



**Inside:**

**No Ely ambulance study yet... See /3**

**Bois Forte sobriety powwow... See /12**

**Ely hosts cross-country ski meet... See /1B**

**Slow going for Arrowhead 135...See /4B**

# The **TIMBERJAY**



Serving the communities of northern St. Louis County since 1989

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## FIXING EMS

# Higher ambulance payrolls contribute to financial woes

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

REGIONAL— As ambulance services across rural Minnesota struggle financially, there's one factor that has contributed more than any to the flow of red ink for most services: the skyrocketing cost of payroll.

For years, most small-town services relied on a stable of volunteers who were willing

to respond at all hours, often for no pay. In more recent years, most services began paying volunteers for the time they spent on runs, but not for the periods of time they were simply subject to page. That increased the payroll costs for ambulance services, but not to an extent that jeopardized their

**EDITORIAL**

Ambulance impasse in Tower. **Page 4**

financial viability.

But as services increasingly struggled to fill their staff rosters, and to meet the requirements of state law to maintain an on-call schedule 24 hours a day, seven days a week, many services have begun to pay ambulance staff to sign up for periods during which they are subject to page. A review of area services by the *Timberjay*

See...AMBULANCE pg. 10



Left: High EMS payroll costs are contributing to the financial troubles of many area ambulance services, like Ely's.

file photo



photo by M. HelMBERGER

## ELY WINTER FESTIVAL

# It's party time in Ely



Snow sculptures are just part of a packed lineup for the annual Winter Festival

by CATIE CLARK  
Ely Editor

ELY- It's one of Ely's longest-running annual events, but it never gets old. The Ely Winter Festival is finally here, kicking off on Thursday, Feb. 1, when the snow sculptors start their magic to transform 14 giant cubes of snow into creations of wonder.

The event will take place this year under remarkably balmy temperatures and while that might be good news for visitors, it's a challenge for the sculptors. The recent thaw and lack of snow has already caused the festival to cancel the amateur portion of the snow sculpting, but the professionals will carry on despite the temperatures.

"The city of Ely was able to

source enough snow," explained festival coordinator Shauna Vega, "from the airport, the cemetery, and parking lots." That allowed the city to fill all 14 of the eight-foot by eight-foot wooded forms, which sprang up in Whiteside Park in the middle of January.

The conditions haven't dis-

See...FESTIVAL pg. 11

Left: Artist Nancy Scheibe was busy this past weekend working on the festival's traditional welcome sculpture at the corner of Central and Sheridan.

## COUNTY SCHOOLS

# Costly fix on tap for failing wastewater systems

by DAVID COLBURN  
Cook/Orr Editor

VIRGINIA- The inadequate wastewater treatment system at South Ridge School will get a million-dollar fix this summer after the ISD 2142 school board voted Tuesday to proceed with the work.

The school board recently considered three bids from potential contractors, the initial low bid from Septic Check of Milaca for \$1.092 million. But after consulting on and agreeing to some cost-saving measures, the board approved a final contract with Septic Check for \$1.003 million.

The state Legislature allocated \$500,000 for the project in 2023. District finance director Kim Johnson was unavailable Wednesday to answer questions about how the district would cover the remaining balance.

A sampling of the cost of major subcomponents of the bid include about \$353,000 for the necessary concrete tanks, \$147,000 for the system control panel, and \$140,000 for the electrical work.

It's one major project among many that are the sad legacy of construction deficiencies at both South Ridge and North Woods schools by Johnson Controls Inc., Kraus-Anderson and Architectural Resources, Inc. — the three companies that designed or oversaw work on the

See...WASTEWATER pg. 9

## U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

# Slow and no delivery hurting customers

by JODI SUMMIT  
Tower-Soudan Editor

TOWER-For newspapers that mail thousands of copies each week, it's not unusual that one or two occasionally gets lost along the way. But what was once an occasional errant newspaper has become a veritable deluge each week for the *Timberjay* and other

frequent users of the U.S. Postal Service.

"I've received a lot of calls from subscribers not receiving multiple issues," said *Timberjay* subscription manager Michelle Toutloff. "I know it is frustrating for them, and it's been equally frustrating for us because there is not a lot we can do to correct

the issue."

At the *Timberjay*, complaints of missing papers for out-of-town subscribers now come in almost daily, and often more than one a day. That's despite the fact that the newspaper uses post office-certified mailing software which prints a USPS barcode for each paper mailed, along with the standard

address information.

The *Timberjay's* experience is hardly unusual these days. Nick Wognum, publisher of the *Ely Echo*, called the situation "maddening" and said the situation has prompted some long-time subscribers to shift to the *Echo's* online version.

See...DELIVERY pg. 9



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Community notices



**Courtney Yasmineh comes back to Ely Folk-rock songwriter Courtney Yasmineh to perform at Northern Grounds Feb. 5**  
 ELY – The Ely Winter Festival proudly presents a candlelight solo acoustic concert with folk-rock songwriter Courtney Yasmineh Monday, Feb. 5 in the Great Hall above Northern Grounds from 7-9 p.m. Tickets are \$20 at the door. For more information visit [www.courtneyyasmineh.com](http://www.courtneyyasmineh.com).

**Cuddle up with a book pancake breakfast at Timber Hall Feb. 3**

EMBARRASS - The Embarrass Region Fair Association is holding the Cuddle up with a Book pancake breakfast at Timber Hall from 8 to 11 a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 3. Attendees can take home gently used books, games, and puzzles to enjoy on cold winter nights.

Breakfast will include all-you-can-eat pancakes, choice of ham or sausage links, fruit cup, juice, and a bottomless cup of coffee. The cost is \$7 for adults, \$4 for children ages 6-10, and kids 5 and under eat free.

**Grace Lutheran youth to hold fundraiser dinner Friday, Feb. 9**

ELY – The public is invited to help the youth of Grace Lutheran Church get to the 2024 National Youth Gathering this summer by coming to the Grace Lutheran Church fellowship hall located at 301 E Conan St. for dinner Friday, Feb. 9 from 4-8 p.m.

Dinner includes your choice of chicken or pork, mashed potatoes, vegetable, roll, dessert and drink. Vegetarian options are available upon request.

Pre-sale tickets are on sale now for \$13 and tickets at the door are \$15. Dinner for kids ages 3-12 is \$10. Take out orders are also available.

For more information, questions or to place an order by phone, please call or text Rachel Brophy at 712-899-2527.

**Finnish Americans and friends to meet Feb. 6**

HIBBING- The first meeting of the year is on Tuesday, Feb. 6 at Grace Lutheran Church 4010 9th Ave W at 2 p.m. The program has not been confirmed, but everyone is invited to attend. People are encouraged to support our programs by paying yearly dues of \$10, which can be paid at the meeting. Meetings will be scheduled for upcoming months.

**Youth in Action hosts a special Valentine's Day Parents' Night out Feb. 14**

VIRGINIA – Youth in Action encourages parents to enjoy a night out without the kids. The Parents Night Out event is Wednesday, Feb. 14 from 4-8 p.m. at the Virginia GSC building located at 210 S 3rd Ave. W. Parents and guardians can drop off kids ages five to twelve for a fun evening of games, activities, dinner and snacks in a safe environment. The cost of the event is \$20 per child and space is limited. Preregistration is required. Call Taryn Burnett at 218-966-9061 or Angela Zavodnik at 218-780-0-9109 to sign up.

CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP

**Minnesota Discovery Center welcomes Conger as new executive director**

CHISHOLM - The Minnesota Discovery Center (MDC) announced that Char Conger of Cook, has been selected as the next executive director of the nonprofit which transports area residents and guests to a space where they can connect with the Iron Range's storied past while creating lasting memories that honor the region's unique human and natural history.

"On behalf of the MDC Board of Directors, I would like to welcome Char to the executive director position. The board and staff look forward to working with her to continue to move the organization forward with new opportunities and exciting endeavors, as well as continuing our mission as a museum," said MDC Board of Directors Chair, Robin Harkonen. "Char has experience in both the corporate and nonprofit sectors, which will provide a good balance of skills to help support our amazing and talented team at the MDC."

Char joins the organization with a wealth of experience working in the private and nonprofit sectors, most recently serving as the manager of services quality and programs at the Entrepreneur Fund, the regional training general manager for Caribou Coffee, and the community resource manager for United Way of Northeastern Minnesota. Additionally, Char has been committed to making a positive impact for our region through her work serving on regional boards including ReGen Northland, Friends of the Lake Vermilion Trail, and Iron Range Partnership and Sustainability.

In the role, Char will have the duty of upholding robust and influential community connections and



Char Conger

statewide partnerships in addition to overseeing staff and operational management, formulating strategic initiatives, promoting growth, and efficiently maintaining the museum's facilities and historical assets.

"I look forward to working closely with the Minnesota Discovery Centers' talented staff, board members, volunteers, and stakeholders to further develop and implement innovative ideas that align with the mission and values of the organization. By working together, we aim to establish a thriving, sustainable, and enduring future for the Minnesota Discovery Center," Char said.

She begins her new position Feb. 12.

FUNDED

**Area arts organizations awarded grants from the Arrowhead Regional Arts Council**

REGIONAL – Recently, several grants were awarded to the following area artists and arts organizations.

Emily Koch of Orr was awarded the Individual Artist Equity grant. This funding will support the creation of a series of paintings, photography, and film using homemade props and digital editing to create surreal results.

Virginia's Lyric Center for the Arts received the Arts Learning Grant. This funding will support the Lyric Center for the Arts Youth Theatre Education Programming Spring

Production.

The Mesabi Community Orchestra d/b/a Mesabi Symphony Orchestra of Virginia was awarded the Art Project Grant. These funds will support the collaboration with Range of Voices choir to offer two concerts titled "Music Is Comforting" and featuring "A German Requiem" by Johannes Brahms.

Northern Lakes Arts Association of Ely also received funding through an Art Project Grant that will support the Ely Mural Project: Painting Untold Stories of Our Community. Through conversation,

and collaboration the artists are creating a mural that represents some of the untold stories of the community.

An Art Project Grant was also awarded to Waawaate Programs of Ely. This funding will support the creation of Indigenous Students Day at the Ely Film Festival.

Operating Support Grant recipients included the Ely Folk School to fund the expanded instructor development program and Ely's Historic State Theater who will use the funding to support employee salaries.

Operating Support Grant Renewals were awarded to the Lyric Center for the Arts in Virginia. The funding will support Iron Range community theater and art space for youth and adults to create an arts ecosystem on the Iron Range. Also awarded an Operating Support Grant Renewal was Tofte Lake Center of Ely. Funding will support workshops and retreats connecting artists to nature and one another.

For more information on all the grants offered please visit [aracouncil.org](http://aracouncil.org).

GOOD TO KNOW

**State's new Assisted Living Report Card goes live**

STATEWIDE - Minnesotans shopping for assisted living can now turn to a valuable new resource for help. The state's new Assisted Living Report Card allows consumers to look up assisted living residences and find comparative ratings based on resident and family surveys, as well as ratings based on state inspections.

Modeled after Minnesota's longstanding and successful Nursing Home Report Card, the Assisted Living Report Card is designed to deliver useful information to help consum-

ers make decisions about assisted living. Nearly 63,000 Minnesotans live in more than 2,200 licensed assisted living facilities across the state.

Nearly four years in the making, the newly launched web tool is a work in progress. The Assisted Living Report Card currently features ratings for about 20 percent of the state's assisted living facilities – focusing on the largest facilities, which are home to almost half of all Minnesotans who use assisted living. The report card will expand early next year, adding more facilities and ratings based on the Minnesota Department of Health's licensing surveys and investigations.

Authorized by Gov-

ernor Tim Walz and the 2019 Legislature, the Assisted Living Report Card was developed through a partnership among the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Minnesota Board on Aging, and the Department of Health.

Dr. Tetyana Shippee at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health led research and development of the quality measures.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with the state to build this resource for consumers," said Shippee. "Minnesota once again is leading in pioneering a data-driven, evidence-informed tool for consumers seeking assisted living options. I am honored to contribute to

this much-needed initiative."

Assisted living is licensed and regulated by the Minnesota Department of Health. The Assisted Living Report Card is managed by DHS and the Minnesota Board on Aging, which also conducts the resident and family surveys. The quality measures developed by the University of Minnesota School of Public Health are based on state data and calculated into the report card measures.

For more information visit [Minnesota Assisted Living Report Card: https://alreportcard.dhs.mn.gov/](http://MinnesotaAssistedLivingReportCard.dhs.mn.gov/) and University of Minnesota School of Public Health: <https://www.sph.umn.edu/>

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PUBLIC SAFETY

# Ely-Bloomenson ambulance study not done

by CATIE CLARK  
Ely Editor

W I N T O N - Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital CEO Patti Banks quickly let attendees at Monday's meeting of the Ely Area Ambulance Joint Powers Board that the \$70,000 study they had hoped to see this week has not yet been completed.

EBCH has hired a firm, Safe Tech, of Isanti, Minn., with a national reputation as a specialist in rural EMS solutions. The study the hospital commissioned in August 2023 would look beyond just Ely to look at both regional and local solutions to the area's struggles in funding EMS.

The study, which had an original completion date of January, was delayed for two reasons, according to Banks. For one, she said Safe Tech had received information needed to complete the study from the Ely Area Ambulance Service (EAAS) just last week. Finally, Safe Tech representatives had hoped to incorporate relevant discussions or decisions made at the Jan.29 JPB meeting.

"Right now," Banks added, "there are at least three different viable solutions for innovative approaches to EMS within our region. For me to speak on the outcomes or any of those potential solutions would be specu-

lative at this point."

Later in the meeting, Banks did reveal a brief summary of what the three scenarios might look like. "One is a regional model. One of them is a (local) model that would depend on who holds the license for the ambulance service." Banks made the point that regardless of who held the license for providing EMS for the area, all the staffing problems and costs of operating an ambulance service would remain the same.

Banks concluded by saying, "The one solution that seems we are consistently headed towards is to do nothing (and maintain the) status quo." Banks took a dim view of the latter course, remarking, "We're not going to solve any issues with just continuing to finance a system that is broken."

### Disconnected discussion

Banks said she was hoping for a discussion about how the current system of EMS might be fixed or improved, so she could take any ideas for "innovative solutions" back to Safe Tech. Such solutions were not forthcoming, however, as the board and the other attendees at the meeting focused on the perpetual near-term problem of funding the ambulance service operations.

At least 15 minutes



The Ely Area Ambulance Joint Powers Board at the Jan. 29 meeting. From left-to-right: Eric Hart, Al Forsman, Marlene Zorman, and Bob Berrini. photo by C. Clark

of the meeting were spent discussing the need to lobby the Legislature and the federal government for aid to address the financial problems that all rural ambulance services currently have.

Both ambulance board chair Chuck Novak and JPB member Bob Berrini spoke about the specific efforts through personal connections and groups like the Range Association of Municipalities and Schools to elevate the funding issue in the eyes of state- and federal elected officials.

"There is going to be money given to the ambulance issue," Berrini stated, expressing his optimistic opinion that the Legislature will act.

Ely Mayor Heidi Omerza pointed out that legislators would also

like to hear about the sort of solutions that Banks was hoping to discuss, remarking, "I think they were very interested in hearing (about) a viable solution. I think they would be definitely willing to pilot a program."

When Banks tried to shift the discussion from funding and a possible legislative fix, her calm businesslike demeanor met with pushback from EAAS board members who appeared to miss what she was saying.

Berrini, who is a member of both the EAAS board and the JPB, commented that the ambulance service already gave Safe Tech feedback. "We went good a half hour, 45 minutes (with Safe Tech), and gave all the information that you needed on your study—

right, Patti?— during the interview process."

After more fruitless discussion, Banks said she would bring the three fleshed-out scenarios to the next the JPB meeting.

### EBCH statement

Banks also brought a formal statement which she read to the meeting, addressing what she called "rumors and misunderstandings" in the community regarding the hospital's intentions.

The statement made seven points:

➤ EBCH was committed to providing the best patient care possible, including EMS. As a former provider of EMS, the EBCH felt it had valuable input to contribute to the

ongoing funding problems impacting regional ambulance services.

➤ EAAS, EBCH, and JPB were all separate legal entities, and none had control over the others.

➤ Neither EBCH nor JPB has the authority "to transfer or otherwise affect" the Minnesota EMS license belonging to EAAS.

➤ EBCH has not taken any steps "to transfer or otherwise affect" the Minnesota EMS license belonging to EAAS.

➤ Neither the EBCH nor JPB has any control over EAAS' finances.

➤ EBCH has no control over how much JPB contributes to EAAS' finances and JPB has no control over how much EBCH contributes to EAAS' finances.

➤ "EBCH respects the decision EAAS and the JPB make for what they feel are the best interests of their respective organizations."

Novak followed on the heels of Banks' statement, stating, "I agree with everything that Patti (Banks) just said," commenting that both EBCH and EAAS wanted the same thing, and that was the best care for their patients.

Novak added, "We live in a community that is ripe with rumors ... I'll just say that the con-

See EAAS...pg. 5

## TRIBAL ELECTIONS

# Bois Forte primary election slated for April

by DAVID COLBURN  
Cook-Orr Editor

NETT LAKE- Bois Forte Chairperson Cathy Chavers will face competition for the Band's top elected office when the Band holds its primary election on Tuesday, April 2.

According to the uncertified candidate list released by the Band

## Chavers faces opposition in race for chair

this week, five people including Chavers have filed for the tribal chair position and six for the District I Council seat currently held by Travis Morrison. The two top vote-getters in each race will move on to the June 11 general election.

Those opposing Chavers in the chairperson race include Brian

Whiteman Sr., Carlos Hernandez, Hannah Lehti-Chosa, and Ray Toutloff.

District I Council seat contestants include William Isham, Perry Drift, Edward Villebrun, Michael Connor, David Villebrun Jr., and Robbie Gogleye.



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# OPINION

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The First Amendment of the United States Constitution

## Editorial

### Ambulance impasse

Greenwood and the city of Tower should discuss issues that could make a difference

Representatives from Greenwood Township and the city of Tower should stop talking past one another and sit down to discuss what is really at issue in their ongoing impasse over financial support for the ambulance.

None of the minor complaints raised to date by the area's largest and wealthiest township justify failure to support its local ambulance service. If Greenwood has real concerns, such as the city council's lackluster management of the Tower ambulance service, they should sit down with council members and talk it out. That could actually be constructive.

Anyone with a calculator can determine the primary causes of the ambulance service's recent budget shortfalls. While Medicare reimbursement rates and other factors are stressing most ambulance services, Tower's service could at least be cash-flowing if the city council and the Tower Ambulance Commission would make two changes. As we reported last week, the city had to contribute just over \$40,000 to ambulance operations last year due to the enormous cost of its ambulance payroll. It's too small a community to sustain that.

Tower's on-call pay is exceptionally high compared to other area services, as our report this week makes clear. Tower's ambulance is in trouble in large part because it was saddled by a previous city council and the former ambulance director with an on-call pay rate that was never properly analyzed and that is clearly unsustainable.

The city could cash flow operations of the ambulance if the city council reduced that rate of on-call pay by \$2.50 an hour and the ambulance commission agreed to eliminate its \$1.66 charge for every mile the ambulance is driven on an inter-hospital transfer. The Emergency Medical Services Regulatory Board identified precisely these two issues in its 2021 evaluation of Tower's ambulance service and recommended elimination of the mileage fee as well and cutting its on-call pay by half. Unfortunately, neither the city nor the ambulance commission took any action in response to these recommendations.

As the EMSRB noted, the \$1.66 charge assessed to the Tower ambulance was unprecedented in their experience, since most would-be benefactors to an ambulance service don't actively harm that service by imposing a penalty for trying to boost revenues.

If Greenwood officials wanted to be constructive, rather than simply combative, they would raise these legitimate management concerns with the city

council and the ambulance commission. While some try to lay the blame on the current ambulance supervisor for the service's financial woes, the supervisor has little control over the service's finances. It is the city council and the ambulance commission that control pay rates and the mileage fee and they have been unwilling to take the obvious steps to get the service back on track financially. While the service is likely to continue to show deficits for the foreseeable future, due to uncompensated depreciation, the two changes addressed here would at least allow the city to cash flow the service without having to cover the bleeding with regular infusions from its general fund.

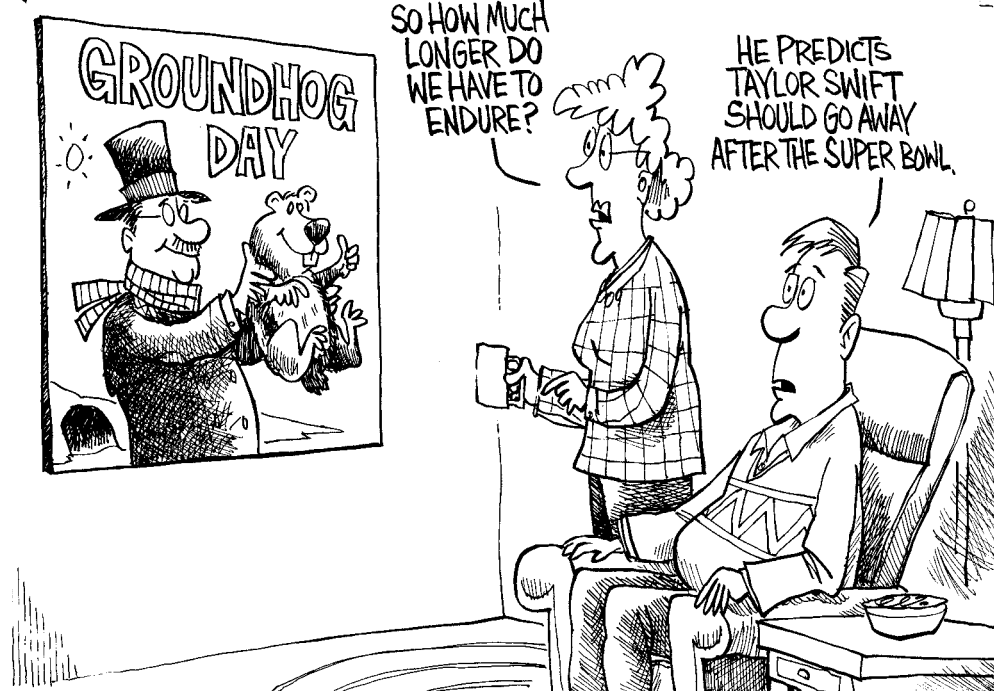
Rather than address substantive issues, the city and the township argue about inconsequential matters. Such as whether the city has kept up with its payments of the \$1.66 charge. Here's the reality: When the ambulance replacement fund (where the \$1.66 funds go) ends up short of cash for ambulance purchases, it's the city that makes up the difference from its general fund. In other words, the city ends up making its payments to the ambulance replacement fund, and then some, one way or another.

Greenwood's liability concern over its contributions to the ambulance replacement fund is another example. The kind of liability at issue with an ambulance service would involve an injury or a "tort" in legalese, which requires a demonstration of negligence. Making a donation toward the purchase of a new ambulance, from a reputable supplier, to be used by trained and certified staff of a state-licensed service, is never going to meet the definition of negligence, regardless of what some attorney says. Greenwood should quit using it as an excuse to refuse contributions to the ambulance fund.

The debate over basic life support versus advanced life support is more of the same. As Ely's ambulance has demonstrated, funding ALS service is impossible without massive subsidy (as in many hundreds of thousands of dollars annually) from taxpayers within the service area. Ely has the advantage of more runs and its own hospital, which guarantees it as many transfers as it can handle. Even so, it's hemorrhaging red ink to the tune of a quarter million dollars a year. The red ink would be far worse in Tower's case. Who's going to pay for that? If history is any guide, it won't be Greenwood.

It's time for honest conversation about how to fix what ails the Tower ambulance service. Let's drop the talking points and roll up our sleeves.

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## Letters from Readers

### Stauber the ultimate do-nothing congressman

The 2023 or the 118th Congress was the least productive in history. Fewer than 30 bills were passed into law, much less than other years in which our government was split between a Republican House and Democratic Senate and President. So unproductive that at the end of the session a Republican congressman from Texas in a fiery speech on the House floor stated "Anybody sitting in the complex - you want to come down to the floor and come explain to me one material, meaningful, significant thing the Republican majority has done besides, well, I guess it's not as bad as the Democrats?"

This do-nothing atmosphere seems to be the perfect home for our current Eighth District Rep. Pete Stauber. In Stauber's years in congress he has had just two bills become law. One of his bills renamed a post office building. I bet that was a tough lift. But why do anything, when it is so much easier to have fancy Washington D.C. lunches paid for by your corporate donors, then to vote no on important bills and then turn around and take credit for the benefits when federal money comes to your district. Pathetic! Pathetic Pete! We in the Eighth Congressional District need someone else who will work for us in D.C.

**George Pliml  
Cook**

### The U.S. shows its true colors in Gaza

More than 25,000, and counting, Palestinians, mostly women and children (and men, too, who also count),

have died so far in the war in Gaza. While the trigger fingers behind those deaths may belong to the Israeli army, the weapons and encouragement coming from the U.S. government and its taxpayers. In other words, us.

The U.S. is 100 percent to blame and the U.S. is encouraging this, in just the latest horrendous international crime. President Biden is being sued for his genocide of the Palestinian people by the Center for Constitutional Rights and they recently had a court hearing in California.

Palestinians are suing the U.S. for genocide and there is no doubt that the U.S. is the cause of this massacre of the people who are fighting for their survival and have been since 1948. Biden could stop it in a minute. Biden along with many of the Democrats and Republicans are guilty and should be impeached and sent to prison. Imagine, our president killing more than 25,000 and maiming mostly women and children in Palestine for life by encouraging Israel in this horrific crime against the Palestinian people, against humanity.

America loves war but Americans don't. The American government represents the rich corporate interests and in no way shape or form represent the people.

There is not a speck of reason to be proud of the U.S. or to be proud to be an American.

Only when these criminals in Washington get punished for their crimes will we be able to call America a democracy. The crimes against Palestine are helping us to wake up but at such a terrible cost to them. The U.S. is definitely the enemy of humanity. Let's stop thinking otherwise.

**Steve Johnson  
Ely**

### Who is minding the store on Birch Lake pollution?

I read in the *Timberjay* about the pollution of Birch Lake which lies near Ely and was amazed that in the following paper there was not a single editorial comment concerning the pollution. It's the runoff from the Peter Mitchell mine. The runoff flows into the Dunka River which flows into the south end of the lake. The Kawishiwi River flows out of Birch Lake on the northeast end of the lake into the BWCA at Lake One. The question is, who is responsible to stop this action? Of course, Erie Mining Co. is long gone, so this is the sad result of their mining engineers. What is our non-illustrious House member Pete Stauber doing about this? Does he know about the problem?

**Skip Dickinson  
Britt**

## 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](mailto:marshall@timberjay.com).

We ask that letters be limited to 300 words.

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

## COMMENTARY

# The rise of the digital voice clones – are you next?

Instead of having to read his insightful articles, how would you like to have Marshall Helmberger read them to you?

To make that happen now, Marshall would have to record himself reading each article and we'd have to post the audio files to each article on the website, a rather time-consuming task that isn't ever going to happen given Marshall's incredibly busy schedule.

that we could make it happen without Marshall ever having to press a record button? With the latest in artificial intelligence voice cloning, it's possible.

In case you weren't aware, Marshall does a weekly radio interview recapping our top stories on KAXE radio (91.7 FM), most of which are archived on the radio's website. Those

recordings give me the necessary sample of Marshall's voice to create a clone, something easily done by going to one of several AI voice cloning websites available.

Once the site has the audio sample, it uses AI to analyze it and create a "voice" based on the tonal qualities it "hears," and when you type in a text-based message it will create an audio recording of that person's voice reading what you typed. In Marshall's case, I could create his voice, cut and paste one of his articles into the text field, and

voila! Marshall is reading his story to you in a voice you'd swear on a stack of Bibles was his own and not an AI-generated fake.

I tried it on one of the sites using my own voice, creating the clone and pasting in a portion of the North Woods – Cherry basketball game, and immediately noticed one glitch. While it sounded exactly like me, it didn't know how to pronounce the last name of Isaac Asuma, saying "un-SOOM-uh" instead of "AH-soom-uh." But the vocal quality was spot on – sounded just like me reading the story.

One of the best uses for this amazing new tech would be for people who have lost the ability to speak. If there's a recording of their voice, it could be made into a digital voice clone. Sen. David Tomassoni was having a digital voice clone developed for himself when his ALS made it nearly impossible to speak, but the tech has advanced exponentially since then. Combined with a computer and video system that lets an ALS patient type by looking at a keyboard, that person could carry on conversations us-

ing their own still fluent, clear digital voice clone. For digital media content creators, digital voice clones can speed up the creative process by allowing input of scripts for video voice-overs. Coupling a digital voice clone with a generative AI chatbot can turn a company's phone receptionist into an interactive customer service rep that sounds exactly like that person. Actors who do commercial voice-over work could use digital voice clones to



**DAVID  
COLBURN**

COMMENTARY

# History has lessons about today's dangerous leaders

Bad things happen when good people become complacent and forget that they need to stand up and stop the evils happening on their doorstep. These are two true stories. Ignore them at your peril.

The soldiers of the King came in the cold of a January night, looting and burning the port of Sunbury. Dr. Hall mounted his horse and fled, knowing that if he were caught, he would be shot or hung without trial. His house and all his possessions were set on fire. Hall was left with the clothes on his back. The year was 1777.

In fear for his life, Hall fled to Charleston, where he reunited with his wife, who escaped by another route. When the British moved to invade the city, Hall and his wife fled again, back to his hometown of Wallingford, Conn., where they were sheltered by his brother, Col. Street Hall of the Connecticut Militia.

Dr. Lyman Hall, my many-times great uncle, stayed with his brother, my many-times great grandfather, in Wallingford until 1792, when the British evacuated Georgia. Then he and his wife returned to Sunbury to piece his life back together. He was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and the first Governor of Georgia. The price he paid for his fame as a patriot was fear for his life, flight, and

the loss of everything he owned. Others in the Hall family also lost their homes and farms when the red coats raided and looted a path across Connecticut in 1777. Four in the Hall family paid the ultimate price, that of death, in the war against Great Britain.

The past is a foreign country, and we can only visit it through the dusty pages of books and other historical records. It's easy to forget the price the founders of this nation paid. They were willing to die for their independence from a non-representative government and its system of corporate welfare that benefited only elites in London.

Corporate welfare in the 18th century? Check your history books, folks. Parliament's corporate welfare bailout to keep the East India Company afloat led directly to the Boston Tea Party and other colonial acts of unrest. Colonist complaints over the economic injustices were met with hostility by King and Parliament. The rest is history.

Why am I writing an opinion piece that sounds like it should be printed on the Fourth of July? Because I believe the danger facing the American Republic is real, right now, today. Because the time to be compla-

cent is over. Because the Minnesota presidential primaries are upon us. Absentee balloting and early voting have already started. This is the year that the American experiment can fail if the voters of this country don't take a stand against a man who I believe will do far worse things to Americans than King George and Parliament ever did.

I formed my opinion about Donald Trump from watching the man for more than four decades. Lend me an ear for a moment and I will tell you why I think this man is a danger greater than a hundred Clintons.

In the late 1970s, when I lived on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, I don't think there was a single New Yorker who didn't know that Donald Trump was the son of a crooked slumlord, and a swindler in his own right. Newspapers on either side of the political fence catalogued his abuse of the legal system to defraud his investors.

I watched the whitewashing of Trump through "reality TV" with mounting disbelief. Despite my lifelong affiliation with the Republican Party, and my own conservative tendencies, I have watched in horror as this man has decimated the values of the once proud party that Abraham Lincoln founded. I believe the evidence points to Trump following in the footsteps of Hitler or Lenin.

Don't take my word for this. Consult some history books. You should find that both

Lenin and Hitler had many supporters who believed in them. Why? Because they promised the things that their supporters wanted, like economic stability and an overturning of ruling elites.

In 1981, I shared a train compartment traveling from Vienna to Munich with a German grandfather who had been a member of the SS. My young, naïve self asked this old soldier why he followed a man like Hitler. I will never forget his answer. "Because I believed he could save us from a bad government ... Hitler promised us what we wanted."

We need to remember Hitler and his insidious takeover of a democratic Germany. He did so through a legal election followed by legislative sleight-of-hand. He built his support with voters by telling people what they wanted to hear, not what he meant to do.

We need to remember how Hitler and his cronies murdered six million Jews and many others like disabled people, journalists, clergy, and any political foes, including the leadership of moderate political parties. Hitler promised posterity. He delivered a war, economic ruin, and mass murder on a scale only rivaled by Stalin.

My favorite books to read are history texts. My considered opinion is that there are too many parallels between Hitler and Trump, too many to list here. I believe the evidence of

this man's self-serving character has been on public display for five decades in the news.

He thumbs his nose at the rule of law and has done so all his life. In the mold of Hitler, immigrants and those of Hispanic descent are his Jews. Moderate Republicans and Democrats are branded as "antifa" and traitors, just like the moderate Socialists and Christian Democrats of Hitler's Germany. Violent attacks by Trumpists on peaceful protesters and journalists have increased every year since 2016.

Do you think the violence can't happen here in St. Louis County? It already has. Have people already forgotten the attack in 2020 on a reporter just doing his job in Duluth by a Trump supporter? Working in journalism right now is uncomfortable with Trump branding every news writer as an enemy of the people. If re-elected, I wonder if some evening I will be making my own flight to a safer place like Dr. Lyman Hall.

I doubt that any Trump acolytes will leave the altar of their idol and vote for someone else. I appeal to the rest of us who can see the cult of Trump for the fraud that it is, to the independents, the Libertarians, and the Republicans like me who have been driven out of the now-corrupted Party of Lincoln: don't be complacent. Keep Trump off the ballot in November. Don't vote for this wannabe Hitler in the primary.



CATIE CLARK

## EAAS...Cont. from page 3

tention between the ambulance service and the hospital is not as bad as portrayed in public."

### Other business

In other matters, the JPB:

➤ Heard the report from Novak that the audit

of the EAAS finances was still not finished, adding that the ambulance's former billing company was the problem. The firm was not responding to requests for information from the auditors, and this has stalled the completion of the audit.

Novak stated that if

they accumulated enough evidence of non-responsiveness from this firm, they would take it to the Minnesota Attorney General's Office.

➤ Heard the report that the EAAS would bring a completed 2024 budget to the JPB at the next meeting.

Novak explained that revenues recently received were improved and that the EAAS board wanted to redo the budget based on the numbers "we're actually seeing now."

➤ Approved \$36,200 for architectural services from TKDA of Duluth

for design drawings and specifications for the proposed garage for the EAAS. The cost for Winton will be \$1,448, with the remainder of the cost to be split equally between Ely, Fall Lake, and Morse.

These moneys will be reimbursed at some time

in the future from the \$1.3 million U.S. Dept. of Agriculture rural development grant to the City of Ely and the EAAS which was awarded in 2023.

## CLONES...Cont. from page 4

get additional work. Creating audiobooks would be a breeze, requiring 30-seconds of recording for a voice clone rather than the author having to read the entire book. And in a nod to our opening example, digital voice clone newscasters could function 24 hours a day, constantly refreshed with AI-generated content. The possibilities are extensive and astounding.

But as we've already seen, there's a dark side to this technology as well. In last week's New Hampshire presidential primary, a digital voice clone of Joe Biden was used for robocalls telling Democrats not to vote. Getting a politician's or celebrity's voice to clone is simple, and there are lots of sites and apps "for fun" that let you create audio and video files putting any words you want in their mouths.

Scarier still are the

crimes being committed by using digital voice clones. People who have posted videos of themselves online talking have had their voices cloned by unscrupulous scammers who have used those voices to try to authorize illegal financial transactions. They've created "family scare" scams in which a person receives a phone call supposedly from a loved one who is experiencing a crisis and needs money immediately. In one such scenario, the cloned voice says hello and a few words and then another person comes on the phone claiming to have kidnapped them and demands ransom be sent through a cash payment app. Such scams have become prevalent enough that the Federal Trade Commission released a warning about them last spring.

The best way to avoid any such scams is to not


post any clips of yourself or others speaking to social media sites. At the very least, use privacy controls on social media to restrict access to your media files, and don't accept friend requests from people you don't know. Assume that anything you post online can be found by anyone unless you've taken specific steps to keep it hidden and secure.

Of course, equally scary is the pairing of digital voice clones with AI

generated video of someone, video with lips moving in perfect sync to the words that it was given. I created one of those for Joe Biden just the other day, warning of the dangers of bananas. There are numerous samples on YouTube - Biden giving advice on how to get a goth girlfriend and telling the story of the magic pistachio are two unusual

ones that demonstrate the tech without fear of accidentally creating an international crisis. But those could be coming, much

more easily and faster than we're ready for.



## the TIMBERJAY

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Operating support is made possible in part 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.

Week of Feb. 5

**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 Charlemagne's 52 Club \$100 cash winner for week 27 is Jen Manick of Tower.

History Tidbit: There were many merchants with shops along Tower's Main Street in the late 19th and early 20th century as the city grew. With its train station, Tower was the embarkment point for the logging companies and gold explorers.

**Maude Lenz named to Dean's List at University of Minnesota Duluth**

DULUTH- Maude Lenz, of Embarrass, has been named to the University of Minnesota Duluth Dean's List for Fall Semester 2023. Students on the Dean's List have achieved a grade point average of 3.50 or higher while earning a minimum of 12 letter-graded credits. Lenz is as senior in the Swenson College of Science and Engineering, majoring in Civil Engineering.

**Bookmobile stops**  
REGIONAL- The Arrowhead Bookmobile will be in the Tower-Soudan area on Wednesdays: Feb. 14, March 6 and 27, Apr 17, May 8 and 29, Jul 10 and 31, Aug 21, Sept. 11, Oct. 2 and 23, Nov. 13, and Dec. 4, 2024.

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.

**Get Informed!**  
**Get the Timberjay!**

FUN ON THE ICE

Warmer temps make for slippery action on the ice

by JODI SUMMIT  
Tower-Soudan Editor

TOWER- A group of dedicated volunteers, along with the Tower-Soudan Lake Vermilion Events Board, made sure that this year's Finlander Bocce Ball Tournament was another success. With temps hovering close to freezing, quite a change from last year's sub-zero event, attendees had no trouble staying warm while playing out on the ice all day.

Players included seasoned bocce aficionados along with many newcomers among the four-member teams. Last year's winning team members, the Bialke crew, were out of town, which meant there was some fierce competition to fill the top spots in the double-elimination tournament.

The rules for play are relatively simple, though tape measures were often needed to determine whose wooden "rock" was closest to the "pick." Games progressed steadily throughout the morning, leading up to the final rounds in the afternoon.

Newcomers said the game was harder than it looked, and experienced players noted they often went home bruised from sliding on the ice, but that didn't hamper the fun of playing.

Volunteers got the lanes ready on the ice by Your Boat Club starting on Jan. 22 with help from Brent Peterson and John Mroszak. The bocce ball playing piece, rocks, picks, and handles, were assembled the next day. On Friday, John and Jolene Mroszak shoveled the slight coating of snow off the lanes and used their own version of a "Finlander Zamboni" they had seen on TikTok to smooth out the lanes. It took 15 gallons of water for each lane which they hauled from the Your Boat Club building in five-gallon buckets and poured into a tote with small holes drilled into the bottom and sides. They attached a rope for a handle and draped a towel over the side to smooth out the water. After their first attempt, they added a block of wood on top of the towel to weigh it down. The contraption created pretty smooth, and rather slippery ice for the bocce action on Saturday.

The Vermilion Weiner Cruiser did their first "ice" event and was selling hot dogs and brats.

Next year's event is set for the last Saturday in January.



**Pictured clockwise from top left, the many techniques on display: Jennifer Villebrun, Ryan Potter, Tyler Pirsig, Scott Marwick, Nina Wycoff, and Shara Dostert.**  
photos by J. Summit

**Winners**

This year's winning teams were:

- 1st Place: Earl Villebrun, Jennifer Villebrun, Adam St. George, Ashlee Isham
- 2nd Place: Johnny Eloranta, Ryan Potter, Briita Potter, Wendy Riendeau
- 3rd Place: John Mroszak Jr., Jolene Mroszak, Nick Lindbery, Kaitlyn Longworth
- 4th Place: Raini Boshey, Jason Premo Jr., Jenny Porter, Scott Morcom

**Thank you**

Event organizers would like to thank these incredible people and businesses that made it possible:

- Vermilion Tree Service - Cut and Split wood for our bonfire
- Your Boat Club - allowing us to hold the event there, being open the day, and installing a temporary "dock" so it was safe to get on and off the ice.

- Brent Peterson
- Jen Manick
- John Mroszak Jr.
- Johnny Eloranta
- Della Mroszak
- Scott Marwick
- Keith Folstad
- Lake Vermilion Weiner Cruiser

St. Martin's hosting Mardi Gras celebration on Feb. 9

TOWER- St. Martin's Catholic Church in Tower is hosting a Mardi Gras celebration on Friday, Feb. 9. Fun for the whole family begins at 5 p.m. and goes until 8:30 p.m. It's an open house style event - come when you want and stay as long as you want! There will be an evening of fun for all ages.

For children there will be an activity area just for them:

games, art projects, kid's-only bingo at 6:30 p.m., breaking of the pinata will be at 7:45 p.m. As always, no charge for kids to participate in these activities.

For adults a cribbage tournament begins at 5:45 p.m. You must sign up your team by Feb. 4. Cost is \$10 per participant and the winning team takes home half of the money collected; adult Bingo begins at 6 p.m. Cost is \$5

for 10 games and prizes include gift certificates/gift cards for local businesses.

The cash bar will be open from 5 - 7 p.m. There will be bucket raffles (with items for adults and kids), silent auction, a 50/50 cash drawing, and a meat raffle. Winners announced at 8 p.m.

You can't have a Mardi Gras celebration without food. There

will be much to choose from - jambalaya, chili, a variety of appetizers, and several desserts. The cost is a freewill offering. Everyone is welcome to attend this evening of fun and great food before the start of Lent.

WELLNESS

Sue Wille now offering massage therapy at Harbor View Spa

TOWER- Starting on Thursdays in mid-February, Sue Wille will be offering massage therapy at Harborview Spa in Tower. Massage will be by appointment, and additional days may be added if there is enough demand.

Wille offers therapeutic massage, cranio-sacral therapy, myofascial release, and reiki.

Cranio-sacral therapy optimizes nervous system functioning and is a treatment for headaches, TMJ, and head injuries. It also produces profound relaxation, Wille said, creating deep relaxation.

Wille has been working as a licensed massage therapist for the last 30 years. She is currently living in Ely, but has summered on Lake Vermilion at her family cabin, which they've had since the 1950s in the Blackduck Bay area. She is also an herbalist and teaches classes at the Ely Folk School.

To make an appointment or for more information, you can contact Wille at 612-978-4535. She also offers a ten-percent discount on all services for those living in the 557-area zip code.



## AROUND TOWN



Upper left: The Ely ArtWalk starts this weekend with the works of over 150 artists displayed in the windows of local businesses. Cathy Bell's fiber arts are displayed in the window of Piragis Northwoods Co. on Central Ave. Upper Right: The warming tent for snow sculptors waits for the beginning of the Snow Sculptors Symposium, part of the Ely Winter Festival. The sculptors start carving on Thursday, Feb. 1. Lower left: The next musical in Ely is only a handful of weeks away. The Timberjay caught the members of the cast of the Northern Lakes Arts Association's production of *Fiddler on the Roof* at rehearsal on Jan. 29, as director Ian Lah (left) follows a scene with his copy of the script. On stage from left-to-right: Anna Heil, Grace Klein, and Wendy Lindsay. Lower right: A block print by Rachel Pace in the ArtWalk display in window of Brainstorm Bakery on Sheridan St. photo by C. Clark



# Highway 169 rollover

by CATIE CLARK  
Ely Editor

EAGLES NEST- An Eveleth couple suffered a single-vehicle rollover accident on Sunday morning, Jan. 28, around 9:30 a.m. The green 1998 Ford Explorer was southbound on Minnesota Highway 169 towards Tower when it went off the road at the curve just past Deer Haven Rd.

The SUV rolled over and landed upside down in a depression on the north side of the road.

The pavement was icy at the time according to the accident report, which was confirmed by a *Timberjay* reporter who traveled this same route at 10 a.m. and passed multiple vehicles belonging to the Morse Fall Lake Fire Department and Tower Ambulance.

Ely resident Sarah Brummund saw the Ford Explorer on a tow truck as it drove past sometime before 11 a.m. Brummund was working on the snow sculpture at the corner of Sheridan and Central in Ely at the time. She told the *Timberjay* that the vehicle was "completely wrecked," and expressed concern for those who were inside at the time of the accident.

The driver, Elizabeth Dahlquist, age 42, was transported by Tower Ambulance to Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital for non-life threatening injuries, according to Lt. Jill Frankfurth of the Minnesota State Police. Passenger Robert Dahlquist, age 43, was not injured according to the accident report. Both were wearing their seat belts.

## In Brief

## Tuesday Group schedule

ELY - The Tuesday Group community educational lunch gathering meets every Tuesday at noon at the Grand Ely Lodge. Participants have an opportunity to order lunch. For those interested in being a host, or who have a speaker suggestion, contact Lacey Squier by email at ElyTuesdayGroup@gmail.com or call her at 218-216-9141. Tuesday Group is now on winter holiday hiatus.

Upcoming Tuesday Group speakers:

►Feb. 6: Learning About Lynx with Taylor Brannock.

►Feb. 13: Understanding and Managing Stress with Sharon Gilbert.

## Breathing Out

by Cecilia Rolando ©2024



icicles dripping  
warming in time for fest fun  
welcomed excitement

## Libraries

### Ely library

Hours: Monday — Friday,  
9:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m.  
Closed on Saturday,  
Sunday, and holidays  
Phone: 218-365-5140

### Babbitt library

Monday	10 am-6 pm
Tuesday	10 am-6 pm
Wednesday	10 am-6 pm
Thursday	10 am-6 pm
Friday	10 am-2 pm

## Support groups

### AA - Alcoholics Anonymous

**OPEN AA - 7:30**

p.m. Wednesdays and Saturdays, in-person, First Lutheran Church, 915 E. Camp St., Ely.

**AA FRIDAYS - 7 p.m.**

Fridays, First Presbyterian Church, 262 E. Harvey St., Ely.

**ELY WOMEN'S OPEN**

**AA - Monday** at noon at Ledgerrock Church, 1515 E. Camp St., Ely.

**BABBITT AA - 7 p.m.**

Thursdays, Woodland Presbyterian Church.

**AL-ANON - Sundays**

8-9 p.m. at St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Ely.

**BABBITT AL-ANON -**

Thursdays, 7 p.m., at Woodland Presbyterian.

**CO-DEPENDENTS'**

12-step support group,

4:00 p.m. Tuesdays, Wellbeing Development,

St. Mary's Episcopal Church, 712 S. Central Ave., Ely.

**ADULT BASIC EDUCATION GED**

Study materials and pre-test available. Call 218-

365-3359, or 1-800-662-5711.

**CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUPS:**

Babbitt: 3rd Monday of Month: 6-7:30 p.m. at Carefree Living.

Ely: 4th Monday of Month: 10-11:30 a.m. at Ely-Bloomenson Hospital.

Conference Room B.

# Elyites earn academic honors

AMES, Iowa- Iowa State University announced on Jan. 12 that Elyite Jenna Merhar graduated Cum Laude in December 2023 from Iowa State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in accounting. Her degree was awarded at graduate and undergraduate ceremonies held on Dec. 15-16 at Hilton Coliseum.

SUPERIOR, Wis.- The University of Wisconsin-Superior has named Erika Mattson and Jen Shuster-Dahlin to its Dean's List for the Fall 2023 semester. Students on the Dean's List must complete at least 12 degree-seeking semester credits and achieved at least a 3.50 grade point average on a 4.0 scale.

BEMIDJI- College students Melissa Schroeter and David Shober earned Dean's List honors at Northwest Technical College for the Fall 2023 semester. To be eligible for the Dean's List, students must enroll in at least 12 credits and earn a grade-point average of 3.5 or higher for the semester.

NORTHFIELD- St. Olaf College announced that Juliet Stouffer, daughter of Timothy and Jennifer Stouffer of Ely was named to the Dean's List for Fall 2023.

WINONA/RED WING- Elyite Ryan Mahoney was named to the Fall 2023 President's List at the

Minnesota State College Southeast in Winona and Red Wing. To be eligible for the President's List, students must complete a minimum of 12 credits during an academic term and achieve a grade point average of 3.5 or above.

DULUTH- The University of Minnesota Duluth announced on Jan. 26 that three Elyites were named to the Dean's List for the Fall 2023 semester. Those students are senior Dylan Fenske, junior Brynn Volom, and freshman Jakson Hegman. Students on the Dean's List have achieved a grade point average of 3.50 or higher while earning a minimum of 12 letter-graded credits.

## COMMUNITY EVENTS AND NOTICES

### Ely Public Library

ELY- The library will be closed on Monday, Feb. 19.

The library's Get Crafty group will provide the materials for kids to make their own Valentine Day cards on Tuesday, Feb. 6, from 3-4 p.m. Please register in advance so the library can order enough materials for all who attend.

The Library Board will meet on Wednesday, Feb. 7, 5:30-6:30 p.m.

The library will hold a Kahoot online trivia game on books one through three of the Ranger's Apprentice series by John Flanagan. The Kahoot starts on Thursday, Feb. 8 at 3 p.m. and ends on Monday, Feb. 12 at 8 a.m. Please register in advance with an email so the library can send the link to the Kahoot.

The Friends of the Library book club will meet on Monday, Feb. 12, from 3-4 p.m. The book for discussion will be "Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking" by Susan Cain. You do not need to be a member of Friends of the Library to attend.

The monthly Friend of the Library Board will meet on Tuesday, Feb. 13, from 1-2 p.m.

The library will celebrate Innovation Day on Friday, Feb. 16, from 1:30-2:30 p.m. with projects for attendees to try. This is a program for all ages. Please register in

advance so the library can order enough materials for all who attend.

The library will hold a Kahoot online trivia game on Margaret Mitchell's best seller "Gone with the Wind," and the 1939 movie based on it. The Kahoot will start on Tuesday, Feb. 20 at 3 p.m. and will end on Monday, Feb. 26, at 8 a.m. Please register in advance with an email so the library can send the link to the Kahoot.

Preschool Storytime is held every Friday from 10:30-11 a.m. All library events are at the Ely Public Library at 224 E. Chapman St., unless otherwise noted.

### Babbitt Public Library

BABBITT- The Reading Wonderland Winter Reading Program is holding a coloring contest for adults. Entries will be accepted through Feb. 29. Pick up a coloring page at the library. Use colored pencils only. Prizes will be awarded for the best picture.

The library invites patrons to have a blind date with a book. Read a wrapped mystery date book, rate it on the provided scorecard, and return the scorecard to be entered into a drawing for prizes. The blind dates started on Feb. 1 and will end on Feb. 29.

The library is holding a sealed bid auction

as a fundraiser. Bidding ends on Thursday, Feb. 8. If you want to bid on an item, write your bid amount, name, and phone number on a piece of paper. Place it in a sealed envelope and give it to the library staff. The library reserves the right to reject any or all bids.

The library will have host live entertainment featuring Gerry Mealey, on Thursday, Feb. 8, starting at 2 p.m.

Book bingo will be on Monday, Feb. 12 at 1 p.m. The program is free. The prizes are books.

The library will hold a program on Monday, Feb. 12, at 2 p.m. to make your own photo coasters. Bring a 4-inch by 4-inch photo or smaller to make into a coaster to take home.

Preschool Storytime is held every Wednesday at 10:30 a.m. All library events are at the Babbitt Public Library at 71 South Drive unless otherwise noted.

### Ely Ice Rink

ELY- The rec center ice rink is now open. Depending on the weather, the rink will have an attendant and the bathrooms will be open Monday through Friday, 3-8 p.m.; Saturday, noon-8 p.m.; and Sunday, 1-6 p.m. Check the city's Facebook page or ely.mn.us/reccenter for closures due to adverse weather.

### Ely Ice Arena

ELY- The Ely Ice Arena on the Ely School District campus is open for skating on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, from 1:30-2:30 p.m. through March 4, except when school is closed for holidays. To see an entire schedule and to register for this no-cost activity, go to ely.k12.mn.us/communityed.

### Strawberries

ELY- The Ely PTO is holding a strawberries fundraiser. Order a flat of fresh strawberries for late February/early March delivery through Feb. 11 at elywolvespto.com. Cost is \$35.

### Whirlwind Outdoor Event

ELY- The Dorothy Molter Museum and the outdoor education students at the Vermilion Campus of Minnesota North College will hold a day of interactive, interpretive winter outdoor activities on Saturday, Feb. 3, from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. The museum will be open to the public for no charge from 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

### CPR/AED Training

WINTON- The Winton Community Center, 102 Main St., will be the site of two American Heart Association Heartsaver CPR-AED first-aid classes on Sunday, Feb. 4 and

Saturday, March 23. Each class will be from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Class sizes are capped at 21 participants. The Heartsaver training includes basic first aid, CPR, automated external defibrillator use, and choking response for adults, children, and infants. Cost is \$75. Call 218-235-4016 to sign up for either class.

### Braver Angels

ELY- The next meeting of the Ely Braver Angels will be on Tuesday, Feb. 6, 6:30 p.m. at the Ely Senior Center, 27 S. 1st Ave. E. The group pursues and teaches practical skills to return civility to political civics. All are welcome.

### Down Town Arts Market

ELY- The Northern Lakes Arts Association Down Town Arts Market will be on Saturday, Feb. 10, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Ely Senior Center, 27 S. 1st Ave. E.

### List your event

Do you have an upcoming Babbitt, Ely, or Winton event? Email event details, location, time, place and event cost to catie.timberjay@gmail.com by close-of business on the Tuesday the week before the event takes place for a free notice.

COOK CITY COUNCIL

# Council hears concerns about community center staffing

by DAVID COLBURN  
Cook-Orr Editor

COOK- Friends of the Parks representative Tammy Palmer questioned the Cook City Council at length at last Thursday's meeting about staffing for the Cook Community Center, a situation that she said has never lived up to its original promise.

The specific issue involved the city's decision to not renew the contract of part-timer Therese Cheney for the new budget year. Palmer was disappointed with the decision, noting that Cheney had been teaming well with Recreation Director Lisa Haley.

"I'm very, very disappointed that Therese Cheney's position was terminated," Palmer said. "Therese has done a tremendous amount of work, and she and Lisa were coordinating working together."

City administrator Theresa Martinson objected to Palmer's use of the

word termination, noting that termination is an action used to sever employment with regular employees. A contract position is for a specific period of time, and at the end of the contract it can be renewed or not be renewed at the employer's discretion.

Palmer asserted that there should be money in the budget to cover Cheney's contract position.

"She was working there," Palmer said. "I'm just saying it's not on the budget, so we don't know what the contract services amount is." "We have no contract in the budget for 2024 for recreation," council member Liz Storm said.

Mayor Harold Johnston stepped into the discussion when Palmer wanted to know why Cheney's contract wasn't renewed.

"We have one person who is doing the job or will be doing the job that she did, as well as what else we have," Johnston said. "We don't need two



**Cook Community Center staffing was an issue at Thursday's city council meeting.** file photo

people doing the same work."

Palmer reminded the council that a year after the building was built the plans for staffing the center were different.

"I thought initially we were having a rec director and a rec attendant," she said.

While the council listened and engaged in the conversation, they displayed no inclination to reverse their decision to not renew the contracted position.

In other business, the council:

► Accepted private donations of \$200 for the library equipment fund, two \$100 donations for the library book fund, and \$100 for the fire department, and a \$100 donation from North Star Credit Union for the library book fund.

► Received reports from the Jan. 8 fire and ambulance advisory board annual meetings. Of note in the ambulance report was an update on the timeline for receiving the new ambulance, which should be delivered in June. Johnston noted that the fire de-

partment's per capita rate for full-time residents was raised by \$1 to \$41. Discussion at the meeting was to raise the per capita by \$1 every year to help offset inflation.

► Entertained a request from a citizen for the city's official calendar to reflect the second Monday of October as Indigenous People's Day rather than Columbus Day, in accord with the state's official holiday designation. The city is not required to have any special observance of the day.

► Approved invoices

for airport-related projects from KGM, Lenci, and SEH.

► Heard an update on the proposed community housing study from councilor Liza Root.

► Received a library report from Crystal Whitney, which included a discussion of the need to have the old roof replaced. Whitney said that a Minnesota library construction grant could possibly be obtained to cover the cost, and the Friends of the Library has committed to help with fundraising.

► Announced that the annual local board of review for property valuations will be April 16 from 10-11 a.m. at the county assessor's office in Virginia.

► Received the annual weed report from councilor Storm. She identified the primary concern as buckthorn, but encouraged the public to contact her with any questions or concerns.

## Sopoci named to UW-Milwaukee list

ANGORA- Steven Sopoci, of Angora, has been named to the Peck School of the Arts dean's honor list at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee College of the Arts and Architecture for the fall 2023 semester. Students must maintain a GPA of 3.75 or above, earned on 12 or more graded credits in a given semester to qualify for the honor.

Sopoci, a 2023 graduate of North Woods School, is working towards a bachelor of fine arts in film.

## Area collegians earn academic recognition from UM-Duluth

REGIONAL- The University of Minnesota Duluth has announced its Dean's List for fall semester 2023. Students on the Dean's List have achieved a grade point average of 3.50 or higher while earning a minimum of 12 letter-graded credits.

Local area students honored include Alex Hartway, of Cook, a junior economics major; ThiLe IntVeld, of Cook, a senior psychology major; Emma Snell, a senior biochemistry major; and Michaela Luecken, of Gheen, a ju-

nior criminology and sociology major.

## Empty Bowl event is Friday at school

FIELD TWP- The 11th annual Empty Bowl Event will take place this Friday, Feb. 2 from 4:30-7 p.m. at North Woods School, a fundraiser for food shelves in Cook and Orr.

Buy a handmade bowl made by students for \$10 and get a hearty soup meal. Take a chance on the \$1 raffle baskets, face painting and enjoy wheel-throwing demonstrations. Come meet the current Miss Minnesota, Angelina Amerigo.

In addition to this fundraiser, the art club will be raising funds to support the families of Tra'von Boshey and Matthew Goggeleye.

This event is open to the public and all are welcome.

## Gallery to offer dreamcatcher class on Feb. 10

COOK- Join American Indian educator Stacy Palmer to make your own contemporary dreamcatcher on Saturday, Feb. 10 at 1 p.m. at Northwoods Friends of the Arts Gallery in Cook. In this class students will create

a contemporary ten-inch diameter dreamcatcher.

Ethnographers believe dream catchers originated from the Ojibwe Chippewa tribe, an Anishinaabe people from the area that is currently southern Canada and the northern Midwestern United States.

The Ojibwe believe that the night air is filled with dreams, both good and bad. The dream catcher attracts and catches all sorts of dreams, nightmares and thoughts into its protective woven spider web. Good dreams can pass through the sacred hoop and gently slide down the feathers to comfort the sleeper below. Bad dreams, however, are caught up in its sticky net and destroyed, burned up in the light of day. For this reason, dreamcatchers traditionally must be hung above the bed in a place where morning sunlight can reach it.

Authentic dreamcatchers are made of spiritual sacred objects: a wooden hoop, sinew, strips of leather, feathers, beads and other objects.

Palmer teaches Native culture at North Woods School. She is also a member of the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa.

The gallery is located at 210 S River St.

Students must pre-

register for the class by calling Alberta at 218-666-2153.

## Archery team selling pasties, pot pies for nationals

COOK- The North Woods Grizzlies archery

team is selling Zup's pasties and pot pies to raise money for a trip to Nationals in Louisville, coming up in May.

They are \$8 each, arrive frozen, and are a hearty, quick meal. The team has plenty of freezer space to store lots of both,

so stock up and they will make arrangements to get them to you.

Each archer is taking orders, but if you don't know an archer you can place an order by calling Jennifer Scofield at 218-780-0430. The last date to order is Feb. 9.

## LIONS HONORED



**Cook Lions Club members and friends were at the recent Lions District 5M10 Midwinter Convention at Fortune Bay to accept the Club Excellence Award for their service efforts last year. Club president Steve Kajala received the International President's Leadership award, the third-highest award in the 1.4 million member organization. Kajala was also elected to serve as Second Vice District Governor for District 5M10, which covers northern Minnesota and northwestern Ontario. Pictured are, from left, Colette Huisenga, Crystal Whitney, Therese Cheney, friend Karen Woods, Bill Woods, Linda Flack, Steve Kajala, and friend Kari Huffman.**

## NORTH WOODS SCHOOL 2023-24 SECOND QUARTER HONOR ROLL

### A Honor Roll

**Seniors**  
Evelyn Brodeen  
Jonah Burnett  
Annabelle Calavera  
Brandon Cook  
Madison Dantes  
Sean Drift  
Addy Hartway  
Riley Las  
Cadense Nelson  
Victoria Olson  
Tiauna Peltier  
Ella Smith  
Isaac Spears  
Trinity Vidal  
Adriana Whiteman  
Jacob Whiteman

John Danielson  
Isabelle Koch  
Victoria Mathys  
Isabel Pascuzzi

### Freshmen

Alethea Bangs  
Corralyn Brodeen  
Kate Cheney  
Emarie Gibson  
Andrew Hartway  
Carson Johnson  
Ella Kruse  
Barbara Littlewolf  
Sophia Mathys  
Hunter Schwarzenberger  
Kaycee Zupancich

### Eighth Grade

Gage Aune  
Zoey Burckhardt  
Carsyn Burnett  
Colt Chosa  
Sawyer Glass  
Cyrus Johnson  
Joshua Long  
Aubrey Olson-Stoltenberg  
Vincent Pascuzzi  
Alice Sopoci

### Seventh Grade

Olivia Baumgartner

Anelise Brodeen  
Michaela Brunner  
Tessa Burnett  
Josie Gibson  
Laurin Glass  
Lila Kajala  
Cooper Long

### B Honor Roll

**Seniors**  
River Cheney  
LeMar Drift  
Aleesia Geshick  
Talise Goodsky  
Emily Grahn  
Chloe Johnson  
Cynthia Kirkman  
Haley Leinonen  
Zefrym Mankowski  
Alex Niles  
Jessy Palmer  
Cole Rabas  
Keenan Whitney  
Luke Will

### Juniors

Nicholas Abramson  
Susan Aderman  
Kalvyn Benner  
Rory Bundy  
Nevada Gauthier

Talen Jarshaw  
Vincent Kajala  
Mya Kinsey  
Cody Kirkman  
Rose'Lee Knott-Morgan  
Jaida Lambert  
Jay Mattson  
Louie Panichi  
Dakota Schwarzenberger  
Lydia Trip

### Sophomores

Tatum Barto  
Josephine Carlson  
Ira Isham  
Brittin Lappi  
Blaze Markwardt  
Rogelio Noyes  
Sadie Spears  
John Warren

### Freshmen

Makayla Benner  
Grace Bundy  
Abigail Dargontina  
Kaelyn Ehrbright  
Collin Grahn  
Jett Lambert  
Elijah Lindgren  
Aiyeshia Mohamed  
Michael Nuthak  
Victoria Phillips

Caleb Rutchasky  
Cash Rutchasky  
Elwood Spears  
Latise Strong  
Donald Villebrun

### Eighth Grade

Sophia Bangs  
Johnathon Hampson  
Felicity Hoagland  
Cedar Holman  
Rebecca Koch  
Brittan Koskela  
Tysen Lenzen  
Evangelina Mathys  
Kalle Nelson  
Lila Pearson  
Cassidy Pinski  
Peyton Swanson  
Evalyn Thiel

### Seventh Grade

Savannah Abts  
Mallory Bibeau  
River Deatherage  
Beau Fabish  
Caitlynn Goodbird  
Buckley LeForte  
Bayla Rutchasky  
Elias Sheffer  
Brady Swan

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Lauren Burnett  
Brynn Chosa



## PUBLIC HEALTH

# COVID on the decline in county from January peak

by DAVID COLBURN  
Cook/Orr Editor

REGIONAL- The COVID news is good for the North Country this week, as a declining number of hospitalizations has caused the Centers for Disease Control to lower the region's COVID activity level from medium to low.

The CDC-designated health service area that includes St. Louis, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, and Pine counties had been one of the few remaining areas in the state with elevated levels of COVID activity in recent weeks, but hospital admissions dropped by almost 45 percent last week, taking the rate per 100,000 people down to 7.1, solidly below the 10 per 100,000 benchmark for the elevated CDC category. The northeast region remains well above the last hard statewide data reported by the Minnesota Department of Health on Jan. 8, which was 1.32 per 100,000.

That's in line with overall declines posted for the state and the nation last week, and better than the national rate of 8.01 hospitalizations per 100,000.

Another measure in northeast Minnesota that had bucked the statewide trend was the level of the COVID virus in wastewater, but it finally fell in line last week, declining by 19.2 percent.

Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, noted the downward COVID trend in a podcast last Thursday.

"I do feel quite confident that we have, in fact, reached a recent peak in activity and are now starting to see declines," Osterholm said. "There is still a lot of COVID transmission in our communities. I actually had a physician this past week that informed me that he lived on COVID Avenue, based on how many people in his neighborhood were currently affected. The good news is that while we are

seeing lots of cases, the number is starting to drop."

One statistic that hasn't seen a decline is the number of deaths attributed to COVID, Osterholm said.

"Deaths have continued to increase in the U.S., approaching nearly 1800 a week towards the end of December, more than 250 deaths a day. Because of the delays involved in obtaining death data, it could still take several weeks to see some apparent declines matching up with the declines in cases as of now."

Osterholm contrasted the death toll and vaccination rates for COVID against those for influenza.

"If you look at COVID, it is killing Americans at a rate almost three times higher than influenza," he said. "Yet we've seen influenza vaccine coverage this season approaching almost 50 percent among children and adults, while uptake of the latest dose for COVID sits at roughly eight percent in children and 21

percent in adults. So clearly, we have a significant challenge here."

MDH data clearly shows that the 65 and older segment of the population is bearing the brunt of the winter COVID surge. Hospitalization rates for this group were at a staggering 97.06 per 100,000 on Jan. 7, more than ten times higher than the overall statewide rate of 9.47, and those over 85 were far and away the most likely in that age group to die from COVID.

Native Americans had the highest hospitalization rates of any ethnic group throughout the month of December, although in early January the rate came down to about the same as Blacks, at about 11 per 100,000.

## No tripledemic

Osterholm also took time in his podcast to dispute the suggestion made in many media circles that the country has been experiencing a triple epidemic of COVID, influenza, and RSV.

While health officials have repeatedly talked about the challenges of all three illnesses being active at the same time and the potential impact on the health care system, the data simply doesn't support the notion of a tripledemic.

"A triple epidemic means that we're seeing all three of the viruses at epidemic levels, and that just hasn't happened," Osterholm said. "RSV and influenza cases and deaths have been well within the range we'd expect them to be at this point in the respiratory virus season. In Minnesota, influenza activity has remained at the minimal level throughout the entire influenza season - we are the only state that has experienced this very, very quiet flu season. This has ultimately been a very average flu season in terms of the amount of activity and mortality we've seen."

## WASTEWATER...Continued from page 1

projects. The combined cost for the schools was around \$60 million, and problems began surfacing within a few years of their completion. When the district threatened legal action in 2019, KA and ARI quickly responded and indicated that they wanted to work toward some resolution, but little has happened since to hold the companies accountable.

A similar wastewater treatment system fix at North Woods will go out for bid next year, according to Superintendent Reggie Engebretson, and it should

be less extensive and therefore less costly than at South Ridge.

In other business, the board:

- Approved continuation of the Q Comp professional development and alternative pay program for 2024-25, eliminating one peer coaching observation for a savings of \$15,000 and cutting teacher stipends from \$1,000 to \$800, saving about \$39,000. Cuts were made to make the program budget conform with the available Q Comp funding.
- Received an extensive summary report on

achievements and integration related to the state's World's Best Workforce initiative.

- Approved the 2023-24 Indian Education policies and procedures.

- Approved an application to the Minnesota State High School League for a combined speech program for Northeast Range and North Woods.

- Adopted the standard annual resolution directing district administrators to make recommendations for the reduction/discontinuation of programs and positions.

- Adopted a resolution releasing the district from individually recording write-in votes for board elections unless a candidate receives write-in votes equal to or greater than the fewest votes for a ballot candidate.

- Heard a grievance from Cherry language arts teacher Kristen Kenjalo regarding graduate credit hours she obtained prior to entering and completing a master's degree program. She requested that the graduate credits be added on to her current master's equivalent status,

which would change her placement on the district's salary matrix. Engebretson denied the request under the rationale that the graduate credits had already been used to move Kenjalo on the scale prior to her obtaining the master's degree, and that re-applying them now would be inappropriate. The board voted to uphold Engebretson's decision, and per the teaching contract the matter will go to arbitration.

- Hired Kelly Nuthak as a full-time long-term substitute social studies teacher at North Woods.

- Hired Timothy Kulik

as a full-time long-term substitute elementary teacher at Northeast Range.

- Hired Kelsey Cook as a part-time paraprofessional at Tower-Soudan.

- Hired Sheri Israel as a part-time paraprofessional at Northeast Range.

- Accepted the resignations from Dan Squires as NW assistant track coach; Sheila Moravitz as NER paraprofessional; Lizbeth Getman as part-time music teacher at NER; and Angela Schultz as assistant girls basketball coach at NW.

## DELIVERY...Continued from page 1

A bigger concern, he said, is that frustrated subscribers might simply opt to cancel subscriptions or opt not to renew.

That's a concern at the *Timberjay* office as well, since most long-time readers still prefer to read the paper the traditional way, in print. While online subscriptions to the paper have been steadily increasing, it is still only a fraction of the paper's traditional print subscription base.

Adding insult to injury is the fact that the delivery problems are coming at the same time that the post office has steadily increased mailing rates for newspapers and other frequent mailers.

The delivery problems are, at this point, limited to out-of-town readers. The *Timberjay* drops off local subscribers' papers at the post offices in Tower, Soudan, Cook, Orr, Ely, and Babbitt on Thursday morning, and these papers are delivered promptly. But out-of-town papers get picked up by the postal truck on Thursday, and are brought to the St. Paul sorting center, located in Eagan.

The public has increasingly been airing its concerns about poor delivery and some of the state's top elected officials are pushing for changes. In December, U.S. Sens. Tina Smith and Amy Klobuchar, as well as the Minnesota House delegation, sent letters calling on the post office's Inspector General to perform a statewide audit in hopes of discovering where the mail is getting waylaid.

"What we all have

heard is just late mail," Klobuchar said. "Things like medications and letters for grandma's birthday and mortgage checks. You just can't mess around. People rely on the postal service every day."

Klobuchar said an initial audit provides evidence of what her constituents have been telling her and other legislators who pushed for the review.

"We know that one-quarter of the out-bound trips from the St. Paul processing center were delayed," Klobuchar said. "And they actually have some recommendations to reduce the number of late trips, to fix the transportation schedules, so there's not so much congestion at the docks, which exacerbates the problem."

Consolidation of postal sorting, implemented several years ago, appears to have exacerbated the problems. Most materials mailed in northeastern Minnesota in the past were initially processed in Duluth, but the closure of that sorting center means outgoing mail from the Arrowhead now goes all the way to the Twin Cities for initial sorting, and it's apparently created backups.

An audit of Minnesota post office branches, including the major sorting center in St. Paul, found delayed mail, safety issues and deficiencies in property conditions. Now, the U.S. Postal Service says it will perform an audit of the entire Minnesota-North Dakota District.

The audits cited nearly 140,000 pieces of delayed mail, a lack of resources

from management and poor security issues at the Eagan and Apple Valley facilities.

At each branch, and for most issues outlined in the audit, the review pointed to a common culprit: bad management. In many incidents, the investigation found that management failed to provide adequate resources, oversight, or scheduling.

In New Brighton and Eagan, management blamed attendance issues for the delays. At the St. Paul processing and distribution center, the review determined that management did not ensure enough staff was on hand to sort mail in time for delivery.

While many Minnesotans have long complained to Klobuchar and other legislators about delayed mail, the audit also illuminated another issue many constituents were not aware of: security issues.

At each branch, the review spotted improper practices that could lead to a higher risk of mail theft. At the St. Paul processing and distribution center, auditors watched an employee leave a sack of registered mail unattended on a dock platform for 20 minutes. Registered mail is supposed to be the most secure USPS postal service.

Klobuchar said she anticipates the next audit will reveal issues in Bemidji and Rochester, too, and she said improved management, personnel training and hiring are key to bringing better mail service to Minnesotans.

**Subscribers understanding**  
Despite the frustrations

with delivery, Toutloff said most of the *Timberjay* subscribers she deals with are understanding. In most cases, Toutloff mails customers a second copy, but even that isn't a guarantee of delivery. "Some of these do end up being delivered after a long delay," she said. "But some never make it at all."

Toutloff was pleased to hear that the causes of the delay are, at least, under investigation.

"I hope they can identify and correct the problems that are causing this," she said. "I know there proba-

bly won't be an immediate fix, but at least it's a start."

*Minnesota Public Radio News contributed reporting for this story.*

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	Date/Time <b>February 8, 2024</b> 3:00 to 6 PM		Location <b>Ely Senior Center</b> 27 S. 1st Ave E. Ely, MN 55731
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POLITICS

# State GOP sees anti-flag sentiment as possible wedge issue

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

REGIONAL— The culture wars apparently have a new hot button in Minnesota that the state’s GOP is hoping to press to organize their voters and raise badly-needed funds. The state’s newly-redesigned flag has been greeted with yawns from most Minnesotans since its official adoption last month, but some Republicans have been hoping to use it as a wedge issue to drive dissatisfaction with DFL lawmakers who pushed for the redesign.

A new web page, called Save the Flag has been posted on the Minnesota Republican Party website and hawks a variety of t-shirts with messages calling for retaining the old flag.

The state flag has long been criticized as virtually indistinguishable from many other state flags, many of which have featured a state seal of some kind on a background of varying shades of blue. It’s also been described as racially tinged given its depiction of a white farmer plowing the

prairie and a single horse-mounted Native American riding into the sunset. Some commentary on the seal from the era of its creation suggests the symbolism was intended to show white settlers driving out Native Americans and their culture from the state.

The fine detail in the state seal made it largely meaningless incorporated into a flag at the top of a flagpole, which was one reason the longtime flag, first created in the late 1800s, has been roundly panned by flag aficionados. Ted Kaye, who represents the North American Vexillological Association, an organization devoted to flags and flag design, gives the new flag high marks. Kaye, who wrote the book, “Good Flag, Bad Flag,” told *PBS News Weekend* that he’d rank Minnesota’s new flag in the top ten among states. Kaye told PBS that state flags are changing both to remove offensive symbolism and to improve the branding of states.

But not everyone is on board with that goal, calling it “woke” and Republicans are hoping to

tap into that resentment over the issue to garner political support. Republican Party Chair David Hann and Deputy Chair Donna Bergstrom released a statement earlier this month calling on the Legislature to reject the new flag.

Bergstrom, a member of the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe, sought to flip the script by suggesting the new design discounted Native Americans.

“As a Native American and tribal member, it is exhausting to see Native Americans once again bearing the brunt of the short-sighted eradication of our shared history,” Bergstrom said. “Keeping the current flag would have been a powerful acknowledgment from the Walz administration and the DFL that our Native contributions are valued.”

That view was challenged by fellow Aaron Wittnebel, himself a Red Lake band member who served on the State Flag State Emblems Redesign Committee in a recent commentary that first appeared on *Minnpost* and was republished in the 1/19 edition of the *Timberjay*. He notes that



The new Minnesota state flag flew over Hidden Valley on Saturday during the Ely Invitational Nordic ski meet.

photo by M. Helmsberger

Minnesota’s first governor, Henry Sibley, who designed the former state seal without legislative approval, wrote at the time that it was meant to symbolize Manifest Destiny, which was a 19th century belief that white settlers were destined by God to expand their dominion across North America. The view, which has since fallen out of favor, held

that whites were inherently superior to Native Americans and that it was America’s mission and duty to remake the West in the image of the eastern U.S.

It remains unclear what impact the GOP action might have, since the new flag is now official and no further action is required by the Legislature.

## AMBULANCE...Continued from page 1

has found a significant variation in how area services pay their on-call staff and those differences can significantly influence the financial status of those services.

Area services also differ in the status of their on-call workers, and most consider the hours they spend on-call to be non-work hours, rather than on-duty hours. The federal Department of Labor and the Internal Revenue Service describe this distinction, which is an important one for rules like overtime, as “waiting to be engaged” or “engaged to wait.” Those “waiting to be engaged” are considered off-duty and are free to do as they please as long as they can respond quickly, usually within ten minutes, in the event of a call. Those waiting to be engaged can work any number of hours and are not subject to rules like minimum wage or overtime.

Unlike most other services in the area, the Ely Area Ambulance Service, which offers a full-time

advanced life support service, provides full-time on-duty staffing, paying EMTs \$18 an hour while on duty, and paramedics \$23 an hour. During those hours, the ambulance crews remain at the hall (engaged to wait) and are expected to be out the door in three minutes or less in the event of a call. That commitment allows the Ely ambulance to provide a quick response and a high level of care, notes Chuck Novak, who chairs the nonprofit board that manages the service. The cost of maintaining that service, however, has become a major issue in the community as the city of Ely and area townships have had to contribute increasingly significant sums to help cover annual deficits that now exceed well over \$200,000.

Novak said other volunteer ambulance personnel are needed at times to fill gaps in coverage, or to serve as “second shift” when the on-duty staff are on a 911 call or are needed to transfer a patient from the Ely-Bloomenson

Community Hospital to medical facilities in places like Virginia or Duluth. Those volunteer staff are subject to pay during those times without pay, although they are compensated when they are required to respond for a run.

Most other area services compensate their volunteer staff for the hours they agree to be subject to pay, and that varies considerably.

Eveleth is another area department that relies on on-duty staff, rather than on-call personnel to respond to the 800-850 calls a year that the service receives. “They’re required to be at the hall or very close to it,” said ambulance director Therese Elverum, who is also an EMS instructor. The department’s EMTs are paid \$12.50 an hour, although that increases to \$14 hour for those staff members who work more than 48 hours a month. Elverum said most of her staff put in the extra hours and that the pay bump is a good incentive to do so.

The Tower Area

Ambulance Service made its shift to a paid on-call staffing model in 2018 and the impact on the service’s financial picture has been dramatic, increasing the city’s payroll for its ambulance crews from the \$50,000 a year range prior to the change to well over \$200,000 today. The city’s on-call pay is higher than most other small services in the area, which includes \$11.50 an hour for EMTs and \$10.50 an hour for Emergency Medical Responders, or EMRs. Those staff also are paid substantially more when they’re required to respond to a call.

The state’s Emergency Medical Services Regulatory Board had noted Tower’s remarkably high rate of pay during a 2021 review of the service and had recommended that the rate be reduced to a more typical on-call rate of five or six dollars an hour.

City officials have not acted on that recommendation, however, out of concern they could lose staff or impact morale by reducing a rate of pay to which its staff has become accustomed. City officials have tried to find ways to reduce payroll costs, but have faced pushback from ambulance staff and have yet to enact any changes.

Tower Ambulance Director Dena Suihkonen agrees that the pay rate was probably too high when first set several years, but she argues that factors like inflation have brought the pay rate, which has remained unchanged since 2018, to a more reasonable level. She also notes that the Tower service handles considerably more runs than other services in similarly-sized communities. The greater number of runs

### Area ambulance pay rates

#### On-duty staff (working at the hall)

Ely: EMTs- \$18/hr, Paramedics- \$23/hr

Eveleth: EMTs- \$12.50/hr, \$14/hr after 48 hrs/mo

#### On-call (non-duty hours)

Ely: Volunteer (no pay)

Babbitt: EMTs and EMRs- \$5/hr

Orr: EMTs- \$5/hr

Cook: EMTs- \$7-\$9/hr, EMRs \$5-\$7/hr

Tower: EMTs- \$11.50/hr, EMRs- \$10.50/hr

Hoyt Lakes: EMTs- \$15.84/hr

should benefit the Tower ambulance service financially but even so, the city had to subsidize operations of the service by more than \$40,000 last year, an amount equivalent to ten percent of the city’s levy.

“Ideally, it would have started at 5-6 an hour,” said Tower Clerk-Treasurer Michael Schultz. He acknowledged that the high pay established in the beginning, prior to his service with the city, wasn’t sustainable and has made it difficult to control payroll because of the morale implications of pay reductions.

Reducing the on-call rate by \$2.50-\$3 an hour, however, could save enough to allow the city to cash flow operations.

Other area services pay their staff considerably less than Tower when on-call. The Cook ambulance service pays its EMTs \$7 an hour for their first 100 hours per month, although that increases to \$8 an hour after 100 hours, and \$9 an hour after 200 hours.

EMRs are paid \$5, \$6, and \$7 dollars an hour respectively. Cook ambulance staff is also paid \$2 per loaded mile for handling transfers from the Cook hospital. Assuming five hours for a typical transfer to Duluth and back,

that amounts to almost \$40 an hour.

On-call personnel up the road in Orr are paid \$5 an hour, which is the same rate paid to on-call staff in Babbitt. Both of those services have managed to operate without significant financial challenges. “We’re actually a very thriving ambulance service,” said Babbitt Clerk-Treasurer Becky Jaeger. Both of those services also pay their on-call staff considerably more when they’re required to respond to a call.

Paying the highest rate in the area for off-duty on-call ambulance staff is Hoyt Lakes, which pays \$15.84 an hour, but doesn’t pay additional when their on-call staff is mobilized for a call. That high rate of pay contributes to operational deficits for the service, but unique circumstances at Hoyt Lakes help the service operate closer to break-even than its high on-call pay rate might suggest.

“We take a lot of transfers because we have a hospital in our service area,” said Melanie Olmstead, ambulance supervisor in Hoyt Lakes. “Last year, we took 431 transfers,” she said, virtually all to Duluth.

Inter-hospital transfers tend to be the most profitable type of call for ambulance services, so the huge volume of transfers at Hoyt Lakes helps them generate far more revenue than a similarly-sized service might otherwise. What’s more, said Olmstead, the White Hospital, which is served by Hoyt Lakes, is within the Aurora zip code, which means they generate additional revenue from St. Louis County, which pays a subsidy to ambulance services that serve hospitals located outside their zip code.

Despite the healthy revenue stream, Olmstead said the Hoyt Lakes service is still losing money, about \$82,000 last year, although she said they’d be closer to break-even if she hadn’t made some larger equipment purchases. “Without our transfers we would not be doing okay,” she said.



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NURSING HOME CARE

# Boundary Waters Care Center seeking help once again

by JODI SUMMIT  
Tower-Soudan Editor

ELY- Ely's nursing home is again asking the community for their support.

"I can honestly say that we would not have been able to get to this point without your help," wrote Boundary Waters Care Center (BWCC) executive director Adam Masloski in their current fundraising appeal. "The fact that Boundary Waters Care Center exists in such a supportive

area is the only reason that this business is still here today."

Last year, BWCC was in danger of closing, threatening a home for residents and the jobs of the 50 workers at the facility and the \$2.5 million payroll that goes with those positions.

The wider Ely community donated approximately \$60,000 last year, which enabled the center to keep the doors open, pay its employees, and prepare to become more self-sufficient in the future.

This year finances are brighter, but the center still needs help building up its financial reserves.

The care center received Critical Access designation in 2023 and saw an increase to our reimbursements beginning this past November, said Masloski.

"If we can receive help from the community once again, and couple it with this reimbursement change, I believe we can get over this operations hump."

The center also received some special aid last year from

the state legislature to use for capital investment.

"That means we are able to make improvements to the physical plant or buy equipment," said Masloski. "This money is not allowed to be used for operations."

This funding has been used to benefit the resident's lives. There is a new jacuzzi tub and remodeled bathing room, allowing residents to have a "truly, spa-like experience."

Additional capital improve-

ments are planned, including a new call light system and a room-by-room update and remodel.

"Our plan is to focus this year on building back our reserves so that we can continue to make the capital improvements that our residents deserve," said Masloski.

Donations can be made out to Boundary Waters Care Center and mailed to 200 West Conan St., Ely, MN 55731.

THE LEGISLATURE

# End-of-life options bill under consideration in St. Paul

by DAVID COLBURN  
Cook/Orr Editor

REGIONAL- It's been languishing in the Minnesota Legislature for a decade, but is this the year the Minnesota End-of-Life Options Act finally gets through the legislative logjam and becomes law?

The End-of-Life Options Act, modeled after a 26-year-old Oregon law and those of ten other states, would legalize physician-prescribed life-ending medication for terminally ill, mentally capable adults.

It was first introduced in 2015 by chief author State Rep. Mike Freiberg, DFL-Golden Valley, but has never mustered enough support to make it through a politically divided Legislature. With the DFL now holding slim majorities in both the House and Senate and the governorship in the hands of DFL'er Tim Walz, the upcoming session represents the best chance for passage of the bill since it was first intro-

duced. A companion bill in the Senate is authored by Sen. Kelly Morrison, DFL-Deephaven, a physician.

Key provisions of the bills include:

► To be eligible, a person must be 18 or older, be terminally ill with a prognosis of six months or less to live and be mentally capable of making an informed healthcare decision.

► An individual must administer the provided medication themselves, and it cannot be administered by injection or intravenously, and a family member or healthcare provider cannot administer the drug.

► Information about alternative end-of-life care options including comfort care, hospice care and pain control must be provided to the patient.

► Authorized health care providers include a doctor of medicine, a doctor of osteopathy, and advanced practice registered nurses.

► Two health care providers must confirm that the

person is terminally ill with a prognosis of six months or less to live, is mentally capable and is not being coerced.

► A terminally ill person can withdraw their request for medication, not take the medication once they have it or otherwise change their mind at any point.

► If either health care provider has concerns about the patient's capacity to make an informed health care decision, a mental health evaluation is mandated before a prescription can be written.

► Anyone attempting to coerce a patient will face criminal prosecution.

► Life insurance payments cannot be denied to the families of those who use the law.

► No health care provider or pharmacist is required to participate.

**House hearing**

Last Thursday, House Health Finance and Policy Chair Tina Liebling took the unusual step of holding

a pre-session committee hearing on the bill, a hearing that lasted about five hours and required an extra room to accommodate the overflow of testifiers and observers. One hundred and three written statements were filed with the committee before the meeting, and 75 people provided oral testimony during the proceedings.

Freiberg noted at the outset of the hearing that the original bill had been amended to emphasize the exclusion from eligibility of those under guardianship or conservatorship and to clearly provide criminal penalties for coercion.

Nancy Uden, of Corcoran, who was diagnosed with an aggressive form of brain cancer in late 2022, testified in favor of the bill, emphasizing her dire prognosis and treatment limitations.

"This bill has been in front of the Minnesota Legislature for ten years already. It's time to act," she said. "As I imagine

the end of my life, I would like to be able to say my goodbyes and go peacefully. I'm thankful that we have hospice as an option. I will use it for the maximum comfort I can. But if it's not enough, in the end, I want the option to die gently in my sleep."

Dr. Cory Carroll, a Colorado physician with the organization Compassionate Choices, shared his insights on medical aid in dying, highlighting how patients control the process by noting that a third of eligible patients opt not to use the prescribed medication.

Kevin Bradley, representing the Libertarian Party of Minnesota, spoke on the bill's alignment with principles of bodily autonomy and reduced governmental control over individual choices.

Opponents voiced concerns about the bill's implications. Jean Swenson, living as a quadriplegic, expressed gratitude for not having assisted suicide as an option during her

depression. Charles Dennis O'Hare, a doctor in assisted living and memory care, and Karin Charron, a nurse, opposed the bill on moral and ethical grounds.

The Citizens' Council for Health Freedom, a non-profit health policy organization said the bill would result in a lowered standard of care for patients, corrupt the practice of medicine and pressure patients who feel they have become a burden to end their lives.

The marathon hearing concluded with Dr. Lisa R. Mattson clarifying the bill's applicability only to terminally ill, mentally competent individuals, not affecting those with chronic illness, mental health issues, or disabilities.

The bill is set for further discussion in the House Committee on Public Safety Finance and Policy when the legislative session resumes on Feb. 12.

**FESTIVAL...**Continued from page 1

couaged the snow sculptors like Franz Agrabal, the German champion snow sculptor and graphic designer who is returning to sculpt once again this year. And two new teams have joined the line-up for this year, both from Canada.

"The sculptors start working on Thursday," Vega said, "and they should be done with their creations by Saturday night."

**Opening Ceremony**

The festival will have its official "kickoff" ceremony on Friday, Feb. 2, at 6 p.m. in Whiteside Park. The annual ceremony involves the arrival of the festival torch, which "glides into the park," according to the festival event schedule.

The schedule is available as a booklet from the Ely Winter Festival headquarters at Northern Grounds, near the corner of Sheridan and Central, or online at elywinterfestival.com.

Most of the winter festival activities occur during the first two weeks of the February but some last all month. Activities include events at the Dorothy Molter Museum (see p. 7 of this edition), snowshoeing, blacksmithing lessons, craft lessons, concerts, the annual Ely ArtWalk, and the Ely Film Festival.

Before the opening ceremony, stop by St. Anthony's Church, for the Ely Community Resource

(ECR) fundraiser spaghetti dinner, from 4-6 p.m., and pack in the comfort food. The ECR is a nonprofit focused on helping Ely's youth, running after-school activities, reading, and tutoring programs and summer programs for kids.

After the opening ceremony, head over to the jazz concert at Washington Auditorium (details on page 7 of this edition), or stick around at Whiteside Park for the U.S. Molkky

Winter Championship. More information on the game can be found at the website of the International Molkky Organization, at molkky.world, where the tournament in Ely is listed.

**ArtWalk**

The Ely ArtWalk, an integral part of the winter festival, gets officially underway on Saturday, but several stores already had their art works up in their windows this week. The ArtWalk displays will remain in place through Feb. 29.

The ArtWalk, now in its 27th year, turns the city of Ely into one huge gallery and shops and organizations in town host the works of over 150 artists, displaying more than 400 works.

The ArtWalk displays are spread throughout Ely's downtown business districts, along Sheridan St., Chapman St., Central Ave., and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Aves.

A map of the windows with art displays is available at the Ely Winter Festival headquarters at Northern Grounds.

The ArtWalk will have an opening event and reception at the Ely Folk School, at 209 E. Sheridan St., on Saturday, Feb. 3, from 3-5 p.m. This is a no-cost event and open to all. Attendees will be able to meet the artists whose works are on display at the event.

**Ely Film Festival**

The Ely Film Festival is going into its second year, and it has already made itself an important piece of the winter festival. As of Jan. 30, the award-winning documentary, "40 Below," on Saturday, Feb. 10, is sold out as are several of the short film blocks. If you want tickets for any of the shows, don't drag your feet or the films you want to see may sell out. The schedule and online tickets are available at elyfilmfest.com.

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BOIS FORTE BAND

# Sobriety powwow promotes healing through connection

by DAVID COLBURN  
Cook-Orr Editor

VIRGINA- On Saturday at the Iron Trail Motors Event Center, there were two very different events going on at the same time that had the parking lots filled to capacity.

One was a ferocious hockey game, with intense competition between two teams bent on taking the other down.

The other, by contrast, could have been called a lovefest of sorts. Down the hall in a large room a short distance away from the slap shots and high sticking, approximately 200 people gathered to show love and support for each other at the first-ever Bois Forte Sobriety Powwow, an event intended to encourage those on healing journeys on the path away from addiction.

The *Timberjay* spoke with Band members Toni Wakemup and Joel Boshey to learn more about the unique powwow.

"Addiction does not have blinders on," Boshey said. "It affects everybody, from every tribe, every city, every country. So, when we opened this door, we left it wide open for anyone who is willing to come and heal, to share time and space and be in a safe place in a safe environment. That's one of the main things, having a safe place for us to practice our culture, our spirituality, and practice our recovery."

"We're connecting people with each other," Wakemup said. "It's all about connection. If we don't have connections to our values, our traditions, our culture we're going to stay in addiction."

Boshey said connecting younger generations with the Band's culture is particularly important as the number of elders continues to dwindle.

"A lot of our youth are getting away from the culture because we're running out of teachers, we're



Elizabeth Francis and Curt Moon carried a banner during the Grand Entry, with names of those seeking encouragement during their healing journey. Right: Aniyah Wakemup danced with her mother, Meredith TwoCrow, right behind her. photos by D. Colburn

running out of elders to share the beliefs and how they work for them," he said. "I have a daughter who is 17 years old. The most powerful gift I could ask for is the power to just be present, to keep living my life in a spiritual, traditional way. I don't have all the answers, I don't have all the old teachings, but I'm willing to learn."

Wakemup said that 114 dancers participated in the opening grand entry Saturday afternoon, and it appeared there were at least that many for the evening grand entry as well. Over a dozen drum circles in the center of the room provided the songs for dancing. One healing song dance was led by head jingle dress dancer Elizabeth Francis and head men's traditional dancer Curt Moon, carrying a banner between them signed by all those seeking encouragement in their healing journeys. Medallions were also presented to attendees recognizing years of sobriety. Wakemup said one person received a 50-year medallion.

People familiar with the Band's annual cycle of powwows know that they are connected to significant seasonal themes. The

Sobriety Powwow was not scheduled in relationship to a season, but to a perceived need.

"We actually wanted to do it on New Years Eve weekend so that our people have some sober fun to come to, but because of a lack of venues for booking we had to do it this weekend," Wakemup said.

Wakemup was quick to give the credit for pulling the powwow together to Boshey, David "Squidg" Morrison Jr. and Kristen Holmes.

"These are our champions," she said. "The dedication, compassion, and kindness of these three humans made this happen."

Preceding the powwow on Friday was a youth conference bringing together students from around the region to learn about historical trauma, youth suicide prevention and bullying. Wakemup said the conference was well attended and that the youth were very responsive and engaged. The two events were made possible through the Bois Forte Healing Toward Wellness Program and a Substance Abuse Disorder Prevention grant, and additional grants from the Special Diabetes Program for Indians and Johns Hopkins University.



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## GIRLS BASKETBALL

### Mixed week for Grizzlies

Fold down the stretch to Barnum, rebound to beat Red Lake

by DAVID COLBURN  
Cook-Orr Editor

FIELDTWP- The North Woods girls basketball team returned to the court this week after an 11-day layoff to mixed results, dropping

**Left: Brynn Chosa looks for help under a heavy press from Barnum on Monday.**

photo by D. Colburn

Monday's contest against Barnum but bouncing back for a win Tuesday over Red Lake.

Tuesday's matchup against the Warriors was all about defense, as the Grizzlies' full court press and swarming man-to-man kept Red Lake out of sync the entire game. Tatum Barto got the Grizzlies on the board first with a triple from the top of the key on a designed inbounds

play, but both offenses were sluggish early on, with the Grizzlies up 13-3 after eight minutes of play. A pair of baskets and a free throw by River Cheney and a pair of treys from Barto got the Grizzlies on a roll as they took a 34-14 lead into the half.

The Grizzlies defense kept rocking and rolling in the second

See NW GIRLS...pg. 2B



## BOYS BASKETBALL

### Grizzlies rough up Hilltoppers

by DAVID COLBURN  
Cook-Orr Editor

DULUTH- The North Woods boys basketball team scored a convincing road win last Friday, topping the century mark in a 102-75 beatdown.

The spotlight coming into the game was on the Hilltoppers' 6'6" junior guard Brooks Johnson, who just the night before crossed the 2,000-point career scoring mark by dropping 50 points against Hermantown. The Grizzlies employed a gimmick defense early on to try to neutralize Johnson, but soon abandoned it in favor of their usual stingy man-to-man and had good success in creating turnovers and turning them into points. By halftime North Woods held a comfortable 61-44 lead, with the spotlight shifting to the play of the Grizzlies' terrific trio of Jonah Burnett, Louie Panichi, and Luke Will. At the intermission, Panichi had matched Johnson point-for-point with 21, Burnett had 17 and Will had 13.

Burnett, the state's sixth-leading scorer with 452 points and a 30.1-point scoring average according to MN Boys Basketball Hub, kept the heat on in the second stanza, dropping in 20 more as the Grizzlies steadily padded their lead against the Hilltoppers. Burnett finished with 37 points, four more than Panichi, as the Grizzlies became the first Class A team to take down Class AA Marshall this season.

"The game plan was to stop them through a junk defense on Johnson

See GRIZZLIES...pg. 2B

## HOCKEY

### Fourth loss in a row for T-Wolves

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

ELY— For the fourth game in a row, a Marolt drew first blood in Timberwolves hockey action and the team went on to lose, further extending their longest skid in an otherwise impressive season. This time it was Owen Marolt who lit the lamp five minutes into the second period, putting Ely up 1-0 against the Bagley/Fosston Flyers.

But as in other recent games, that early advantage didn't hold up. The Flyers tied the score at the 15:29 mark of the second and that's where it remained until late in the third period, when the Flyers got the puck past Ely goalie Ben Leeson for the second time on the night. It was all the Flyers would

See HOCKEY...pg. 2B



## NORDIC SKIING

### A great day for skiing

Thrills, and a few spills, at the Ely Invitational ski meet at Hidden Valley

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

ELY— The hills at Hidden Valley echoed with the excitement of hundreds of young athletes as Ely held its annual high school Nordic ski invitational on Saturday.

"We had a great day," said Ely Head Coach Todd Hohenstein. "The trails were fantastic considering the low snow year, all because of the hard work from the grooming crew at Hidden Valley."

A total of ten teams took advantage of the conditions as the skiers geared up for sectionals later this month, and Ely skiers made their mark, as has become the team's tradition, despite being among the smallest schools in the section.

"The boys had a solid performance on the day," said Hohenstein. Ely's top performance came in the sprint relay competition as the team of Aksel Skustad and Silas Solum took first with a final time of 15:10. While other schools are likely still determining their sprint lineups for sectionals, Hohenstein said Saturday's strong performance by Skustad and Solum shows they are well matched for the event. "Both Aksel and Silas have dynamic and explosive skiing styles that make them great sprinters," said Hohenstein. "Our team is deep enough that we can have top level skiers in both the pursuit and relay events. We understand just how important those relay points are in the section meet format and we want to compete for the top spot."

Ely, of course, will be up against Duluth East, which has become the state's Nordic ski powerhouse and they demonstrated that once again as they dominated the top slots in both the freestyle and classic events in the girls and boys competitions.

In the boys pursuit competition, Ely junior Dylan Durkin took sixth overall, the top finish for an Ely skier, with a combined time of 31:18. Freshman Oliver Hohenstein finished in ninth place with a time of 31:55. Juniors Milo McClelland and Eli Olson took 11th and 12th places

See NORDIC...pg. 2B



**Top: Ely junior Milo McClelland holds in the tuck position as he descends a hill along the Hidden Valley course in Ely on Saturday, with teammate Eli Olson right behind.**

**Above: Ely senior Claire Blauch stays focused as a Grand Rapids skier face-plants on a downhill during the girls classic event. Ely senior Ava Skustad is in the background.**

**Below: Ely's Aksel Skustad tags his relay teammate Silas Solum during the sprint relay event. The pair took first place in the event, the top finish of the day for Ely.** photos by M. HelMBERGER



BOYS BASKETBALL

# Wolves lose heartbreaker to Greenway, top L-BF 69-60

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

GREENWAY — The Timberwolves lost a heartbreaker here on Tuesday on a last-second Greenway bucket that left the Raiders on top 52-51.

The hard-fought defensive contest was close throughout, although the Wolves took a 28-23 lead into the break. The Raiders came back in the second half as

both teams traded the lead more than once. Sophomore Jack Davies, who drove the Wolves offensively with 32 points, sunk a shot with 14 seconds left to give the Wolves a one-point lead. But the Raiders scored on their next possession and Ely couldn't score in the remaining five seconds.

Despite the loss, Head Coach Tom McDonald generally liked what he saw. "We lost to them at home by about 20 points earlier

in the month and I thought we did a better job defensively with them," he said. The Raiders' 6'-8" sophomore was tough to control given the Wolves' lack of height. "He had 22 points and 16 were in the second half on offensive put-backs at the rim," said McDonald. "There wasn't much we could do with it."

Junior Caid Chittum added 11 points to Ely's total. Playing at home last Friday,

the Wolves had their hands full against Littlefork-Big Falls, but came away with a satisfying 69-60 victory in overtime. "It was our best overall game of the year so far," said McDonald. "We played excellent defense against them and also played well offensively. They have had six games going over 100 points this season and I thought we did a great job of limiting their great opportunities on offense."

Davies again led the Wolves offensively with 25 points. Chittum and sophomore Drew Johnson both notched double-doubles on the night. Chittum poured in 19 points and added 11 rebounds, while Johnson scored 13 and posted 11 boards as well. He also notched six assists.

The Wolves are off until next Tuesday, when they head to Deer River.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

# Ely girls notch two dominating performances

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

NASHWAUK — The Timberwolves didn't let the bus ride slow them down here on Monday as they offered up a dominating performance to rout the Spartans 82-41. "The game was over pretty fast in the first half,"

said Head Coach Max Gantt. "We were up 62-22 at halftime."

The Wolves were clicking on both ends of the court. On defense, they racked up ten blocked shots, while senior Sarah Visser dominated the boards with 17 rebounds. A total of 11 Ely players scored on the night, making it one of the most balanced scoring

attacks of the season. "We hit seven threes in the first half," said Gantt. Hannah Penke made her mark back in the lineup, as she tallied three of those treys on her way to a game-leading 19 points. Senior Grace LaTourell added 14 points while junior Clare Thomas added 11. "It was just a dominant offensive showing," said Gantt.

"We hit threes, we posted up really well, we pushed the ball in transition and just dominated from start to finish."

Playing at home on Saturday, the Wolves made short work of Moose Lake in a 64-36 beatdown, thanks to a 38-14 margin in the second half. "It was not our best shooting game, but a solid team

defensive effort led to the win," said Gantt. LaTourell and freshman Audrey Kallberg posted 14 points apiece, while Penke added 11 points to the mix.

The girls are off until Monday when they travel to Mt. Iron to take on the Rangers.

## NORDIC...Continued from page 1B

with times of 32:19 and 32:48 respectively. Olson had finished in seventh place in the freestyle competition in the morning but had a tough fall on a challenging hill to fall back in the classic portion of the competition. The pursuit competition combines the times in both the freestyle and classic events.

"The interesting thing is that you can see how each race may be different for each skier," said Hohenstein. "An athlete may be a very strong skate skier and do very well in the morning race, but then struggle in the classic and slip back a few spots. Our goal is to train a well-balanced skier."

In the girls pursuit,



Left: Varsity girls skiers from around Section 7 warm up ahead of the classic portion of the pursuit competition held Saturday at Hidden Valley in Ely.

photo by M. HelMBERGER

senior Claire Blauch delivered the top performance for Ely, finishing in 11th place with a combined time

of 35:51. Fellow senior Ava Skustad was right behind in 13th place overall, with a time of 36:09.

"Ava was excited to be out skiing in front of the home crowd and had a great morning race finish-

ing 13th in the skate," said Hohenstein. "Claire had a solid race and finished 16th. In the afternoon race, Ava maintained her position and finished 13th overall, while Claire put together a great effort and passed five skiers to earn the 11th spot overall."

In the girls sprint relays, Ely's young team of Molly Brophy and June Nelson qualified for the finals and finished in fifth

place in the finals competition. "Molly and Nelson impressed us with their willingness to take on this role for the team," said Hohenstein. "It was a challenging classic course on a warm day."

At the junior varsity level, Ely showed considerable depth for the future, as the team placed four boys in the top ten in the freestyle event, including eighth-grader Wyatt Devine, who took first, freshman Brooks Brenny, who took third, and freshman Mason Molden who finished in fifth place. Freshmen Tyde Brecke finished seventh.

## GRIZZLIES...Continued from page 1B

at first, but their team was ready for it and saw right through it," North Woods Head Coach Andrew Jugovich said. "After that we went straight up man and we wanted everyone else on that team beside him to beat us, and it worked in our favor. The second half goal was to put them down

and we really took it to them playing good defense, and our ball movement was incredible. We had a lot of fast breaks and you could tell that they were exhausted halfway through the first half."

Jugovich praised the play of Burnett, Panichi, and Will, who finished with

17 points.

"Luke has really been making strides for us, especially in the paint - I believe the last five games he's averaging 15 a game," Jugovich said. "Louie has taken a big step up from being our fourth scorer last year to our second and he's been good running our

point. And Burnett, he's tough - when he wants to score he'll score at will. We're really lucky to have those three out there because on any given night they can combine for 75 points themselves."

Jugovich also credited the rest of the team for setting up all of the scoring

opportunities with head-up ball movement.

"Aiden (Hartway), Talen (Jarshaw), Keenan (Whitney), Evan (Kajala) and Kalvyn (Benner), they're all moving the ball and they're having fun. That's what's making our team a lot better, because when the ball is moving

they're trusting each other and no matter what they have confidence in each other."

The Grizzlies moved to 11-4 with the win and were scheduled to be on the road Friday to take on Class AA Greenway, followed by a Monday trip to Blackduck.

## NW GIRLS...Continued from page 1B

half, at one point holding the Warriors scoreless for seven minutes as they built a 52-23 advantage. A 12-4 run at the end of the half gave the Grizzlies the 64-27 win.

Brynn Chosa led North Woods in scoring with 13 points, and Cheney added 11 as the Grizzlies were productive throughout the lineup with 10 players notching scores.

### Barnum

With extended practice time since their Jan. 18 win over Nashwauk-Keewatin, North Woods Head Coach Liz Cheney had time to install some new wrinkles in the Grizzlies' offense, and they proved to be effective against Barnum on Monday. The teams matched up well against each other, with North Woods holding a 25-24

lead 12 minutes into the game. But a steal and score by Barto, a score by Talise Goodsky, and a triple by Helen Koch put North Woods up 32-24, and a strong defensive effort sent the Grizzlies into the locker room with a 42-28 halftime lead.

Barto and Goodsky scored to open the second half, giving North Woods an 18-point 46-28 lead, and the Grizzlies appeared to have the game well in hand. But the Grizzlies went stagnant on offense as the Bombers slowly crept back into the game with a 10-0 run. The Bombers were within five at 48-43 when Koch gave the Grizzlies a much-needed boost with a corner trey, and a second Koch triple minutes later kept North Woods in the lead 54-47. But the Bombers drained a triple of their own to tie the

score at 57, and followed a Goodsky basket with another to take their first lead since early in the game at 60-59. Chosa put North Woods back up 66-62 with a layup, a pair of free throws and a trey, but the Bombers answered back with a trey by Alizondra Collelo and a deuce by Ella Heaton to go up 67-66 with 1:39 left. Cheney hit the back end of a pair of charities to tie the score at 67 at the 1:06 mark, but the Bombers regained the lead on a basket by Sophia Frank. This time the Grizzlies had no answer, turning the ball over twice and missing a potential game-tying layup in the final 30 seconds to seal their second-half collapse in the 69-67 loss.

Turnovers made the difference as the Grizzlies gave up the ball 31 times to Barnum's 25, giving the

Bombers a 31-24 edge in points scored off turnovers.

Chosa again led North Woods in scoring with 19 points, followed by Goodsky with 16 and Koch with 15.

Cheney zeroed right in on the reason for the loss.

"Turnovers, turnovers, turnovers," she said. "Lots of turnovers tonight, and Barnum capitalized on all of our turnovers in the second half."

Cheney was pleased, however, with how the Grizzlies executed their new offense.

"They did a great job," she said. "That's hopefully just the beginning of something new, something that multiple layers can be added onto. It was fun seeing them move the ball around in it."

North Woods was scheduled for a one-day

breather before a Thursday home game against Deer River followed by a Friday road trip to take on Hill City/Northland. The Grizzlies

will be back home next Tuesday to take on Cherry

## HOCKEY...Continued from page 1B

need in a 2-1 victory on Ely's home ice.

The score reflected a hard-fought game in which both teams put up similar stats. The Flyers,

who spent just six minutes in the box on three penalties, peppered Leeson with 36 shots on goal. Ely, whose skaters spent eight minutes in the box on five

infractions, tallied 33 shots on goal, but managed just five to the Flyers' 13 in the all-important third period.

The latest loss drops Ely's record to 12-9.

The Wolves are set to visit St. Paul Johnson on Friday night and Burnett, Wis. on Saturday. They'll be back at home on Monday to take on North Shore.

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## Obituaries and Death Notices

**Dane Clark Francis**

Dane Clark Francis, age 62, passed away peacefully and unexpectedly, at his Lake Vermilion home on Thursday, Dec. 14, 2023. A private interment will be held at a later date.

He was born to George R. and Betty L. (Fosburgh) Francis on July 15, 1961, in Cook. Dane grew up in Cook, graduating from Cook High School in 1980. He went on to attend the University of Minnesota at Duluth, and the University of North Dakota.

He returned to Cook

after his schooling, and began work as an agent at the Francis Insurance Agency. Shortly after, Dane, along with Kirsten Reichel, and lifelong friend Doug Nakari, purchased and operated the Comet Theatre and Montana Café. Dane and Ann (Christensen) Cook were wed on May 22, 1991. In 1992 he became the chief executive of the Francis Agency until its sale to the North Star Credit Union, after which he continued to own and operate the Blue Cross/Blue Shield portion of the business.

Dane greatly enjoyed

living and boating on Lake Vermilion. He also looked forward to spending time deer hunting at The Stone Ridge Hunting Shack in Meadow Brook, along with his stepsons and hunting buddies.

Dane was preceded in death by his parents George and Betty, foster parents Ray "Shorty" and Vida Anderson, stepson Alex Cook, grandparents George J. and Myrtle (Hocking) Francis and Clayton and Thea (Teigen) Fosburgh, uncles Robert J. "Bob" Francis, Ronald Fosburgh and Donald Fosburgh, aunts

Marion (Francis) Pelto, Helen (Francis) Erkkila, and Charlotte (Francis) Aagard.

He is survived by his wife Ann Francis, as well as stepson Jeffrey Cook (Jenny) and their children Lilah, June, and Griffin. Also his brothers George J. and Blake (Barbara) Francis, extended family, and numerous friends.

**James M. Koski**

James M. Koski, 87, of Ely, a proud U.S. Army veteran, passed away on Sunday, Jan. 28, 2024, at Carefree Living in Ely. A celebration of life will be

held in the spring. Memorials may be directed to the Ely Blue Line Club. Funeral arrangements have been entrusted to Kerntz Funeral Home of Ely.

He is survived by his ex-wife, Helen Perko Koski; son, Jim (Julia) Koski; daughter, Nancy Koski; grandson, Daniel T. Koski; nieces, Marjorie Thompson and Martha (Bill) Sturgis; and nephew, Paul Koski.

**Don W. Loomis**

Don W. Loomis, 89, of Ely, entered peacefully into God's Kingdom on Monday, Jan. 29, 2024.

Funeral services were held on Thursday, Feb. 1 at First Lutheran Church in Ely. Burial was in the Ely Cemetery. Memorials are preferred to First Lutheran Church. Arrangements were entrusted to Kerntz Funeral Home of Ely.

He is survived by his wife of 68 years, Enola Nelson Loomis; son, Thad (Soraya); daughter, Teri; granddaughters, Hannah (Alex Povhe), Emma and Scout; and great-granddaughter, Enola.

## BREITUNG TOWNSHIP

**Quest to connect the Tower/Breitung bike loop back on track**

by STEPHANIE UKKOLA  
Staff Writer

SUDAN- Breitung Township and the city of Tower have resumed working together to complete the bike trail loop connecting the Hoodoo Point and McKinley Park campgrounds. This project has been in the works for years, but finishing the last mile has been a challenge as wetlands and issues with private and utility easements have complicated the effort.

The final mile portion of the trail forces bikers and pedestrians onto County Rd. 697, a paved, windy road with minimal shoulders and many driveways.

In addition to reducing the safety hazard, completing the loop creates a pleasurable lake and woods experience for riders or walkers and offers an incentive for residents to get out to master the six-mile loop.

The working group, with representatives from both communities, have asked JPJ Engineering, which worked on the other portions of the same trail, for cost estimates for the final mile. JPJ has been asked to provide a ballpark estimate of costs. Different possible routes are being mapped, including a route that snakes behind the airport or follows the county road. The group hopes to be able to apply for funding in spring of 2025 and have work completed before June of 2026.

In other news, the Breitung Town Board:

► Heard from Supervisor Matt Tuchel that the recreation committee will meet soon to plan improvements to the Soudan recreation area. He said the rink has had about 9-12 kids regularly each night. Tuchel said he will certify rink attendants in first aid next week.

► Awarded the '23 infrastructure project to Mesabi Bituminous of Gilbert. The Mesabi Bituminous bid came in at \$286,944. The only other bidder was Utility Systems of America whose bid came in at \$319,185. The project consists of work on 1st Ave. and Church St. from the Superior St. intersection to the mud ditch on Church St. The project should be completed by the end of the 2024 construction season.

► Heard that CBDG has awarded \$75,000 to Breitung Township for stormwater runoff improvements on Center St. between Soudan's Only Store and the Vermilion Park Inn.

► Discussed but did not yet approve a Sick and Safe Leave Policy citing concerns about the clarity of the language. The board will revisit the issue after revisions are made.

► Passed a motion for payment of \$46,256.82 to JPJ Engineering.

► Approved a payment of \$1,010.36 to Tony Zavodnik for siren parts. Zavodnik donated



A scenic portion of the paved trail in Breitung Township, near McKinley Park, winds through a stand of large red pine with some large boulders. file photo

his time to fix the original siren and acquire and repair a second replacement siren. The town board sincerely thanked Zavodnik for his time.

► Appointed election judges including Jorgine Gornick, Katy Popesh, Trudy Hendricks, Randy Winkler, Kathleen Zavodnik, Laurie Anderson, Teresa Doliner, Stephanie Ukkola,

Sally Turk, Cindy Zollar, Miranda Kishel, and Corrine Hill.

► Appointed Sally Turk, Trudy Hendricks and Katy Popesh to the absentee ballot board.

► Passed a motion to tell the ambulance commission that the township is in favor of dropping the \$1.66 per mile charge for inter-hospital transfer miles

and approving the increase to the \$25 per capita charge to the township. "I truly want to keep the service here," said Tuchel.

► Set the next meeting for Thursday, Feb. 22 at noon.

## HELPING OTHERS

**MCF-Togo inmates build ramps for accessibility**

by DAVID COLBURN  
Cook-Orr Editor

REGIONAL- It's been three-and-a-half years since the Minnesota Department of Corrections threatened to shut down the Togo and Willow River Correctional Facilities in a cost-saving measure, but a groundswell of public support convinced the Legislature to find \$7.5 million to avert the closures.

The unique community-focused restorative justice programs at the facilities were a key factor in swaying the debate, and today an important collaborative effort between the two institutions continues as a vital contributor to the well-being of families and individuals with special

mobility needs.

Nearly 2,000 families in Minnesota have maintained independent living in their homes, thanks to a collaboration between Willow River and Togo Challenge Incarceration Programs (CIP) and Access North, a nonprofit that provides accessibility ramps for homes.

These ramps are modular, similar to deck or dock sections, and are assembled as needed by CIP participants for installation at homes.

Willow River has been involved with Access North for nearly two decades, with Togo joining the initiative in 2016. The lumber for the ramps is processed at Willow River, and some finished modules are sent to Ac-



cess North's inventory in Hibbing. Togo participants handle material logistics at Hibbing and contribute to various aspects of ramp construction and installation.

Sergeant Matt Stone

of Togo, part of the restorative justice program, explained the partnership's significance.

"Our collaboration with Access North exemplifies restorative justice," he said. "It's not just about

having multiple sites work for a nonprofit. It's about community service and fulfilling Access North's mission 'Living My Life as I Choose.' Our participants gain a sense of value and respect through this work, which in turn supports numerous families in living independently."

CIP is a voluntary program, with the first of three six-month stages completed at Willow River and Togo and the next two in supervised community placements. Programming includes substance use disorder treatment (if

applicable), education, critical thinking skills, restorative justice, physical training, military bearing drill, and ceremony, work crew, and transition preparation.

CIP participants are significantly less likely to become repeat offenders following the completion of their sentences, and the model has been lauded and even replicated in other states.

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# Outdoors

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ARROWHEAD 135

## Warmth creates its own challenges for racers

Soft snow, open water, and a rough trail contribute to slowest times in years for ultramarathoners

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

REGIONAL—Frostbite. Frozen water bottles. Those are typically the biggest challenges that participants in the Arrowhead 135 ultramarathon face along the winding course between International Falls and Tower. Set in what is normally the coldest week of winter in the North Country, the race is famous for regularly offering up some of the coldest race temperatures in North America.

But the 155 racers who left the starting line early Monday morning may remember 2024

as the year they faced some of the toughest conditions of all, thanks to a record warm winter that proved to be a bigger challenge than the cold.

The warm weather and the minimal snowfall so far this winter had left much of the marathon's usual route nearly impassable at times. The vast majority of the route, which follows the Arrowhead snowmobile trail, had never been groomed this winter due to the lack of snow. That grooming, combined with more typical snowfall, tends to smooth out the trail, flatten the brush and other vegetation that grows up each year, particularly in the

**Right: Andy Weinzierl, of Duluth, pedals his way through the Lost Lake Swamp along the final two miles of the Arrowhead 135 course.**

photo by M. Helmberger

vast swamps traversed by the trail. In cold weather, those groomed trails set up hard and can make an excellent base for the fat tire bikers who make up the vast majority of the participants in the race.

Not this year. Instead, racers fought shoulder-high brush, swampy hummocks,

See RACE...pg. 5B



### Fishing reports

#### Ely area

Warm temps have cooled off the ice making process, with just 6-12" of ice being reported on local lake trout lakes, while most other lakes are sporting 12-16" of ice. Due to warm temps, slush and water on the ice has become very common on area lakes. This issue is expected to grow as warm temperatures remain in the forecast.

Lake trout fishing remains slow for many anglers. Many of the lakers being caught this last week, were caught with a sucker suspended just off the bottom, under a tip up. Deep flats in 30-50 feet of water have been best.

Walleye anglers reported good fishing this last week. Best bite has mainly been after dark, in 20-25 feet of water. Rattle reels tipped with a lively minnow, like a rainbow, has been the most popular for successful anglers.

Warmer than usual temps had many die hard spring crappie anglers out and about checking spring crappie spots. Unfortunately many were not greeted with traditionally good spring crappie bite, but rather a typically slow late January bite.

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



A recent ring around the moon heralded the arrival of milder weather after the brief cold snap in mid-to-late January. The rings are caused by ice crystals in the atmosphere, in a process similar to sun dogs. photo by M. Helmberger

### CHANGING CLIMATE

## Warmest winter ever? It's looking more and more likely

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

REGIONAL—The North Country is on track to set a new mark for the warmest winter in the historical record. While the books weren't quite closed on January when the *Timberjay* went to press this week, this past month will rank among the top ten warmest Januarys on record. Combined with December's astonishing warmth, the December through January period is running at an average of 20.4 degrees at International Falls, the weather station with the longest period of record in the region.

That shatters the previous warmest December-January average temperature of 17.3 degrees set back in the winter of 1913-14, according to Pete Boulay, state climatologist.

"This year is number one by a lot," said Boulay, who noted that overnight lows in particular have contributed to the exceptional warmth this winter. According to the National Weather Service, residents of the North Country can expect to wake up to a Friday morning low this week in the low 20s, or over 80 degrees warmer than the cold record mark of minus 60 degrees, which was set in Tower on the same date back in 1996. That's also about 30 degrees warmer than the average low for Feb. 2, which is minus 7.9 degrees F in Tower and minus 5.5 degrees F in International Falls. The average Feb. 2 high in the border city is 17.6 degrees.

Barring a dramatic change in February, the winter of 2023-24 is almost certain to end up as the warmest ever recorded in northern Minnesota. And, based on the extended forecast from the U.S. Climate Prediction Center, there appears to be no end to the extraordinary warmth. The latest 8-14 day outlook, which is valid through Feb. 13, shows a continued high probability of above normal temperatures, a pattern which is expected across virtually the entire eastern two-thirds of the lower 48 states.

Unlike recent predictions, however, the latest outlook suggests above-normal precipitation. Given

“This year is number one by a lot.”

Pete Boulay  
Climatologist

### WILDERNESS RESERVATIONS

## Reservations now open for BWCAW

### Forest Service offers advice for a successful experience

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

REGIONAL— Careful planning is key to a successful visit to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area this summer, according to the U.S. Forest Service. Reservations for entry permits to the 1.1 million-acre federal wilderness area went on sale on Wednesday of this week, but many permits remain available, particularly if visitors are flexible on dates and entry points. Reservations are available at [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov), or by calling 1-877-444-6777.

The quota season in the Boundary Waters begins May 1

and runs through Sept. 30.

Visitors planning to take an overnight trip, or a motorized day trip into the BWCAW will want to plan ahead and consider a number of factors that can enhance their wilderness experience and improve their chances of obtaining an overnight permit.

Tips from the Forest Service include:

- Have at least three travel options (dates and entry points) in mind before making a reservation in case your preferred option is unavailable. Reserve only permit(s) you can use. Reserving only what you can use allows others to experience the unique beauty of the BWCAW.
- Consider where you want



to pick up your entry permit and its proximity to your entry point. Given the Boundary Waters' vast size (stretching nearly 140 miles east to west), this can make a huge difference. You must pick up your permit from the issue

**Above: Canoeists fish a shoreline on Slim Lake north of Ely last fall. The BWCAW is home to more than 1,000 lakes.**

photo by M. Helmberger

See BWCAW...pg. 5B

See WARMTH...pg. 5B



RACE...Continued from page 4B

and soft snow that led many to multiple wipe-outs along the way. "The worst was between the second and third checkpoints," recalls Mike Running, of Ely, who competed in the Arrowhead for the first time and finished 14th. Running and other racers reported about a seven mile stretch of the trail that apparently had not seen a snowmobile all winter. That left untracked snow, peppered with brush and other vegetation that forced the racers to walk with their bikes for two or three hours.

"We were post-holing the whole way," said George Hollerbach, of Newtown, Pa., who completed his fourth Arrowhead 135 on Tuesday, at his slowest time ever, at about 26 hours.

It wasn't just Hollerbach who was lagging. Race co-organizer Jackie Krueger, of International Falls, said racers were having their slowest race in many years. The first-place finisher, Nick Nygaard, of Duluth, reached the final checkpoint at Fortune Bay Tuesday morning, a little over 24 hours from the Monday morning start in the Falls. That was about eight hours slower than the typical winning pace, said Krueger. It was



Mike Running, of Ely, about two miles short of the finish line, was dressed lightly given the exceptionally mild conditions. Racers, who typically arrive at the finish line covered in frost, faced a long list of other challenges this year, due to the warm temperatures and minimal snowcover.

photo by M. Helmberger

Nygaard's first attempt at the Arrowhead 135, so his first-place showing was impressive nonetheless. He said he would have liked to have seen smoother trails, but acknowledged this year's unusual conditions were part of the experience. "Part of the ethos of the race is to deal with whatever is handed to you and make the most of it—I was ok with how it turned out."

Hollerbach said the warm temperatures made the snow much softer than usual and that made it difficult to keep their bikes in a straight line. Racers ran into trouble, particularly on downhills, where many reported spills. Andy Weinzierl, of Duluth, said he wore a helmet for the first time out of concern over potential injuries. He said he experienced several falls due to the soft snow,

which would catch front tires, sending them off in unexpected directions.

Equally unexpected was the open water on at least one of the river crossings, which prompted race organizers to provide heavy-duty garbage bags to all the racers, which they used like make-shift hip waders to get through the water. "We'd never had to deal with open water before," said Krueger.

While many of the racers appreciate the solitude along the trail, Krueger said they had more than usual this year because they sharply limited their usual snowmobile patrols due to the poor trail conditions. She said they would have responded had a racer gotten into trouble, but the usual checks just weren't feasible this year.

As tough as the bikers had it, a few other racers had it worse. One competitor, who was traveling the route by kick sled, languished for long stretches through swampy hummocks that tipped her sled almost continuously and dense brush that blocked her path.

Krueger said there's only one thing that keeps racers moving forward under such difficult circumstances. "Pure stubbornness," she said. "It comes to that attitude of 'I'm just not quitting.'" There is, of course, a time limit in play. The racers have a total of 60 hours to travel the 135 miles, but few manage to hold out for 60 hours given the limited opportunities for sleep.

Several racers were lounging and fueling up in the board room at Fortune Bay on Tuesday morning, winding down from the event and comparing

notes on their experiences on the trail. Some were headed off for the next race. Hollerbach, a retired cardiac nurse, was scheduled to fly to Alaska later in the week to bike the Iditarod trail, a competition he's entered before. Running, from Ely, was heading home and back to normal life. While some of the racers are constantly training in rugged conditions, Running took a bit more laid-back approach. He said he likes to bike the new trails at Hidden Valley and did some training with a loaded bike and had a stationary bike at his home which he used to help build endurance.

Most of those hanging out were waiting for friends, partners, or others they've met over the years from the rather exclusive world of extreme ultramarathoners.

It's a world that Krueger says she's come to see as family. Her husband Ken has done the Arrowhead and other ultramarathons before, but she says she's content to handle the logistics. "I'm not a glutton for punishment," she said. "But I like to hear the stories."

Brian K. Anderson contributed reporting for this story.

BWCAW...Continued from page 4B

station specified on your permit and you can only pick up your permit on your entry date or one day prior, so plan to use the ranger station closest to your entry point for convenience.

➤ Create or register for your recreation.gov account before you plan to make your reservation to ensure you don't have problems once you've decided on your destination. The latest version of the web browser Chrome is recommended for best results on the website.

➤ Review the section of your permit that addresses fees and cancellations so you know how to cancel your permit if you can't use it. That allows the permit to go back into the system for someone else to use.

Other information

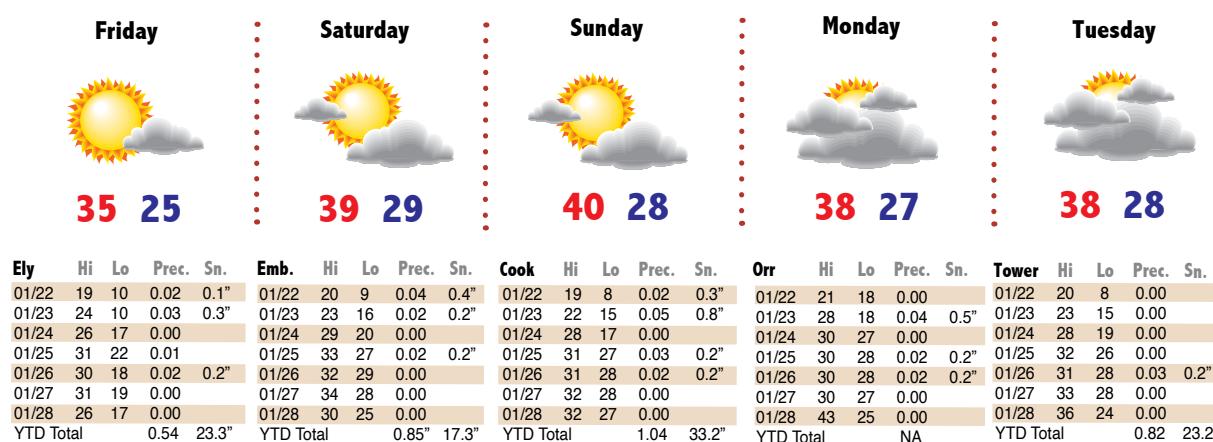
The Forest Service

reminds visitors that the maximum group size is nine people and no more than four watercraft. Smaller groups enhance the wilderness experience, reduce the impacts on the wilderness, and improve your chances of seeing wildlife.

The Forest Service also recommends that visitors consider whether a trip in the Boundary Waters is the best option for your group. There are more than two million acres of the Superior National Forest located outside the wilderness, with 254 backcountry campsites that require no fees or reservations. For more information on those sites, visit the Superior National Forest website at [www.fs.usda.gov/main/superior/home](http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/superior/home).

LAKE COUNTRY FORECAST

from NOAA weather



WARMTH...Continued from page 4B

the forecasted warmth, the only real question is whether that precipitation will fall as rain or snow.

Despite the warmth, the North Country has managed, so far, to hold onto its snowcover, which fell in mid-January during the only cold outbreak of the winter so far. Boulay noted that snow is harder to melt in January than in March and April, even with the recent warm temperatures.

That's because the late January and early February sun doesn't have the strength that it will have in another month or two. "It's harder to burn off the morning clouds and fog as well, because the sun is still low in the sky this time of year," said Boulay.

Those clouds, and the area's snowcover, is expected to keep northern Minnesota significantly cooler over the next ten days than is

forecasted for more southerly parts of the state, where snow is limited or absent. A few hours of afternoon sun in Minneapolis on Monday of this week pushed the high temperature there to a jaw-dropping 50 degrees F.

"We just kind of wandered around outside in a daze," said Boulay. "We had to check the calendar to remind us it was still January."

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 Washington DC Sept 12-16, 2024  
 Fall New England Cruise Sept 28-Oct 5, 2024  
 Tour of Italy Oct 13-22, 2024 (sold out)  
 Panama Canal Cruise January 11-23, 2025  
 Alaskan Cruise August 13-25, 2025

**2024 DAY TOURS**  
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 Menopause The Musical 2 Duluth | Mar 6  
 The Lion King Musical Minneapolis | Apr 14 (sold out)  
 SIX The Musical St. Paul | Jul 27  
 A Day at the MN State Fair St. Paul | Aug 26  
 Beautiful: Carole King Musical Chanhassen | Sep 7  
 Discover Bayfield, Wisconsin Bayfield | Oct 5

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**EBCH**  
Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital

**Hospital Connection**  
Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Healthcare

**Q: How will Artificial Intelligence (AI) impact healthcare in the future?**  
**A:** AI is all around us. We hear about it almost daily on the news. While it is unclear how AI will affect healthcare, we know it will likely impact how healthcare is delivered. We can only project that AI might allow for greater access to healthcare for patients, reduce human error, or assist medical professionals through advanced technology. EBCH is always working on strategic planning and looking at the future of healthcare. What will EBCH look like in 2030? We are excited to see!

**Q: Can AI be used in scams?**  
**A:** Yes. We recently had an incident where the Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital CEO Patti Banks "seemingly" left voicemails on some of our patients' phones. That was not the case. These are typically scams perpetrated by using AI and cloning an individual's phone number or, in some cases, even their voice. We want to remind you to be cautious when confronted with a potential scam; never give out your personal information or pay money to them over the phone.

**Q: How can I find out more information?**  
**A:** Call us at 218-365-3271. During regular business hours, a receptionist typically answers our phones and directs our calls. We pride ourselves on making as many personal connections with our patients as possible. If something seems wrong, trust your gut and call us. You can also visit our website at [www.ebch.org](http://www.ebch.org) for a full range of information about EBCH. We generally post urgent announcements on our Facebook page and share them with the "What's Up, Ely, MN" and "What's Up, Babbitt, MN" pages.

Hospital Connection is a new feature from Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital (EBCH) this winter. We are excited to share our most recent updates and information in a question-and-answer format featuring a new topic each week. Throughout the next several weeks, we will share exciting information about EBCH, our newest services, and how we are a partner in the communities we serve. You can also find more information about EBCH by visiting our website at [www.ebch.org](http://www.ebch.org). Like our Facebook page to keep up with current events and announcements.

**ebch.org**  
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218-365-3271

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## EMPLOYMENT

### OPENINGS



Vermilion Country School (VCS) is seeking applicants for the following positions:

Vermilion Country is a project based learning school seeking to expand our staffing. We are adding new positions! Currently open for interview on a rolling basis - call 218-248-2485 or email info@vermilioncountry.org for more information:

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 > Science &/or Math Teacher (Licensed) 40K-54K DOE

**Student Support and Community positions (no education license required) Benefits Eligible**  
 > Special Education Assistant /para(Special Education ) (Hourly \$17.50 - 24.50/HR +)  
 > Student Success Counselor (salary) (\$40K annual salary)  
 > Student Success Program Specialist (hourly \$24-30/hr+ DOE)

**Part Time:**  
 > American Indian Programs Liaison & Community Organizer (Hourly \$24-30/hr+ DOE) Part time 4-8 hours per week  
 > Transportation Driver (Van) 5-20 hours per week. Hourly rate DOE  
 > Transportation Driver (Class C School Bus) 5-20 hours per week. Hourly rate DOE

**For inquiries, contact**  
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 and/or 218-248-2485

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**US:** A small nonprofit focused on preserving and interpreting the history of the Ely and Winton area. A committed volunteer board of directors. A part-time colleague for you in the form of a bookkeeper. A museum and artifacts requiring caretaking, organizing and interpretation support.

PART-TIME (up to 20 hours/weekly), \$15-\$18/hour (depending on qualifications). Full job description available at <https://www.elywintonhistory.org> and preference given to cover letters and resumes received by Monday, February 12. 2/2

### POSITION OPENING

#### Ely Public Schools Paraprofessional

Ely Public School District is looking for a paraprofessional starting in the Memorial/Washington building for the 2023-2024 school year. We are an EC - Grade 12 district, seeking an energetic, self-starting, personable, and highly motivated individual. Background check required.

**Required Qualifications:**  
 > High School graduate or equivalent and one of the following:  
 -Associate of Arts Degree, or  
 -Completion of two years of study at an institution of higher education, or  
 -Passing the ParaPro assessment.

**Preferred Qualifications:**  
 > Previous experience in working with children, preferably students with disabilities, learning difficulties, and/or attention difficulties.

**Benefits include:**  
 > Paid sick leave, personal days and vacation  
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 > Flexible spending account  
 > PERA retirement

Application available at: [www.ely.k12.mn.us](http://www.ely.k12.mn.us)

A complete application must include the following:  
 > District Application  
 > Resume  
 > College Transcripts  
 > 2 letters of recommendation

**Return materials to:** Ely Public Schools, Attn: Superintendent, 600 E. Harvey St., Ely, MN 55731 or email [lwestrick@ely.12.mn.us](mailto:lwestrick@ely.12.mn.us)  
**Starting Rate of Pay:** \$18.48/hour  
**Hours:** 6.5 hours/day, 172 student contact days  
**Deadline to apply:** February 8, 2024; open until filled.

Published in the Timberjay, Feb. 2, 2024

## PUBLIC NOTICE

### EAGLES NEST TOWNSHIP MAIL BALLOT NOTICE

**Notice to Voters** residing in Eagles Nest Township, St. Louis County will vote by mail in statewide elections as authorized by Eagles Nest Township under MN Statute 204B.45.

Notice of State Presidential Primary Election: March 5, 2024. All persons **registered** to vote as of January 19, 2024, in MAIL BALLOT precincts will automatically be sent a ballot at least 14 days prior to the election. If you are registered to vote and do not receive a ballot by February 20, 2024, please contact the St. Louis County Auditor's Office at one of these locations Auditor, St. Louis County Courthouse 100 North 5th Avenue West, Room 214 Duluth, MN 55802, (218) 726-2385 or Virginia Government Services Building 201 South 3rd Ave West Virginia, MN 55792, (218) 749-7104. You may email questions to [elections@stlouiscountymn.gov](mailto:elections@stlouiscountymn.gov).

Published in the Timberjay, Jan. 26 & Feb. 2, 2024

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## King Crossword

### ACROSS

- 1 TV schedule abbr.
- 4 Rotate
- 8 Exerciser's target
- 12 Slithery fish
- 13 Layered cookie
- 14 Greek vowel
- 15 Selflessness
- 17 Seize
- 18 Chapeau
- 19 Slogan
- 21 Garden figurines
- 24 Use henna
- 25 Post-op area
- 26 Apply cream
- 28 College study
- 32 Close by
- 34 "Gee, ya think?"
- 36 Golfer's cry
- 37 Campfire leftovers
- 39 Clothing protector
- 41 Sandwich meat
- 42 "- been real"
- 44 By and large
- 46 Opposite of candor
- 50 Eggy quaff
- 51 Bern's river
- 52 Halite
- 56 Egyptian deity
- 57 Shrek, for one
- 58 Half of CIV
- 59 Society newbies

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		

- 60 French perfume brand
- 61 Prom rental
- DOWN**
- 1 Afternoon get-together
- 2 Ann Patchett's "Canto"
- 3 However
- 4 Praised loudly
- 5 Mentalist Geller
- 6 Take it easy
- 7 Wanderer
- 8 Biblical cover-up?
- 9 Petty of "Tank Girl"
- 10 - impasse
- 11 Innocent one
- 16 Ewe's mate
- 20 Workout venue
- 21 Actress Gershon
- 22 Mark Harmon TV series
- 23 Melancholy
- 27 Fella
- 29 "Atlas Shrugged"
- 30 Exam format
- 31 "Ratatouille" rat
- 33 Patty Hearst, for one
- 35 "Tell -" (Streisand/Dion song)
- 38 Fr. holy woman
- 40 Monopoly job
- 43 Seafood selection
- 45 Cyclades island
- 46 Stated
- 47 Lighten
- 48 Baby's bed
- 49 Boo-Boo's buddy
- 53 - -Magnon
- 54 Lucy of "Elementary"
- 55 Box office buys, slangily

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## Even Exchange by Donna Pettman

Each numbered row contains two clues and two 6-letter answers. The two answers differ from each other by only one letter, which has already been inserted. For example, if you exchange the A from MASTER for an I, you get MISTER. Do not change the order of the letters.

- 1. Pavlova's dance \_\_\_\_\_ E \_\_\_\_\_ Voter's ticket \_\_\_\_\_ O \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Outer space archer \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_ Tear inducer \_\_\_\_\_ N \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Babbling water \_\_\_\_\_ K \_\_\_\_\_ Dust pan's partner \_\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. TV accessory \_\_\_\_\_ T \_\_\_\_\_ Detach \_\_\_\_\_ V \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Gherkin or dill P \_\_\_\_\_ Capricious \_\_\_\_\_ F \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. Banish from class \_\_\_\_\_ P \_\_\_\_\_ Outshine \_\_\_\_\_ C \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. Truck procession \_\_\_\_\_ O \_\_\_\_\_ Express an idea \_\_\_\_\_ E \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. Lancelot's attire \_\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_\_ Garden archway \_\_\_\_\_ B \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. Give a speech O \_\_\_\_\_ Infuriated \_\_\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. Fasten \_\_\_\_\_ H \_\_\_\_\_ Invade \_\_\_\_\_ K \_\_\_\_\_

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## CryptoQuote

AXYDLBAAXR  
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, **A** is used for the three L's, **X** for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each week the code letters are different.

PYEQN OQSWH YTP Q ITKHP  
 KDPHSFTEH JYS NYTSCHFJ KD  
 XUKOU PY ESHQR, BHD KD UQDE.  
 YDFN ESHQRC LKWH AKSPU PY  
 OUQDLH.  
 - CQSQU AQD ASHPUDQOU

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each week at [timberjay.com](http://timberjay.com)  
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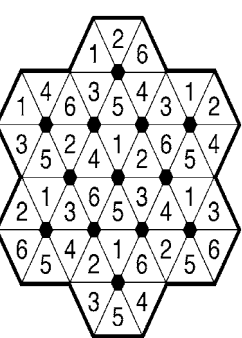
## Super Crossword

### Answers

E	G	M	A	N	D	A	S	A	N	I	S	H	R	I	N	E	S		
M	A	R	I	N	A	O	S	A	G	E	S	L	A	I	D	O	U	T	
B	L	A	C	K	H	A	W	K	D	O	W	N	U	N	M	A	N	L	Y
L	I	V	E	A	B	E	T	T	A	N	S	T	O	O	L				
E	L	I	A	C	L	O	C	K	W	O	R	K	O	R	A	N	G	E	
M	E	T	E	R	S	R	E	I	K	I	L	E	R	O	Y	S			
S	O	Y	L	E	N	T	G	R	E	E	N	N	O	O	B				
			S	M	O	O	T	H	E	N	P	T	A	E	E	G	S		
S	K	E	E	S	S	E	B	L	U	E	V	E	L	V	E	T			
N	E	T	S	I	T	E	T	I	N	E	A	R	I	N	L	A	T	E	
O	P	T	T	H	E	W	O	M	A	N	I	R	E	D	A	S	I		
O	T	O	O	L	E	A	R	I	S	E	N	E	T	O	N	I	A	N	
P	U	R	P	L	E	R	A	I	N	E	S	P	O	R	T	S			
S	P	E	E	T	H	C	T	V	S	E	A	S	O	N					
			R	A	C	E	P	R	E	T	T	Y	I	N	P	I	N	K	
O	C	T	A	V	O	T	I	E	O	N	M	A	C	N	E	E			
W	H	I	T	E	M	E	N	C	A	N	T	J	U	M	P	A	T	T	
L	A	T	I	P	A	T	E	O	N	O	N	O	S	O	T	T	O		
E	C	H	O	D	O	T	C	O	L	O	R	P	I	C	T	U	R	E	S
T	H	E	N	O	S	E	A	V	E	N	G	E	P	E	T	E	R	I	
S	A	S	S	I	E	R	P	A	T	T	E	N	A	S	S	E	S		

## SNOWFLAKES

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## Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

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

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

**DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦♦**

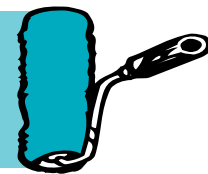
♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging  
 ♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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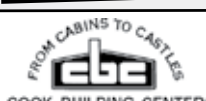


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## EMPLOYMENT



DEPARTMENT OF IRON RANGE RESOURCES & REHABILITATION

**COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR**  
Communications Manager 1  
Permanent, Full-Time

The Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation is seeking to fill the permanent, full-time (1.0 FTE) position of Communications Director (Communications Manager 1).

The Communications Director provides leadership as an agency communications and marketing strategist for Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation. This position oversees development and execution of strategic communications and marketing including public relations, engagement and outreach efforts, media relations to advance agency objectives, inform stakeholders, protect and enhance the agency's reputation and lead crisis communication efforts. This position provides leadership in execution of agency strategic planning development, implementation, consultation, evaluation, and communications. This position serves as the agency spokesperson and liaison to the Governor's Office. This position is located in Eveleth, MN with the eligibility for a mixture of in office and telework. Occasional travel to events is required.

Learn more and apply online at [mn.gov/careers](http://mn.gov/careers)  
Job ID: 73254

Application deadline: February 7, 2024

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