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OCTOBER 28-31

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Ad funding provided by the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa, Winneshiek County

 **HELPING SERVICES**
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NEWS



Two generations of the Bruening family pose with employee Leonard Panos last Thursday afternoon after Panos received a new pickup truck in recognition of his 40 years of employment with Bruening Rock Products, a Decorah business now in its fourth generation. From left are Michael Bruening, Keith Bruening, Greg Bruening, Leonard Panos, Tyler Bruening and Jacob Bruening. (Decorah Newspapers photos by Sarah Strandberg)

Early Decorah house rehabilitated by local contractor is ready for new life

Historic tax credits make project feasible

By Will Fellows

Thanks to David Wadsworth and his crew, the 150-year-old house on the southwest corner of Main and William streets in Decorah is still there, looking good and ready for new occupants.

After about 20 years' experience working on new and old houses, Wadsworth, owner of Wadsworth Construction in Decorah, is increasingly attracted to old houses—because of their interesting architectural styles and details, and the quality of the materials they were built with and how they were put together.

Wadsworth had driven past 409 East Main many times, but he had never noticed the place. Then in early 2018, the forlorn house was stripped of its cement siding in preparation for demolition.

“Once that siding was gone, there was an old house there, intact, unique in a way that was

of another time and perhaps another place. And it still had its original windows and clapboard siding. That’s what gives a house character. Without those things I wouldn’t have given it a second

Upstairs are two bedrooms (one with a large walk-in closet), laundry, and full bathroom. Downstairs are the living room, dining room, kitchen, and a half bath that’s adjacent to a

This 150-year-old house on the southwest corner of Main and William streets in Decorah has been rehabilitated and is ready for new occupants. (Submitted photo)

glance,” Wadsworth said.

Look at that cute little house, Wadsworth thought. But what could he do with it? For about six months he watched it sit, “for sale by owner.” Then the sign was gone and Wadsworth assumed the house was lost, but he soon learned that the sale had fallen through. He decided to take a closer look, then bought it with the idea of rehabilitating and selling it. He would use historic tax credits, if available, to make the venture more feasible financially.

Tax credits

Wadsworth bought the house not knowing if it would qualify for tax credits. He hired a consultant to prepare a National Register of Historic Places eligibility report. If the State Historic Preservation Office of Iowa determined that the property was National Register-eligible, Wadsworth would be able to claim state tax credits equaling 25 percent of his qualified rehabilitation expenses of \$50,000 or more. (Wadsworth is still working his way through the tax credit process.)

The original part of the house was built in about 1869 by Archa and Mary Dennis, who came from New York. It’s an I-house, a folk architecture form found in the Northeast U.S. and, before that, in the British Isles. Within about five years the Dennises sold the house to Knut and Julia Thompson, a Norwegian couple who soon added the large, two-story rear wing.

“It’s solid, well put together,” Wadsworth says. “The foundation is great all the way around and there are no framing flaws. The addition and later remodeling were done in ways that tied the house together really well.”

small room that could serve as an extra bedroom. There’s an east-facing enclosed porch and the house has original wood floors throughout. It’s well insulated and has all-new electrical wiring, plumbing, heating and air conditioning.

Wadsworth worked with an interior designer to create a contemporary aesthetic that’s compatible with the house’s historic features. The upstairs bathroom, with wainscot and tile walls and hexagonal tile floor, has its original claw-foot bathtub as well as a new glassed-in shower.

Creating a new kitchen was a real challenge.

“We’ve opened it up some from how it originally was, connecting the kitchen to the dining room without losing those individual rooms. It was important to me to respect the distinct spaces.”

“I love the house,” Wadsworth says. “Throughout it all, I’ve really grown fond of it.”

The house shares its lot with the state’s largest European larch tree, and Wadsworth says many people have expressed interest in the tree’s future, not just the house’s.

“It’s very much a part of what makes this property special.”

The public is invited to an open house at 409 East Main in Decorah on Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 2-3, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The place is for sale, but anyone with an interest in old houses (or old trees) is welcome to stop by. Wadsworth and the Decorah Historic Preservation Commission will be scheduling a free workshop this winter on the use of historic tax credits in historic building restoration.

Sheriff

Second offense

Aaron Hemesath, 36, Ossian, was charged with second-offense operating while under the influence after an accident Sunday, Oct. 20, in Springfield Township.

According to the Winneshiek County Sheriff’s Office, Hemesath’s vehicle struck a tractor at the intersection of Highway 52 and Middle Calmar Road at about 7:20 p.m. No immediate medical attention was sought.

Hemesath was arrested and booked into the Winneshiek County Jail.

Failed to serve

Brent Fullhart was arrested in Fayette County and transported to the Winneshiek County Jail Oct. 11 on a failure to serve jail time arrest warrant.

Under the influence

Kathryn Gaffney Warden, 58, Waukon, was arrested on 279th Avenue in Burr Oak Township Oct. 12 at about 1:35 p.m. and booked into the Winneshiek County Jail for second-offense operating while under the influence.

OWI

Donald Oliver, 25, Ossian, was arrested on Highway 52 in Military Township Oct. 12 at about 1:30 a.m. and booked into the Winneshiek County Jail for operating while under the influence.

City of Decorah offers options for leaf disposal

The city of Decorah is offering several options for the disposal of leaves this fall.

The city Yard Waste Site on Trout Run Road currently has extended hours. The Yard Waste Site is open weekdays from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to noon. There is a 24-hour area designated for the disposal of leaves on-site at the Decorah Street Department, 108 Railroad Avenue, from now through Friday, Nov. 15.

Leaves also may be deposited along the curb of any street or alley. The schedule for curbside leaf pickup is:

- Wards 1 and 2: Nov. 4-8
- Ward 3: Oct. 21-25 and Nov. 11-15
- Wards 4 and 5: Oct. 28-Nov. 1 and Nov. 18-22

Additional information is available at the Decorah Street Department’s Facebook page. Contact the Street Department at 382-2157 with any questions.

Coming Up

DECORAH COUNCIL

The Decorah City Council meets 5:45 p.m. Monday, Nov. 4, in Council chambers at Decorah City Hall.

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Decorah Welcomes

Luther President Jenifer K. Ward

November 1, 2019

Inaugural Night on the Town

Come downtown Friday evening to enjoy Decorah’s great restaurants, shops, special entertainment and activities.

November 2, 2019

Inauguration Ceremony, 11 a.m.

Center for Faith and Life

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A full schedule of events can be found at

luther.edu/inauguration

