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# IOWA TODAY®



CEDAR RAPIDS

## EAST IOWA JOURNAL

### NEWS ROUNDUP

#### CEDAR RAPIDS

##### Water, heat pacts OK'd

Two Cedar Rapids firms were awarded contracts from the city Wednesday after submitting low bids on a pair of projects.

Dave Schmitt Construction won the rights to install a water main along First Street NE between B and D Avenues for \$333,541. City officials had estimated that project would cost \$374,000. Bids from four other companies ranged up to \$406,304.

Modern Piping was awarded a \$34,458 contract to convert the Ground Transportation Center from electric to steam heat. The company's bid was the lowest of four ranging up to \$69,492. All were well under the city's estimate of \$85,000.

The project, 75 percent of which is funded by a federal grant, is expected to save \$25,000 annually in heating bills at the GTC.

The city also received two bids for a \$1.25 million storm and sanitary sewer project in Northwood Knolls, the lowest of which was 18 percent above budget.

City Engineer Dick Ransom said the bids and project are being reviewed to prepare a recommendation to the City Council on how to proceed. The project is not expected to be delayed, however, due to lead time built in for manufacturing storm sewer pipe.

Northwood Knolls is a subdivision south of 42nd Street NE between Wenig Road and Interstate 380. The project is intended to relieve the area of flooding that occurred even before this summer's record rains caused similar problems in other areas.

##### Grant funds bus projects

Funds to renovate the old Cedar Rapids Fire Station No. 2 highlight a \$1.16 million federal grant approved recently for Five Seasons Transportation.

Transit Director Bill Hoekstra announced the grant at Tuesday's City Council meeting. It includes \$120,000 to renovate the old fire station at E Avenue and Fifth Street NW to provide storage space for the bus department.

"We're going to try to bring it back to its splendor," Hoekstra said of the city landmark.

The grant also provides \$713,151 to remanufacture nine buses, \$204,300 to convert 23 buses to run on diesel and ethanol fuel, and \$120,000 to replace four underground fuel storage tanks at the bus garage. The grant requires a 20 percent local match — which amounts to \$265,288.

##### Snake seized in arrest

Police got more than they bargained for when they executed a warrant last night trying to find a Cedar Rapids man wanted on several charges — they also netted two more arrests and confiscated some drugs and a snake.

According to Lt. Larry Greco, police obtained a search warrant for Eldridge Prince, 54, who was staying at 1534 Second Ave. SE at 9:45 p.m.

When police arrived at the scene, they found and arrested Prince, who was wanted under eight warrants: two for revocation of probation and one each for driving while barred, failure to appear for assault while causing injury, drunken driving, driving with suspended license, doing damage to two vehicles and failure to maintain control of his vehicle.

While they were arresting Prince, police also arrested his nephew, Lucius Prince, 20, and Andrea Cox, 23, for possession of marijuana and possession of a dangerous exotic animal. Lucius had a constricting snake in his home.

#### IOWA CITY

##### No verdict in bike death

A Johnson County District Court jury will reconvene today after its first full day of deliberations in a vehicular homicide case.

Jurors got the Lawrence M. Henning case at 3:20 p.m. Tuesday. They deliberated all day Wednesday and were dismissed for the evening at 4:30 p.m. Jurors will return to the courthouse at 9 a.m. today.

Henning, 37, of rural Iowa City, is accused of striking 13-year-old Christopher Harding as the youth rode his bicycle along Highway 921.

Jurors also will determine whether Henning is guilty of leaving the scene of a fatal accident.

Vehicular homicide carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. Leaving the scene of a fatal accident carries a sentence of up to two years in prison.

#### NEWS TIPS

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# Shoplifters don't take a holiday

By Darin Metz  
Gazette staff writer

For many, the holiday season means countless hours of shopping for presents for family and friends.

But for Shaun Farmer, a security director at Westdale Mall, it usually means countless hours of watching and preventing some shoppers from committing a crime.

"I see it as a peak shoplifting time," he said. "The merchants' employees are watching a lot of people at the same time. I know they do their best with cameras and mirrors, but people still find a way to get the merchandise."

Farmer, store owners and police officers are tackling a problem that has become as routine as Christmas decorations — shoplifting.

The season is especially enticing to would-be thieves, Lt. Larry Greco

of the Cedar Rapids Police Department said.

"The stores stock a lot more items this time of the year," Greco said. "And let's face it. This time of the year, all the stores are crowded, and with the extra people and busy atmosphere, it could lull a thief into thinking they are more secure and can get away with what they are trying to pull."

Since Jan. 1, 2,889 thefts have been reported in Cedar Rapids. About 1,026 of those cases are shoplifting incidents. Between Thanksgiving and the Christmas season, the Police Department averages three or four shoplifting cases per day.

Nationally, theft accounted for the lion's share of the \$27 billion in shortages, or "shrinkage," reported by U.S. retailers last year — about 1.9 percent of sales, the National

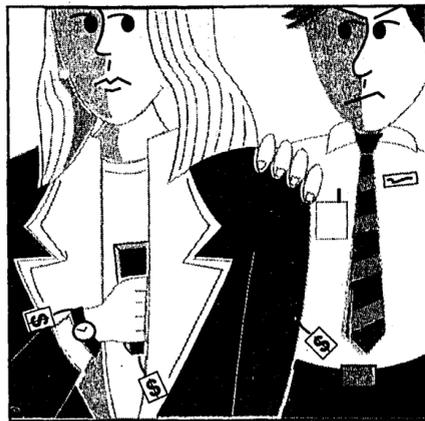
Retail Federation said.

Stores are equipped with the standard security devices, such as video cameras and tags that can only be removed by sales people. In cities like Chicago and New York, cameras are installed in the mannequins on display.

Cameras have been effective in reducing the number of shoplifting incidents over the past few years.

"A lot of juveniles, those are the major shoplifters we catch," Farmer said. "I think that as age increases, shoplifting decreases. As people become more of an adult they start to see right from wrong. Most of the times it's teens who want to try and see if they can get away with it."

Jane Vaassen, assistant operations director of Lindale Mall, said



Gazette illustration by Chad Willenborg

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Jolene Kacere, a post office customer relations coordinator, displays some holiday gift ideas that can be found at the main office in Cedar Rapids. Some of the products include commemorative stamp books.

Gazette photos by Chris Stewart

## Post office puts stamp on season

Products marketed as Christmas gifts

By Dick Hogan  
Gazette staff writer

The post office is more than a place to mail your Christmas gifts. It's a place to buy them, too.

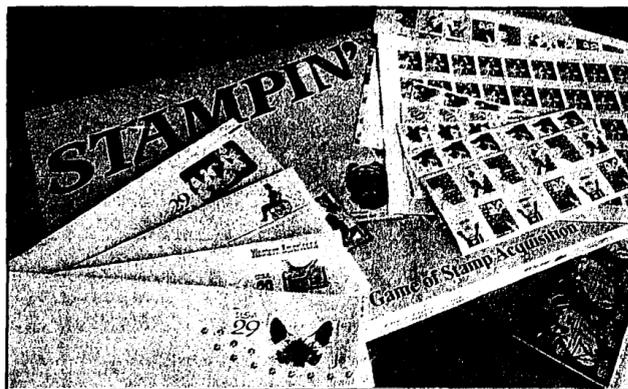
Postal officials suggest that stamps are among the most practical holiday gifts, often welcomed by shut-ins, the elderly, college students with limited budgets, or maybe even a favorite teacher.

History buffs and nature lovers will love unique commemorative books available from the U.S. Postal Service. One book focuses on World War II, another features wildflowers. Each contains descriptive text, vivid illustrations and colorful stamps, says Jolene Kacere, customer relations coordinator in Cedar Rapids.

One of the most popular books offered for stamp collectors is the new 20th edition of "The Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps." The 400-page catalog, which sells for \$9.95, is highlighted by full-color or pictures of more than 2,000 U.S. postage stamp designs.

Besides the common stamps usually seen on business correspondence, the Postal Service offers intriguing special collector's issues, such as the Elvis Presley stamp. The numerous colorful designs should appeal to a broad variety of interests.

Kacere says collectors will



Gift ideas from the Postal Service include a game board, adhesive stamps and envelopes that can be printed with return addresses.

appreciate a 1993 commemorative stamp collection containing the most popular stamps issued this year. The collection comes in a handsomely illustrated hardbound book with Elvis on the cover. It features stories about the subjects of the commemorative stamps. It sells for \$24.95.

And for an extra thoughtful gift, the Postal Service offers pressure-sensitive stamps. All you have to do is peel off the backing, then affix the stamp. No licking needed.

For the younger set, a board game of stamp acquisition is offered by the Postal Service.

Another practical gift is a box of distinctive personalized envelopes with return address and postage already imprinted. A personal logo can be included on the return address. A set of 50 envelopes costs \$17.40. Order forms are available at the post office, and delivery takes three to four weeks.

Office hours for the Philatelic Center at Cedar Rapids' main post office, where most of the items mentioned are available, are from noon to 4 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday; 9 a.m. to noon on Saturdays; and closed on Tuesdays.

## Ex-minister found guilty of assault

By Tom Fruehling  
Gazette staff writer

Former Cedar Rapids minister Wendell Beets, 48, has been found guilty of assault with intent to commit sexual abuse against one of his young female parishioners.

In making his ruling Wednesday afternoon, Associate Linn District Judge Michael Newmeister said he believed the testimony of the woman and did not find Beets' version of the incident to be credible. Newmeister noted that the stories they told in a one-day trial before him in October were "diametrically opposed."

The accuser, Kim Frazier, 20, of Cedar Rapids, said Beets attacked her while the two were alone in his van on July 19, 1992. The former pastor at the Sound Doctrine Church of God in Christ, meanwhile, contended Frazier was "a flirtatious and amorous young woman" who lured him into the encounter.

The two were part of a church group that had gone on a church choir trip to Des Moines. When they returned, Beets dropped off the others and drove to a remote area on a gravel road near Highway 13 and Mount Vernon Road.

Newmeister pointed out that Frazier had known the minister for 14 years and was not uncomfortable being alone with him. He apparently delayed taking her home under the guise of helping her look for a car in a used car lot.

While parked late at night, according to testimony by Frazier, Beets began kissing her on the face and neck. He then started to fondle her breasts under her shirt and her thigh under her skirt.

Newmeister ruled that Beets made advances on the woman without her verbal or implied consent and that she continued to urge him to stop. Frazier testified that Beets exposed his penis and continued his attack. While continuing to struggle, she began sobbing.

At that point, Newmeister ruled, Beets "realized the inappropriateness of his behavior" and ceased his advances. He then expressed remorse, alluding to his "weaknesses as a human." Beets also urged Frazier not to tell anyone of the incident, saying it would hurt himself, her family and the church. She apparently agreed but eventually told her sister.

When confronted by Frazier's parents, Clarence and Louise Ellis, Beets admitted to the attack and said he was sorry. He resigned as pastor a few days later.

Newmeister said Beets offered no plausible reason for his resignation. And Beets claimed that Frazier made accusations against him because of an alleged affair he had had with her mother, Newmeister noted. The judge, however, said he found Frazier's testimony to be accurate.

Newmeister set a sentencing date of Feb. 25 and ordered a pre-sentence investigation. Assault on commit sexual abuse is an aggravated misdemeanor and carries a maximum punishment of two years in jail and a fine of \$5,000.

Assistant Linn County Attorney Jeff Clark, who tried the case, said the ruling vindicates Frazier and her parents. "I have a great deal of respect for them," Clark said. "They faced a personal risk and brought attention to themselves by bringing this case to trial."

Beets could not be reached for comment.



Wendell Beets  
Judge says defense not credible

## 'Economic abuse' cited in mobile home park eviction

Couple say laws unfairly favor parks

By Rick Smith  
Gazette staff writer

It was a bitter breeze Wednesday that hit young parents Megan Wolfert and Kyle Bye as they hurried to move modest possessions and an attractive Christmas tree from their mobile home in the Squaw Creek Village Manufactured Home Park east of Marior to a Cedar Rapids apartment.

The Wolfert-Bye move was a forced one, which the couple, with the support of their parents, had battled since October. Ultimately, they gave up the fight.

State law — they, their parents and attorney concluded — is weighed too heavily in favor of mobile home park owners for them to fight on. A park owner needs no reason, let alone a good reason, to evict someone, they say.

"I'm mad about the whole thing" Megan Wolfert, 22, said. "I don't believe we did anything wrong. She (the park manager) gave no justified reason for evicting us. Ultimately, she didn't have

to prove anything."

Her father, Roger, who owns the mobile home and calls himself a conservative Republican salesman, termed the entire experience with the mobile park "pretty disquieting."

"These people are obviously engineering their own prejudices. It's economic abuse," he said.

William Neppi, the Cedar Rapids attorney who represents the Squaw Creek Village park, said state law does not favor mobile home park owners over tenants, but treats them the same.

The law gives park owner and tenant

the same ability to end their relationship in 60 days without providing a reason, said Neppi.

"The tenant just as well as the landlord enters into that relationship with both eyes wide open," said Neppi. "Both parties can leave within 60 days. Whether or not it is fundamentally unfair, I guess I don't think it is."

In practice, owners don't evict tenants on a whim, added Neppi. It's bad for business. Eviction generally comes at the end of a failed dialogue, he said.

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