

## Making the City of Gardens bloom

*How the community of New Hartford rebounded from the floods of '08 and made the city better than ever*

By MICHAELA KENDALL  
*The Grundy Register*

NEW HARTFORD – After the worst flood in recent history swept through New Hartford 10 years ago this week, destroying dozens of homes and damaging businesses, the community was left at an all time low.

"The tornado hit and came through the northern part of town, destroying some homes over there. Then two weeks later to the day we had the flood; that came in and took what the tornado didn't," said Carol Chapman, a longtime resident of New Hartford. "It affected the whole town. Businesses like Quick Star and our hardware store left town. We had people taking FEMA buyouts on their houses and moving because they couldn't afford to repairs their homes. Then we had 25 lots with abandoned houses around town to deal with. The community was devastated; we were at an all time low."

But even at their lowest point, when all seemed hopeless, the community banded together to rebuild their town. Today, New Hartford is stronger and better than ever.

In fact, the disaster even helped spark a new identity for the town: the City of Gardens.

If you drive through New Hartford today, you'll see that nearly all of the abandoned lots have been turned into something special: immaculate parks and gardens, which now draw visitors from around the state; playgrounds for the local kids; an orchard growing fresh fruit for the community; a pumpkin patch for the town's annual Pumpkin Festival; and a log cabin heritage center for programming and events.

All of this can be contributed to one group of dedicated citizens who call themselves the Lot Restoration Committee. The Committee, which was formed by Carol and Larry Chapman, Sandy and Larry Bass, Judy and Terry Thompson, and Greg and Kathy Chapman, was a driving force behind New Hartford's transformation.

"We wanted to help give back to our community, which has always been so supportive," Chapman said. "New Hartford is a unique place. It isn't rich or glitzy, but it's a place every community strives to be like; a place where you can feel the sense of love, compassion and support. We truly believe in this community, and we're so proud to call this place home. We wanted to do our part to make it better."

But the process of the transformation wasn't an easy one, or quick.

After the City acquired deeds to the vacant lots; it took years to get the abandoned houses demolished. After that, Chapman and the rest of the Lot Restoration Committee still had to deal with the fact that they had no money to do anything with the lots.

But in February of 2012, they invited the community to a public meeting to hear more about the Lot Restoration Committee's idea of turning the empty lots into gardens and parks; the idea instantly gained traction.

"Little by little, the donations started to come in," Chapman said.

The first garden, the Four Seasons Perennial Garden, started when Chapman's church had to do work around the side of their building, and needed to get rid of some flowers; so she dug them up and replanted them along the corner of Main and Church streets – creating the first garden.

Then, the group started applying for grants. From there on, it seems like everything happened all at once.

The group aimed to build three parks that first year, and they did: the Veterans Memorial Garden, designed and built by New Hartford resident and retired art teacher Bill Close; the Four Seasons Perennial Garden; and the crown jewel of New Hartford's gardens – the town square park and gazebo – which was designed by local art students.

But though the group was aiming for three gardens, they ended up completing seven.

They also completed: the 1800s Heritage Garden, which displays sentimental artifacts reflecting the community's heritage; the Family Park, which offers playground equipment for children of all ages, as well as a basketball court; the community garden, now the Pumpkin Patch; and the Community Fruit Orchard, which features a variety of apple, plum, pear and cherry trees.

In 2013, the group added the Meditation Garden at the Town Square Gazebo Park. The new park features a winding path, calming wind chimes and a beautiful wooden statue of a Phoenix, created by Bill Close.

In 2014, the group raised enough money to install beautiful, new welcome signs at the edges of town.

In 2015, the group completed their Log Cabin Learning Center, and then later added the swinging benches and fire pit on the outside.

Chapman says none of this would have been possible without the volunteers and community members who have chipped in their time, efforts and donations over the last several years.

"Looking back, I can see how God had a hand in every project," she said. "He put everything and everyone in place for us to make the impossible happen, and to create all of this out of nothing. So many people have shared with us in the efforts. And now, people tell me that they love to drive through town now, when they never did before; they like to stop and sit in the gazebo, or they take their kids to play at the parks. People here are proud to say to others:

you need to come see what's happening in our little town. The people here in town have given so much in love, support, help, donations; they're so inspiring and I'm so proud. It's so special. You can't buy that feeling."

The Lot Restoration Committee may be running out of empty lots to build into gardens, but they are still recruiting volunteers or anyone who wants to help take care of the gardens.

Chapman says anyone who's free for any amount of time – whether it's an hour a day or 30 minutes a week – is welcome to contact the New Hartford Lot Restoration Facebook page to find out how to get involved.

"We just want to keep the momentum going, and we are always looking for people to help, no matter how small," she said. "These gardens just bring such an immense joy to those of us who work here, and the hope is that it will bring joy to others, too. The journey to get here has been unbelievable, and it'll be amazing to see where it all ends. But who knows, maybe this is just the beginning of what's meant here for New Hartford."

Mayor John Anderson agrees: New Hartford isn't done yet. In fact, the city has big plans to grow and expand even more in the near future.

"After the flood, the citizens all got together to help each other and get things back to normal," Anderson said. "Now, we want to look toward our future. We want to build this city up. We're looking to grow and get better and stronger, so we've put our heads together to come up with new ideas."

Currently, the city is in talks with a local landowner to annex around 30 acres of his land into town. Once the land is annexed, the city plans to work with Echo Development to build up to 50 new homes on that land, which is located at the north edge of town.

"The potential is unbelievable if this takes off," Anderson said. "We have a great school, a lot of opportunity for small businesses, and we're close enough to Cedar Falls to get people here that want that small town life, with big city amenities only 10 minutes away. Our hope is that bringing more people to town will in turn bring more businesses to town, and that's good for everybody."

City Clerk Shawna Hagen says New Hartford is a hidden gem just waiting to be discovered.

"There's huge potential here, and we want to help bring that about," she said. "We don't want to be dormant, we want to build and spur growth. We already have visitors coming through for the gardens, we have tourism, now we want to build and expand and keep people coming here, and hopefully even staying here. We have high hopes about the future."



Countless volunteer hours by community members made the beautiful gardens in New Hartford possible. Shown above, volunteers work at the local fruit orchard, located one block east of Broadway Street at the corner of Water and Washington Street. (Photos courtesy of the New Hartford Lot Restoration Committee)



The Gazebo Garden at the corner of Main and Broadway is the crown jewel and centerpiece of the City of Gardens. On warm days, the garden draws visitors who sit and enjoy a quiet moment in nature.



The Log Cabin Learning Center is a gem in the little town of New Hartford, built by hand by members of the New Hartford Lot Restoration Committee. The Learning Center is available for public use for programs, meetings, reunions, parties and more.



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# A meeting of minds

## Chess players gather in Wellsburg for tournament

By BETHANY CARSON  
Mid America Publishing

"I am a competitor, and I want to battle for as long as possible. The game of chess draws me in because not only is it a mental battle, but you can keep battling for years and years. I enjoy the training and preparation that goes into these events, and the opportunity to play against opponents that are equally as passionate as myself," said James Neal of Iowa City.

Neal, along with current Iowa co-champion Joseph Wan, Gokul Thangavel and Ying Tan, finished in a four-way tie for first with three out of four points in the open section at the fourth annual Wellsburg Open and Reserve chess tournament held at Wellsburg Reformed Church on Saturday. The four players split the top prizes and went home with \$130 each after four grueling games that lasted from 9 a.m. to past 8 p.m. Each player had 75 minutes plus a five second delay every move to finish each game.

Between rounds, players enjoyed analyzing games, playing chess variants and blitz (fast) games, chatting, and enjoying a complementary meal provided to players and their family members who attended to cheer them on.

A total of forty players attended the tournament, which included an open section for the higher-rated players, a reserve section for the lower-rated players, and an extra section. They ranged from elementary students to senior citizens and hailed from around the state as well as from Nebraska, Minnesota and Missouri.

Eric Vigil, president of the Iowa State Chess Association (IASCA), organized a carpool of six players coming from Iowa City.

"On the way there, we chat chess, and on the way home we go over games that we played and talk about the recent tournament," Vigil said. "It is a great way to meet people and develop friendships with a common interest that span generations, socioeconomic boundaries, politics, religion, race and gender."

IASCA Treasurer and En Passant (state chess magazine) editor Mark Capron, who was also at the event, points to the benefits of chess for both the young and old.

"I feel that chess can be a very positive influence on all ages. When young, you can strengthen your logical and strategic thinking. Chess has been used in many schools (before school, after school and as an

actual class during school) as a way of helping at-risk kids (and others) find a positive way to focus their energies and stay out of trouble," Capron said. "As you get older, you can keep your mind sharp by playing games such as chess, Sudoku, crosswords, etc. There have been several studies that show a lower incidence of Alzheimer's amongst chess players. The relationship is probably not chess-specific, but with people who continue doing activities that allow their brain to exercise."

Capron calls problem-solving a passion. He also appreciates how with the strategic thinking required by the game, he can eliminate extraneous thoughts and focus.

"I like playing chess as it's the best game to train logical thinking and thought completeness," said Ying Tan of Lincoln, Nebraska. "It's an honor to be tied for first with the best players in Iowa; it's just awesome."

Although the Wellsburg Open and Reserve, organized by myself, is only an annual event, players have many opportunities throughout the year to practice their skills. A state tournament calendar is kept online at [www.iowa-chess.org](http://www.iowa-chess.org). There are scholastic, senior and girls' championships, as well as tournaments open to all ages. Many players travel to out-of-state and national chess tournaments as well. Others practice at clubs or play online.

Gokul Thangavel of Iowa City enjoys chess because it helps promote analytical thinking.

"To tie for first was pretty ecstatic. I had played some challenging games, and in the end, I managed to pull some decent results," Thangavel said.

Other prize-winners in the Open section were Steven Cusumano (Top U2000) and Michael Mills (Top U1800). Both players hail from Nebraska and finished with 2.5 out of four points—a win and three draws—for \$100 each. In the Reserve section, Steve Jacobs and Mithruul Prasad tied for first with 3.5 out of four points, drawing only to each other. Eric Vigil finished as top U1400 with three wins and a loss to Jacobs. The biggest upset of the day came when Kuan-chuen Wu, a mechanical-engineering Ph.D. student at ISU, rated 1259, defeated Daniel Vasto, a Des Moines area school psychologist rated 2006.

But to some players it's not just the results that count, it's the experience, win or lose.

"I was happy to get first, but,



Ying Tan, Joseph Wan, James Neal and Gokul Thangavel finished in a four-way tie for first at the Wellsburg Open chess tournament on Saturday. (Bethany Carson photo)



Forty players competed in a chess tournament at Wellsburg Reformed Church Saturday. (Bethany Carson photo)

to be honest, I didn't feel I performed well this event," Neal said. "The result of the game isn't as important as the process, and I feel I still have a lot to work on."

Neal pursues chess full-time as a chess coach. But around the room, a variety of professions were represented. There were students, a welder, carpenter, accountant, professors, chemist, warehouse worker, insurance examiner and software engineer.

Vigil left a career in nursing and is now back in college with an aim of becoming a teacher.

"It's funny; I have not been practicing chess much, but have been in college doing physics. My chess game has improved this year," Vigil said. "Researchers say that practicing chess works on the same part of your brain that is involved with playing musical instruments and learning foreign languages.

I see a lot of crossover in science and music."

This year, Vigil, in his third term as IASCA president, sees chess players across the country excited as American Fabiano Caruana has earned the right to play for the world chess championship against Magnus Carlsen of Norway in London in October. Caruana is the first U.S. challenger to the title since Bobby Fischer.

Vigil originally started playing chess with his brothers, cousins and uncles as a boy during the Bobby Fischer chess boom. When his own son joined an elementary school chess club, he started playing again, this time competitively. He lost his first rated game to a boy in kindergarten. But practice and study have helped.

"As a player who started in elementary school, chess taught patience and gave me an outlet for my creativity," Joe Meyer

of Waterloo said. "As an adult, I am continuously retaught humility and that hard work always beats talent."

Some may argue that a chess player needs both talent

and hard work. It's an age-old debate. But there's no debating that chess is fun. And it's a game for anyone willing to give it a try.



Tim Carson of rural Grundy County focuses on a chess game. (Charity Carson photo)

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# Major changes underfoot at local counseling office

By ROBERT MAHARRY

*The Grundy Register*  
GRUNDY CENTER- As of last week, the staff at Heart and Solutions in Grundy Center got substantially larger, and the caseload is growing exponentially along with it.

The counseling office, co-owned and operated by husband and wife duo Julie and Joe Johnson, is bringing on several employees and clients from Monarch Therapy in Parkersburg as founder Rusty Eddy shifts his focus toward his re-election campaign for the Butler County Board of Supervisors.

"It's been kind of a process," Mrs. Johnson said. "But (Eddy's) primary goal was that his clients continue to be served... Monarch stopping that service doesn't mean that the clients have to stop."

Most notably, Heart and Solutions will take over Monarch's Behavioral Health Intervention Services (BHIS), an in-home offering that focuses on younger children with potential issues. BHIS clients are located across the state, and the staff at the Grundy Center office—located at 604 8th Street near Hurley and Associates and the county Farm Bureau headquarters—has now grown to around 13 employees.

The Johnsons have been in Grundy Center for nearly four years now, and they're excited to grow the business with a whole new set of services. Julie, a Massachusetts native, has found her adopted hometown to be a welcoming environment and a great place to raise a child with Joe, who grew up in Allison.

Heart and Solutions operates five offices in Iowa (Grundy Center, Waterloo, Cedar Rapids, Nevada and Jefferson), and as mental health concerns make their way to the forefront of the state and national conversation, Johnson believes it's more important than ever to let potential patients know that help is available locally.

"A lot of times parents will think 'If I could just get some help with my child's behaviors.' Nobody really knows how to manage those things when you



Heart and Solutions co-owners Joe and Julie Johnson recently expanded the offerings at their Grundy Center location as a result of changes at Monarch Therapy in Parkersburg. The office is at 604 8th Street. (Robert Maharry/The Grundy Register photo)

become a parent. It's trial and error sometimes," she said. "We can just be a support for the whole family to teach them new skills or help them with anger management and listening skills."

As a licensed mental health professional, Johnson added that she's excited about the news of a new shared social worker position that will be divided between the AGWSR, Aplington-Parkersburg, Dike-New Hartford and Grundy Center districts—Heart and Solutions already provides services at three of the four school systems.

"Any additional mental health things in the community are good," she said. "If they know that we're available, and they can connect those kiddos to us... when it's in the school there's a little less stigma."

Going forward, the future of

psychiatric care will likely be a topic of intense debate in the aftermath of deinstitutionalization movement that took root in the 1960s and the recent closure of two mental hospitals in Iowa under former Governor Terry Branstad.

Johnson, a successful professional with a family and a relatively stable life, argues that addressing the root causes of these problems will require an acknowledgement that mental illness is not confined to any race, gender, socioeconomic class or specific type of person. It can happen to anyone.

"As human beings, we're expected function at a certain level of skill, but we're not taught those skills anywhere," she said. "To me, behavioral health intervention is that class... We practice on those skills that nobody taught formally."



Two vehicles were damaged in a near head-on collision at the Highway 14 Holland turnoff on Thursday afternoon. A 2013 GMC driven by Michael Heard (left) was turning on to D35 when it hit Donald Fleshner's 1999 Ford pickup pulling a horse trailer (right). (Photos courtesy of the Grundy County Sheriff's Office)

# Three injured in Highway 14 accident north of Grundy Center

By ROBERT MAHARRY

*The Grundy Register*  
HOLLAND- A near head-on collision between two vehicles at the D-35 turnoff north of Grundy Center on Highway 14 Thursday left a Steamboat Rock woman with serious injuries that required treatment at Covenant Hospital in Waterloo.

According to the Grundy County Sheriff's Office, Michael Heard of Steamboat Rock, with passenger Cathy Heard, was headed northbound

and made a left turn onto D-35 at about 4:30 p.m., the blacktop road that leads to Holland, when Donald Fleshner of Janesville—driving a 1999 Ford pickup pulling a Titan horse trailer—struck Heard's 2013 GMC truck.

Mr. Heard and Mr. Fleshner were treated at the Grundy County Memorial Hospital, but Ms. Heard required additional attention at Covenant, where she was transferred by ambulance for upper torso injuries. The estimated damage on

Heard's vehicle is \$20,000 after most of the front end was destroyed, and damages to Fleshner's vehicle and trailer are projected at \$15,000, a total loss. Traffic was rerouted for approximately two hours as the scene was cleaned up and investigated.

No citations have been issued, and the accident remains under investigation. State troopers, the Iowa DOT and Grundy Center Fire and Ambulance all assisted on the scene.

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**Waverly Health Center**  
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# New Hartford Beaver Creek Days



At top left and top right, the New Hartford American Legion and local Boy Scout troop lead the parade on Saturday morning. Several tractors, including a 1967 Allis-Chalmers (left) drove through, and the Legion created a replica of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (right). At bottom left are characters from well-known kid's movies, and at bottom center, Walker Weidemann makes a run for some candy. Even the Waterloo Bucks mascot (bottom right) made an appearance. (Robert Maharry/Mid-America Publishing photos)



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