

Face-off with a robot

WCTC students create air hockey robot

By Karen Pilarski
kpilarski@conley.net.com
262-513-2657

PEWAUKEE — The joy of playing air hockey is to compete against a less-experienced player and watch them fumble with the mallet. The thrill of victory is hearing the sound of the puck going into the opponent's slot. Now, Waukesha County Technical College students created an air hockey robot to make the game a bit more challenging.

The robot can play, attack and defend.

Jason Solberg, automation systems technology instructor at WCTC, said manufacturers like AI and automation integration. Students learn about taking a process that might normally be done manually and find a way to automate it. They learn how to do industrial electricity, hydraulics and a lot of programming.

At the end of the AST program, students do a capstone project in a 16-week course.

Capstone projects are intended for students to demonstrate the different skills they learned throughout their classes. Solberg said some projects are made from scratch while other ones are modified from a previous capstone project.

The air hockey robot was created the previous year, but it didn't work. A new group of students, Wesley Lidwin, Tyler Solberg (Jason's son) and Caleb Roubik reprogrammed it and fabricated the enclosure.

"They basically built the system," he said.

Lidwin is an alum of the AST program and is now pursuing a degree in electrical engineering. He

said the only direction given was the project was intended for Discovery World. Lidwin said the first week of the course was stressful because they had to take in what they already had and what they wanted to improve on.

"It was a fun week trying to throw our brains at it and figure out what we wanted to do," Lidwin said.

The first accomplishment was the enclosure around it with 80/20 and polycarbonate pieces.

"That was a victory in our eyes. That top part took us eight weeks with issues ordering, cutting, and building and putting it together," he said.

Lidwin said it specked out perfectly as they planned it.

"The other fun part was the robot and the vision camera. I was allowed to program it all by myself. I spent a hundred hours outside of class just looking at code and making it better. My brain was stuck in there but I was having a ton of fun," he said.

Anytime he tried out something on the robot it excited him.

"I thought, 'Ohhhh, serotonin,'" he said.

The students learn about what they might encounter in the field, such as deadlines, which was challenging for the students.

Lidwin said it was hard to complete the project in 16 weeks with all of their other commitments.

The students had to replace the robot twice and rewrite the code due to internal issues with it.

After the project was completed, Lidwin said he felt the most proud he has ever been.

"All three of us were enthralled with it. When we got the basic function working was a huge win. We



Courtesy of Wesley Lidwin

Waukesha County Technical College students created an air hockey robot in their capstone course.

See the video online

To see the robot in action, visit:
<https://www.instagram.com/theaifield/reel/C9yLUc-ttRm/>.

were all psyched about it," he said.

The project was displayed at Discovery World in Milwaukee and showcased at WCTC. Jason Solberg posted a video on LinkedIn of the robot and it went viral. They were challenged to air hockey at a Chicago automation event to take on different robots.

The big question is if the robot can be beat and the answer is yes. There are three different levels on it: easy, medium and hard level.

"Me personally ... I think I scored on it once. Our vice president of the college came in here and he got to score on it. It was on the hard level," he said.

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North Point Chiropractic joins Hartland chamber

PEWAUKEE — The Hartland Chamber of Commerce board of Directors and ambassadors hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony Aug. 3 at North Point Chiropractic to celebrate its successful opening in Pewaukee.

Pictured from left to right are: Dr. Hannah Scherbarth of New Heights Physical Therapy; Alyssa Tomfohrde of Northpoint Chiropractic; Dr. Loni McClellan of Northpoint Chiropractic; owners Dr. Victoria Gonzalez and Dr. Peter Gonzalez; Abigale Schwartz and Mallory Zabinski of Northpoint Chiropractic; and Elise Miller of Lake Country Bed Barn.

North Point Chiropractic provides chiropractic care in Pewaukee and the surrounding areas while teaching “The 100 Year Lifestyle” principles of optimum health, longevity, and wellness.

North Point Chiropractic is at 1230 George Towne Drive, Suite C, Pewaukee and can be reached at 414-482-5282. Visit www.npchiropractic.com for more information.



Photo courtesy of Hartland Chamber of Commerce

Summit commission approves rezoning for charter school

SUMMIT — During its meeting on Aug. 20, the Summit Plan Commission unanimously approved the rezoning of 42 acres from agricultural to institutional district. The change would mean that a school would be a permissible use on the property at the northwest corner of Pabst Farms Boulevard and North Sawyer Road.

Lake Country Classical Academy sought the rezoning of the land for the construction of a new school. The construction would be done in three phases, according to documents submitted to the village.

Phase one would be a 77,000-square-foot two-story elementary and middle school, plus a playground. For phase two, there would be a 60,000-square-foot, two-story, expanded middle school and high school, a 14,000-square-foot gym and a 15,081-square-foot weight room. For phase 3, there would be a 32,536-square-foot auditorium and atrium.

In addition to the school building, plans call

for athletic fields, parking and a playground. According to the meeting notice, the Village Board approved a land use plan amendment request for the same property, at the recommendation of the Plan Commission, to allow institutional land uses on the subject property subject to several conditions, including the property needing to be developed and occupied within two years of the land use map amendment being approved by the Village Board.

In addition to parking and stormwater management facilities, outdoor facilities would include up to two baseball fields, four tennis courts, sports stadium with bleachers and a track, associated track and field facilities, a soccer field, and unlabeled accessory buildings. The traffic flow is currently designed so traffic enters on Pabst Farms Boulevard and exits on North Sawyer Road.

Lake Country Classical Academy is currently at 818 W. Wisconsin Ave., Oconomowoc.

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Budget Task Force identifies sales tax as possible revenue option

County is looking at a \$5 million budget gap in 2025 budget

By Karen Pilarski
kpilarski@conleynet.com
262-513-2657

WAUKESHA — Waukesha County is looking at a \$5 million budget gap going into the 2025 budget.

Previously, Waukesha County Executive Paul Farrow discussed how the county is considering possible revenue options such as a wheel tax, property tax levy increase or a sales tax. Farrow also had announced a task force made up of municipal leaders and business representatives who discussed what the county budget may look like over the next five to 10 years.

Last month, the Waukesha County Board heard a Budget Task Force report by Rafetlis, County Department of Administration Director Andrew Thelke, and County Chief of Staff Shawn Lundie. Emily Uselton of Rafetlis said they assessed the challenges the county is facing, opportunities, the resources available and how they are being deployed.

Uselton said Waukesha County deserves a "gold star" and that the county does a lot of things really well.

"You put your community first, so the strategic planning process looks at your community, priorities what they care about and then you ensure that the resourcing sort of follows suit to other priorities. That's the key component to fiscal management best practice," she said.

They came up with a financial forecast that looked at the next six years. The financial forecast model started with 2025 and projected through 2030.

They used the 2024 budget

as a base and looked at key assumptions of what they expected revenue sources to be and the expected growth.

"With all that, not surprising I think to many of you the outlook included preliminary budget gaps over the next six years, meaning that revenue just isn't growing at a rate to cover the cost to continue providing the same services you are today in the next six years. That results in a budget gap that has to be addressed each year to meet balanced budget requirements," Ueselson said.

They started considering different scenarios that would help address the budget gap in the future.

The Task Force

Raftelis Financial Consultants, over the course of four different meetings, helped the task force lay out what the different options were. They selected values such as public safety, infrastructure stability, quality of life, fiscally responsible, and financially viable when making policy decisions. They looked at service area priorities of the over 200 programs in the budget. A common theme among the group was the importance of infrastructure development and economic development. In the next session they took some possible service level reductions and how to go about thinking through service level adjustments in the budget.

Farrow said at a recent panel discussion, a question was raised, "If we have to increase revenue in Waukesha County to maintain the level of services, what are the things we should be looking at?"

“The three main options we have for a new revenue

stream would be a wheel tax, a sales tax that we have an opportunity to do or increase our levy. We could go to referendum by the county to do an increase to the county levy," Farrow said.

A referendum would be similar to what school districts do when they go out for referendum for operations or to build a new school.

The task force discussed the advantages and disadvantages among the three options.

options. "There was overwhelming support for the first two options. Part of that was because one, it wasn't going to solve the problem entirely and two, the underlying growth profile for both of these options is going to become some structural issue that already that already exists," Uselton said.

The task force felt the sales tax could address the preliminary budget gap.

"The fiscal challenges the county faces runs downstream to all the municipalities in the county as well. So a lot of the municipal leaders in the group thought the solution not only helps the county, but could potentially help us the way the state is structured," she said.

Useilton added the task force was hesitant about enacting a percentage amount that would yield more revenue than — at least in the short run, over the next six years — is actually needed to solve the budget gap.

"The group gathered quickly that sales tax was the option that was going to make a difference in the long-term," she said.

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Second prosecutor leaves D.A.’s office

Expected to lose two more positions as grants expire

By Brian Huber
bhuber@conley.net.com
262-513-2674

WAUKESHA — Days after former deputy Mike Thurston resigned, a second prosecutor has left the Waukesha County District Attorney’s office, with more expected vacancies looming.

Assistant District Attorney Molly Schmidt submitted her resignation Aug. 15, indicating Wednesday, Aug. 28 was her last day. District Attorney Sue Oppen said in an email interview that Schmidt offered no resignation letter, instead filing a requisite form with state human resources officials. On that form, Schmidt cited “personal reasons” for her resignation.

Schmidt’s departure follows that of former Deputy District Attorney Mike Thurston, who lost the Aug. 13 primary election to fellow DDA Lesli Boese in the race to succeed Oppen, who did not seek re-election. Thurston resigned effective last Tuesday, citing “a complete and utter difference of opinions in the office.” He also said he feels Boese “should be able to select her own management team and she should be able to determine which direction she wants the office to go and I think it’s really important for her to have that ability so I don’t want to stand in the way of that.”

Schmidt declined to comment when reached by a reporter. Her Facebook profile indicates she supported Thurston in the D.A.’s race, although whether her departure is connected to the election is not clear.

Schmidt came to the Waukesha D.A.’s office at the end of 2019 after working in the Milwaukee County D.A.’s Office, according to her Facebook profile. Thurston also worked in Milwaukee County’s D.A.’s Office before spending nine years in Waukesha’s.

“The loss of two senior attorneys who were dedicated, tenacious career prosecutors will certainly be felt by this Office,” Oppen said. “I have begun the process of hiring to fill their positions but expect it will take time. We have other staffing issues as well, as we are due to lose another attorney position at the end of September and another at the end of the year due to grant funds terminating. We will not be

able to sustain all our current practices with less attorneys. They are asked to do too much already, and now more responsibility is heaped on. I will say I am grateful for the support of all the attorneys, staff and victim witness advocates of the DA’s Office who have (selflessly) stepped up to cover these shortages. The demands on them can be overwhelming but they are fully devoted to keeping Waukesha County safe. While I expect challenging days ahead, I know that as a team, we will fight on.”

In addition, two assistant district attorneys are out on family leave, with one slated to return Nov. 12 and the other leaving this week and projected to be out until Dec. 9, Oppen said.

During the campaign for the DA seat, the candidates discussed the paucity of prosecutors, with Boese telling The Freeman the National District Attorneys Association indicates that there should be one prosecutor for every 10,000 in population. With a county population north of 410,000, there should be 41 prosecutors. At the end of the year, after grant funds expire, Boese projected the office would have 19 full-time prosecutors.

The 2024 Waukesha County budget shows the D.A.’s Office with \$3.87 million in expenditures, with \$1.5 million in revenues and nearly \$2.3 million coming from tax levy dollars. A note in the budget indicated the D.A.’s office utilized \$303,000 in American Rescue Plan Act funds to temporarily cover a special prosecutor, a victim witness specialist and an administrative specialist to staff a sixth criminal court. A federal Victim of Crimes Act grant also is budgeted at \$349,000.

It is anticipated that Waukesha County Executive Paul Farrow will introduce the next county budget later this month.

In a statement county Public Information Officer Hillary Mintz provided to The Freeman on Friday, Farrow said, “The Waukesha County District Attorney’s Office is state funded. Currently they’re down about 10 positions. The lack of funding from the state is a clear sign, the state does not prioritize courts and the prosecutors. Furthermore, the state has neglected its responsibility to provide necessary funding to local government. As a result of the lack of funding, the County created the Budget Task Force to gain critical public input on cost savings, budget prioritization, and revenue options moving forward. Public Safety remains our top funding priority.”

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6:00 pm

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(Right: This year's collectible pint glass)