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The **TIMBERJAY**



Serving the communities of northern St. Louis County since 1989

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\$1⁵⁰

OFF BEAT

Groaners galore as puns break out at Ely laundry

by CATIE CLARK
Ely Editor

ELY- The Laundry Room at 428 E. Sheridan St. has been stricken by a punbelievable outbreak of colorful quips—take-offs on celebrities and movie characters. No longer are patrons utilizing run-of-mill washers and dryers. Instead, they're tossing their tighty whities into the gaping maw of Luke Skywalker or

Oprah Spinfry.

The punny name project was the idea of Emily Weise, one of the new owners of the Laundry Room along with her husband Joe Weise. Emily, who runs the marketing side of the business, has also been spreading her spin on naming the machines out on Facebook. Photos of the latest washer and dryer names have popped up on the What's Up Ely, MN Facebook group. The

Facebook page for the Laundry Room hosts posts asking for name suggestions and then running polls to see which ones are the most popular.

The best-liked names will likely label a washer or dryer, even though many machines are already named. "Star Wars" fans can wash their dirty laundry in Obi-wan Kleanobi while "Game of Thrones" aficionados will appreciate Drynerys Targaryen for drying

Right: Joe Weise, new co-owner of the Laundry Room laundromat in Ely, with two of his dryers, now named "Albus Tumbledore" and "Helga Hufflefluff."

photo by C. Clark

their clothes.

"As a family, we like word play," Joe Weise told

See...**LAUNDRY** pg. 10



LAND USE

Solar project still moving forward

Tower-Breitung Waste Water Board hopes to have final plan by mid-summer

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

TOWER— A plan to build an approximately five-megawatt solar array near the Tower-Breitung water tower remains in the works even as agreement on the details have taken longer to finalize than originally anticipated.

"We're trading options with Minnesota Power right now," said Tim Tomsich, the chair of the Tower-Breitung Waste Water Board, or TBWWB, which owns the land currently slated for development of the project.

The proposal, originally spearheaded by retired Minnesota Power executive Eric Norberg, has since been assumed by Minnesota Power, which is in the process of substantially

See...**SOLAR** pg. 9

OHV camp construction set for 2024

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

REGIONAL— A new state campground designed specifically for off-road vehicle users should be under construction later this year just east of Soudan. The campground was part of the original concept for the Lake Vermilion-Soudan Underground Mine State Park, but the idea ran into opposition from lawmakers and outdoors groups that opposed the lifting of a longstanding prohibition on ATVs and other off-road vehicles in state parks.

The small section of park land,

See...**OHV CAMP** pg. 10



ELY THEATER

FROZEN debuts Friday

Ely High School won the exclusive rights to perform the musical in Minnesota

by CATIE CLARK
Ely Editor

ELY- After more than a year of buildup, the weekend of "Frozen in Ely" is finally here.

Ely Memorial High School was the only high school in Minnesota to win the rights to perform "Disney's Frozen, The Broadway Musical" and the school's three performances are set for Friday and Saturday at 7 p.m., along with matinees on Saturday, at 2 p.m., and Sunday, at 3 p.m.

Tickets are available online at frozeninely.org until 6 hours before each performance. If the shows don't sell out, the remaining tickets will be sold for cash or check at the door. The performances will all be at Washington Auditorium at the Ely School District Campus at 600 E. Harvey St. Parking is available in the district's parking lots or along 4th Ave., Harvey St., and 7th Ave. Use the center door, labeled "Door 1," into the new addition. Go through the double doors of the entrance and

Above: Ely freshman Chezne Nickolson (left) and Ely sophomore Molly Lindsay (center) play the troll couple Bulda and Pabbie, looking upon Ely sixth grader Beck Sponholtz, who plays a younger Princess Anna who had just been cured of her magical injury at the hands of her sister, Princess Elsa.

Right: Ely junior Rachel Carter playing Princess Anna and Northeast Range senior Gabriel White playing Prince Hans at the beginning of the dance sequence in "Love Is an Open Door."

photos by C. Clark

then turn right. The auditorium is at the end of the hallway.

As of Wednesday morning, the Saturday and Sunday matinee performances looked likely to sell out. "Consult the website before

See...**FROZEN** pg. 11



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Community notices

Ely Chamber hosting job fair on Feb. 8

ELY- Job fairs are great opportunities to gather businesses and job seekers in one location. The Ely Chamber of Commerce has reserved the Ely Senior Center for a community job fair on Thursday, Feb. 8, from 3 – 6 p.m., with light snacks and refreshments available.

The chamber invites local businesses and organizations with job openings to contact them to reserve a spot at the job fair. All businesses are invited to participate. For those unable to attend, please drop your information off at the chamber office, and they will share it during the fair.

A second way to share job openings is on the job list. The chamber maintains the list and provides the information to job seekers. Send openings to fun@ely.org. Chamber members will also have their openings posted on the Ely.org website. Job seekers of all ages are invited to attend. With the job fair scheduled to start at 3 p.m., high school students can swing in after school. The job fair runs until 6 p.m., so area residents and college students can check out job openings too.

Those who would like to have a table at the job fair, please contact the chamber office at 218-365-6123 or director@ely.org.

Funding for dislocated workers announced by JET

REGIONAL - JET, which serves adults, dislocated workers, public assistance recipients, and youth ages 14+ on career paths to employment in a seven-county area of Northeast Minnesota announces availability of funding for dislocated workers. This funding can be life-changing for people who have been laid off from a job and need a way to recover lost wages and benefits. Applicants must have been on Unemployment Insurance sometime in the past year to be considered for this opportunity. Funding can be used to assist with training and job search expenses such as help paying tuition for a 2-year degree or the last two years of a bachelor's degree and short-term trainings such as Nursing Assistant, Commercial Driver's license, (CDL), Boiler's license, Peer Recovery Support Specialist and more.

Support service assistance includes purchase of required uniforms and tools, car repairs, testing and licensing fees and more. To be eligible you must live in one of these counties: St. Louis, Carlton, Aitkin, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, or Cook. Please go to the link below to find contact information for one of our career counselors that serve the county in which you live. Please find more information here: <https://www.nemojt.org/dislocated-workers/>

Lake Country Power seeks applicants for Electric Cooperative Youth Tour

COHASSET – Most students may not have an opportunity to visit Washington, D.C., but at least one will be sponsored by Lake Country Power (LCP) to attend the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour for a week in June.

The cooperative is seeking high school sophomores and juniors to apply for an opportunity to be selected as their representative on this year's Electric Cooperative Youth Tour. The application deadline is February 20, and all applicants must have parents or legal guardians who are active LCP members – meaning they currently receive electric service from the cooperative.

More than 1,900 student delegates from all over the country go on the Youth Tour in D.C. each year, including at least 40 students from Minnesota. Students visit with their congressional representatives, tour some of the most famous museums in the world and make memories and friends that will last a lifetime. Students also learn about the electric cooperative business model and American history.

The Electric Cooperative Youth Tour has been a tradition among high school students since 1957 when it was established by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). Students will find the application form online and more information about this opportunity at www.lakecountrypower.coop/youth-tour. If questions, contact LCP at 800-421-9959, extension 7152, and ask for Tami Zaun. School counselors have been informed about this opportunity and can be a local resource as well.

CELEBRATING WINTER

There's sNOw keeping down the Ely Winter Festival

ELY - Did you really think a little snow shortage was going to stop the Ely Winter Festival? Hah! Mother Nature came through again, which means it's about time to pull on your boots, zip up your coats and come on out. The Ely Winter Festival runs Feb. 1-11, and there are so many fun activities to choose from. The board and volunteers are putting together the final details to bring you a wonderful winter festival. Be sure to check out the website www.elywinterfestival.com for more information and event schedules.

The festival will once again be home to favorite events such as the Snow Sculpting Symposium, the Ely ArtWalk, skating and kick sledding in Whiteside Park, snowshoe hikes with the Listening Point Foundation and tons of classes at the Ely Folk School. Look for a schedule of events in newspapers and in their brochure. Extra special events this year include a concert by singer-songwriter Courtney Yasmineh at Northern Grounds Coffee House, a big band concert, and the Ely Film Festival at Ely's Historic State Theater (EHST). For tickets to the film festival, check out the EHST website www.elyfilmfest.com.

Snowshoe hike tours out to Sigurd Olson's historic Listening Point will be available through the ten days of the festival. For more information and sign up sheets, visit www.listeningpointfoundation.org. Limited slots are available, so sign up soon.

The 2024 Ely Winter Festival pin is available at Northern Grounds, Zup's Market, Grand Ely Lodge, Potluck Kitchenware, Blue Loon, the Chamber of Commerce, and Piragis Northwoods Company for \$6. The price includes a \$1 donation to arts programs in the schools. Last year's donations went to Ely Memo-



Above: This Viking ship snow sculpture shows there's no shortage of creativity at the Ely Winter Festival. Photo by Chris Ellerbroek

Right: The 2024 Ely Winter Festival pin is on sale now at many local retailers and the chamber for \$6.



rial High School for production of the musical, "Frozen." This year's recipient will be the art department.

Long-sleeved T-shirts with this year's pin design are available at Grand Ely Lodge, Northern Grounds, and Piragis Northwoods Company for \$25.

Anyone interested in volunteering during the festival should email snow@elywinterfestival.com. Volunteers are always needed and appreciated.

The Ely Winter Festival sends much gratitude to the city of Ely, Grand Ely Lodge, Ely Family Dental, Ely Film Festival, Raven Words Press, Veterans on the Lake,

Rock Country Masonry, Dutchman Tree Service LLC, Ely Flower and Seed, and all of the other amazing sponsors. This festival couldn't happen without you, and they appreciate all your support. Thank you!

This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board and the Arrowhead Regional Arts Council, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

For more information contact Shauna Vega at 218-365-SNOW or Shauna@elywinterfestival.com.

Ely Chamber of Commerce to hold next business incubator session Jan. 23

ELY - Nick Dunnom, from Sunbelt Business Advisors, is back for a second session on Business Succession Planning. The session is scheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 23, from noon to 1:30 p.m., at the International Wolf Center.

Those who attended the Business Succession Planning 101 in October learned from Nick the do's and don'ts of valuing a business and the importance of planning for a business sale or transfer to family or staff. Any time is the right time to

begin succession planning.

Succession Planning 201: How to Maximize the Value of Your Business digs deeper into succession planning. Nick will recap the basics from the first session, then discuss how to determine the baseline value of a business and deep dive into different value drivers that bring the number up or down. To register for the session, please get in touch with the Ely Chamber of Commerce before Monday, Jan. 22, at 218-365-6123 or director@ely.org.

The Ely Chamber of Commerce seeks business owners who are willing to teach a seminar. Topics should focus on content that aids business owners and managers to develop or expand their businesses or services. Topics can include types of retirement accounts, group insurance policies, marketing, loan options, or other business-related information. Session slots are available for March and April. Those who want to teach a session can contact Eva at the chamber office.

Free online class assists farmers to sell direct to customers

STATEWIDE - The University of Minnesota Extension will offer a free online class to farm operators on how best to price and market farm goods direct to customers.

The series of three classes will be on Tuesdays at 6 p.m. on Feb. 6, 13 and 20. A self-guided workbook will be available to apply the knowledge to your own operation and the entire series is free. Register at <https://z.umn.edu/direct-to-consumer>

According to Ryan Pesch, Extension ag business management educator. "Whether you are a beginning operator looking to get started at your local farmers market or a seasoned veteran looking to sell some quarters of beef on the side, this class will give you the basics

to get up and running in 2024."

Extension ag business management assists producers with a range of business management issues. Go to <https://extension.umn.edu/managing-farm> to find more information and other events.

**BUSINESS INCUBATOR LUNCH & LEARN****Succession Planning 201: How to Maximize the Value of Your Business**

Nick Dunnom is leading another great Lunch & Learn session that digs deeper into succession planning. Nick will recap the basics from the first session, then discuss how to determine the baseline value of a business and deep dive into different value drivers that bring the number up or down.

LOCATION
International Wolf Center
1396 Hwy 169

TUESDAY
January 23, 2024

TIME
Noon-1:30PM
Bring a lunch

RSVP
By January 22, 2024
Director@Ely.org

**Minnesota North College and The Bois Forte Band of Chippewa Program Fair**

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ELY CITY COUNCIL

Council recognizes Mike Popesh for 43 years service to city

by CATIE CLARK
Ely Editor

ELY- After 43 years of service, Public Works Foreman Mike Popesh, a long-time city of Ely employee, retired last week. He began work with the city at the end of 1980, according to Mayor Heidi Omerza.

The mayor gave Popesh a plaque in commemoration of his service during the Ely City Council meeting on Tuesday evening. "We sure appreciate all of your hard work and all that you have been through with us," said Omerza. "Congratulations on your well-deserved retirement and thank you for your over 43 years of service to the citizens of the city."

Public hearing

The regular city council meeting was preceded by an informational public hearing on the use of the \$1.3 million U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Rural Development grant for new construction and renovation of public safety and ambulance facilities in Ely. The grant is split equally between the city and the Ely Area Ambulance Service, or EAAS.

The grant will provide most of the funding for a new city garage to house fire department equipment, the renovation of the EAAS building, and the construction of a new storage building for the EAAS with expanded garage space. The EAAS renovation will use half of the current garage space in its existing building for a meeting room and an ADA bathroom.

The terms of the grant require the city to make multiple paperwork submittals in addition to holding Tuesday's public hearing. The hearing was for the residents of Ely, Winton, Morse, Fall Lake, Stoney River, and the unincorporated portions of St. Louis County covered by the EAAS's 1,500 square mile service area.

The first planning

phase of the grant is already complete. The second phase, which is now starting, includes holding the informational public hearing and preparing the bid package for the construction work.

Most of the public hearing involved the Ely Clerk-Treasurer, Harold Langowski, explaining the detailed plans for the renovation and new buildings. "(Our) the intent is to get the bid package together over the winter months," Langowski said, "so we can have a contractor in place in the spring so construction can start." The plans for the new buildings and the renovation are available in the public hearing pdf on the city's website.

Two citizens testified at the hearing. Michael Smith of Ely stated his support for the projects. Ely resident Larry Polyner stated his objections to the projects as presented.

"I believe it is extremely irresponsible to build another building (for the EAAS) when you could store everything in the garage you already have with no problem." Polyner remarked that the planned meeting room in the EAAS building was unnecessary. He pointed out that a meeting space already existed at the Fall Lake "joint facility on the east side of town," which is available for use by groups like the EAAS.

In other business, the city council:

- Approved making the Ely Area Ambulance Joint Powers Board meeting on Monday, Jan. 22, at 4 p.m. at the Winton Community Center a special meeting of the Ely City Council. This is required by Minnesota law so city council members can attend.

- Approved a recommendation from the Projects Committee that the city council support the efforts of the HRA in partnering with Minnesota Housing Partnership.

- Approved a recommendation from the Proj-



Public Works Foreman Mike Popesh received a commemorative plaque from Mayor Heidi Omerza in honor of his more than 43 years of service to the city of Ely at Tuesday's city council meeting. Popesh retired last week. He started working for the city at the end of 1980. photo by C. Clark

ects Committee to submit the Culture and Tourism Grant for the completion of the pocket park at the Ott property.

- Approved a recommendation from the Projects Committee to pass a resolution supporting application for a trail groomer for the Tomahawk Trail.

- Approved a resolution supporting a grant application to the Minnesota DNR's Federal Recreational Trail Program to purchase a snowmobile for grooming.

- Approved supporting an application to the DNR Federal Recreation Trail Program for funds to build additional mountain bike trails.

- Approved a recommendation from the Projects Committee to table an invoice from Mesabi Bituminous for \$10,360 until it can be reviewed. "This invoice should have been sent to the general contractor," said Langowski, which was for the 2022 grading and repaving of streets in the Spaulding neighborhood. Mesabi Bituminous was a subcontractor on the project.

- Heard the report of Fire Chief Dave Marshall that for the third month

in a row, Ely has not suffered any fires. Despite last year's record number of carbon monoxide calls, the FD has only had one such call recently in the fall. He cautioned that this situation could change with the current cold snap.

- Heard the report of Police Chief Chad Houde, who presented the 2023 incidents statistics for his department. Those statistics are available in the city council agenda packet on the city's website.

- Approved a sign-on bonus agreement for Police Department employees. The agreement sets out the terms of the canoe and equipment recruitment and retention bonus, stating the new employees will agree to stay at least three years working for the department, and if they leave, they will reimburse the city on a prorated basis.

- Approved the mortgage satisfaction for Derek Jensen for his residential rehabilitation loan

- Approved the purchase agreement for Lot 1, Block 1, East Spaulding First Addition between Isaac Olson and Sonya Olson and the city of Ely.

- Approved the pur-

chase agreement for Lot 6, Block 4, East Spaulding First Addition between Gregory Paul Demarce and the city of Ely.

- Approved the purchase agreement for Lot 8, Block 1, East Spaulding First Addition between Kevin Fred Decker and Debbie Lynn Decker and the city of Ely.

- Approved the city of Ely and the Ely Utilities Commission claims for payment for Jan. 16 for \$410,710.

- Approved change order No. 2, decreasing the contract amount by \$106,785 and the final pay estimate No. 6 for \$10,892 to Utility Systems of America for the

2022 street improvements/ Spaulding phase III project. Langowski explained that this was to account for using fewer materials than the project conservatively budgeted for, and that such adjustments were routine. "When you use less, you pay for less," Langowski remarked.


- Approved providing in-kind services for the 2024 Ely Winter Festival. Designated the Assistant Treasurer as the person to oversee, monitor, accept responsibility, and evaluate the "nonaudit/ nonaudit services, which include the preparation of the notes to the financial statements to be included in the audit of the city of Ely for the year ending Dec. 31, 2023. This is a routine matter in preparation for the audit of the city's 2023 finances.

- Approved authorizing a Temporary Deputy Clerk for election purposes.

- Approved establishing an Absentee Ballot Board for the 2024 elections. Langowski reminded everyone at the meeting that absentee balloting will be accepted beginning next week.

- Accepted the resignation of city council member Angela Campbell from the Cemetery Committee in the middle of her tenure in an Ely resident seat with a term expiring Jan. 31, 2025.

- Approved providing in-kind services for the 2024 Ely Winter Festival.



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OPINION

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The First Amendment of the United States Constitution

Editorial

Investigation needed

How did the DNR get away with its apparent misuse of federal wildlife funds?

A newly-released report from the federal Fish and Wildlife Service (see related story page B4), or FWS, suggests that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources misused millions of federal grant dollars earmarked to improve wildlife habitat to pay for commercial timber harvests to placate the industry.

According to the draft report, which had been kept under wraps by the FWS since it was written in 2020, stemmed from site visits by two FWS biologists to three wildlife management areas in Minnesota to address concerns that had been raised by the public and DNR wildlife officials themselves.

The report found that two federal grant programs dedicated to the improvement of wildlife habitat, which are supposed to be managed by state wildlife officials, had essentially been hijacked by the DNR's Forestry Division, which largely shut out wildlife officials from the forest management decisions and actions funded by those federal dollars.

And it isn't just federal money at issue. The federal grants in question require matching funds from state agencies and in the case of the DNR, it appears some of those funds may have come from hunter and angler license fees paid to the DNR. Those funds are supposed to be spent on projects that enhance fish and wildlife, providing a direct benefit to those sportsmen and women who pay these fees. If those funds are, instead, being used to manage intensive commercial timber harvesting to placate the timber industry, the DNR is hardly living up to its obligations to hunters or anglers.

At a time when state and federal officials are justifiably investigating groups like Feeding Our Future for gross misappropriation of millions of dollars in federal COVID funds earmarked for feeding kids, those same investigative entities should be examining the DNR's apparent misappropriation of millions of grant dollars earmarked for wildlife habitat to benefit the wood products industry. While there isn't any evidence that DNR officials personally benefitted from the misappropriation of federal dollars, the misuse, if proven, could be a violation of federal law. An investigation could help to clarify exactly what funds were used or misused by the DNR. It could also reveal which individuals within the agency are responsible for this situation and provide for accountability, something that is desperately needed within Minnesota state government. State agencies shouldn't be able to engage in these kinds of actions without those responsible for it facing the consequences.

As this newspaper opined

last fall, state agencies in Minnesota are often far too cozy with industry. We've seen this time and again with the regulatory process surrounding the permitting of the NorthMet copper-nickel deposit. It appears that agencies like the DNR and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency ignored or glossed over key issues in the permitting process, leaving the impression that state regulators are pushovers for big business. We also learned that the MPCA pressured the federal EPA to withhold written record of their concerns about one of those permits, pressure that ultimately kept the Trump-era EPA from submitting written comments on it. Did the same thing happen with the DNR and the FWS, which conveniently never completed their draft report highlighting the apparent misuse of federal funds? We have no evidence that it did, but given recent history, it's a question worth asking.

The DNR's adoption of the so-called Sustainable Timber Harvest Initiative, or STHI, which is the driver behind the apparent misuse of federal funds, was simply another example that should trouble Minnesotans who support multiple use of our state's forests. The agency, under intense pressure from industry, implemented aggressive new logging goals that have elevated timber output above other considerations. While the Division of Forestry has long led forest management decision-making within the agency, wildlife officials at least had a voice in timber plans to provide a bit of balance between timber production and the needs of wildlife and a public that enjoys intact forests. That voice has largely disappeared, even within wildlife management areas, or WMAs, and DNR wildlife officials reported nearly universal dissatisfaction with their status and work within the agency in a recent internal survey. Some reported unmanageable levels of stress and feelings of hopelessness as they face constant criticism from supervisors if they don't go along with the agency's aggressive timber targets.

If the DNR is ignoring wildlife considerations even within WMAs, what is the situation on other state lands? We can only assume it's far worse, which is why it's critical that at least on WMAs, wildlife habitat isn't sacrificed to placate industry. And the DNR should certainly not be using funds earmarked for the improvement of wildlife habitat to help pay for a timber program that seems focused only on a single value—commercial production. How we got here is a question that only an in-depth investigation can answer.



Letters from Readers

White-tailed deer are an invasive species in the North Country

There has been quite a bit of controversy lately here in the Northland about the scarcity of deer. Many hunters attribute this scarcity to “wolf mismanagement” or lack of any management thereof. The DNR gives “deep snow” in certain zones as an answer. Some of us realize it is probably a combination of the two reasons given.

My reading of frontier biographies, history of early exploration and Midwest settlements and watching documentaries shows that white-tailed deer were basically non-existent in most of Northeast Minnesota. The cloven-hoofed cud-chewing critters here before European settlement were basically a population of moose and woodland caribou, with a few elk sprinkled in. These ungulates have longer legs than white-tailed deer and are then able to travel in deep snow to get to food sources much easier than deer can. Older deer do not help younger ones obtain food.... in fact, if you watch deer being artificially fed corn or hay, the big bucks usually kick the does and youngsters out. Even larger does kick the fawns out of the feeding area.

Basically, white-tailed deer are technically an “invasive species.” They followed another invasive species, (humans of European descent) from the eastern colonies. There were deer in southern and central Minnesota at the time of European arrival but were quickly decimated by market hunting and subsistence by pioneers. As agriculture and logging moved north, so did the deer, and so did their diseases, pri-

marily brainworm. Deer are carriers of this parasite but are not severely affected by it, unlike moose and caribou. “Deer ticks” carry Lyme and other disastrous bacteria that affect humans, and they have been traced back to the eastern U.S. as well. Woodland mice are co-hosts of these infections along with white-tailed deer.

The European “iceman” that came out of an alpine glacier had tissue that tested positive for Lyme bacteria. Our ancestors brought over not only Lyme and its co-infections, but many other diseases like smallpox and cholera.

Humans usually do things in a big way, mainly due to economics and survival needs. Maybe we can do some things in a big way to bring back the original ungulate mammals that inhabited this region. It will take research and some money to do so.

Mark Roalson
Hoyt Lakes

Stauber proves he's no patriot

I am writing to express my profound disappointment that my Congressman, Pete Stauber, has again endorsed Donald Trump for President. Really, Pete? That's the best you can come up with for the highest office in this country? Have you been paying attention to what this man has been saying lately? He exhibited again who he truly is this past weekend in Iowa when he again mocked the late Senator John McCain when he said “John McCain, for some reason, couldn't get his arm up that day”.

I'm sure Trump doesn't remember, but in case you don't remember Mr. Stauber, John McCain broke both his arms and his right leg when he ejected from the cockpit

of his downed jet over Hanoi during the Vietnam War. He was then bayoneted and beaten by his captors, shattering his right shoulder. He endured five and a half years of further torture and isolation during his captivity. He was left with a permanent limp and an inability to raise his arms over his shoulders for the rest of his life. So yes, “for some reason” that Donald Trump doesn't understand but you certainly should, Mr. Stauber.

You have endorsed a man who exhibits his contempt and disdain for military service and sacrifice at every opportunity. He is morally bankrupt and you, by your endorsement of him, have shown that you also have no sense of duty or honor. You can parade around District 8 for all the medal pinning ceremonies you want and don the cloak of patriotism, but you sir, are no patriot. You have shown yourself to be unwilling to do the hard work of selfless heroism that John McCain displayed.

Michele Jackman
Virginia

We welcome your letters

The *Timberjay* encourages letters to the editor. You can submit letters by mail at PO Box 636, Tower, MN 55790, or email letters to marshall@timberjay.com.

We ask that letters be limited to 300 words.

Letters are subject to editing, primarily for length and clarity.

Letters are a great way to offer your input to the *Timberjay's* editorial page. We want to know what you think!

COMMENTARY

GOP claims are historically wrong and needlessly divisive

There was no state flag for Minnesota prior to and during the U.S. Civil War



AARON WITTEBEL

MN State Flag State Emblems Redesign Commission

While I knew that the minority caucus in each legislative chamber disapproved of the new official state flag because of shared concerns about process, the claims in a recent press release from Minnesota Republican Party Chairman David Hann and Deputy Chairwoman Donna Bergstrom are troubling. More to the point, they are, as reported, factually incorrect. When Hann was a

state senator, I found him to be quite knowledgeable and agreeable on a variety of policy positions; this week's statements are a concern for me.

Hann stated, “The flag the DFL eliminated was a version of the historic flag our regiments fought under during the Civil War.” As a member of the flag redesign commission, I know that there was no state flag for Minnesota prior to and

during the U.S. Civil War. The original version was from the late 1800s, decades after the Civil War and it was the Great Seal on a white flag.

I respect Mr. Hann, but I find it unbelievable that he would make this claim, when Minnesota Civil War battle flags from the volunteer regiments are displayed in places across the state, which includes a well preserved one right across

from the entrance to G-15 Senate Hearing Room in the State Capitol. There is also one on display in my hometown of Lake Park. The Minnesota Volunteer Army Regiments fought under a U.S. flag with gold fabric letters of “M” and “N” sewn onto them.

Though we are both Red Lakers, I haven't had the pleasure of formally meeting with Ms. Bergstrom. She stated: “Keep-

ing the current flag would have been a powerful acknowledgment from the Walz Administration and the DFL that our Native contributions are valued. The new flag erases every trace of our contributions and every trace of us.”

Bergstrom seems to not have read up on the historical facts. Henry Sibley,

See FLAG...pg. 5

Letters from Readers

A type of mining that helps the environment

Proposals to mine Minnesota's critical mineral resources have created significant controversy and political division in our communities. However, one type of Minnesota "critical mineral" mining, accomplished by recycling 100 percent of our electronic waste (e-waste), is not controversial and offers huge benefits.

Recycling 100 percent of our e-waste is an opportunity to responsibly "mine" the enormous amount of rich metal resources found in our desk drawers, storage rooms and garages across Minnesota. Every year millions of electronic items quit working and "die" in our homes and businesses. Unfortunately, "dead" electronics are commonly discarded inappropriately when people are asked to pay for their responsible recycling. E-waste is not appropriate for "garbage" collection and placement in landfills because it creates major fire-hazards and contains lead, arsenic, and flame retardants which contaminate the ground, water and air from fires and leaching. These e-waste items represent the richest and most accessible critical metal "ores" available for manufacturing new electronic goods. Minnesota generates 266 million pounds of e-waste annually, providing a \$3.2 billion annual opportunity to capture critical metals with recycling. Right now, we only collect and recycle 24 percent of our e-waste in Minnesota due to outdated laws restricting the items which can be recycled. Instead, we are burying most of these valuable materials in landfills or exporting them to other countries that take advantage of this opportunity. Recycling all of our Minnesota e-waste offers over 1,700 jobs, significantly reduces our need for new production of domestic and foreign critical minerals and metals, and lowers our air and water pollution.

Recycling e-waste prevents major toxic groundwater and air pollution from municipal waste incinerators and accidental battery landfill fires, which all harm human and environmental health. Lithium-ion batteries in many electronics are a major fire hazard when they are damaged during waste handling.

Nationally, the pollution from e-waste disproportionately affects low-income communities creating significant environmental justice issues including increased asthma and cancer risks, while elevating our medical care costs.

Lithium-ion batteries from electronic devices increasingly wreak havoc to our waste handlers. Three percent of U.S. waste infrastructure (e.g. garbage trucks and transfer stations) is lost annually due to battery fires, and this problem is rapidly worsening. Battery fires in landfills are also common with small "spot fires" every few days. Not all landfill fires are easily contained with some producing uncontrolled release of airborne toxins endangering communities for miles downwind like the May 2023 Rice County landfill fire which lasted for days.

The Recycling Electronics for Climate Action (RECA) organization in collaboration with the Iron Range Partnership for Sustainability, are working to create and pass new state law allowing responsible recycling of 100 percent of e-waste generated in Minnesota.

Please tell your state legislators you want them to change the outdated law and ensure that 100 percent of our e-waste is responsibly collected and recycled. E-waste should be "harvested" and the full value of this important source of critical minerals should be used to support our transition to a clean energy economy, creating important and sustainable jobs in our communities and cleaner air and water for everyone.

For more detailed information on e-waste recycling see:

<https://www.irpsmn.org/ewaste-recycling>

**Mike Overend
Two Harbors**

A change in ambulance coverage area is needed

Having read the *Timberjay* coverage of the Jan. 9 Greenwood Town Board meeting, I encourage folks to check out the agenda and meeting packet for that meeting on Greenwood's web site. I was on the agenda for that meeting, and the letter I submitted to the board on 12-31-23 detailing my concerns and suggestions about the ambulance service future in Greenwood is in the meeting packet. It will clarify some of the things in the *Timberjay* article.

When my turn on the agenda came, I started it out by reading this additional statement:

"Over the past several years, I've followed and studied the ambulance situation, reading, listening and attending meetings across the Range and Duluth. I've learned a lot and the board knows that I've shared a lot of that with them. All of the ambulance services on the Range could be considered to be rural, and they all are facing the same two problems: a shortage of funds and a shortage of staffing. These problems have only gotten worse since I began my learning curve. Some of the Range ambulance services are going to need a cash infusion, possibly from the Legislature, just to make it through this year without shutting down. The legislative session begins in February and this short-term bailout will be on their table. A bailout can't happen every year.

"In the meantime, the legislature has created an EMS task force to study and find solutions to the ambulance crisis. The task force is holding input hearings, with their final report due in August, well after the current legislative session ends. I believe that to serve the best interests of Greenwood folks, the Greenwood Town Board needs to begin working on some solutions right now, especially ones that may require legislative action. "As I've said before, ambulance service

is going to cost taxpayers more, regardless of what is or isn't done. For example, I believe we need to create an ambulance tax district, based on parcels, to go along with a new ambulance primary service area, based out of Cook. From what I've learned, the most logical ambulance services are based out of communities that have a hospital. That has to do with income from patient transfers out of that hospital and ambulance staffing. Cook has a hospital. At some point it probably makes sense, for a number of reasons to tie in with Virginia also. Greenwood should be an attractive partner to Cook, we have 1,975 parcels with buildings on them and 1,158 vacant parcels. My property tax totals \$6,868, with the township bill amounting to \$162.51. Personally, it wouldn't bother me to pay another \$100 or \$150 for ambulance service. Some of the things I've mentioned above, such as primary service area boundary changes would possibly require legislative action. Primary service area boundary changes and consolidation of services are two of the recommendations that the 2022 Office of the Legislative Auditor Report on the EMSRB made to the Legislature.

"This is my input, from the things I've observed and learned. But now we've come to a fork in the road. Actions need to be discussed and implemented. Talking, negotiating and planning with neighboring townships and cities needs to be done by Greenwood Town Board members. I am asking that the board pass a motion naming two Town Board members to begin meeting and working on ambulance issues with our neighboring governments."

After I read this out loud to the meeting, it is my opinion that the immediate discussion between the board, myself and several folks in the audience was informative. The board subsequently appointed two board members to begin meeting and working on ambulance issues with our neighboring governments. I take

the current ambulance situation seriously, it's a rural crisis that I believe requires serious attention sooner rather than later.

**Lee Peterson
Greenwood Township**

Why not hydrogen for fuel?

A recent article in the *Washington Post*, paints a stark picture of the rapid degradation of our global climate. An apt quote from U.N. Secretary General referred our age as "global boiling."

For example, Phoenix, Ariz., experienced 31 consecutive days of temperatures above 110 degrees Fahrenheit.

Many areas of the world are experiencing extreme drought. Navigable rivers, including the Mississippi River, are becoming too shallow for essential river commerce. Drought is also curtailing farmland crops and potable water availability. Forest fires are active throughout the world destroying homes, schools, trees, and vegetation. Other parts of the world are having hurricanes and cyclones destroying the livability of these parts of the world.

These catastrophes can be attributed to global warming caused by the emissions of greenhouse gases, of which fossil fuels are one the biggest contributors, and yet there seems to be no sense of urgency among major oil companies to address the issue or to act. For example, Exxon plans to spend \$60 billion to expand their production of fossil fuels from 4.2 million barrels oil per day (bpd) to an anticipated 6.2 bpd assuming their acquisition of Pioneer Natural Resources is completed, that's 2,000,000 barrels or 48-percent increase a day.

The company also plans to spend \$20 billion buying their own stock. Instead of spending \$20 billion for their

stock plus \$60 billion for expansion for oil and gas, these expenditures are likely to be more beneficial to their stockholders to invest these funds in the development of non-polluting pure hydrogen. Reservoirs of pure hydrogen have been confirmed in at least ten countries including the United States, according to *The Economist*.

Exxon has all necessary ingredients for developing the hydrogen industry. They have expertise in drilling vertical and horizontal deep wells. They have transportation systems that can be retrofitted pipelines to distribute their hydrogen through their existing gas stations. Pure white hydrogen does not emit greenhouse gases or have to be processed through expensive electrolysis. It can be directly used as an economical replacement for many oil and gas uses. Moreover, Exxon and other major companies have financial wherewithal to start and to market a new industry. They would be able to access the decade long, very generous hydrogen subsidies offered by the Federal Government.

The continuing degradation of global climate is at risk if we; our companies, institutions, and government, do not make every effort to divert potential catastrophe. Industrialization created disastrous climate change. Instead of spending \$60 billion increasing the marketing of polluting greenhouse gases and \$20 billion buying their stock, Exxon, and other oil companies, should utilize their resources to stem the tide to ameliorate the potential Nero-like conflagration from climate change.

**Gerry Snyder
Ely**

FLAG...Cont. from page 4

who unilaterally took it upon himself to create the old Great Seal without legislative approval, was noted for saying that it was a memorial to "Manifest Destiny." This was a bloody, genocidal part of the U.S. government policy at the time. It is nothing to be celebrated, and its depiction in the Great Seal is offensive, bar none.

The Great Seal does not belong on a flag. A flag is an emblem used to identify a nation, state, group or other subdivision from a distance, in this case Minnesotans. The Great Seal is a functional tool that represents the authority of state government. While the seal has some ceremonial uses, those are not the official purpose. It is for authenticating, certifying, recording, and officiating governmental documents. It should

not include depictions or caricatures of peoples or things that are not official state symbols.

It was hard for me being the only moderate, with mixed ethnicity (half Germanic/half Ojibwe) and the only member with a disability, to sit on the State Emblems Redesign Commission (SERC), which contained liberals, far-left liberals and no conservatives; it made for a very frustrating time at attempting to carry out the duties as delegated by the Legislature, duties that were unclear in certain parts. Another fact that continues to be misreported, though it is clear in the enabling legislation, is the power of adoption. Simply stated: If SERC completed its directive to adopt a new Official State Flag and new Great Seal on or prior to January 1,

2024, at 11:59 p.m., there is nothing further to be done.

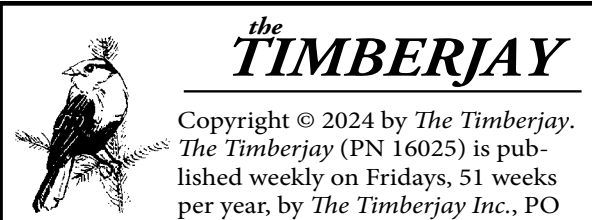
The new flag and seal as adopted by State Emblems Redesign Committee go into effect on May 11, 2024, with no further action required. Officials who hold duties with the Great Seal (like me in my work as a notary) will have time to replace our seals by January 2025. I was hoping to get a legislator from each caucus and chamber to correct the new Great Seal for errors in its design. But, with partisans going at each other, that doesn't seem likely and it's very distressing to me. We have a short bonding session this winter/spring, and I don't think many policy bills will be considered based on history of the Legislature.

This story or pressure

by the party leaders appears to be less of a genuine concern about process, input or our new state flag. It appears more like an under-the-radar attempt to have people sign petitions, which in turn ask for donations to a political party burdened by debt. Either way, it is only sowing further division among Minnesotans.

Aaron Wittnebel lives in Lake Park, Minn. He is a former legislative aide with the Minnesota House to both parties, a political party leader and a mayor. He has worked on matters to improve the quality of life for those living in the rural and tribal communities throughout greater Minnesota.

This column was published last week in the Community Voices section of Minnpost.com.



**the
TIMBERJAY**

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Week of Jan. 22

Monday

Embarrass Al-Anon Family Group- Hope Lutheran Church, 5088 Hwy. 21, 6 p.m.

Tuesday

Tower Area Food Shelf- Open on the third Tuesday of every month from 2:30-5 p.m. Located in the back of the Timberjay building on Main Street. Next food shelf day is Feb. 20.

Greenwood Fire Dept.- Training meetings on the first and third Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m.

Thursday

AA Meeting- Lake Vermilion 12x12 (Open) 6:30 p.m. at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Tower. Use the rear side door entrance.

**TSHS weekly winner**

TOWER- The Week 25 Winner of the \$100 cash prize in the Charlemagne's 52 Club is Mary Levy of Washington, Iowa.

History Tidbit: For a historian, a good map can be a gold mine of valuable information. Beyond road names or topographical features, maps can show the historical arrangements of buildings, property owners, and even the location of a specific furnace in an industrial plant. Few maps do this better than Sanborn fire insurance maps, which depict the commercial, industrial, and residential sections of more than 12,000 American cities and towns from ca. 1867 to 1970. Fire insurance maps were developed in the United States in the mid-19th century in response to the insurance industry's need to assess fire risks. Underwriters had previously inspected properties themselves, but as cities expanded, this system became impractical. As a result, several companies, among them the D. A. Sanborn National Insurance Diagram Bureau, began creating maps designed to assist insurance agents. By 1902, the newly renamed Sanborn Map Co. had monopolized the industry, making "Sanborn map" synonymous with "fire insurance map".

Bookmobile stops

REGIONAL- The Arrowhead Bookmobile will be in the Tower-Soudan area on Wednesday, Jan. 24.

Stops include: Britt (Sand Lake Storage): 9 - 9:30 a.m.; Bois Forte (Boys & Girls Club): 11 - 11:30 a.m.; Greenwood (Town Hall): 12 - 1 p.m.; Soudan (Post Office area): 2:30 - 3:30 p.m.; Tower (Civic Center): 3:45 - 4:30 p.m.; and Embarrass (Hwy 135 & Hwy 21): 5 - 6 p.m.

For more information on the Bookmobile or Mail-A-Book services, contact the Arrowhead Library System, 218-741-3840, email at als@alslib.info, or website at alslib.info.

Finlander bocce ball tournament set for Jan. 27

by JODI SUMMIT
Tower-Soudan Editor

TOWER- Get ready for some outdoor winter fun as part of the Finlander Bocce Ball tournament on Saturday, Jan. 27 starting at 9 a.m. The event will be held at Your Boat Club Lake Vermilion Marina.

The games will be played with wooden disks on lanes plowed on the ice of the East Two River.

All teams must be pre-registered by 5 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 25. All teams must be two men and two women, 18 years of age or older. Sign up at Good Ol' Days, D'Erick's, Benchwarmers, or Fuel and Food in Tower. You may also contact Jolene Mroszak 218-255-2131 or tseventsboard@gmail.com with your team information.

Cost to play is \$15/person, with cash payouts to the top four winning teams. Payment must be made before playing starts on the



The event is spectator-friendly, though one needs to dress for the weather. There will be bonfires and areas to warm up. Food will be provided by the Vermilion Weiner Cruiser.

day of the event.

The Vermilion Weiner Cruis-

er will be on site serving from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

The event is sponsored by the Tower-Soudan Events Board.

Soudan Skating Rink set to open on Saturday



Lace up those skates and get to the rink in Soudan for a fun family time. file photo

TOWER- Barring any unexpected changes in the weather, the Soudan Skating Rink and warming shack will be open starting on Saturday, Jan. 20.

The rink is usually ready for skating by Christmas, but this year's record-warm temperatures in December meant it was too warm to try to make ice.

Breitung Township maintenance supervisor Tom Gorsma said they have been flooding the

rink this past week, and while the cold temperatures are great for making ice, the frequent light snows have hindered the process.

"We've been going from one extreme to the other," he said. This past week's forecast, with days of cold weather and no snow have them hopeful they will have good clear ice ready for skating on Saturday.

The warming shack will be open, and anytime the shack is open there

will be food, especially pizza, being served. Gorsma said they are hoping to have burgers grilling outside the rink on Saturdays. At this point in time, scheduled skating parties have not been set. The warming shack has a large assortment of skates in both children's and adults sizes for those who do not have their own pairs.

Tower cross-country ski trails are now groomed

TOWER- The Howard Wagoner ski trails have been groomed and are ready for your skiing enjoyment!

A Great Minnesota Ski Pass is required to ski on this trail as this helps fund the grooming of the trail. They are available locally at Fuel and Food, the Y Store, and the Soudan Store. They are also available online at <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/skiing/skipass/index.html> Funding from the ski passes help pay for grooming ski trails, including these trails in Tower.

Activities such as hiking, snowshoeing, and dog walking damage groomed trails so we highly encourage you to not use the groomed ski trails for these activities. The Pine Ridges and Ancient Cedars trails, both in Tower, are available for these activities instead.



Challengers running against all three Greenwood incumbents

REGIONAL- Filings for area townships who hold their elections in March closed on Jan. 16. The election season will be quiet except for Greenwood Township, where all three incumbents filed for reelection, but all three will be facing challengers.

Township elections are on Tuesday, March 12.

Greenwood Township

Barbara Lofquist and Craig Gilbert have filed for the supervisor seat currently held by Lofquist (seat 3).

Sue Drobac and Lois Roskoski have filed for the supervisor seat currently held by Drobac (seat 5).

JoAnn Bassing has filed for

the clerk seat, which she currently holds. Deb Spicer, who served as clerk previous to JoAnn Bassing has also filed for the clerk seat.

Breitung Township

Erin Peitso filed for the supervisor seat currently held by Chuck Tekautz, who is retiring.

No one filed for the clerk po-

sition, currently held by Dianna Sundsahl.

Vermilion Lake Township

Jen McDonough filed for the supervisor seat currently held by Frank Zobitz, who decided not to run again for supervisor. Zobitz filed for the clerk position, currently held by Crystal Alaspa.

COMMUNITY NOTICES

Book donations needed for elementary school book swap event

TOWER- The Tower-Soudan Elementary PTO is holding a book swap for students to celebrate "I Love to Read Month" in February. We want every child to go home with a book they love. The community is invited to donate gently-used children's books.

Books may be dropped off in the school office during the week of Jan. 29 - Feb. 2 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.

St. Paul's Lutheran annual meeting set for Sunday, Jan. 21

SOUDAN- St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church will hold their annual meeting on Sunday, Jan. 21 following the close of the 8:30 a.m.

service. Coffee an' will be served during the meeting. All church members and friends are invited to attend.

Free community meal at Immanuel

TOWER- Immanuel Lutheran Church in Tower will host a free community meal on Wednesday, Jan. 24 from 4:30 - 6:30 p.m., or until the food is gone. The meal this

month is turkey gravy over mashed potatoes. All are welcome. Dine-in or carry-out available.

Indoor walking at the Timber Hall

EMBARRASS- This winter the Timber Hall will be open for indoor walking on Mondays and Wednesdays from 5 p.m. until 7:30 p.m.

Karate classes in Embarrass

EMBARRASS- Karate North Tae Kwon Do will be holding classes at the Timber Hall Event Center, 4855 Hwy. 21, on Mondays and Wednesdays. Beginner class is from 5:30 - 6:30 p.m. and color belt students from 6:30 - 7:30 p.m. Cost is \$20 per month per person.

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Voyageurs National Park prepping snowmobile trail

Campers looking ahead to summer with record numbers of reservations

REGIONAL- The staff at Voyageurs National Park has been chomping at the bit to get to work on the park's winter snowmobile trails and ice roads, and now with a bit more cooperative weather a main snowmobile thoroughfare could be officially open as early as this weekend.

"We don't have any of our winter recreational trails established yet in the park," Superintendent Bob DeGross told the *Timberjay* on Tuesday. "But I'm hoping that prior to this weekend, we should be able to get the green trail from Frank's Bay up in the International Falls area down to Ash River staked, ideally, and then maybe even south of Ash River. My top priority with the crew is to get that green snowmobile trail in, because that provides our main mode of connection between all of the gateway communities."

DeGross said it's been hard to wait for adequate conditions to prep the park for winter recreation.

"This winter is frustrating in a variety of different ways, because usually we have all of this done typically around the middle of December, trying to open things up prior to New Years. The way the winter rolled in, it has prevented us from being able to do that. That rain and warm weather that we had over the Christmas weekend did not do us any favors at all."

A complicating factor

staff have discovered as they've been out on the ice the past two weeks is the presence of numerous ice ridges, including one ridge on the west end of Kabetogama Lake that has been deemed impassable. Ice measurements have been thinner as one nears the ridges, in some places less than two inches.

But DeGross has been encouraged by this week's cold temperatures and was optimistic conditions would improve to the point that crews could do the necessary work to reduce those ridge hazards.

"Our plan is to get out there and as long as we find adequate ice thickness near the ice ridge, which I'm pretty confident that we will considering the cold conditions that we've had, then they'll cut that ice ridge down in one specific area where they'll have the trail established. Then it takes about a day for it to freeze over adequately and then we can drag through there."

The cold also has the park on the brink of beginning work on its ice roads.

"Ideally, we want at least 12 inches of ice to be able to start plowing and establishing an ice road," DeGross said. "They've been checking ice thicknesses. I'm pretty sure we're probably close to decent ice thicknesses for establishment of the roads."

DeGross said that snowmobilers should exercise caution when they're out on the park's



An aerial view of ice ridges at Voyageurs National Park on Jan. 10.

photo courtesy of VNP trails.

"They'll find that our portages are probably rough because we haven't been able to get out there, so be mindful of that," he said. "Be mindful of those ridges as you travel along. Just use extreme caution and be aware of your surroundings."

Summer is coming

It's been a record-setting year for people making summer plans for camping in Voyageurs National Park, according to information in recent community updates from the park.

Online camping reservations for the coming year were opened on Nov. 15, and the park logged 244 reservations in the first minute that the site was open. By the end of the day, 1,009 folks had reserved their preferred sites and dates, the larg-

est number of first-day registrants since the system was initiated in 2019. Only 297 people took advantage of the first-day rollout of the system in 2019, and numbers have continued to increase every year since. This year's total represents a five percent increase in first-day reservations over those for the 2023 season.

Another record was set for the most reservations as of Dec. 30, with 1,561 stays reserved for 2024, topping the previous high of 1,507 in 2022.

Other activities

As reported in the park's community updates, rangers and maintenance crews completed their annual Thin Ice Rescue Training in November.

As of the park's Jan. 10 trails update, there were no open snowmobile

trails or ice roads anywhere in the park. Three Rainy lake area hiking trails were open, as were three Ash River area trails. The sledding hill and ice rink at the Kabetogama recreation area were both closed.

Winter events currently being planned include a boreal stargazing event and the Heart of the Continent Partnership conference taking place the week of Feb. 11. To facilitate dark sky programming this winter, the park hired a winter field fellow.

Beginning Friday, Jan. 5, the Rainy Lake and Kabetogama Visitor Centers reopened for the winter season. Rainy Lake will be open Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from 10 a.m.-4 p.m., while Kabetogama will be open Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

The park also has

cross country skis and snowshoes available to rent for those who want to experience the park's winter landscape. The cost is \$10 per pair for adults and \$5 for children 16 and under. Reservations can be made online at <https://www.recreation.gov/ticket/facility/10090880>. Rental fees go back into the program to help with the cost of equipment replacement.

Additional items of note from the updates include:

►Work on the new Kabetogama boat ramp has been completed.

►Close inspection of docks, chains and buoys pulled from Rainy Lake and Namakan Lake in preparation for the winter season revealed no evidence of zebra mussels, building on past positive monitoring results for the invasive aquatic species. The update noted that the findings support the positive effects of the vessel decontamination station at Kettle Falls.

►The park Resources team has been developing funding proposals for future projects, including a Cruiser Lake cold water fish habitat research study.

►The Kabetogama Visitor Center was painted and maintenance work conducted on some of the park's seasonal housing units.

BENEVOLENT LIONS



A group of Cook Lions Club members and friends gathered at the Cook VFW on Saturday for the second annual tie blanket drive. The crew had a fun day assembling 60 new blankets which will be distributed to individuals in need.

Right: Ron Maki and Linda Flack work on a blanket together.



LIONS SCHOLARSHIP



Cook Lions Club members Bob Ulseth, left, and Judith Ulseth, right, present the \$5,000 DeDe Desannoy Tuuri Kaml Scholarship to 2023 North Woods graduate Avery Thiel. The scholarship was established by Mick Desannoy in honor of his sister in 2022 and is administered by the Lions Club. Thiel is attending Minnesota North College -Vermilion in Ely, where she is studying to be a veterinary technician. photo by D. Colburn

COMMUNITY NOTES

NWFA photo contest seeks entries for March exhibition

COOK- Northwoods Friends of the Arts in Cook announces its annual photo contest, with a theme of "A Closer Look."

The event is both a contest and a fun fundraiser for NWFA. The entry fee is \$10 per photo and includes a display mat and sleeve. Students 18 years old or younger may enter three photos free. There is no limit on adult entries.

Photos sized 5x7 or 8x10 photos may feature portraits, flora, fauna or objects in detail.

The entry deadline is Saturday, March 2 at 1 p.m.

The contest exhibit will open at the NWFA Gallery on for viewing and voting by the public. Voting will continue through Friday, March 29, when two People's Choice Awards of \$100 and \$50 will be announced at a reception from 5 to 7 p.m. at the gallery at 210 S River St.

Enjoy visiting and shopping the nonprofit NWFA Gallery during regular hours of Thursdays and Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. and Saturdays, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Photo contest entry forms and more informa-

tion are available at the gallery or online at www.nwfamn.org, or by emailing nwfamn.org@gmail.com.

Cook student makes dean's list

COOK- Pierce Johnson, of Cook, an anthropology/geographic information science major at Minnesota State University Moorhead, has been named to the school's dean's list in recognition of academic achievement for the fall semester of 2023. Students must maintain a 3.25 or higher grade-point average and carry 12 graded credits to qualify for the honor.

11th Annual
EMPTY BOWL EVENT

North Woods Grizzlies

\$1.00 raffle baskets plus free pictures and autographs from Miss Minnesota, Angelina Amerigo!

Friday, February 2, 2024
4:30 - 7:00 pm
NORTH WOODS SCHOOL COMMONS

Shop one of a kind clay bowls and vases made by students. Enjoy a soup, dessert, and beverage meal with the purchase of a beautiful handmade bowl for **\$10.00!** And, don't forget to partake in our **\$1.00 raffle basket drawing and face painting corner** put on by the Art Club!

Proceeds are given to the Cook and Orr Food Shelves.

BROADBAND

County falls in high-speed broadband rankings

by DAVID COLBURN
Cook/Orr Editor

REGIONAL- St. Louis County is falling behind in the deployment of high-speed broadband, tumbling down the rankings of Minnesota counties based on recent data from the Minnesota Office of Broadband Development, or OBD.

Ann Treacy tracks broadband development initiatives for the Blandin Foundation in her regular "Blandin on Broadband" email updates, and her recent analysis reveals the challenges facing residents in the state's geographically largest county when it comes to getting high-speed broadband internet access.

The currently accepted base-

line for high-speed broadband is 100 megabits per second download and 20 megabits per second upload, and OBD has a goal of reaching full access to these speeds statewide by 2026.

That target appears to be a tall order for St. Louis County, however, according to Treacy's analysis. OBD estimates that 23,734 households of the county's 88,360 residential locations are without wired 100/20mbps service, ranking 68th in the state, a drop of 11 places from last year's rankings.

Using a cost estimate of \$9,300 per household for service deployment, Treacy calculated that bringing wired high-speed broadband to all households in the county would cost \$22.73 million.

Due to technological advancements in fiber optic technology, gig-speed broadband, or 1,000 megabits per second, has been replacing 100/20mbps as the preferred speed for new system deployments, and St. Louis County ranks 73rd in the state in access to those speeds.

The major hurdle facing high-speed broadband expansion is finding enough funding to reach the number of households that need it, particularly when it comes to reaching underserved rural areas, which are more costly to connect. Treacy's analysis concluded that it would take over \$2 billion for Minnesota to reach 241,705 unserved households and meet its 2026 goal, while Minnesota's allocation of funds

from the federal Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program is only \$651 million.

Clearly, states will have to make choices about how to reach high-cost unserved locations, which will likely mean turning to technologies other than wired fiber optics, such as fixed wireless and satellite. The lack of overall funding and the need to target those funds to manage deployment needs sets up a conundrum, Treacy noted.

"The frustration is that it sets up a two-tiered system where some (hopefully most) people get better internet access (fiber-like access) and some do not," Treacy said. "It doesn't feel fair but it's the best we can do without a

limitless budget. It feels a lot less fair if your cousin a mile closer to town gets fiber and you don't. If you go from access to nothing to satellite, that will feel more like a win but if you aren't satisfied with current broadband and you don't see improvement that will feel like a lost opportunity."

Minnesota does have an edge when it comes to getting the best return for available dollars to invest, Treacy said.

"This is where Minnesota has the advantage of experience with the Office of Broadband Development," she said. "They know the lay of the land and the players. They have a history of getting folks to work together to optimize available funding."

SOLAR...Continued from page 1

expanding its solar capacity in order to meet state targets for the transition to carbon-free sources of energy.

At five megawatts it is considered a small project, so it hasn't been a top priority for Minnesota Power and the company has not responded to information requests from the *Timberjay* over the past couple years.

But the details should be falling into place soon if the project is to move

forward. According to Tomsich, the parties have set July of this year as the deadline to reach agreement on the details. "They intend to do it, but it takes time," said Tomsich, who spoke to the *Timberjay* this week.

The project would be built on a largely treeless, south-facing slope that extends to the south and west of the water tower, providing a large and sunny location for solar photovol-

taics, which are solar panels that generate electricity. Tomsich said the wastewater board had originally considered a solar array there to help prevent ice buildup in the water tower. While that idea didn't pan out, the potential of the site for solar power has been known for some time.

The site is also located adjacent to a Minnesota Power substation, located on Junction Rd., which would provide for a conve-

nient interconnection with the power grid.

While a small project by the standards of a large utility, the five-megawatt project would still generate enough energy under full sunlight to power about 3,750 homes. The array could also likely provide for the power needs of the Lake Vermilion-Soudan Underground Mine State Park, and Tomsich said park officials have been interested in possibly part-

nering in the project to provide for the power needs of the park. "Hopefully, it would generate enough power to run the park," said Tomsich. "We have to get the lease agreement signed with Minnesota Power, then we can talk with the DNR more seriously."

If it ultimately moves forward, the project would entail the installation of hundreds of solar panels along with the racking to hold the panels in position

on approximately 10-15 acres of the 93-acre site owned by the TBWWB. A preliminary 2022 agreement between Norberg's group and the TBWWB also held out the possibility of battery storage at the site, along with all the associated metering, inverters, and other equipment. No installation timeline for the project was available as of presstime.

2023 Lights of Love Donation List

The VHHP Board of Directors would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all who contributed to the success of the 2023 Lights of Love Campaign.
A special thank you to the volunteers in the communities of Cook, Orr and Tower for their work in coordinating the ceremonies!

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STATE BONDING

Walz's \$982 million spending plans lack specifics

Proposal leaves local governments unsure of governor's support for improvement projects

by DAVID COLBURN
Cook/Orr Editor

REGIONAL- Gov. Tim Walz unveiled a proposed \$982 million capital budget for the 2024 legislative session on Tuesday, and local governments, including Tower, were left hanging on whether or not their requests will be funded.

That's because the governor chose to forego earmarking money for any of the \$2.9 billion in requests for over 550 individual county and city projects this time around. Instead, Walz shunted lump sum allocations to various state agencies to be distributed through grant and loan programs. Agencies, not Walz, will prioritize local government projects for funding, and with nearly \$2 billion more in requests than the total Walz proposed for the capital budget, a large number of requests are certain to go unfunded.

The only local government request submitted from the North Country came from the city of Tower on behalf of the Tower Breitung Wastewater Board, a request for \$3 million for upgrades to the water treatment facility. Tower and other communities with water treatment projects will now have to direct their requests to the Public Facilities Authority, which would have \$60 million from Walz's proposal allocated for clean water project grants, and \$39 million more in loan capacity, all funded through general obligation bonds.

State facilities

The largest single area allocation in Walz's proposal is for renewal and maintenance of state facilities, which he touted as a key aspect of a safe, healthy, and fiscally responsible budget. With an investment exceeding \$440 million, the plan focuses on the upkeep of taxpayer-owned buildings, including nearly \$206 million for repairs and renovations at Minnesota State and the University of Minnesota facilities. "Forty-five percent of the resources in this package would go towards fixing and improving existing facilities," said Erin Campbell, commissioner of the Minnesota Management and Budget office. "Included in this category is \$387 million dollars for asset preservation for state agency and higher education facilities and infrastructure. Last year's bonding bill had a lot to be proud of including major investments in new infrastructure. With those needs addressed, this is a year to focus on reinvesting in taking care of the state properties that taxpayers already own. The state has a building portfolio with an average age of 42 years. The largest and most expensive of all asset renewal projects tend to occur when a building is over 30 years old. As a result, significant funds need to be invested in preserving what we already have to serve Minnesotans for many years to come."

Campbell noted that the funds aren't exclusively target-

ed for buildings, saying that the Department of Natural Resources will get a portion of the funds to use for refurbishing park roads and bridges.

"We need to invest in these assets now to begin to address the \$6.4 billion in deferred maintenance of state infrastructure. Investing in our facilities is the fiscally responsible thing to do," Campbell said.

Public safety

More than \$142 million has been designated for public safety initiatives. This funding will expand laboratory and investigation capabilities of the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension and support the planning of a new Minnesota State Patrol headquarters. Additionally, \$47 million is included to develop infrastructure for rehabilitative programming and educational spaces in prisons. And \$81 million has been designated for repair of state correctional facilities, a need Department of Corrections Commissioner Paul Schnell addressed at Tuesday's news conference.

"As many people know, our facilities range in age from 125 years on the oldest side and the newest facility is pushing 30 years old," Schnell said. "The needs are profound. That's about ten percent of the deferred maintenance needs the department has."

Two regional office facilities for the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, including an existing office in Bemidji and

a new office and laboratory in Mankato, have been tagged for a combined \$52 million in Walz's proposal, \$22.4 million has been allocated for design and land acquisition for a new State Patrol Headquarters building. "This is about charting the future of the Minnesota State Patrol," said State Patrol Chief Colonel Matt Langer. "We currently, in our metropolitan area, work out of six different office spaces. That's about as fragmented and disjointed as you can get. Given the pressures that we have today, and what Minnesota needs out of the State Patrol, as we look toward the future, we see tremendous value in bringing those six fragmented, segmented sections together to gain efficiency, to gain synergy, and to gain additional accountability."

Housing

Walz's proposal allocates \$97 million for housing and environmental improvements. Over half of that is reserved for housing infrastructure bonds to aid in developing multifamily housing for the homeless, seniors, and families. This plan also includes more than \$16 million for renovations at the Minneapolis Veterans Home to enhance resident care.

Other infrastructure

About \$85 million has been tagged for investment in the many diverse infrastructure needs across Minnesota. This encompasses \$40 million for local government project requests that ranged from community centers

and sporting facilities to libraries and economic development initiatives \$5 million has been earmarked for grants for constructing and renovating early childhood facilities.

While a November forecast projected a \$2.4 billion surplus for the upcoming year, tighter economic times are on the horizon, as spending is projected to exceed revenue for fiscal year 2026-27. Walz said that given last year's \$2.6 billion bonding package, the state should take on a smaller list of projects this year.

Legislators will weigh in on Walz's proposal when the new legislative session begins next month, and will undoubtedly haggle over numerous items, as neither party has enough votes to unilaterally pass the proposal with the three-fifths required support from each chamber.

Senate Capital Investment Committee Chair Sandra Pappas, DFL-St. Paul, has warned that the legislature won't be able to please everyone.

"We have a huge backlog for infrastructure needs, you know, roads, bridges, wastewater, clean water in particular. And I think that it's going to be difficult for the state to meet all those needs, and take care of state buildings," she said.

Republican Sen. Karin Housley, of Stillwater, said she was disappointed that Walz's proposal was skewed more toward state agencies and away from local requests.

OHV CAMP...Continued from page 1

about 400 acres, located just south of Hwy. 169 near the Murray forest management road, was re-designated as a state recreation area in 2020 to allow for construction of the OHV campground. Despite its new designation, state park staff will manage the new campground just as it manages other camping facilities within the park itself.

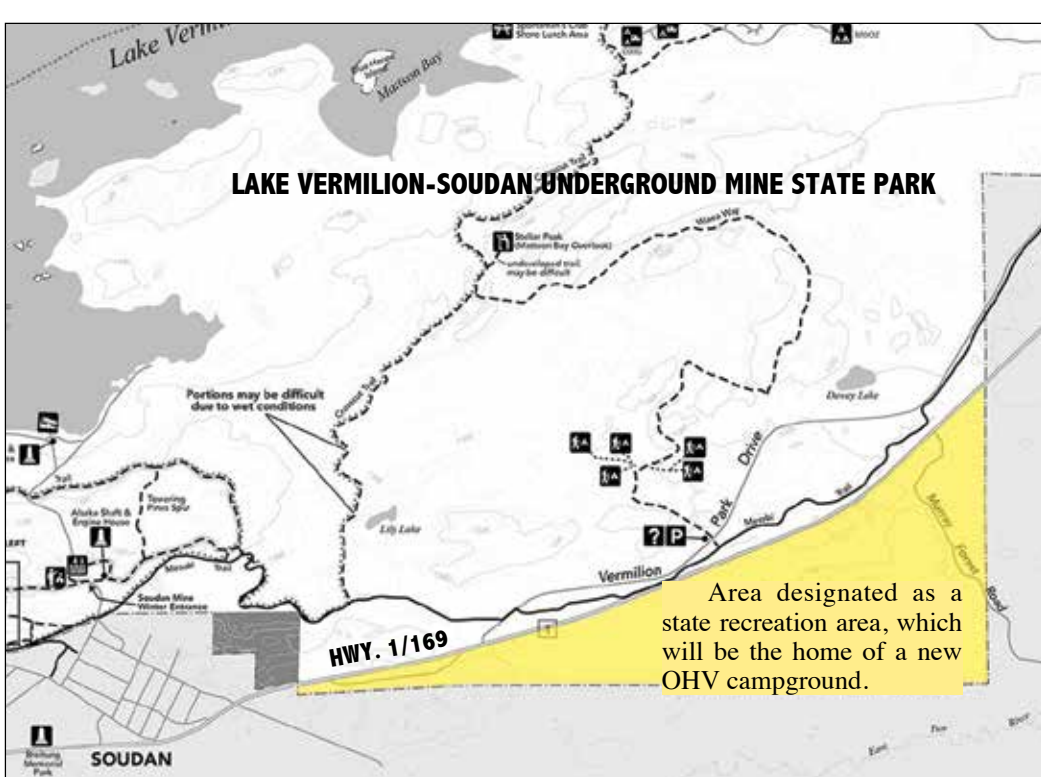
While final site design is not fully completed, Assistant Park Director Jim DeVries said park officials are hoping they'll be able to go out for bids on the project yet this winter, with construction set to begin this summer. DeVries said the project is currently scheduled for completion in July 2025.

The new camping area is expected to include 27 large, pull-thru campsites, which will be considerably wider than those found in most state park sites to allow for loading, unloading, and maneuvering of off-road vehicles. Like most other state park campgrounds, facilities will include a shower house and vault toilets. The new campground

is also slated to include an ATV wash station, which DeVries said is intended to help reduce the spread of invasive species, since seeds from invasive plants like dandelion and tansy are frequent hitchhikers on ATVs.

The new sites will provide for either tent camping or RVs. The DNR was not releasing any cost estimates at this time, nor a preliminary site map. That additional information should be forthcoming in March. In 2020, the park did receive \$5.8 million in bonding funds from the Legislature to help move the project forward.

The new campground will have direct access to the Prospector's Loop ATV trail, which will connect riders with an ever-growing network of off-road vehicle trails in the region stretching from the North Shore to the Canadian border. Another trail in the works will provide campers with direct access to both Tower and Soudan, where gas stations, restaurants, and other services are available.



The planned state OHV camp is set to be built just south of Hwy. 169, just off the Murray Forest Road in the area shown in yellow.

LAUNDRY...Continued from page 1

the *Timberjay*, explaining how the puns spread from home to business. "Laundromats are not exactly a sexy business... We thought it was a good idea, to spruce up

the (laundromat) experience for people, and let the customers know we're invested in the business and that we care about it."

The Weises have been in Ely 15 years. Joe is a

financial planner at the Thrivent Financial office in Ely, just two blocks from the Weise's new business. Emily is one of the directors at the YMCA Camp du Nord on Burntside

Lake. They recently bought the Laundry Room and reopened for business on Dec. 16.

"We want to expand the business," Joe Weise said, "especially the com-

mercial side." The Weises plan to target resorts in the region for commercial laundry services and hired their first two employees just this week for the commercial side of the business.

Regardless, it's the individual customer side of the business that pun-ishes its patrons with the washers and dryers with the play on names—because a bad pun, after all, is its own reward.

AAUW Women in the Trades
Ely (MN) Branch • Scholarship •

The Ely Branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) is currently accepting applications for a "Women in the Trades" Scholarship. The scholarship, in the amount of \$2,000 will be awarded to any woman (high school or beyond) that is accepted or enrolled in a non-traditional trade program (plumber, electrician, mechanic, HVAC Tech, boilermaker, construction worker, line person).
Deadline for applications is April 1, 2024.
Contact person below for an application form or with questions.

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PUBLIC HEALTH

Latest COVID variant is spreading rapidly in Minnesota

by DAVID COLBURN
Cook/Orr Editor

REGIONAL- It's a week of mixed signals for COVID activity in Minnesota, not an unusual circumstance considering the limited measures of surveillance available now compared to earlier in the pandemic.

Suggesting that St. Louis County health service area may have reached a peak in the latest winter surge sweeping across the nation, the hospital admission rate dropped last week by 31 percent, bucking the national upward trend of 3.2 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control. St. Louis County and surrounding counties that are part of the CDC's designated service area remain at a medium level of COVID activity.

Conversely, measures of COVID viral load in wastewater in northeast Minnesota that had dropped for two consecutive weeks rose again in the most recent readings by 14.1 percent, trending opposite the statewide average.

The CDC's county levels map paints a more encouraging picture for Minnesota overall, with

only 17 counties now rated as having medium levels of COVID activity and five rated as high.

Yet nationally, the CDC data suggests that we could be in the midst of the second largest surge of COVID since the start of the pandemic. Wastewater data collected by the CDC is higher nationally than it's been in two years. However, the current surge is nowhere near the magnitude of the pandemic's massive Omicron spike in January 2022, when weekly hospital admissions soared to over 150,000. Weekly hospital admissions currently are running around 34,000, more than double that at the end of October.

Dr. Michael Osterholm, nationally recognized epidemiologist and director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, said in his Jan. 11 podcast that it has become increasingly difficult to assess the extent of COVID activity in the country.

"There's been talk and headlines about the U.S. being in the midst of the second largest COVID wave since the beginning of

the pandemic," Osterholm said. "And while there is no arguing that we're in the midst of a surge, it's tough to really know exactly how big it is given the limited tools we have for tracking and deciphering activity. Remember, we have virtually dismantled all of the surveillance systems we had in place throughout most of the pandemic. I wish I could say we have lots of data. We don't."

And while levels of hospitalizations, serious illness and deaths haven't approached levels seen at past high points in the pandemic, Osterholm is convinced COVID itself remains extremely active.

"Today I can tell you, though, that it's my personal experience and that of many of my colleagues and friends, that there is much COVID in our communities right now, as (much as) we've probably seen it any time in the pandemic. That includes even the days of Omicron," Osterholm said. "We are not going to go back to the days of 2020 to 2022-early 2023, where at that time in the pandemic large surges in cases often meant also large increases in the numbers hospitalized

and the number who died. That is not where we're at today, but we still have a challenge because we are still seeing a burden of illness that I think is absolutely unacceptable."

Osterholm noted that the wastewater data could be skewed by the dominance of the JN.1 COVID variant, which accounts for around 60 percent of cases nationwide. JN.1 has been associated with diarrheal type illness, and Osterholm said it could be possible that those infected are putting more excreted waste into the wastewater system. Comparing current levels to past levels could lead to artificially inflating the extrapolated levels of community COVID activity.

"At this point, it's not straightforward - we don't know how to interpret it," Osterholm said. "But clearly this virus isn't done with us and the message is being lost on people."

Osterholm lamented the low uptake of the latest COVID vaccine, which has been shown to be effective in reducing the risk of hospitalization, serious illness and death.

"Right now, less than one in five adults in this

country have received a dose of the updated vaccine," he said. "Why is it in nursing homes less than two in five have received this particular new dose? And why is it among those in long-term care facilities who work there that we're seeing, in many instances, single-digit numbers of people vaccinated? I believe that the sharp rise of JN.1 and the accumulation of cases has been exacerbated by the fact that Americans are now severely under vaccinated when it comes to the updated vaccine."

Osterholm noted that immunity has also waned for those who were infected at least six months ago or more, which makes the overall population more susceptible to JN.1.

Osterholm also talked about what he termed one of the "most unfortunate situations" of the pandemic, the severe underutilization of the antiviral Paxlovid for treating COVID. A recent study showed that Paxlovid reduced hospitalization risk by 26 percent and the risk of mortality 28 days after infection by 78 percent. However, of the million people in the study, only

9.7 percent had been treated with Paxlovid by their doctors.

"One of the areas that I have been very frustrated by is the number of physicians who don't yet understand how effective this drug can be and who have often misled patients," Osterholm said. "And I don't believe intentionally, but they have misled patients into believing, oh, don't get it, you'll just get a rebound illness from it. We have data showing that's not true. I think that's been a real problem. We have to do more to educate our medical community."

"Another key issue," Osterholm continued, "is the timeline for prescribing and taking Paxlovid. People often don't seek it out until their symptoms get worse during their infection. But once they do, it's too late into the infection to be effective. You really need it in those first five days. So we have a lot of work to do in terms of educating people that if they do develop COVID, they should seek Paxlovid immediately."

FROZEN...Continued from page 1



Ely seventh grader Kylie Mosher (in the red plaid shirt) plays a young Dorothy Molter, who makes several cameo appearances in the Ely Memorial High School production of "Disney's Frozen-The Broadway Musical." photo by C. Clark

you decide to come to see if a show has sold out," said Catherine Helm-Clark, who is the Frozen in Ely webmaster and manages the ticket sales for the musical. "We are listing how many tickets are left for sale on a frequent basis at frozeninely.org and will also post if we have sold out any of the shows on the

website." Any questions and problems with tickets should be sent to admin@frozeninely.org, which is checked several times a day by volunteer "tickets wrangler" Sean Clark during this last week before the show. Ely Memorial High School won a Disney-sponsored national com-

petition called "The United States of Frozen." The contest awarded the rights to the full Broadway version of the musical to just one high school in every state.

The musical has received widespread support from Ely and all

the other communities in the area, all the way down to Virginia. Local businesses helped fund a trip for students to see the touring Broadway production of "Frozen" in Milwaukee last spring. The list of sponsors and volunteers are all listed

on the Frozeninely.org website.

The cast of the production extends beyond just Ely and includes students in grades 6-12 from the Ely School District, Northeast Range School in Babbitt and area homeschoolers.

The production really is bigger than just Ely in every way and it is this level of community involvement that was one of the factors that helped Ely win the rights to perform this show.

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LOTS OF MOVIES

Get your tickets early for the Ely Film Festival

by CATIE CLARK
Ely Editor

ELY- If you're hoping to attend this year's Ely Film Festival, here's some advice: buy your tickets soon. Heading into just its second year, the festival has already sold out some of its most anticipated screenings as interest in the event continues to grow.

The festival runs four days, from Feb. 8-11, with all films showing at the two cinemas inside Ely's Historic State Theater.

The festival includes the film, "40 Below," that has already gained national recognition. "I expect '40 Below' on Saturday night (Feb. 9) to sell out," festival director Jacob White told the *Timberjay*. The film is a feature-length documentary about two participants in northeast Minnesota's grueling Arrowhead 135 race, which takes place every January. The film has already collected several awards and honors since premiering in April 2023 in Minneapolis. Several of its showings, especially in Minnesota, have sold out.

Name change

The Ely Film Festival changed its name this year. It began last year as the End of the Road Film Festival. "The rebranding gives the festival



better name recognition," White remarked. "We noticed last year, folks from out of town were already using that name. If you're not from the local area, 'end of the road' isn't as recognizable as being connected to Ely."

"Athens" still in post-production

"The most asked question I get, is whether the film shot last May here in Ely will be at the festival," said Jacob. That feature length movie, which has used working titles of both "Athens" and "Boundary Wa-

ters," is currently in its post-production phase and will not be done in time for this year's Ely Film Festival.

The film is the project and brainchild of accomplished television and film producer Erin Mae Miller, profiled in the April 28, 2023, edition of the *Timberjay*. The film crews used a house in town, the campus of the Ely Public Schools, Ely City Hall, and other locations around town. Many Elyites were extras in the film.

"They want it to play in Ely," White said, who also worked on the production, "but

they're not done with post-production yet."

The 2024 program

Opening night for the festival is sponsored by Ely Winter Festival. The opening ceremony will be at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 8. The festival requests that those who wish to attend should arrive 20 minutes early. The ceremony will include speakers, songs, and prayers from a traditional Anishinaabe drum team. After the ceremony, opening night will offer film screenings and a Q&A session with arctic explorer Lonnie Dupre.

"We've sold 130 festival passes already," White said, referring to the passes that include admission to all the films and perks such as breakfasts, the loyalty club lounge, parties, and discounts on festival memorabilia. For those not able to attend the entire festival, individual tickets for feature films and the short film blocks are \$10 apiece.

This year's film festival will show 15 features and 11 short film blocks. Festival passes and tickets can be bought in advance at elyfilmfest.com

State trails still poor for snowmobiling

by DAVID COLBURN
Cook-Orr Editor

TOWER- Tower DNR staff have been out packing snow on the Arrowhead, Taconite, and other snowmobile trails under their care since last week, but Area Supervisor Joe Majerus says it's anyone's guess as to when they'll be able to get the groomers out and rolling.

While a good portion of the trails are now marginally passable with last week's snow, trail conditions are still considered poor, with areas of open water and unfrozen

wetlands for snowmobilers to contend with, Majerus told the *Timberjay* on Tuesday.

The wetland conditions create the possibility of snowmobiles breaking through thin ice layers that may not be readily evident with the recent snows. Majerus noted that wetlands are problematic because decomposition generates heat that impacts how well they freeze. He said it's not unusual to observe steam rising from wetlands even after prolonged periods of cold weather.

But it's clear that the wetlands aren't ready to accommodate the

weight of a groomer yet, and Majerus wouldn't hazard a guess as to when they might be ready to do so. He wasn't overly encouraged by long-range forecasts predicting temperatures in the mid-30s by the middle of next week and little to no snow for the foreseeable future.

Majerus said the last time he recalls conditions being like this was in the 1990s. He said there was one year they didn't groom the trails at all, and another where they groomed only once.

"We need more snow," he said.

Car hits plow near Tower

TOWER- Traffic on Hwy. 169, between The Y Store and Tower, was disrupted for hours on Jan. 11 when a 2000 Jeep Cherokee traveling northbound lost control on the highway before striking a MnDOT snowplow head on, leaving the vehicle and the plow in the ditch. The accident occurred at 4:34 p.m. but the traffic delays at the site lasted at least two hours as heavy equipment had to be brought in to get the plow back on the road.

The Jeep driver, Joann Collins Smerage, age 64, of Winona, was transported to the Essentia-Virginia Hospital with non-life-threatening injuries. The driver of the snowplow was not injured.

Both drivers were wearing seatbelts, and alcohol was not a factor in the accident.

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GIRLS BASKETBALL

Hilltoppers outscore Wolves

Duluth Marshall connects on 18 threes to outpace Ely 89-68

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

ELY— Duluth Marshall had a hot night from beyond the arc here on Tuesday as they poured in 18 treys enroute to an 89-68 win over

Left: Ely freshman Amelia Penke looks for an opening under heavy pressure from a Duluth Marshall defender.

photo by J. Greeney

the Timberwolves. “We just couldn’t stop their scorers, especially their three-point shooters,” said Head Coach Max Gantt. “They made 18 threes but it felt like 30.”

Ely tried to keep pace as the Wolves offense performed well under the onslaught. Senior Grace LaTourell scored 17 points, while freshman Amelia Penke was right behind with 16 points. Coming off the bench, junior Maija Mattson scored eight points and sophomore

Zoe Mackenzie added eight as well

Even so, the Wolves fell behind early and were down 44-28 at the break. They improved their ball handling and their offensive output in the second half but still trailed the Hilltoppers 45-40 in the frame. The Wolves faced a couple tough competitors in Duluth Marshall’s Chloe Johnson and Regan Juenemann. Chloe had 32 points for them.

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HOCKEY

Wolves top Broncos 4-2

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

INT’L FALLS— The Wolves have been indomitable on home ice in recent weeks, but they proved they can manage just fine on the road on Tuesday as they downed the Broncos here, 4-2, to improve to 12-5 on the season.

After a scoreless first period, Ely senior Drew Marolt put the Wolves on top in the opening minutes of the second, with a goal at the 3:56 mark off an assist from senior Deegan Richards. Freshman Owen Marolt added a second Ely goal just 30 seconds later, with the assists going to Richards and Drew Marolt.

The Broncos weren’t about to give in, however, and they came bucking back later in the frame with two Parker Olson goals, the first on a power play, to tie the game at two. Richards broke the log jam at the ten minute mark of the third period, with assists from Drew Marolt and junior Garrett Rohr. Sophomore Jayden Zemke found the open net in

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NORDIC SKIING

Ely skiers rise to cold weather

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

GRAND MARAIS— Skiers at the Cook County Invitational had to contend with something they haven’t faced in a meet yet this year— cold weather.

“It was our biggest mountain to climb,” said Ely Head Coach Todd Hohenstein. “The cold weather can really sap a skier’s energy. On the other hand, we did have a few skiers that thrived in the cold and took on the conditions as a personal challenge.”

Among those who thrived on the Pincushion Mt. trails were Ely seniors Ava Skustad and Eli Olson, who both finished in sixth place and helped lead

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BOYS BASKETBALL

Grizzlies split a pair

Win hard-fought battle at Fond du Lac, fall to Mt. Iron-Buhl at home

by DAVID COLBURN
Cook-Orr Editor

FIELD TWP- The North Woods boys basketball team scored a tough road win against Fond du Lac on Tuesday, bouncing back from a rough and tumble home loss to Mt. Iron-Buhl last Friday.

North Woods had all they could handle on the hardwoods at Fond du Lac. Louis Panichi and Luke Will got the Grizzlies off to a good start before Jonah Burnett caught fire and hit for 17 first-half points. Despite Burnett’s performance, the Ojibwe led at the half 39-37. The Grizzlies second-half comeback was punctuated by a pair of triples from Will, two by Talen Jarshaw, and one from Panichi. North Woods held off a late Fond du Lac charge with the help of a bizarre triple technical foul call, one on the Grizzlies and two on the Ojibwe that resulted in a player

Above: The Grizzlies’ Jonah Burnett takes a jump shot from heavy traffic during last Friday’s contest with Mt. Iron-Buhl.

Right: The Grizzlies’ Luke Will looks for a way inside the tough MI-B defense.

photos by D. Colburn

ejection.

“I didn’t even see what happened,” North Woods Head Coach Andrew Jugovich said. “Apparently Keenan (Whitney) had come from behind and laid out a kid when they were going on a fast break.” Whitney was whistled for a technical, but Jugovich said the Fond du Lac player lost his composure and was hit with a pair of technicals. Instead of the Ojibwe having the ball with momentum and the chance to

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COLLEGIATE SPORTS

North Woods’ Olson to play golf for U of M-Crookston

by DAVID COLBURN
Cook/Orr Editor

FIELD TWP- Muscle memory is essential to the game of golf as a player learns to shape and groove their swing, but for North Woods senior golfer Tori Olson perhaps the most important muscle memories are the ones she holds in her heart.

Family and friends gathered with Olson at the school last week as the three-time state tournament qualifier signed a

letter of intent to play collegiate golf for the University of Minnesota-Crookston next year. But if not for the memories she carries in her heart of her grandparents, Roger and Sylvia Makela, she might never have reached this moment at all.

“The first time I got a golf club in my hands was with my grandma and my grandpa, they used to take me all the time,” Tori said. “At first I didn’t like it.”

But they persisted, and Roger in particular, as he always had custom-fitted clubs just for her so she would learn to swing properly, according to Tori’s father, Todd. And over time, Tori came around.

“Now I am so thankful that I got into golf, it’s like my favorite thing in the world,” Tori said. “And I probably never would have been in golf without my grandpa.”

But it’s safe to say that

Right: North Woods Head Girls Golf Coach and mom Kandi Olson shows her daughter Tori where to sign a letter of intent to play golf for UM-Crookston this coming fall.

photo by D. Colburn

Roger Makela wasn’t the only golfing influence on Tori. Growing up in a family that includes North Woods girls golf

See OLSON...pg. 2B



GIRLS BASKETBALL

In three routs, Grizzlies lose two

by DAVID COLBURN
Cook-Orr Editor

FIELD TWP- It was feast or famine for the North Woods girls this past week as they squared off against two powerhouses and a patsy, losing a pair to Mt. Iron-Buhl and South Ridge while picking up a dominant win over Littlefork-Big Falls.

Tuesday's home tilt against South Ridge, coming in at 12-3 and on a five-game win streak, was expected to be a tough one against a tall, quick opponent. River Cheney got the Grizzlies on the board with a trey from the top of the key, matching the Panthers' opening score. Cheney scored again from down low and Helen Koch got two on a drive to keep the Grizzlies close at 13-7, but South Ridge picked up the pace on both ends of the court and used a 19-6 run to go up 32-13 with six minutes left in the half. The Panthers continued to bring the heat, ballooning the lead to 51-21 at the half. North Woods didn't mount a serious threat in the second half, losing 85-38.

Cheney was the only North Woods player in double figures with 14.

Littlefork-Big Falls

In Monday's home contest against Littlefork-Big Falls, it was the Grizzlies who lowered the hammer in a big way, routing the Vikings, 84-20. Baskets by Koch and Tatum Barto gave North Woods an early 9-2 lead, and with Cheney and Talise Goodsky getting into the act the

lead quickly grew to 17-4. LBF ballhandlers were nearly helpless against the Grizzlies' pressure defense, turning the ball over an astounding 41 times, with 32 of those being North Woods steals. With few scoring opportunities and shooting only 25 percent, the Vikings were well out of the game by halftime, 40-17. North Woods Head Coach Liz Cheney substituted in platoons of five in the second half, but the Grizzlies didn't skip a beat. Allowing the Vikings just one basket and one free throw while piling up 44 points of their own for a huge 84-20 win.

Cheney led all scorers with 24, and Goodsky added 14 as ten Grizzlies scored points.

Mt. Iron-Buhl

Last Thursday, the Grizzlies had the unenviable task of traveling to Mt. Iron-Buhl to take on the Class A defending state champion and top-ranked Rangers, a task they were unfortunately ill-suited to handle. The Rangers took full advantage of their superior speed and athleticism to run the Grizzlies off the floor in the first half, building a whopping 84-17 lead at the intermission. With the clock running the entire second half and Mt. Iron-Buhl diving deep into its bench, the Grizzlies kept playing hard and came out ahead in the second stanza 18-16, but limped home on the short end of a 100-35 beatdown.

Koch was the only Grizzly to reach double figures with ten points.

"I feel like there are five



The Grizzlies' River Cheney goes in for a layup during Tuesday's home contest with South Ridge. photo by D. Colburn

teams that when we play them we end up beating ourselves, and you could see it tonight," said Cheney after Monday's loss to South Ridge. "The hesitation on the drives, the hesitation with the shooting can make all the difference in the world, so what is holding their confidence back? South Ridge, MIB, Floodwood, Chisholm and Ely, those are the five teams that are just a head game for us."

"When we play teams like (South Ridge) it helps expose our weaknesses, what we need to work on," Cheney said. "When we play teams like Littlefork, we have some bad passes, some turn-

overs, but they don't necessarily show up as much because they may not be as bad of mistakes as the team we're playing."

The Grizzlies also didn't perform up to snuff against MIB, Cheney said.

"MIB can sometimes draw the best out of us, but they did not last Thursday," she said. "It was a pretty poor showing on our part. It was just bad."

Something the Grizzlies have consistently shown this season in both wins and losses is the desire to battle to the final whistle. Cheney was pleased to see that same intensity against LBF in a situation where many teams will

have a second-half let down when they have an insurmountable lead.

"We were able to just keep playing basketball," Cheney said. "We didn't have to press for a full half and we still scored 84 points. And we were able to play with different groups of kids. So it was good, it was fun."

The Grizzlies were scheduled to play on Thursday at Nashauk-Keewatin before the schedule gives them an 11-day break. Cheney is looking forward to an extended period of practice for the Grizzlies to hone their game before returning to the home hardwoods against Barnum on Jan. 29.

NW BOYS...Continued from page 1B

trim the lead, Panichi hit three of four free throws to put the Grizzlies up by seven. North Woods was able to close with a strong finish and an 88-76 win.

Burnett finished with 31 points, while Panichi canned 22, Will dropped in 17, and Jarshaw had 10.

"It wasn't the game that we really thought we were capable of, especially being down at halftime," Jugovich said. "Our boys need to take better care of the ball. It's just something we have to keep imprinting on the boys' minds that they have to take care of the ball

or otherwise we are not going to be winning."

Mt. Iron-Buhl

The Grizzlies got off to a rough start against MIB, turning the ball over on three of their first four possessions, foreshadowing a problem that would dog them throughout the game. MIB led early, but three-balls on consecutive trips down the court by Keenan Whitney and Louie Panichi gave the Grizzlies a short-lived 26-25 lead. MIB responded with a run that gave them a 44-35 advantage, their biggest of the half, but the Grizzlies

managed to keep pace with Jonah Burnett and Luke Will scoring four points each in an 8-2 run to close out the half and pull North Woods to within 46-43 at the break.

"Going into the locker room, we said hey, for how poor we have played we're within three," Jugovich said. "That shows what kind of team we're capable of being. Even with all of our turnovers we managed to keep within three."

North Woods opened the second half slowly as MIB built an eight-point lead, but a deuce by Burnett

and a triple by Panichi sandwiched around an MIB score cut the deficit to five at 57-52.

That's as close as the Grizzlies would get, as the Rangers went on a decisive 19-4 run, connecting on four threes as they blew out to a 20-point edge at 76-56 with just over ten minutes remaining.

"The boys just seemed out of sync - I'm not sure exactly what was going on, but it wasn't like how we were in the beginning of the year, there wasn't as much vocalicity on the floor." The Grizzlies gamely

fought back with Will, Panichi, Burnett, Evan Kajala and Kalvyn Benner all hitting big shots to pull back within nine at 81-72 with 7:28 left to play. But the Grizzlies came up empty in their next eight trips down the floor, and while MIB did little to capitalize on the drought, the Grizzlies' momentum fizzled out. North Woods never seriously threatened again as the Rangers closed out a 95-80 win.

The Grizzlies were whistled for 20 fouls in the game, leading to a big disparity at the free throw

line, where MIB was 16-of-25 and North Woods was six-of-11. North Woods had 24 turnovers into the Rangers converted into 25 points, 15 more than the Grizzlies made off 14 MIB turnovers.

Burnett scored 23 to lead North Woods, with Will and Panichi each chipping in 16 in the loss.

The Grizzlies were scheduled to take the home court on Friday against Kelliher/Northome before facing off against the state's No. 1 team in Class A, Cherry, on Monday at home.

OLSON...Continued from page 1B

coach Kandi Olson and a pair of older siblings, Tate and Coley, who've made their own marks golfing at the collegiate level, it would have been odd if Tori hadn't come to love the game. "Both of them were just great role models," Tori said of Tate and Coley. "They've always helped me and given me tips and insight on the game. It was like they were my mentors. They were a big part in my growth, too. Having them as college athletes and golfers as well, it's been amazing to have them by my side helping me."

"I'm so proud of her," Coley said. "I'm so happy she made this decision. I think this is the right place for her to go."

"It's been so exciting to watch Tori grow," Coach/

Mom Olson said. "In just her sophomore year she had to start taking over leadership roles in the golf world. To see how she managed that and continued to grow throughout the next couple of years was really exciting."

A gifted volleyball player as well, Olson might have drawn some interest from college coaches for that sport, too, but there was no question about what Tori wanted to pursue.

"It's always been golf," she said. "I've been pretty passionate about golf."

And it's that passion that's driven her to put in the extra work necessary to excel and be successful at the next level.

"After practice, I would be the girl that would want to play three more holes,"

Tori said. "I was committed to golf in the summer and I would go and hit buckets and buckets of balls. I did summer tournaments, Junior PGA tournaments, putting in that extra time and I always tried to stay connected to the game."

Tori expressed appreciation for her experience at North Woods as she contemplated the move to Crookston.

"I'm so very thankful for my golf team at North Woods," she said. "I'm thankful that I got to be a leader and be the number one scorer and help the team. Going into college, I love that I'll be at the bottom again, because that's how I'm going to get better and improve. I'm focusing on improving, having a great time

and a positive attitude and meeting people who have more experience in the game than I do."

And something significantly different is that she won't be calling Crookston's golf coach Bryant Friskop "Mom."

"It's definitely going to be a change because I've had my mom, my sister, my brother and my grandpa all be a part of the coaching staff at some point," Tori said. "I met him and he's a really great person and he seems to know everything you need to know about golf. I think it'll be a good thing for me to try something new, and I'm very excited. I would love to make the traveling team as soon as possible."

It's also going to be a change, and a welcome one,

for Kandi.

"The stress of having to coach them and be a mom is often challenging to deal with," she said. "Now I can be a mom and just go enjoy and watch my kid participate in things. Of course, we still have a season coming up."

Friskop is also pleased to have signed Tori, as evidenced from the announcement of Olson's signing on the Crookston website.

"I'm excited to have Tori join our squad here for U of M Crookston Women's Golf," Friskop said. "Tori is a very impressive young woman who has a strong drive to be the best

she can be both in her golf future and her academic future. Tori has a powerful swing that'll translate to the collegiate level. I can't wait to have her here next summer to get to work!"

Tori said Crookston will be a good fit for her.

"I wanted to stay in Minnesota," she said. "I want to become an elementary teacher. And golf. They just hit all the boxes. They offered me a scholarship, and I really got a good warm vibe from the school when I visited there. It's a great community."

HOCKEY...Continued from page 1B

the final minutes as the Broncos pulled their goalie to lift Ely to the 4-2 final.

Ely junior goalie Ben Leeson had a strong night in the net, fending off 39 of 41 shots on goal. The Wolves notched 28 shots but made them count.

Playing in Baudette last Friday, the Wolves struggled to contain Lake of the Woods as the Bears peppered Ely goalie Ben Leeson with 53 shots on goal on their way to a 5-1 win. The Bears jumped out to a 2-0 lead in the

first period and padded their margin with two more goals in a second period that featured five straight Ely penalties. Sophomore Jayden Zemke and senior Brecken Sandberg both hit the box twice in the period— Zemke for trip-

ping and interference, Sandberg for slashing and unsportsmanlike conduct. Leeson was also tapped on a tripping charge.

The Bears added one more early in the third period to go up 5-0. The Wolves scored their only

GIRLS...Continued from page 1B

including five threes. She's a great player. Juenemann connected for five threes as well, for a total of 25 points.

"Playing a good offensive team like this will only make us better," predicted Gantt. "We competed against a really good team and we can take some

lessons away to help us improve."

The Wolves were looking to get back on the winning road on Thursday,

against International Falls. They'll be back home on Monday, when they host Bigfork.

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Obituaries and Death Notices



Orrin A. Haugen

Orrin Arnold Haugen, 87, of Duluth, a former longtime Hibbing resident, passed away peacefully at home on Monday, Jan. 8, 2024. Visitation will be held on Saturday, Jan. 20 from 10 a.m. until the 11 a.m. memorial service at First Lutheran Church in Hibbing. It will be a combined service for Orrin and Janice. Janice passed away on Feb. 25, 2022, and their promise to each other was to wait and have a combined funeral. Inurnment will be at the Minnesota State Veterans Cemetery-Duluth at a later date. Arrangements are by Dougherty Funeral Home of Duluth.

Orrin was born in Thief River Falls to Arnold and Ida (Mostrom) Haugen on Oct. 15, 1936. On May 9, 1959, he married

Janice Sundahl in Goodridge. Orrin was a U.S. Army Veteran, serving from December 1959 to March 1962. After his discharge, Orrin and Janice farmed for a short time near Goodridge before settling in Hibbing, where they made their home for 52 years and raised their family before moving to Duluth six years ago to be with their son, Keith.

Orrin worked for Hoover Construction in Virginia as a heavy equipment mechanic from 1966 until his retirement in 2000. He was a member of the American Legion, 49ers, International Union of Operating Engineers, Moose Club and The First Lutheran Church. Orrin enjoyed construction, fixing, building and remodeling projects, and he was a perfectionist in his work. Of course, Janice was right by his side helping no matter what the project was.

Orrin and Janice loved spending time with family and friends at their hobby farm in Goodridge. Janice and Orrin had a very special kind of love and respect for each other and were happily married for nearly 63 years. The two of them did everything together and never

liked to be apart. Orrin was a devoted husband, caring father, loving grandfather and proud great-grandfather. Family was the most important thing in his life. He had such a special bond with his two granddaughters and his great-grandson Hunter. They brought so much joy and happiness to his life. He was beaming with pride when his great-granddaughter Julia was born a month ago.

Orrin is survived by his children, Keith (Mike Goerd) Haugen and Debbie (Dan) Wirre; granddaughters, Leah (Adam) Nori and Emily (Gregg) Malmgren; great-grandchildren, Hunter Hoopman, Julia Malmgren and Harper Nori; siblings, Ardith Kloth, Lois Bursstad, Edna Hawk, Sharron Johnson and Linda Homme; four sisters-in-law; and numerous nieces and nephews, which include great and great-great.

He was preceded in death by his parents; wife, Janice; brother, Floyd; and two sisters, Fern and Grace.

Brian Jarvi

Brian Jarvi, 57, of Ely, passed away at his residence on Thursday,

Jan. 11, 2024. Funeral arrangements are entrusted to Kerntz Funeral Home of Ely.



Leigh Donald

Leigh Donald, 66, peacefully departed on January 14, 2024, surrounded by her family.

She is preceded in death by her mother and two sisters. She is survived by her dad, two daughters, and a sister; also survived by cats and numerous other family members. The family has opted out of traditional services at this time -- in lieu of, feel free to stop by her dad's house to share any stories about this feisty woman's life. Online condolences at www.mlakerfuneralhome.com

Bonnie R. Shroff

Bonnie Rae Lamppa Shroff, 78, of California, originally of Embarrass, passed away on Monday, Jan. 1, 2024. As per her wishes, she will be cremated at Mountain View Mortuary and Cemetery in Altadena, Calif. A celebration of life will take place at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Jan. 20 at Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Virginia. In lieu of flowers, the family asks for donations to the Alzheimer's Association. Family services are provided by Bauman-Cron, a Bauman Family Funeral Home in Virginia.

She is survived by her husband, Bansi Shroff; sons, Sean and Brennan; and grandchildren, Baron, Waylon, Sadie and baby Tadhg.

Jeffrey A. Rosati

Jeffrey A. Rosati, of Hermantown, died on Sunday, Dec. 17, 2023, at Essentia Medical Center after a lengthy illness. A celebration of life will be planned for spring of 2024. A full obituary will be published at that time.

He is survived by his parents, Nancy (Voxland) and Charles Eichholz of Tower, and Richard and

Lisa (Davis) Rosati of Eveleth.

Judy Armbrust

Judy Rhea Armbrust, 74, of Orr, passed away on Wednesday, Jan. 10, 2024, at Essentia Health-St. Mary's in Duluth. Arrangements are pending with Range Funeral Home in Hibbing.

Mary Jo Tome

Mary Jo Lunquist Tome, 71, Ely, passed away at her residence on Saturday, Jan. 6, 2024. A memorial service/celebration of life will be held during the warmer months when friends and family can enjoy the outdoors as much as she did. Funeral arrangements are entrusted to Kerntz Funeral Home of Ely.

She is survived by her sons, Jack (Kira), Joe (Alaina) and Brian (Helen); grandchildren, Summer, Jake, Madelyn and Ethan; mother, Ruth Lunquist; sisters, Renee (Rick) Martin and Jenny (Bruce) LaChance; sister-in-law, Randi (Dave) Tachney; mother-in-law, Vi Tome; several nieces, nephews and step-grandchildren; and a vast network of other relatives and friends.

ARCHERY

North Woods archers open season with win

by DAVID COLBURN
Cook-Orr Editor

AURORA- The North Woods archery team got off to a good start to the season last Saturday when the middle school contingent won dual first places for bullseye and 3D division at a meet at Mesabi East School in Aurora.

Seventh grader Michaela Brunner led the way for the Grizzlies middle schoolers in the seven-team

bullseye competition with a second-place finish out of 72 competitors. Classmate Laurin Glass placed fourth. Seventh grader Cooper Long took second place in middle school boys out of 98.

The middle school crew also defeated six other teams for the 3D crown. Long nailed down first place out of 58 boys competing. Classmate Brady Swanson took fourth. Brunner captured her second medal of the day by placing third out of 45

girls. The North Woods high school team took second place among seven teams in bullseye, with Cadence Nelson taking second place out of 74 girls competing.

Elementary medalists for the Grizzlies included fifth grader Shay Wilcox, fifth in bullseye and fourth in 3D, and fourth grader Bailey Brunner, second in bullseye.

ELY BASKETBALL

behind with 19 points and ten rebounds for a double-double. Sophomore Drew Johnson added ten boards for Ely.

Tuesday's convincing win proved a nice rebound after Ely's 76-38 shellacking at the hands of Northland. "We were flat from the start," said Head Coach Tom McDonald. "Northland shot the ball really well and it didn't matter what defense we played as they went right through everyone." The Wolves also struggled offensively, managing less than 30 percent from the field. Johnson led scoring for Ely with 12 points, while Davies added 11. Chittum added six rebounds.

Playing at home last Thursday, the Wolves dominated Nashwauk-Keewatin 65-37. "We got off to a good start and led 30-12 at halftime," said McDonald. "I thought our defense was good the entire game and we shot the ball well also." Davies had a big night, pouring in 31 points while Chittum added 16 and seven assists.

The Wolves were set to face Mt. Iron-Buhl on Thursday and host Duluth Marshall in a Saturday afternoon contest that gets underway at 2:45 p.m. They remain at home, hosting Carlton on Tuesday.

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

BIGFORK— The Ely boys basketball squad took two of three games in the past week, after topping the Huskies 63-47 here on Tuesday. The game proved close in the first half as Ely headed into the break up by just five points. But the Wolves pulled away in the second half thanks to more consistent shooting and a better defensive effort.

Sophomore guard Jack Davies led the way for Ely with 20 points, while junior Caid Chittum was right

Ely elementary archers notch first place at Aurora

by DAVID COLBURN
Cook-Orr Editor

AURORA- Ely's elementary archers were flying high in their first meet of the season on Saturday, taking first place in the 3D target competition at Mesabi East in Aurora.

Fifth-grader Aspen MacCoy led the way for the young archers with a first place finish among 22 competitors in the four-team field.

Ely's middle school contingent took second in 3D among seven teams entered, even though none of the team

members placed in the top five in the overall competition.

Cylvia DeBeltz took home a fourth place medal in high school girls 3D competition shooting against 39 other competitors.

Both the elementary and middle school teams took third in the round robin bullseye competition. Eighth grader Laydan Hart scored a third place medal out of 98 competing in middle school boys. MacCoy stepped up again for the elementary girls, placing second out of 45.

Radon is top cause of lung cancer in non-smokers

REGIONAL- Radon, an odorless, colorless radioactive gas, is the top cause of lung cancer in non-smokers, health officials say, and in Minnesota, over 40 percent of homes exceed safe radon levels.

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), along with national public health organizations, is urging home and apartment testing during January's National Radon Action Month.

Dr. Brooke Cunningham, MDH Commissioner, emphasizes the rarity of radon testing in the state, with only one to two percent of homes checked annually. She points out disparities in testing and mitigation, especially in low-income and renter-heavy communities, and in Minnesota's northern and southwestern regions.

"The only way to know if your home has high radon levels is to test," Cunningham said.

Minnesota's unique geology and cold climate contribute to high radon levels averaging 4.2 picocuries per liter, more than triple the U.S. average of 1.3 picocuries per liter. The Environmental Protection Agency has established four picocuries per liter as the target for installing a radon mitigation system.

Winter increases indoor radon levels as heating systems draw in gas from the soil. Basements, commonly used as living spaces in Minnesota, also elevate exposure risks. Renters, especially those on lower levels, are encouraged to test or request landlord testing.

Jill Heins-Nesvold of the American Lung Association stresses the importance of radon testing, as the ALA's 2018 analysis linked radon to about 18 percent of the state's lung cancer cases.

MDH is set to distribute over 6,000 test kits, and kits are also available at stores or through mn.radon.com for \$12.95. Licensed professionals can also conduct tests.

NORDIC...Continued from page 1B

Ely to second-place team finishes, behind skiing powerhouse Duluth East. Skustad's time of 17:54.1 was 2:16 behind first-place finisher Lydia Kraker, of Duluth East, who dominated the race. Olson's time of 15:21.8 was 1:20 behind Duluth East's Carl Morse, who won the race on the boys' side.

"Eli had a great race, said Hohenstein, who added that Skustad's performance stood out as well. "At the starting line she and most other skiers were concerned about the colder temps, but after she started the race, she found a good tempo and was able to maintain it throughout the 5.2 km course."

Ely freshman Oliver Hohenstein was just three seconds behind Olson in the boys race, finishing in seventh.

On the girls side, Ely senior Claire Blauch finished in the top half, in 11th place, with a time of 18:46.5.

For the boys, Ely junior Dylan Durkin, freshman Aksel Skustad, and junior Milo McClelland finished

11th, 12th, and 13th respectively with times of 15:42.6, 16:08.7, and 16:30.7.

Dylan Durkin proved the standout for Ely in last Thursday's sprint competition at Duluth Marshall as he ended up finishing second overall just behind Paavo Rova of Duluth East. The untimed competition pits skiers against each other in 1.3 km classic sprints, with the top two finishers in each heat moving on.

"Before the race, we talked as a team to frame the day as you only have one race," said Hohenstein. "As coaches, we didn't want skiers to be thinking about saving themselves for a later race that might not happen if another skier has a faster time. We wanted them to ski all out and then practice the recovery process."

With 28 skiers moving up in the initial cut, Hohenstein challenged his team to qualify at least three girls and six boys. "Both teams achieved that goal and it was great to have that sense of individuals doing their part for the success of the

team," Hohenstein said.

For the boys, Silas Solum, Aksel Skustad, Olson, McClelland, and Hohenstein all qualified out of the quarterfinal round, in fourth, eighth, 11th, 13th, and 17th respectively. For the girls, Blauch, Ava Skustad, and Anna Dunn all qualified, in 18th, 20th, and 25th place respectively.

Hohenstein noted the balance within the boys team. "It is a really fun characteristic that we just don't know on any given day who is going to be our 1, 2, 3 combination. They celebrate who has the great day and then they work hard to find the spot for themselves. It is one recipe for great team chemistry."

The Wolves head to Two Harbors on Tuesday and return home the following Saturday, Jan. 27, for their big home meet at Hidden Valley. The competition begins at 10 a.m. and will last throughout the day.

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Outdoors

Our lives in the
Northwoods

CITIZEN SCIENCE

Area bird counts reflect the impact of mild weather

Many more hawks and crows remained in the North this year; northern finch numbers mostly lower

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

REGIONAL— Plenty of hawks and crows and very few woodpeckers or grosbeaks. Those were among the more consistent findings from the more than 100 area residents who took part in Christmas Bird counts around the area in northern St. Louis and Lake counties over the holidays.

It's been an unusual winter for birds in the North

Country, as many species that normally head south have lingered thanks to limited snow cover and mild temperatures up until this past week.

The Isabella bird count, one of the longest-running counts in the region at 42 years, posted 15 rough-legged hawks, slaughtering the previous record of just one. The count also doubled its previous record of three bald eagles, with six. That was a paltry total, however, compared to the 103 bald eagles

reported on the Virginia bird count, which beat the previous record of 37 bald eagles in that now 20-year-old count. The mild conditions and exceptionally late ice-ups of area lakes and rivers likely kept the fish-eating bald eagles from migrating south this year. Both the Cook and Aurora counts reported a northern harrier, the first time for that species on those counts. Harriers, also known as marsh hawks, typically winter south of Minnesota,

Right: A male white-winged crossbill perches on a black spruce. Crossbills, which are typically uncommon at feeders, have been showing up for sunflower seeds in recent weeks.

photo by M. HelMBERGER

so their appearance in the far northern part of the state is highly unusual.

See COUNTS...pg. 5B



DNR FOREST MANAGEMENT

Fish and Wildlife report suggests improper use of federal wildlife funds

Draft investigation says DNR forestry diverted wildlife funds for timber sales

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

REGIONAL— A recently released report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or FWS, provides stunning conclusions on what appears to be a wholesale violation of a federal grant program by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The draft report, completed nearly four years ago, was only made public last month in response to a Freedom of Information Act request by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, or PEER, which made the document available to the *Timberjays*.

The 28-page report provided the conclusions of a series of visits by FWS biologists in early 2020 to three state wildlife management areas, or WMAs, in order to investigate complaints that the DNR was misusing its federal funds to support logging urged by the timber industry. The federal funds obtained by the DNR were specifically dedicated to benefit wildlife and wildlife habitat yet appeared to be used instead to pay for hundreds of commercial timber sales that the DNR's own biologists said provided little benefit to wildlife or were even detrimental due to the environmental damage caused by the logging activity. As the *Timberjays* reported last August, the FWS has been at

“DNR Forestry seems to be planning and implementing timber harvests on WMAs with little or no Fish and Wildlife oversight

Excerpt from recently released FWS draft report

odds with the DNR over its use of federal wildlife funds for what appear to be purely commercial timber sales since 2021. The FWS had actually suspended its funding to the DNR for a time, but that funding was restored this past September after the DNR agreed to do a better job of documenting the wildlife benefits of its management activities.

DNR and FWS supervisors have, for the most part, sought to portray the matter as a misunderstanding over paperwork. DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife Director Dave Olfelt said the FWS had placed conditions on the grant that required documentation of the wildlife purposes for forest habitat work covered by the grant. “Unfortunately, this

change in the language for the 2021 grant was not fully clear to DNR,” said Olfelt. “As a result, DNR and FWS were operating for a period of time with different understandings regarding the scope and timing of required documentation of wildlife purposes for forest habitat management activities.”

The 2020 report suggests a far more serious and systemic issue, however, in which the DNR's Division of Forestry effectively usurped the authority of the DNR's Division of Fish and Wildlife to utilize federal wildlife funds to support commercial timber harvest.

Olfelt notes that the recently-released document was a draft that was never finalized, and that the DNR had disagreed with some of the investigators' conclusions. “Among the challenges we had with the 2020 draft report is that it included some unfounded preliminary conclusions that did not tie to clear protocols or standards and did not reflect an understanding of our broader forest management framework,” added Olfelt, who noted that the FWS never concluded that the DNR misappropriated federal funds or that the forestry division had taken over management of the wildlife funds.

Those views generally run contrary to the findings in the report, however, and it is also

in contrast to the views of many within the DNR division that Olfelt leads.

“It appears the primary purpose of the observed timber harvests were commercial,” concluded the FWS report. “DNR Forestry seems to be planning and implementing timber harvests on WMAs with little or no Fish and Wildlife oversight. This appears to constitute a loss of control of federal grant funds...” In addition, because the federal funds must be matched by Fish and Wildlife license revenues, the report concluded that those funds, which typically come from the state's hunters and anglers, were being diverted to pay for commercial timber harvesting that frequently provided no benefit to wildlife, or to the hunters or anglers who helped pay for them.

Wildlife staff express deep dissatisfaction

The possible misuse of federal wildlife grant dollars by the DNR appears to have come as a consequence of a 2018 change in DNR policy to substantially boost timber harvests in response to pressure from the timber industry. The new policy, known as the Sustainable Timber Harvest Initiative, or STHI, came under fire from

See FUNDING...pg. 5B

Outdoors briefly

DNR offering help to private forestland owners

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is inviting private woodland owners with two or more acres of forested property to participate in a new effort to help improve forest inventory across Minnesota.

Private woodland owners who participate in the effort will work with a professional forester and receive high-quality forest inventory data of their woodlands at no cost. Following data collection, landowners will receive an initial report with information about the inventory data collected. A more comprehensive follow-up report will be sent after the project is completed at the end of 2025.

The forest inventory information can be used to:

Learn about fire fuel loads and how to reduce wildfire risk.

Improve forest management relating to harvest planning, wildlife habitat, tree planting or trail development.

Create forest stewardship plans to sustain healthy, resilient and beautiful forests for generations to come.

Interested landowners can visit the DNR website (mndnr.gov/forestry/forest-inventory.html) to learn more and sign up to participate.

Fishing reports

Ely area

Ice conditions have improved greatly on all area lakes these last few days. Ice roads continue to pop up and expand on many area lakes. Lakes with ice roads are reporting 12-14" of clear solid ice. Reports from lake trout lakes went from 3-8" reported on Friday to 7-11" on Sunday. Only a matter of time before anglers start driving on these lakes as well. Four-wheelers and snowmobiles were a common sight on lake trout lakes this last weekend.

Speaking of trout, anglers were not disappointed during the lake trout opener. Anglers did best fishing flats in 30-50 ft. of water. Four-inch tubes, worked aggressively, were the most productive presentation. Sucker minnows, fished under a tip up, also accounted for a fair share of fish.

Rainbows, browns, brook trout and splake were all active for trout opener. All trout were caught with small jigging spoons or tungsten jigs, tipped with soft plastics or wax worms. Rainbows were found 5-10 feet under the ice, while brookies and browns were found on shallow flats that had weeds or timber. Splake were found near the bottom in 15-20 feet of water.

Courtesy of Arrowhead Outdoors. See more at Arrowhead OutdoorsElyMN.com

FUNDING...Continued from page 4B

the start from wildlife officials who argued that the harvest targets in the initiative made it difficult...

That change has devastated morale among DNR wildlife managers. An internal survey conducted by the DNR last fall found that 90 percent of its wildlife officials reported being either "very or somewhat dissatisfied..."

Wildlife officials offered unflattering comments as well in the survey. "Wildlife staff have been marginalized and not empowered to advocate for the benefit of a diverse wildlife and habitat system..."

Some wildlife staff reported seeking medical help for stress management

and panic attacks brought on by the disagreements within their offices over forest management. "I take frustration home from the office, defeated and on the verge of just giving up..."

Federal grant program substantial

The two federal programs at issue, known as Pittman-Robertson and John Dingell grants, have typically provided \$20-\$30 million to the DNR every year. Those funds are supposed to be managed by the DNR's Fish and Wildlife Division to help pay for a wide range of management practices...

But the FWS report concluded that is not what was happening. During their examination of DNR actions within the Red

Lake Wildlife Management Area, for example, DNR's own wildlife officials cited 101 instances where they were unable to identify any wildlife benefits from timber harvests within the WMA. Indeed, the report states, "Results of these timber harvests were considered by [DNR wildlife staff] to be detrimental to wildlife or not to have wildlife objectives at the WMA..."

The Red Lake WMA, the state's largest WMA, is home to some of the state's most extensive stands of black spruce and DNR foresters appeared keen to liquidate as much of this high value timber commodity as possible.

While the DNR's long range plan for the Red Lake WMA cited its desire to "conserve, enhance, and restore all native plant communities... for the benefit of native wildlife," the FWS report found the agency's actions belied those words. "Timber harvests observed at Red Lake seem to contradict these long-range goals, especially timber harvests including black spruce, which are important for wildlife, and are underrepresented on the surrounding landscape..."

The report further found that DNR Forestry was charging personnel time against federal wildlife program dollars for timber sales that had no apparent value to wildlife and were, in some cases, decreasing the quality

and quantity of wildlife habitat."

The FWS investigators found that DNR Wildlife staff were frequently unaware of the location of many timber harvests that had been done within WMAs and had little or no input into the projects.

At the Whitewater WMA in southeastern Minnesota, the investigators found that the DNR appeared to be focusing its timber harvests in high value oak stands, which provide important sources of mast for many wildlife species, including white-tailed deer and turkeys. The investigators reported that some of those timber harvests had created erosion on hillsides, soil compaction in lowlands and the introduction of invasive species and reduction of natural forest regeneration.

"DNR Forestry and contracted loggers seem to be selecting mature oak stands to bid on almost solely for economic reasons, while leaving low economic value stands unharvested," concluded the FWS report. "Mature oak stands have high wildlife value, and harvest of these stands for non-wildlife reasons is inconsistent with the purpose of the [Pittman-Robertson] Act, federal regulations, and purposes, objectives, and approach of the Wildlife Habitat grant."

Questions raised

While the report highlights an apparent break-

down in oversight of these federal grant dollars within the DNR, Bob Bryant, a longtime FWS official who now works for PEER, said the FWS has questions to answer as well, including why the agency waited until just last month to release the report in response to PEER's FOIA request for documents. He said the federal agency had omitted the damning report during an earlier release of information to the group.

Bryant said any of the half dozen findings included in the report should have been a red flag that prompted intervention by the federal agency back in early 2020 when it was written. "The FWS should have taken action back when the report was done," said Bryant, adding that it was clear from the report and other information gathered by PEER that the DNR's fish and wildlife division had functionally lost control of the federal wildlife grant funds, even though the funds are supposed to be managed by wildlife officials in states where the funds are utilized. "That should have been a red light that stopped the logging back in 2020," he said. "They [FWS] have some explaining to do."

Hudson Kingston, an Ely-based legal counsel for the group CURE, agreed. "When DNR staff in 2019 indicated that this program was harming protected habitat, the FWS and the public knew there was

smoke. This 2020 report shows that FWS staff investigated and found the fire," he said. "Then agency management withheld this information from the public for years, letting it smolder and destroy irreplaceable old-growth habitat that should never have been cut."

The Timberjay reached out to Will Meeks, the FWS's new Midwest regional director for comment on this story but he did not respond prior to press time.

Issues resolved?

Top DNR officials insist the issues with the FWS have been largely resolved and that some of the FWS's critiques had led to considerable discussions between the two agencies that helped to clarify expectations moving forward. "The fact that FWS fully reimbursed our 2021-2023 grant and has issued our 2023-25 grant demonstrates their confidence in the work we do and that issues FWS identified have been addressed," said Olfelt.

Kingston isn't so sanguine and faults the FWS as too lax in its oversight of the DNR. "How is this excessive deference to DNR not a loss of control of federal funding committed to habitat management?" wrote Kingston in an October 2023 letter to the FWS.

COUNTS...Continued from page 4B

The mild conditions also appear to have favored crows, a species once rarely found in the region in winter. On the 44-year-old Aurora count, birders sighted 75 crows, the second highest count on record, while counters found just 32 ravens, the second lowest count ever. Even the Isabella count, which tallies a crow only once every three years on average, set a new record with 12.

Other corvids, (members of the crow family) proved to be highly variable. Gray jays continued to show a general decline, with the Virginia count reporting its third year with no gray jays at all. The Aurora count tallied just eight of these friendly and curious birds, while the Isabella count reported 43, which is the count's long-term average. The Isabella count still holds the North American record for the most gray jays with 154, recorded back in 1986.

As gray jays have declined, black-billed magpies have become increasingly notable in much of the area. The Aurora count tied its previous record for the species, with eight, matching the gray jay numbers on the count. The Virginia count reported 12 magpies, the second highest tally in the count's history. Several magpies were reported on the Cook count as well although a final number wasn't available as of presstime.

Among the finches, both evening and pine grosbeaks have proven to be scarce all winter. Counters in Aurora tallied just four pine grosbeaks, the second lowest count on record, along with 20 evening grosbeaks, or well below the long-term average count of 53.

Meanwhile, most counts reported good numbers of red crossbills, which have also been showing up at area feeders this winter, something these cone specialists rarely do.

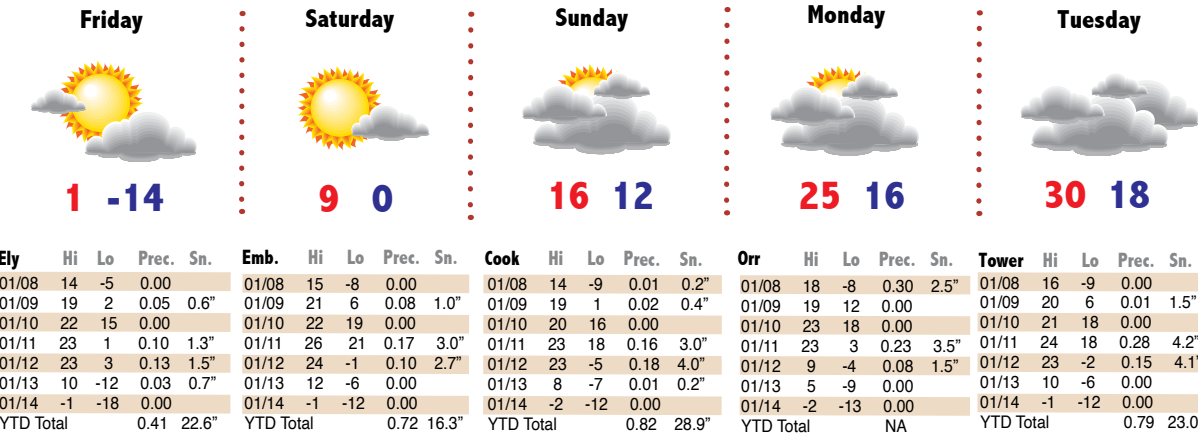
The Isabella count tallied a record 133 red crossbills, while the Aurora count tallied 20 white-winged crossbills. Other smaller finches, like redpolls, pine siskins, and goldfinches were highly variable. The Virginia count reported just three common redpolls, it's third lowest tally on record, while the Aurora count reported just one. The Isabella count, meanwhile, tallied 670 redpolls, more than three times the long-term average.

All the counts reported strong numbers of ruffed grouse, including Isabella, which set a record with 63, more than ten times the long-term average. Isabella counters also reported five spruce grouse. The Aurora count tallied 11 ruffed grouse, the second-highest total in the count's history, while the Virginia count reported 10 grouse.

Woodpecker numbers were down for most counts as well. The Virginia count reported just two downy woodpeckers, a new low, along with ten hairy woodpeckers. The Aurora count tallied just four downy woodpeckers, tied for the second lowest total, along with 12 hairy woodpeckers. In Isabella, by contrast, counters found 88 downy woodpeckers, well above the long-term average of 53, and 29 hairy woodpeckers, above the long-term average of 18.

LAKE COUNTRY FORECAST

from NOAA weather



EBCH Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital logo and a photograph of the hospital building.

Hospital Connection Ely Community Pharmacy

- Q: Who owns Ely Community Pharmacy? A: Although Ely Community Pharmacy (ECP) is located next to the Essentia Health - Ely Clinic waiting area, ECP is owned and operated by Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital...
Q: Is it too late to get my vaccinations? A: It is not too late to get your vaccinations. Currently, Ely Community Pharmacy has vaccinations available on a walk-in basis every Monday through Friday from 8:00 am until 6:00 pm...
Q: How can I refill my prescription? A: You can refill your prescription at Ely Community Pharmacy in various ways.

Hospital Connection is a new feature from Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital (EBCH) this winter. We are excited to share some of our most recent updates and information in a question-and-answer format featuring a new topic each week.

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VISIT VermilionPetCremation.com or call 218-780-8069 for pet cremation details and rates.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Ely AA OPEN GROUP MEETINGS- in person meetings, Wednesdays & Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. at First Lutheran Church, 915 E Camp St., Ely.

MS SUPPORT GROUP- meets the second Friday of the month at 1 p.m. at the Babbitt Municipal Building, senior room. Open to all. For information contact Mary at 218-827-8327.

ORR AA meets Tuesdays at 8 p.m. at Holy Cross Catholic Church, Orr.

TOPS- Meetings every Monday at 4:45 p.m. at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Virginia.

BABBITT AL-ANON- meets Thursdays at 7 p.m. in the upstairs of Woodland Presbyterian Church.

AL-ANON FAMILY GROUP- Are you troubled by someone's drinking? Al-Anon Family Group is a community-based mutual support program for the friends and families of alcoholics. It is confidential and open to anyone affected by someone else's drinking. Hope Lutheran Church in Embarrass hosts an Al-Anon group on Monday evenings at 6 p.m. 218-984-2037.

AA MEETING IN COOK- Sunday Night Big Book Group meets at Trinity Lutheran Church, 231 2nd St. NE, Cook, at 7:00 pm Sunday. For information call 218-666-2820 or 218-780-7670.

AL-ANON MEETING IN COOK - Ashawa Al-Anon Family Group meets at Trinity Lutheran Church, 231 2nd St. NE, Cook, at 7:00 pm Sunday. This meeting is for families and friends of alcoholics.

AA OPEN MEETING- Thursdays at 7 p.m. at Woodland Presbyterian Church, Acacia Blvd. and Central Drive in Babbitt.

ELY WOMEN'S OPEN AA MEETING- Every Monday at noon at Ledgerock Community Church, 1515 E Camp St., Ely.

IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE A PROBLEM WITH DRUGS, give yourself a break. There is a way out with the help of other recovering addicts in Narcotics Anonymous. We have been there. For meeting or other information call 218-728-3199. (Narcotics Anonymous is a non-profit organization.)

HIV/AIDS? For confidential compassionate local support call the Rural AIDS Action Network, toll-free 1-888-647-RAAN(7226).

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS- East Range meetings and information, call 218-749-3387 or www.district8online.org.

AA FRIDAYS- 7 p.m., First Presbyterian Church, 262 E Harvey St., Ely. Meets in the basement.

AA MEN'S PRIMARY PURPOSE meeting, Tuesdays at 7 p.m., First Presbyterian Church, 226 E Harvey St., Ely, 218-235-38191

King Crossword

Answers

Solution time: 23 mins.

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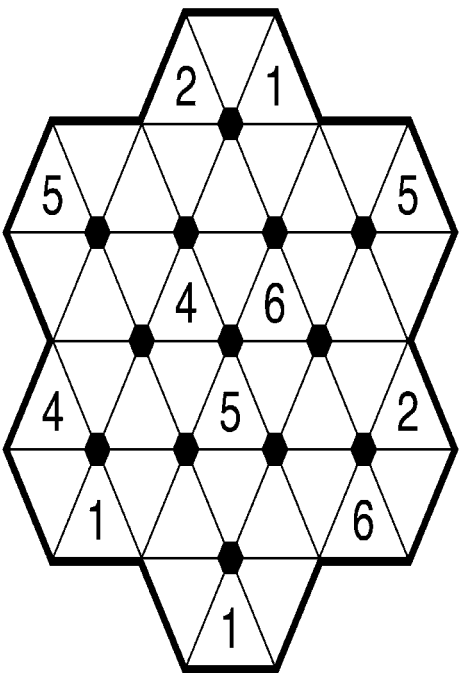
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SNOWFLAKES
by Japheth Light

There are 13 black hexagons in the puzzle. Place the numbers 1 - 6 around each of them. No number can be repeated in any partial hexagon shape along the border of the puzzle.



DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ◆
◆ Easy ◆◆ Medium ◆◆◆ Difficult

Super Crossword

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18					
19							20					21		22								
23						24						25										
		26						27			28											
29	30	31		32			33	34			35				36							
37			38								39			40	41							
42							43						44									
45						46	47				48	49	50		51		52	53	54	55		
56				57	58			59	60				61									
62					63				64		65						66					
			67	68							69					70	71					
72	73					74					75							76	77	78		
79					80	81					82		83						84			
85							86				87	88					89					
					90	91			92	93					94	95						
	96	97	98					99	100					101	102							
103							104				105									106		
107					108	109					110			111				112				
113											114		115	116						117	118	119
120											121											
123																				122		
						124															126	

CryptoQuip answer
We can no longer rely on that old rocket to lift off the ground. It's not thrust-worthy.

CryptoQuote answer
Don't fight a battle if you don't gain anything by winning.
— Erwin Rommel

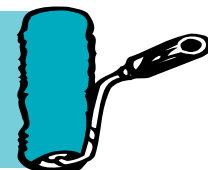
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Weekly SUDOKU Answer

8	9	1	6	3	4	7	2	5
7	2	3	8	1	5	6	9	4
5	4	6	2	9	7	3	1	8
2	1	9	4	8	3	5	6	7
6	7	4	1	5	2	8	3	9
3	5	8	7	6	9	1	4	2
9	3	7	5	4	1	2	8	6
4	8	5	3	2	6	9	7	1
1	6	2	9	7	8	4	5	3



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