

Oneida, Vilas counties launch Snowmobile Northwoods site

FOR STAR JOURNAL

Last Friday, snowmobile trails in Oneida County officially opened for the season, following Vilas County, which opened trails on Jan. 17.

When announcing the openings, both counties advised caution, as trails are in early-season riding condition, and continue to encourage snowmobilers to “ride right, ride safe,” a message promoted on the newly launched snowmobilenorthwoods.com.

The website includes trail info, maps, club details, up-to-date trail conditions, and a page dedicated to rules and safety.

The site, funded by a joint effort marketing grant from the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, Vilas County Tourism and Publicity, and the Oneida County Tourism Council, is committed to raising awareness about snowmobile trail safety in the Northwoods.

“We want to make sure everyone’s visit to the Northwoods is a safe one,” said Collette Sorgel, director of Vilas County Tourism and Publicity. “We hope the website can act as a one-stop-shop for riders to brush up on the rules and riding etiquette and make the Northwoods a safer place to ride.”

On the site, users will find Wisconsin snowmobiling laws and safety tips, a short video from the Vilas County Snowmobile Alliance, and the Ride Right snowmobiling safety pledge, which reminds riders of easy ways they can commit to protecting their safety and the safety of others on the trails.

Riders can also head to local chambers of commerce and visitors bureaus in Oneida and Vilas County to pick up printed materials and Snowmobile Northwoods swag, including reflective decals and safety checklists.

For more information, visit snowmobilenorthwoods.com.

Rhinelanders receives grant to revitalize trees

FOR STAR JOURNAL

The city of Rhinelander plans to revitalize its urban forest with a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service.

The grant will allow the city to work with landowners to remove and replace dead or dangerous trees on private property and plant two for every tree removed.

According to the city, Rhinelander’s tree canopy has been severely impacted by disease, invasive insects such as the Emerald Ash Borer, and unavoidable street construction projects.

See **GRANT** page 4



The city of Rhinelander plans to revitalize and diversify its tree population with a grant from the DNR and USDA Forest Service. **Submitted photo**

Rhinelanders’ Forth Floral still in bloom after 125 years

BY CHRISTINA BRANDMEIER
EDITOR

On a frigid February morning in Rhinelander, the greenhouse at Forth Floral is a welcoming refuge. Ruth Hempel, the owner, dressed in a pink top and matching scarf, is as bright and cheerful as the flowers she sells as she slides onto a bench in the balmy, light-filled space to discuss her family’s 125th year in business.

As the fourth generation to lead the flower and plant shop on North Brown Street, Hempel is excited to commemorate the milestone with events, giveaways, displays featuring old photos and memorabilia, and more. “Because it’s our 125th, we’re going to celebrate the whole year,” Hempel said. “And we’ll probably have a big to do in the fall.”

In 1900, Hempel’s great-grandparents, Peter and Lena Philipp, started the business as Philipps Greenhouse after they immigrated to Rhinelander from Luxembourg, where Hempel still visits.

“Horticulture was just a big thing from Luxembourg,” Hempel said. “I think they were in the country for about a year before they eventually made their way here. They were outside the Chicago area, where there was a lot of truck farming and vegetable growing.

“They started out growing veg-



Ruth Hempel and her husband Henning are the fourth generation to run Forth Floral, one of Rhinelander’s oldest family-owned businesses. Their daughter, Annika, aims to be the fifth. **Star Journal photo**

etables. My grandma remembered when she was little, taking bunches of radishes and going down to the lumberjack bars, and they would sell radishes to the lumberjacks. But eventually, things got more refined here, and they were able to switch more to flower production.”

In 1928, the Philipps’ daughter and Hempel’s grandmother, Julia, bought the business with her husband, Arthur Forth, and renamed it Forth Floral. The two owned and operated the company into the 1970s and even lived there. Today,

Hempel uses their old house as an office.

Forth Floral was always a part of Hempel’s life growing up. “We lived across the alley, so we ran back and forth,” she recalled. “And they always had a lot of people working here, and it was all like family.”

Hempel’s parents, Leona Forth and Marv Schumacher, joined the business in 1958 and eventually became the third generation to run it.

Finally, in 1989, Hempel and

See **FORTH FLORAL** page 3



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Rhinelanders join anti-Trump protest

Last Wednesday, Feb. 5, protesters gathered outside the Oneida County Courthouse in Rhineland to march against the Donald Trump administration, Elon Musk, and Project 2025. It was said to be part of a nationwide movement, the 50501 Movement — or 50 states, 50 protests, one day — organized on social media. An estimated 30-50 people attended the event. **Dave Melancon photos**



Alzheimer’s Association to host finances workshop

FOR STAR JOURNAL
The Alzheimer’s Association will host a Managing Money workshop Tuesday, Feb. 18, from 1-2:30 p.m. at the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) of Oneida County in Rhineland. The free education workshop will describe how caregiving affects finances, list the legal and financial documents caregivers should put in place, prepare for useful discussions about financial decisions and planning, identify steps to lower the chances of financial abuse and fraud, create a backup plan in case a caregiver can no longer provide care,

and offer resources. “If you or someone you know is facing Alzheimer’s disease, dementia, or another chronic illness, it’s never too early to put financial plans in place,” said Julie St. Pierre from the Alzheimer’s Association. “This workshop provides a general overview for people facing a diagnosis and those who wish to be informed.” To learn more about this program or to register, contact St. Pierre at 715-352-4091 or jstpierre@alz.org. The ADRC of Oneida County is located at 100 W. Keenan St.

Rhinelanders Community Foundation accepting grant applications

FOR STAR JOURNAL
The Rhinelanders Community Foundation (RCF) announced its 2025 annual grant application cycle is open until Feb. 28. Qualified organizations serving the Rhinelanders area are encouraged to apply for funding to support impactful projects and programs that benefit the community. Since its establishment in 2015, RCF has distributed over \$1 million in grants to local organizations. These funds have supported a wide variety of initiatives, addressing both current and emerging needs. In 2024 alone, RCF awarded \$59,337 to 25 organizations dedicated to improving the quality of life in the Rhinelanders area. This annual grant cycle is made possible through the Rhinelanders Community Permanent Endowment Fund and additional non-endowed funds sustained by donations from individuals and businesses within and beyond the local community. By pooling contributions of all sizes, RCF ensures resources are available to address today’s challenges while investing in the future. Grants will be evaluated based on

alignment with RCF’s mission, the community impact of the proposed project, the initiative’s visibility, the population it will serve, the demonstrated need for funding, and the applicant organization’s financial management. Through this process, RCF aims to support projects that advance the foundation’s vision for a thriving Rhinelanders community. Eligible applicants include charitable organizations classified as 501(c)(3) under the Internal Revenue Code, local units of state or national charitable organizations, schools, hospitals, governmental units, and religious institutions offering programs that serve the public. The grant application materials include additional details regarding project eligibility and funding guidelines. RCF’s mission is to facilitate charitable giving and work with donors to enhance the quality of life in Rhinelanders now and for future generations. With a vision of a community reaching its full potential through philanthropy, RCF is committed to supporting initiatives that make a meaningful difference. Grant applications can be accessed at rhinelanderscommunityfoundation.com.



Youth basketball

The Rhinelanders seventh grade boys basketball team took first place in Merrill on Jan. 25. Front row: team members Boston Hopfensperger, Coltyn Anderson, Max Howard, and Carter Bell. Back row: Coach Jason Kremer, Jaxson Kremer, Hans Sommer, Connor Clark, Coach Ted Sommer, Coach Josh Clark. **Submitted photo**

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FORTH FLORAL *from page 1*

her husband, Henning, took the reins and grew Forth Floral into the modern business it is today.

“It’s funny because my husband grew up the same way,” Hempel said. “He came to the United States as an exchange student. He’s born and raised in Germany, and his parents had a greenhouse too.”

Hempel said her parents never pressured her to continue Forth Floral’s legacy, but she always thought she would follow in her family’s footsteps.

“It was always in the back of my mind. I got a degree in horticulture, and after college, I did some jobs in sales and more business-oriented things, but it was always in the horticulture field,” Hempel said.

“So my parents were probably just hoping quietly, but they never put any pressure on us. And we tried to do that with our kids,” she added.

Hempel has three children — two sons and a daughter. Her daughter, Annika, 29, recently moved back to town from Columbus, Ohio, and hopes to take over the family business someday, though she’s tiptoeing into it.

“She doesn’t want to make a big splash,” Hempel said. “She doesn’t want to come in and start taking over; she’s starting as an employee.”

Annika went to the University of Minnesota, has a business degree with a minor in horticulture, and worked for three years on a flower farm in Ohio.

“From a personal perspective, I enjoy this type of work,” Annika said when asked about the possibility of running Forth Floral one day. “So, naturally, I might as well do it with people that I love and for the town that raised me, and hopefully give back to Rhinelander and keep the tradition going.”

Not only has the business stayed in the same family for all these years, but it’s always been run by women.

“It’s always been a daughter coming back to the business, which is really unusual,” Hempel said. “I mean, our husbands have always been involved. But Annika isn’t married yet, so she’s like, ‘I might be breaking that now.’”

While Hempel said she has “a good life,” she admitted that keeping Forth Floral going takes a lot of hard work, and not everything’s always coming up roses.

“Over the years, every generation has faced different challenges in running this business,” Hempel said. “And I think one of the successes is that we’ve kept trying to change with the times. You can’t keep selling the same stuff, or you can’t keep offering the same things. You have to be aware of what’s going on and try to stay up with the trends.”

She added that the 2008 recession was particularly challenging. “That really tested my limits as a business



Forth Floral’s owner, Ruth Hempel, grew up across from the greenhouse. Here she is with her sisters in 1970. Submitted photos



Forth Floral’s greenhouse is open year-round and offers a variety of plants and flowers. Star Journal photo



Julia Philipp Forth, the second generation to run Forth Floral, is pictured in the greenhouse in 1919.

person because I had to reevaluate every aspect and try to squeeze every dollar so that we could keep things going and keep our staff paid. But we made it through that.”

Hempel said she’s driven by the fact that her line of work makes people happy. “I love that there’s something about flowers and plants. It just touches people.”

When asked about the secret to her success, Hempel gets emotional, almost to tears.

“I think the secret is to be grateful,” she said, reflecting. “Honestly, I’m so grateful to the community. We couldn’t be here if the community didn’t support this business. And I’m grateful to our employees. Oh, gosh. I couldn’t do it without the people we work with. And I’m just grateful we’ve been in good health and can keep doing it. So gratitude for every day.”

“It’s not like there’s some magic bullet or that we’re extra special or something. We just show up every day and we keep trying new things and just keep slogging away.”

Next is the business’s biggest holiday – Valentine’s Day.

And this winter, Forth Floral is teaming up with local musician Nate Sheppard to provide a free, family-friendly “Music in the Greenhouse” concert series. Singer-songwriter Will Young is set to perform Saturday, Feb. 22, from 1-3 p.m.

For more information, visit forthfloral.com, call 715-362-7600, or stop by 410 N. Brown St.

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Invasive Species Action Award nominations due Feb. 16

FOR STAR JOURNAL

The Invasive Species Council is accepting nominations for the 21st annual Invasive Species Action Awards through Feb. 16.

Award recipients are Wisconsin residents and organizations who have significantly contributed to preventing, controlling, or eradicating invasive species that harm Wisconsin’s native wildlife, wetlands, forests, prairies, lakes, and rivers.

Nominees can be individuals, groups, or organizations that have demonstrated exemplary efforts to address issues surrounding terrestrial and aquatic invasive species.

The Invasive Species Council, an advisory council to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), presents Invasive Species Action Awards for volunteer and professional categories.

A panel of judges selected by the council will review the nomination materials and select the award winners.

All nominators and winners will be notified in April, followed by an award recognition ceremony in June to celebrate Invasive Species Action Month.

To submit a nomination, download and fill out the form available at dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/invasives/InvasiveSpeciesCouncil.

The deadline for submissions is midnight on Feb. 16.

According to the council, invasive species are non-native plants and animals that cause ecological or economic harm, and some can affect human health. Once an invasive species becomes established in an area, it can be challenging to control.

Wisconsinites are encouraged to protect native plants and wildlife from invasive species by avoiding moving them or the materials that might harbor them to new places.

To learn more about preventing the spread of invasive species, visit dnr.wisconsin.gov.

The Y offers pickleball lessons this month

FOR STAR JOURNAL

The YMCA of the Northwoods in Rhinelander offers a variety of pickleball lessons in February, taught by Certified Pickleball Instructor Kelli Hennessey.

According to the Y, Hennessey has a passion for pickleball and many years of experience teaching group and private lessons in Wisconsin. Her teaching skills and personal interest in her students can benefit pickleball players at all levels.

Levels, dates, and times can be found at ymcaofthenorthwoods.org.

Registration is open to Y members and the general public. Space is limited, and registration is required.

To register, call 715-362-9622.

| DEATH NOTICES |

Michael John Perry, 77 of Rhinelander, died Jan. 30, 2025. Carlson Funeral Home.

Dallas Kelley, 91 of Rhinelander, died Feb. 2, 2025. Carlson Funeral Home.

David Nelson Tolsted, 90 of Rhinelander, died Feb. 3, 2025. Carlson Funeral Home.

Pets of the Month



Meet McKenna!
McKenna is a sweet young girl. Though a bit timid at first, she quickly warms up with treat games and a little patience. McKenna has unfortunately been diagnosed with hip dysplasia. Despite this, she remains a loving and playful companion. We are still learning more about her condition to better support her future family. We recommend a home with older children or adults only, as she might be a bit too shy for younger kids.



Meet Bullet!
Bullet is a very shy and under socialized dog who is looking for a very patient home willing to help him learn what it's like to be a house dog in the Northwoods. Bullet came in with the rest of their litter as adults, so they have had little interaction with the outside world. With patience, persistence, and lots of love, Bullet will adjust to his new life and blossom into a wonderful companion. Life begins NOW for Bullet, and his litter mates are ready to start their journey with the right family.

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Rhineland FBLA students compete at regional competition

FOR STAR JOURNAL

The Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) regionals were held Saturday, Feb. 1, at Edgar High School, where eight Rhinelander students competed against 29 other North and Central Wisconsin schools.

Students could choose various types of events to compete in, such as taking a test on related business topics, including accounting or personal finance, or performing a presentation or speech for events such as desktop publishing or public speaking.

Five came home with a first-place medal: Payton McCue, client services; Kate Ripple, business law; Brody Kowieski, impromptu speaking; Greyson Gremban, financial math; and Kamden Kostrova, computer applications.

In addition, the team of Aidien Ostermann, John Turek, and Michael Schiek, entrepreneurship, took second place; Clara Pudlowski and Caden Ehrhardt, introduction to event planning, third; Luna Grage and Evi Sawyer, marketing,

Front row: Josh Haselton, Sam Caselton, Payton McCue, and Greyson Gremban. Back row: Brody Kowieski, Aidien Ostermann, John Turek, and Michael Schiek. Submitted photo

fourth; and Sam Caselton and Josh Haselton, business management, fifth.

Also competing for Rhinelander were Grant Gremban, Lylah Schroeder, Matthew Carpenter, Skylar Cleveland, and Barak Rappley.

Rhineland FBLA was recognized with a first-place chapter award for outstanding community

service.

Students placing first through third place will compete at the FBLA State Competition March 30-April 1 in Green Bay.

For more information about the FBLA competition or to contribute financially to students competing at the state level, email Chapter Advisor Mishcell Fryar at fryarmis@rhinealnder.k12.wi.us.

Students and Staff of the Month

The January Students and Staff of the Month were recently honored in the library at Rhinelander High School.

Front row: Claire Ourada, Evan Wanta, Hailry Perry, Oliver Doppke, and Myah Kalata. Back row: Parker McCone, Truman Lamers, Luke Roberts, Shawn Denis, and Aidien Umnus. Not able to attend: John Turek. Submitted photo

VA medical center to visit Rhinelander Feb. 12

FOR STAR JOURNAL

The Oscar G. Johnson VA Medical Center will host a town hall for veterans Feb. 12 at 5 p.m. at VFW Post 3143 in Rhinelander.

The stop is part of a three-day tour, running Feb. 12-14, designed to bring VA leadership directly to veterans in five communities, offering face-to-face discussions about healthcare services, benefits, and program updates.

“These aren’t just meetings — they’re a chance for real conversation,” said John P. Shealey, medical center director. “Whether you’re currently enrolled in VA

health care or not, we want to hear from you.”

County veterans service officers will join VA medical center leadership at each stop, ready to answer questions about benefits and services.

Veterans’ family members and community stakeholders are encouraged to attend.

VFW Post 3143 is located at 120 W. Park St.

Additional tour stops include Laona, Phillips, Ironwood, Mich., and Chassell, Mich.

For more information, contact the VA public affairs office at 906-774-3300, ext. 32001.

GRANT from page 1

A replacement will be available for every hazard tree removed on private property, providing there is adequate space, and another will be planted in city-owned greenspace.

Selecting the right tree for the right space will ensure it thrives and doesn’t interfere with utilities such as sewer and power lines.

To apply, email forester@rhinelanderwi.us or call City Forester Tom Jerow at 715-401-1578. All qualifying properties must lie within the city limits of Rhinelander.

The city is also partnering with the Oneida County

Land and Water Conservation Department to plant trees that benefit pollinators. The goal is to balance planting trees that benefit pollinators with the need to plant diverse species.

Trees in cities are multitaskers that reduce energy costs, mitigate air and water pollution, boost housing values, provide wildlife habitat, and even improve community health outcomes.

More information about Rhinelander’s efforts to maintain a healthy and vibrant urban forest will be available at Nicolet College’s Earth Day Sustainability Fair, currently scheduled for Tuesday, April 22, from 3 to 7 p.m.



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Hodag Highlights



Senior Ava Kurilla made a three-point shot on an inbound pass from Vivian Lamers in the second half.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

The Stevens Point Area Senior High (SPASH) Panthers girls basketball team visited the Rhinelander gym Tuesday, Feb. 4, to take on the Hodags, who again were without the services of their point guard Aubryn Clark due to a back injury. SPASH had a height advantage as they have six 5'10" or taller girls, and the Hodags have one in sophomore Lexi Beran.

The Panthers used their height and pressure defense to jump out to an early lead that was never in jeopardy in the game. The Panther coach substituted freely in the second half to give their bench a chance to play, and it gave the Hodags a chance to play longer without going to run time.

The Panthers led at the half 30-15 and only outscored the Hodags in the second 24-23 to make the final score 38-54 in favor of the Panthers.

Vivian Lamers led the way for the Hodags with 12 points, the only Hodag in double figures.

On Friday, Feb. 7, the girls defeated conference foe Tomahawk 52-32 on Senior Night.



Alexis Smith placed first on the vault and third in the all-around.



Senior Wendy Fronk prepares for her dismount on the beam. Fronk's second-place finish on the beam and first on the floor helped her to place second in the all-around.

GYMNASTICS

The gymnastics team hosted its only home conference meet against Antigo at the YMCA of the Northwoods Tuesday, Feb. 4.

It was Senior Night, and the Hodags came away with a win by outscoring Antigo 114.425 to 112.225.

Wendy Fronk, a senior, won the floor exercise and placed second on the beam and fourth on the vault. Her scores earned her an all-around score of 28.650, good for second place.

Alexis Smith was third in the all-around, winning the vault with a score of 8.450.

Addison Fish placed second on the bars, and Samantha Aschenbrenner placed second on the floor and third on the bars to add to the winning score.

GIRLS HOCKEY

The Northland Pines girls hockey team played at the Rhinelander Ice Arena (RIA) to honor the two seniors on the team from Rhinelander. Mia Tulowitzky and Emalee Detienne were introduced between the first two periods and were on the ice with their parents.

The Fox Cities Stars girls hockey team, consisting of girls from 13 different schools around Appleton, traveled to the RIA for the game.

The Stars scored their first goal two minutes and 18 seconds into the game and went on to score 10 more and defeat Pines 11-0.

The Pines co-op has four girls from Rhinelander playing: seniors Tulowitzky, Detienne, junior Jalyn Zadnik, and sophomore Reese Retallick.



Rhinelander players together after the game: Jalyn Zadnik, Mia Tulowitzky, Reese Retallick, and Emalee Detienne.



Senior Mia Tulowitzky and her parents, Melanie and Shane Tulowitzky.



Senior Emalee Detienne and her parents, Julie and Steve Detienne.

BOYS HOCKEY

On Thursday, Feb. 6, the Kingsford Flivvers hockey team came to the Rhinelander Ice Arena to play the Hodags on Senior Night. All five seniors, Zach Edyvean, Karter Massey, Timber Cronauer, Nathan Cordy, and Van Tulowitzky, started for the Hodags.

The first period ended with the Hodags down 1-0, and at the end of the second, the score was 4-0. In the third period, the Hodags had several chances to score but could not put the puck in the back of the net. The defense and goalie, Asher Rivord, played well and kept the Flivvers from scoring, but they could not tally a goal and lost 4-0.

On Friday, the team traveled to Ashland and again came up empty, losing another game 4-0.

Senior Karter Massey took a shot that was blocked early in the game.



A loose puck in front of the Hodag net was eventually cleared away from the net by #17 Jackson Turek.

WRESTLING

The Lakeland High School field house was the site of the conference wrestling meet on Saturday, Feb. 8.

The Hodags entered the meet with nine of the 14 weight classes filled. The team was hoping to have a good showing and did have one champion in Reid Schultz in the 285 lb. class, and second place went to Logan Schwinger at 175 lbs.

Third-place finishes went to Avrom Barr, Anthony Boldt, Dresden Klaver, and Jeffrey Dupree, earning them honorable mention all-conference. Schultz was first team all-conference and Schwinger was second team.



These wrestlers earned all-conference recognition on Saturday at the conference meet in Minocqua. Avrom Barr, Anthony Boldt, Dresden Klaver, and Jeffrey Dupree earned honorable mention, Logan Schwinger earned second team all-conference, and Reid Schultz was a conference champion.

SWIMMING

The Heck Community Pool was the site of the Great Northern Conference swim meet Friday, Feb. 7.

The Hodags were set to win the seventh conference trophy in a row. The team was up to the task, winning all 11 events. In the process, seven conference records and four pool records were set.

In the 100-yard freestyle, Senior Samson Shinnars broke the conference record with his time of 48.61 but was out touched by teammate Mathias Fugle with a 48.43 set in 2016.

The seniors shined in the meet as Shawn Denis and Fugle each were part of two record-breaking relays and two individual record-setting events.

Shinnars was a member of two relays and had his dual record-breaking time in the 200-yard freestyle, swimming it in 1:47.00, eclipsing the pool record set in 1992 and the conference record in 2015.

The Hodags scored 463 points, with Tomahawk in second place with 235 points.

Rhinelander next swims in the sectional meet Saturday, Feb. 15, in Ashwaubenon.



Swimmers who were individuals or members of a relay that broke records on Friday were front, Charlie Antonuk, Judson O'Malley, Dolan O'Malley, Shawn Denis, and Dean Gillingham. Back row: Mathias Fugle and Samson Shinnars.

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