

THE HAWK EYE

177th year — No. 105

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2013

75¢

Bridge over the River Iowa



Brenna Norman/The Hawk Eye

Construction continues on the Iowa River bridge on X99 Monday near Oakville. Traffic over the bridge will continue normally until next November.

\$9.6 million span opens next year

Federal government will pick up 80 percent of Louisa County project's cost.

By **BOB HANSEN**
for The Hawk Eye

OAKVILLE — Construction work is proceeding on a replacement bridge intended to carry County Road X99 over the Iowa River about 3 miles west of Oakville.

Crews from Crammer and Associates Construction of Grimes began work on the structure last month and

hope to be finished by November 2014.

The 1,165-foot-long by 62-foot-wide concrete pier-and-precast concrete bridge replaces the badly deteriorated structure that has carried traffic since it was built in 1949.

No interruption of traffic is anticipated during construction.

David Schinker of the Louisa County Engineering Department said the old bridge has met and surpassed its intended lifespan and is plagued by degradation of the deck surface and by a rusted and compromised support structure. He doesn't believe cata-

strophic flooding on the Iowa River in 2008 contributed significantly to the bridge's decline.

The new bridge is estimated to cost \$9.6 million, with 80 percent of the cost covered through a Back to Work grant from the federal Department of Commerce. The remaining 20 percent of the bridge's cost will be paid by the Iowa Department of Transportation.

When completed, the new bridge will be two lanes wide and boast a guarded pedestrian and bicycle lane. It also will be higher than the present structure so it will not be an impedi-

ment to river flow during flood stage.

Tanner Wilkes of Crammer and Associates said the bridge will ride on seven large concrete piers — four of which will rest on the river bottom.

Large shovels are dredging the river bottom to build a construction causeway, which will allow the placement of caissons necessary to pour one of the major supports.

The bridge contractor hopes to keep crews on the project through the winter to meet the targeted completion date.



Volume 163 Issue 11 • March 13, 2014

Newspaper for Louisa County, the Wapello School Board and the Cities of Wapello, Oakville, Letts and Grandview

It's official--this winter was the coldest in 35 years!

DES MOINES - Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey today highlighted a summary of the 2013/2014 winter season compiled by Harry Hillaker, the State Climatologist with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

"It has certainly seemed like a long, cold winter and the numbers from our State Clima-

tologist's office bear that out. Everyone is certainly looking forward to spring," Northey said.

"The meteorological season of winter runs from December 1 through February 28. This past winter season has been the coldest experienced in Iowa in 35 years and ranks as the 9th coldest winter in 141 years of

records. Temperatures this winter season averaged 14.7 degrees or 7.2 degrees below normal," said Hillaker.

On a month-by-month basis all three winter months were unusually cold this past season:

December 2013

17.3 degrees

6.7 degrees colder than aver-

age

17th coldest December

January 2014

13.9 degrees

4.7 degrees colder than average

35th coldest January

February 2014

12.6 degrees

10.5 degrees colder than average

7th coldest February

A colder December was last recorded in 2000, a colder January in 2010 and a colder February in 1979. Historically there have been only 24 winters among the past 141 seasons where all three winter months averaged colder than normal. Temperatures this winter have varied from about ten degrees below normal in northeast Iowa to four degrees below normal over the southwest.

The cold has been very persistent this winter with nearly one-half (44) of all days averaging more than ten degrees colder than normal while only four days averaged more than ten degrees above normal.

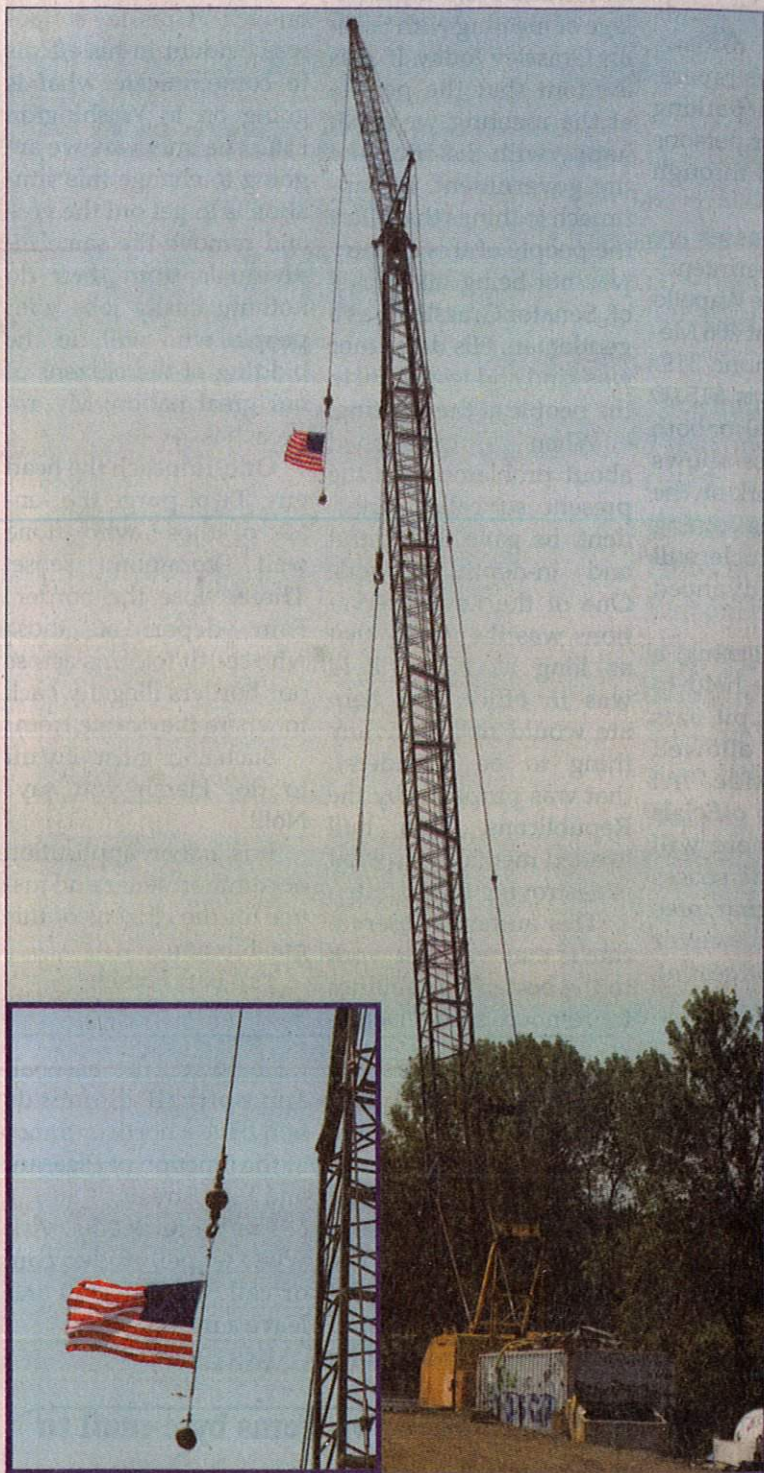
Persistence has been the primary characteristic of the Iowa weather pattern this win-

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Work progressing on new Highway 99 bridge near Oakville

Despite a very cold and snowy winter, work has progressed rapidly on the new bridge over the Iowa River near Oakville. Most of the piers have been poured and I beams have been placed on the piers over much of the span.



Patriotic construction

Workers placed an American flag on a crane at the construction site of the Iowa River bridge near Oakville. The inset is a close-up of the flag.

Three Oakville Bridges

Submitted by Paul Gustison

Oakville officially became a town in December of 1891 and recorded at our Louisa County Court-house on this month, even tho it was in existence much before this official date.

From Toolesboro to Oakville there was the Iowa River to get across somehow and ways, rafts or other ferry ways of crossing.

These were mainly horse and buggy days of life that were hard and miserable. In 1895 and 1896 the 1st bridge across the Iowa River west of Oakville a mile likened a new fast passage way, horse and buggy to Model

A's and T's, Oakville travel to Toolesboro and Wapello and vice versa.

The cost of this bridge at Oakville was \$14,860.40. This new and 1st bridge made that poor farmer the happiest of the lot.

Then during World War II on Dec. 31, 1941 my neighbor Glen Taylor had hired a man from Oakville to truck some of his ear corn to the elevator at Oakville. The truck's owner Jack Blodgett had Charles Blodgett at the wheel. Charles either slid on a patch of ice or otherwise. The truck struck the west side of the extreme north span on the north end of the bridge. The two escaped by kicking the



Louisa County Engineer
Larry Roehl

driver's side window out and scampering up the collapsing plank roadway and running for safety. This Oakville river bridge out of service changed the farmer's egg and cream route to Wapello.

The school route was then through Wapello to Newport to Oakville. Folks at different times picked students up from the Newport bus and then transported them to Oakville, a long ride.

For the farmers with land holdings on each side of the river this was a headache. The war freeze of materials delayed the repair project for nearly a year.

The 200 ft. span of steel was removed after high water retreated. The wood piling driven replaced stone piers. Then the plank floor was placed. The bridge was in service once more. All supplies came by rail to the Oakville Depot.

Immediately after the push was for a new modern bridge to replace that poor old work of architecture that changed the lives of everyone. Then very quickly this new modern bridge became

a reality and opened for business in 1947. I had a couple of friends that entered military service at 16 & 17 years of age by falsifying their age. Three made it back and one didn't. Two of them fished off that bridge all night long until daylight, trying to forget and being left alone. This 1947 bridge never closed down to traffic except for a few 500 year floods. Still today called the Oakville bridge, or officially to our wonderful County Engineer Larry Roehl the Oakville 99 bridge. That's OK.

Now with Larry's warmth and wisdom he has brought to the S.E. corner of Louisa County and the S.E. corner of Jefferson Township a specimen of awe. This 3rd Oakville bridge of beauty just seems too good for older people as I, but I'll accept it with a tip of my hat each time I cross.

As time of life gets shorter for 80 & 90 year olds, I have to be sure I get across this 3rd structure. If I make it I've traveled all three in my lifetime, with 100+ pictures of it's making. The hard working humans worked in the hottest and the coldest weather, and I mean cold. When they poured the extreme north pier (not the cap), on the north side of the river, it

was the coldest day of our 2014 - 2014 winter, at -20° at 5 p.m. That afternoon the form on that pier was filled with concrete, no chemicals added, just really hot water. To me I was stunned, being at the right place at the right time. There were white beards and mustaches that day.

So on Sept. 13, 2014 I took my pickup and started at the south side of the levee on Hwy 99 next to Lanz's. With the new road and curve up to grade I proceeded on a new roadway and Oakville bridge. I carried a broom and swept nails here and there out of the way to make my first of many crossings of this pretty structure, this new 3rd bridge. I looked down to the river itself and then up and down stream. It was that same old changeable river. The sun at 3 p.m. was bright and the sky blue. The Oakville elevator just looked an arm's length away.

The new wide bicycle lane on the east side is protected by a 4' concrete poured barrier for their protection as well as the vehicle's.

That Oakville bridge has two jutted fishing platforms along the bicycle lane. Many talk about 'class in the boondocks'. Then to set it all off, on the east side from the north

end to the south end a pretty stainless steel see-thru railing fence for the bikers' and fishermen's protection. For a person in a wheelchair, sports minded or not, it's just what the doctor ordered. Don't let it slip away.

I have a 4 ft. piece of 1896 history - a piece of the 1st bridge across the Iowa at Oakville. When it went down in 1941 some framing remained on the river bottom and was unearthed during construction on the north side of the river.

It's too bad our winters have to have road salt on this bridge. Maybe the next one will have solar flooring for the next generation.

I have mentioned Oakville bridge several times. It's been that way for the past 100 years + 18. I hope no one tries to come up with another name for this bridge. I know what few Oakvillians that are left would like things left as is. Don't change a tradition that don't need fixed!

If the snowflakes stay away for the next 30 days, you people crossing the river at Oakville will be in for an eye opener. Some, and I included, will take the walk also.

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A bridge to the past. A bridge to the future

Louisa County bids farewell to old bridge and welcomes a new one

Jim Rudisill

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LOUISA COUNTY, Iowa — The grand opening of the new County Highway X99 Bridge near Oakville held last week meant more than just another way to drive over the Iowa River in southern Louisa County.

Oakville Mayor Benita Grooms told the estimated 35 local residents, state and county officials and others who attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday afternoon in sub-freezing weather that the new bridge represented the latest effort by her community to recover from a destructive 2008 flood on the Iowa River.

The flood threatened to destroy the town after a levee collapsed and much of Oakville was inundated with nearly six feet of water. Residents who stayed after the flood worked hard to recover from the devastation, Grooms said.

"We have come a long way since then and we plan to continue to grow and that

bridge is certainly going to help us do it," she said during a reception at the Oakville Community Building following the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

While the bridge represented another step in Oakville's flood recovery, Louisa County Engineer Larry Roehl said it represented a remarkable effort by federal, state and local governments to cooperate together in replacing an aging structure.

According to a fact sheet on the bridge, the nearly \$12 million project was financed by a \$10 million grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), a nearly \$1.6 million grant from the Iowa Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program and local funds.

"It is probably one of the largest (transportation) projects in Iowa that was funded without any transportation money, other than a little bit of local money," Roehl said.

He explained the



JIM RUDISILL/MUSCATINE JOURNAL

Louisa County Board of Supervisor Chairman Chris Ball, center, officially opens the new County Highway 99 Bridge near Oakville on Thursday during a ribbon cutting ceremony. Others helping with the ceremony included (from left): Jim Audino of HR Greene Inc., Cedar Rapids, which provided engineering; Louisa County Engineer Larry Roehl; Ball; Louisa County Supervisor Randy Griffin; Sen. Tom Courtney; Rep. Tom Sands.

economic development angle to the project meant a wide range of private and public organizations had to work together to accomplish the construction.

Mike Norris, Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission Executive Director, agreed and said the bridge project represented a major accomplishment for

his organization.

Norris said the commission had been involved in the project early because of its flood recovery issues, but the grant funding pushed the project into an entirely different category for the commission.

"It's the largest project we have ever worked on from the grant side," he told

the group.

He said over the 40 years the commission has operated, it has brought around \$240 million into southeast Iowa and of that amount, around \$11.5 million of that was earmarked for the bridge.

"We're really proud of the project," he said.

Local resident Melvin

Gertz said his memory of the project centered on the willingness of local officials and construction contractor Cramer and Associates Inc., of Grimes, to work together to help minimize as much as possible the disruption to local residents experience during the work.

"They tried to bend over backwards and they did a fantastic job," he said.

Sen. Tom Courtney, D-Burlington, who attended the ribbon cutting along with Rep. Tom Sands, R-Wapello, also told the group the project, which includes demolishing the nearly 70-year-old former span, also provided him with a special memory.

Courtney recalled driving over the old Highway 99 bridge as a youngster with his Dad and hearing his father explain how he had helped build it following World War II.

"I have now officially outlived this bridge, it was built the year I was born," he joked with the crowd.

Roehl said the new bridge would do that as well, hinting it would have plenty of time to provide more memories for future bridge users.