

Group working to make Gothenburg an ‘Early Learning Community’

Each community has an identity, and Gothenburg is no different. Ask anyone who lives or visits, and they will have words to describe the people, the services, and the opportunities in the area. The Gothenburg Early Childhood Learning Coalition (GECLC) is working to add “Early Learning Community” to the town’s identity.

Last spring, a survey taken by members of the community helped identify the early childhood priorities in Gothenburg. The GECLC has been using these survey results as a guide to address the need for reliable, quality early childhood education for every child in the community. This survey was conducted through GECLC’s involvement in the Nebraska Children and Families

Foundation Communities for Kids Initiative, which aims to partner with communities’ public and private entities to support and coordinate planning for access to high-quality early care and education for all children. The GECLC recently received a \$25,000 grant to be used for further study and planning in support of early childhood education and wellness in Gothenburg.

It was through this work with the Communities for Kids Initiative that Gothenburg was recently selected to be a part of a Nebraska cohort in the National League of Cities’ City Leadership for Building an Early Learning Nation Initiative. This initiative is part of a national effort to identify and support communi-

ties that prioritize programs and policies to improve outcomes for young children. Other participating Nebraska communities in the cohort include: Grand Island, Norfolk, Red Cloud, Schuyler and Wood River.

Marti McFadden Beard, associate vice president with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, through the Communities for Kids Initiative, stated that they are grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Early Learning Community.

“Nebraska ranks near the top in the list of states with a high percentage of parents in the workforce. Available quality care is critically important to our state’s workforce and community vitality efforts. We look forward to the partnership with

other cities and learning from the expertise of the National League of Cities,” said Beard.

The Nebraska Children and Families Foundation Communities for Kids Initiative was chosen for its commitment to working with local leaders in Nebraska to prioritize early learning and the well-being of children. The Foundation will use the National League of Cities’ Institute for Youth, Education and Families (YEF Institute) Early Learning Communities Action Guide and Progress Rating Tool with local Nebraska leaders to assess their progress and continue to develop action plans to move forward. This initiative also includes in-person and virtual opportunities for learning from peer cities and national experts.

The GECLC Board of Directors will begin working with National League of Cities on this process later this month. Board president Colten Venteicher said, “Providing supports to early childhood programs has been at the forefront of our community efforts over the last five years, and being selected to participate in this NLC initiative is one of the next steps in continuing that progress in years to come.” The GECLC Board meets weekly to discuss opportunities and ways to provide the best possible support for early childhood education and wellness for the families of Gothenburg, and they are currently seeking applicants for a community coordinator to work with them in this process.

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Pony Express delivers at the ‘speed of sound’



The Pony Express Station Museum in Gothenburg now presents information via sound. Visitors may tune in to FM 88.1 on the radio to learn additional information. (Contributed photo)

The original Pony Express Station Museum located in Gothenburg — the Pony Express Capital of Nebraska — has added a new feature for motorists who visit when traveling through the state: History of the Pony Express delivery service at the speed of sound via their vehicle radio. Visitors now have the ability to tune in to an FM broadcast anytime they’re near the museum and hear a familiar western voice greet them with information about the Pony Express and its place in American history.

The station is located in a beautiful city park/arboretum that is accessible and open to the public 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. “We want all guests to have the opportunity to hear some history about the Pony Express and museum information no matter what time of day or night they visit,” said Museum

Curator Matt Weiss. “I’ve personally met people here as early as 5 am and well after midnight. Everyone who takes the time and effort to get off I-80 to visit us deserves the best we have to offer, so hopefully this free audio broadcast will be enjoyed by the thousands who visit us even when the museum is closed. We want to be sure that no one leaves our community empty handed.”

The original Pony Express Station is owned by the city of Gothenburg and has been open to the general public since the mid-1950s. It was operated mainly as a gift shop for many of those earlier years. Four years ago, a local nonprofit, the Gothenburg Pony Express Association, was formed and took over the operational management of the station with a focus on creating more of a museum environment. “We want our visitors to be able

to experience a little bit of what life was like during the time of the Pony Express,” Weiss said.

A small gift shop is still open inside the building, helping to offset the museum’s operational expenses. The nonprofit has been committed since day one to reinvest all income from gift shop sales and all donations back into improving the museum and the visitor’s experience. Admission to the museum is free.

The Pony Express Station Museum is open seven days a week from April 3 through October 24 and consistently receives between 30,000 and 40,000 guests annually. Museum hours and additional information are available on the website at: www.ponyexpressstation.org. The equipment for this project was funded in part by a grant from the Gothenburg Chamber of Commerce Tourism Committee.

■ CHAMPION

Cont’d from page A1

As the celebration began in Omaha, Hotz began receiving congratulatory messages right way.

“In about five minutes, I had like 70 people text me, right after that,” he said.

The state title was years in the making for Hotz. He medaled at state as a sophomore, but didn’t place as a junior. It’s something he never forgot.

“That angered me and probably drove me to do better than that,” Hotz said.

The anger that fueled his fire turned into hard work for the Gothenburg senior.

“I can’t tell you the number of hours he’s put in during the offseason, going to camps, going to this Golden Eagles group in Kearney that he went to a lot,” Scott said. “All that stuff comes down to six minutes, six minutes left in your high school career. People think everything happened in those six minutes, but it’s the 6,000 hours, all that work that you’ve done.”

Scott said his team’s difficult schedule helped put Hotz in a position to succeed. He hasn’t lost a match since before the calendar turned to 2019, while many times wrestling state medalists from Nebraska and beyond. Scott also credited as-

sistant coach Tim Negley for his work with Hotz in making him a better wrestler.

“This was an incredible weight class,” Scott said. “There was no weight class that was better. There were eight medal winners from last year or the year before.”

Hotz will greet the public at 6:30 p.m. Thursday in the wrestling room at Gothenburg High School. He’ll show off the move that won state, and also sign autographs for children.

“It’s been great. The outpouring from the community has been incredible. I hear from people all over the place saying congratulations,” Scott said.

Hotz has already seen video of the six minutes that made him a state champion. His thoughts on seeing it from a different perspective?

“It just makes you smile,” Hotz said.

Keep smiling, state champion.

Class B, 132 weight class
Champ. Round 1 - Wyatt Hotz (Gothenburg) over Jarrett Cline (Mount Michael Benedictine) (Fall 5:19)
Quarterfinals - Wyatt Hotz (Gothenburg) over Noah Talmadge (Ralston) (Dec 10-3)
Semifinals - Wyatt Hotz (Gothenburg) over Brady Fago (Lexington) (Dec 5-1)
First Place Match - Wyatt Hotz (Gothenburg) over Jerryd Hernandez (Scottsbluff) (Dec 7-5)



Wyatt Hotz battles Jerryd Hernandez for the state title in the 132 weight class of Class B on Saturday. He also defeated Hernandez in the B4 District finals. (Photo by Kelly Ninas/Tri City Tribune)

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■ EARLY

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In addition to the six Nebraska cities, also receiving technical assistance from NLC as part of this initiative include Brownsville, Tennessee; Hopewell, Virginia; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; New Orleans, Louisiana; Sacramento, California; San Pablo, California; Walla Walla, Washington; and Waterbury, Connecticut. As a city taking part in the City Leadership for Building an Early Learning Nation initiative, NLC will send both Venteicher and Angie Richeson, Dudley Elementary Principal and GECLC board member, to Orlando in March to meet with representatives from

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the other communities to hear what they are doing and gain insights that can assist children and families in Gothenburg.

The YEF Institute knows that cities are centers of innovation in leading the way nationally to put young children at the center of policy and programmatic agendas. With the work of these cities, we are moving one step closer to achieving the vision of a nation where all cities, towns and villages are places where children reach their full potential and where families feel supported and can live safe, healthy lives.

This initiative is generously supported by the Bezos Family Foundation and is part of the Bezos Family Foundation’s vision to create an Early Learning Nation by 2025. This cohort builds on previous work within the YEF Institute to strengthen and build local early learning systems. The National League of Cities is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. NLC is a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans. The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, a special entity within the National League of Cities, helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities.

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