements nowadays that on a park district budget like we have, only about \$165,000 a year, that's all we get from property taxes, which on a large scale is nothing."

Grant a game changer, but still...

Commissioner Dale Walsh broached the subject of how often school playgrounds and city parks are used by children and families.

Bolatto said parks are well-utilized. However, he mentioned that visitors often comment that maintenance and upkeep

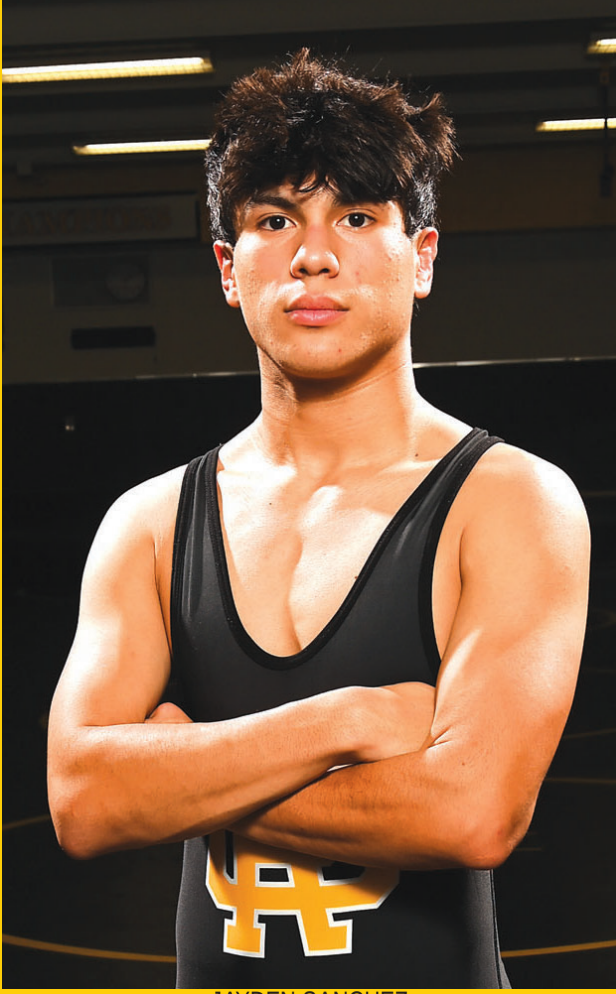
SEE BETTER PARKS PAGE 2

Three Comets going to state

For more turn to sports



COLTON DRINKWINE
State qualifier at 113, Sectional Champion



JAYDEN SANCHEZ
State qualifier at 132 pounds, placed third at sectional



DOMINIC ALAIMO
State qualifier at 215 pounds, placed third in sectional

Resident claims that with satellites, data centers will become obsolete

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

On Feb. 10 Marylu Jensen approached the Braidwood city council with comments about the proposed data center planned by New York developers Hospitality Partners, LLC. The data center is on hold at this time. Jensen had spoken to the council in the past on the subject.

"I'm here tonight with another reason that I would like you to consider, and that is I was very happy to read in the paper that you have not said yes to it yet," she said. "So, that gives me hope, and I wanted to let everyone know that we are probably two years past when the first data centers were being built as you all know. There are 500,000 in our country."

Jensen claimed that in two to three years data centers will become obsolete, and that data handling will be conducted via satellite. She believes that if the city improves it, the building will likely be abandoned.

According to Axiom Space, a company that provides human-rated space infrastructure, data centers are being developed for placement in satellites and space, with initial tests already being carried out by companies like Starcloud, Lonestar, and potentially SpaceX.

Administrative Consultant Steve Gulden commented, "Because the data center is on hold indefinitely, there is no plan for them to come back as of right now, so we are stopping the TIF Four study," Gulden said.

Gulden, who was contracted as

Braidwood's city administrator last year, will continue to serve as the city's administrative consultant.

"This is just updating the contract for Steve for being our consultant," Mayor Todd Lyons said.

Commissioner Warren Wietting asked if there were any major changes to Gulden's contract.

"We're increasing his vehicle stipend from \$100 to \$400, then he'll get a 2% raise in six months from now," Lyons said. "After he's been here a year, he'll get a 2.5% raise."

The motion was passed by a vote of 4-1, with Wietting voting no.

False alarm faux pas

The city is cracking down on false alarms, both personal fire alarms and burglar alarm systems.

For false fire or burglar alarms

SEE CITY COUNCIL PAGE 2

Join BFPD Thursday to help plan future of fire department

BY ROSE PANIERI
STAFF WRITER

Braidwood Fire Protection District (BFPD) will hold its Planning for a Safer Future workshop is on Thursday, Feb. 19 from 6 to 8 p.m. at Reed-Custer Elementary School, 162 S. School St.

This session will give an informative overview of what the BFPD does every day—and the challenges the fire department working through as emergency call volume continues to grow.

"If you've ever won-

dered how the fire district plans ahead, this is a great place to start. Join us on Feb. 19 and be part of the conversation." BFPD Chief Chris Jude said. "Your voice matters. By sharing your perspective, you can help ensure that our District continues to meet the highest standards of service while planning responsibly for the future."

Attendees will receive an overview of district

SEE BFPD PLANNING PAGE 2



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COMET SPORTS



Photo by Amy Walker

RCHS• ALYSSA WOLLENZIEN steals the ball from Coal City during last week's game.

Comets rally past Coal City before falling to Seneca

Reed-Custer's girls basketball team showed resilience this week, rallying past rival Coal City on Monday before dropping a non-conference matchup to Seneca on Wednesday. The highlight came in Monday's Illinois Central Eight showdown, where the Comets used a strong second half to defeat Coal City 39-33. Trailing 21-18 at half-time, Reed-Custer flipped the game after the break. The Comets outscored the Coalers 12-7 in the third quarter to take the lead, then held Coal City to just five points in the fourth to secure the rivalry win.

Junior Alyssa Wollenzien led the charge with 15 points, 13 rebounds and five steals in a dominant all-around effort. Sophomore Kamryn Wilkey added nine points, including two three-pointers, while Harlie Liebermann contributed seven points. Morgan Toler controlled the glass with 11 rebounds as the Comets finished with a 40-rebound advantage and forced 22 turnovers. Despite shooting just 27 percent from the field, Reed-Custer created extra possessions with its defense and rebounding to grind out the victory. Two nights later, the Comets couldn't carry that momentum forward in a 52-42 loss to visiting Seneca. Reed-Custer stayed within striking distance early, trailing 22-17 at half-time. But Seneca pulled

away in the third quarter, outscoring the Comets 18-13 to build a double-digit lead that held through the final period. Wollenzien again paced Reed-Custer with a game-high 20 points, shooting 8-of-14 from the field while adding eight rebounds and two assists. Wilkey followed with 11 points, knocking down both of her three-point attempts, while Toler added seven points and 10 rebounds. The Comets shot 35 percent from the field and 40 percent from three-point range, but struggled to slow Seneca's offensive push in the second half. Reed-Custer finished 10-of-18 from the free-throw line and committed 13 turnovers. The Lady Comets opened regional play Monday night against McNamara (Kankakee) losing 60-36 to finish with a 14-15 record.



Photo by Amy Walker

LADY COMET Harlie Liebermann puts up a shot during last week's game against Coal City.

WINNING THE BATTLE at 132 pounds to claim third place in the sectional and to state is Reed-Custer's Jayden Sanchez who lifts Ardan Baglaev from Westminster by fall.

Photo by Eric Fisher

Comets advance three to state

The Reed-Custer wrestling team may not have filled every weight class with state qualifiers, but what the Comets accomplished Saturday at the IHSA Class 1A Coal City Sectional spoke volumes about the program's toughness and resilience. By day's end, three Comets punched their tickets to the IHSA state finals in Champaign. Colton Drinkwine, Jayden Sanchez and Dominic Alaimo while several others battled deep into the wrestlebacks in a loaded sectional field. For a team built on grit, it was a fitting performance. At 113 pounds, Drinkwine (33-4) delivered the statement performance of the day, capturing a sectional championship in dominant fashion. After a first-round bye, Drinkwine rolled through the bracket with a major decision and a technical fall to reach the finals. There, he turned in perhaps his best match of the season, earning an 18-6 major decision over Coal City's Gavin Roudis. Drinkwine's title not only secured his return trip

to Champaign, but also set the tone for the Comets, showing they could compete with, and beat, the best in the sectional. Reed-Custer's other two state qualifiers took a different path, one defined by perseverance. At 132, Jayden Sanchez (36-13) rebounded from a semifinal loss. After dropping into the wrestlebacks, Sanchez dominated his next two matches, including a fall in the third-place bout to secure his spot at state. At 215, Dominic Alaimo (38-10) followed a similar script. After reaching the semifinals, he bounced back with a fall in the consolation bracket and ultimately claimed third place via injury default in the medal match. Alaimo, a senior, medal sixth at state a year ago. Both wrestlers showed the kind of mental toughness required in postseason wrestling, shaking off defeat and responding with their best when it mattered most. Beyond the three qualifiers, Reed-Custer had several wrestlers who pushed deep into the bracket.

Cole Harris (120, 34-11) battled back to the consolation semifinals with a fall before being eliminated one match shy of qualifying. Nathan Vogler (175, 30-20) put together an impressive run with three pins in wrestlebacks before falling in the blood round. Reed Newbrough (165, 30-16) earned two falls, and competed into the later rounds. At 106, Collin Bryant (18-23) opened with a technical fall victory before running into a tough bracket that ended his tournament early. While they fell short of Champaign, each contributed to a collective effort that reflected the Comets' competitiveness from top to bottom. Now, Reed-Custer will turn its focus to the IHSA Class 1A state finals, which begin Thursday in Champaign. With a sectional champion in Drinkwine and two battle-tested qualifiers in Sanchez and Alaimo, the Comets will look to make noise on the state stage.

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SECTIONAL CHAMPION! Reed-Custer's Colton Drinkwine (right) defeated Coal City Roudis with an 18-6 major decision on Saturday to claim the sectional title at 113 pounds.

Photo by Eric Fisher

Comets suffer a pair of losses

The Reed-Custer boys basketball team suffered a pair of setbacks last week, losing a conference game against Lisle then falling to Spring Valley Hall. The Comets were down 24-3 in the first quarter before battling back to lose 71-55. "We just can't dig yourself that big of a hole and expect to win," commented coach Tyler Schoonover. Matt Kuban led with 13 points and 4 rebounds. Chase Isaac chipped in with 12 points and 4 rebounds while Jesse Tresouthick added 11 points and 4 rebounds. Kaiden Klein scored 10 points, Colton Waldvogel finished with 9 points

and 7 rebounds. The Comets struggled to score against Lisle, falling 58-50. Eddie Bryan paced RCBS with 13 points and 13 rebounds. Klein came through with 11 points and 5 rebounds. Isaac tallied 9 points and 9 rebounds while Tresouthick added 9 points and 3 rebounds. The JV Comets won over Lisle 56-33 for their 10th win of the season! Damian Sanchez paced the Comets with 17 points, Dylan Leonard contributed 12 points and 10 rebounds, Trent Boudreau had 9 points and 9 rebounds while Collin Hakey added 7 points.