



Boys basketball
page 14

Don't miss it!
BENTON *AG*
Section B

Sauk Rapids HERALD

2 Second Ave. S., Suite 135, Sauk Rapids, MN 56379

Saturday, January 6, 2024

Vol. 169, No. 40

Same Local Coverage Since 1855.

County seeks federal funds for park project

Bike, pedestrian trail would link Rice, Bend in the River park

BY TIM HENNAGIR
STAFF WRITER

Benton County will submit a funding application for a future \$300,000 separated bike and pedestrian trail linking Rice with Bend in the River Regional Park in Watab Township.

Commissioners approved two required resolutions to support the federal funding application during a Jan. 2 meeting.

Benton County will act as project sponsor and has agreed to operate and maintain the trail for the duration of its useful life.

County administrator Montgomery Headley said if approved, federal funding would be available in 2028 and take the form of a Transportation Alternative Project grant.

The TAP grants require a 20% match, Headley said. The county's estimated cost would be \$60,000.

The trail is a high-priority project in the city of Rice's park plan and the county's new master plan for Bend in the River Regional Park, Headley said.

The county's deadline for submitting a funding application is Jan. 12.

"In 2021, we applied for this grant through the Minnesota Department of Transportation," Headley said.

Pedestrian trail
page 4



Mild winter eases snow plowing budget pressure

Crews focus instead on tree trimming, other maintenance

BY TIM HENNAGIR
STAFF WRITER

City, county and state snow removal crews do not have downtime. A mild winter means a shift in focus.

When snow does not fly, tree trimming, pothole patching and other maintenance fills their schedules.

"If we have 3-5 inches of snow, and I call our plow drivers, everybody goes out," said Pete Eckhoff, Sauk Rapids' director of public works. "This winter, we haven't had everybody out because we haven't had a substantial snowfall. I've been able to cover things with five street department guys."

Oh, what a difference a year makes when it comes to moving fallen snowflakes.

Snow plowing
page 2



PHOTO BY TIM HENNAGIR

Mark Ebnet, Benton County's public works and highway maintenance superintendent, checks out the county's salt stockpile Jan. 3 at the Benton County Public Works and Highway facility at 7752 Highway 25 NE in Foley. Ebnet said he recently ordered 500 tons of salt to pad the 200 to 300 tons in storage. (Above) Pete Eckhoff, Sauk Rapids' director of public works, checks a plow blade edge on a 1992 Ford L9000 truck Jan. 3 inside the city's public works building at 360 Summit Ave. N. in Sauk Rapids. Last November and December, the city reported 19 snow events that required either salting, plowing or a combination of the two tasks.

Sauk Rapids Police Department takes GPS tracking to next level

BY TIM HENNAGIR
STAFF WRITER

The Sauk Rapids Police Department is taking GPS tracking of its officers and squads to the next level.

City leaders approved a request Dec. 11 to purchase four subscriptions with St. Cloud-based GeoComm, a national communications engineering, geographic information and software development company. The subscriptions cost \$16,500.

GeoComm is best known for systems that route emergency calls to the appropriate call center and map the caller's location on call taker or dispatcher maps.

GPS technology guides emergency responders to the scene of an accident or law enforcement incident on mobile displays within police, fire and ambulance vehicles.

Police chief Perry Beise's background about squad and staff tracking capabilities was presented Dec. 11, 2023, by Mayor Kurt Hunstiger as a consent agenda item.

Benton County and Sauk Rapids have been working with GeoComm to implement a new global positioning satellite tracking solution for the city's police squad cars.

Beise reported that the solution was implemented last month and is enabling Benton County dispatchers to determine squad car locations.

Beise reported police staff are taking the GPS tracking solution to a higher level by obtaining the ability to monitor the location of police officers in each squad car.

Police cars page 3

PUBLIC NOTICES

- Minden Township Notice of Filing - pg. 7B
- Benton County Board of Commissioners Minutes, Dec. 19 - pg. 6B and 7B
- City of Sauk Rapids Ord. No. 15 - pg. 10
- Benton County 'SCORE' Grant Notice - pg. 7B
- Summons - pg. 7B

OBITUARIES

Hurley F. Hommerding
Edward Luebesmier
Odele M. Maciej
Joyce C. Saldana



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Snow plowing from front

For example, during the first week of January 2023, Eckhoff and his plow drivers were dealing with three consecutive snow removal events.

During the months of

November and December 2023 the city reported 19 snow events that required either salting, plowing or a combination of the two tasks, Eckhoff said.

This year, he reported four events that required

salting and one plow event that required street department arterial plowing.

Eckhoff has worked for the city of Sauk Rapids for 19 years. Prior to that, he worked in St. Cloud for 12 years.

"I try and wait until just before a storm wraps up before sending out our plows," he said. "We don't run multiple shifts down the same stretch of road like the Minnesota Department of Transportation. We plow arterials first, then filter out through the neighborhoods. It takes eight hours to plow everything."

The straight grid pattern of city streets is the easiest to plow, Eckhoff said.

Roundabouts are much more plow-intensive. A major snowstorm also means downed signs in the circular traffic control structures.

"People hit them and mow them down," Eckhoff said. "If we aren't plowing or hauling snow or salting streets, we'll trim trees. My guys are working right now on Second Avenue taking trees down there."

Snow plowing
page 3

BURGER BATTLE

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SALT VS. SAND

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Loses effectiveness as temps drop

Keeps snow "workable" so it is easier to remove

Increases traction

Used in extreme cold when salt is less effective

Primarily used at intersections and ramps



GRAPHIC COURTESY MNDOT

This Minnesota Department of Transportation infographic shows the important differences between salt and sand, two common materials that are used for winter road treatment. Each year on average, MnDOT District 3 responds to 25 snow and ice events, clearing an average annual accumulation of 77.2 inches.

January 2 through February 29 Adult & Teen Winter Reading Challenge

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Snow plowing

from page 2

Chris Byrd, Benton County's engineer and public works director, is thankful for the mild winter.

Near-record snowfall from January through April 2023 put a severe strain on the county snow removal budget.

"By last April, we had pretty much used up our snowplowing budget," Byrd said. "If we would have had a normal November and start getting more snow in December, we would have been over our budget."

The county budgeting cycle for snow removal runs from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31 in a given year, Byrd said.

During that time frame, winter starts the year and ends the year. Byrd's goal is to have only spent approximately half of his snowplow-related budget by the time spring arrives.

That wasn't the case last year, he said.

"In 2023, we had used up almost 100% of our snowplowing budget by April and still had the rest of the year to go," Byrd said. "We are really thankful that we didn't have a normal fall and start of winter."

511MN.ORG

WHERE ARE THE SNOWPLOWS?

800

SNOWPLOWS STATEWIDE

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Snowplow routes: 40+ miles long
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If you're stuck in traffic, so are the snowplows.
Drove 20 miles and didn't see a plow? They might be just out of sight, ahead or behind you.

Minnesota Department of Transportation snowplows cover a lot of lane miles each winter. MnDOT snowplows also protect lanes of traffic to allow for other work to be done safely during the year.

Benton County's public works and highway maintenance superintendent Mark Ebnet said that earlier this week he ordered 500 tons of salt to pad the 200 to 300 tons currently in storage.

"I like to hold 800 tons of salt in reserve, so we have something for the following season," Ebnet said. "Our reserve saved us last spring. The docks

will run out of contracted salt. Trucking it is a major cost."

Anne Meyer, communications and media relations coordinator with MnDOT's District 3 in Baxter, reported seven snow events district-wide since winter's start.

Some truck stations, especially in the northern part of the district, have seen more activity,

between 10 to 12 snow events so far this season, Meyer said.

"Yes, we've used plows and plow drivers already — this past weekend we had plows out statewide due to snow and slick conditions," Meyer said.

MnDOT's budget is based on a July 1 to June 30 fiscal year, so this allows an entire winter season to be included in a single budget. There is no split between two years.

MnDOT does various work all season long: pot-hole patching, guardrail fixes and sign replacement.

"Our snowplows also protect lanes of traffic to allow for other work to be done safely," Meyer said.

District 3 currently has 110 snow removal trucks and 437 full-time employees.

Each year on average, it responds to 25 snow and ice events, clearing an average annual snow accumulation of 77.2 inches.

Police cars from front

In order to accomplish this, the Sauk Rapids Police Department needed to purchase four concurrent and shared GeoComm Maps Outside User subscriptions.

Supervisors can quickly learn the location of law enforcement co-workers or safety needs and determine at the patrol officer level who is closest to a call for service.

City council members approved a five-year agreement with GeoComm at an annual cost of \$3,330.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

The What's Happening section of the Sauk Rapids Herald features free and public meetings and events taking place throughout the year. Each year in January, we renew this list to ensure meetings and events are listed at current dates and times. Community members who would like information included in this section should email details to natasha@saukherald.com.

Meetings, fundraisers and events that charge a fee must first be advertised with Star Publications before appearing in this section.

Monday, Jan. 8, 6 p.m. — **Sauk Rapids City Council Meeting.** Sauk Rapids Government Center, 250 Summit Ave. N., Sauk Rapids.

Monday, Jan. 8, 6 p.m. — **Rice City Council Meeting.** Rice City Hall, 205 E. Main St., Rice.

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 10 a.m. to noon — **Living Waters Lutheran Church Food Shelf Distribution.** Living Waters Lutheran Church, 1911 Fourth Ave. N., Sauk Rapids. If in need of emergency food assistance, call 320-255-1135.

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 7 p.m. — **Watab Township Supervisors Meeting.** Watab Town Hall, 660 75th St. NW, Sauk Rapids.

Tuesday, Jan. 9, 7-9 p.m. — **St. Cloud Area Singing Saints Men's Acapella Chorus Practice.** Meets every Tuesday. New participants welcome. Good Shepherd Community Chapel, 325 11th St. N., Sauk Rapids.

Wednesday, Jan. 10, 1 p.m. — **League of Women Voters St. Cloud Area Monthly Meeting.** Featuring the topic "Current Perspectives on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion." Meeting via Zoom. For more information, visit www.lwvsca.org.

Thursday, Jan. 11, 10:30-11:30 a.m. — **Preschoolers Play and Learn Workshop.** Activities designed for ages 1-5. No registration but room limits may be enforced. Great River Regional Library-St. Cloud, 1300 W. St. Germain St., St. Cloud.

Thursday, Jan. 11, 1-3 p.m. — **Career Force.** Job searching services include resume reviews, interest assessments, career exploration and other job assistance. Great River Regional Library, 1300 W. St. Germain St., St. Cloud.

Thursday, Jan. 11, 6-7 p.m. — **Between the Covers Book Discussion.** Discuss the book, "Dragon Teeth," by Michael Crichton. For adults and teens. Great River Regional Library-St. Cloud, 1300 W. St. Germain St., St. Cloud.

Thursday, Jan. 11, 7 p.m. — **Alcoholics Anonymous Meeting.** Meets weekly. Shepherd of the Pines Lutheran Church, 1950 125th St. NW, Rice. For more information, call 320-293-9213.

Thursday, Jan. 11, 7 p.m. — **Alcoholics Anonymous Meeting.** Meets weekly. Living Waters Lutheran Church, 1950 125th St. NW, Rice. For more information, call 320-293-9213.

Thursday, Jan. 11, 7-8 p.m. — **Al-Anon Meeting.** Help and hope for families and friends of alcoholics. Meets weekly. Living Waters Lutheran Church, 1911 Fourth Ave. N., Sauk Rapids.

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SNOWPLOW STATS

15x heavier than an average car
300 trucks equipped with plow cams
800 MnDOT snowplows
1,600+ snowplow drivers
30,000 lane miles of state highways and interstates

This Minnesota Department of Transportation infographic provides a visual summary of snowplow-related winter statistics. MnDOT's District 3 in Baxter currently has 110 snow removal trucks.

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Sauk Rapids council approves engineering hourly rate schedule

BY TIM HENNAGIR | STAFF WRITER

Sauk Rapids will pay an average of 8% more for hourly engineering this year. Short Elliott Hendrickson Inc.'s rate schedule was approved by city leaders Dec. 11, 2023.

Client services manager and city engineer Scott Hedlund's rate information was presented by Mayor Kurt Hunstiger as a consent agenda item, which was unanimously approved by city council members.

SEH's hourly rate schedule lists positions and dollar ranges for key city of Sauk Rapids engineering services such as senior project managers, architects, land surveyors, technicians and surveyors.

In 2023, SEH presented a 3.9% percent increase for hourly rates at the top end of those and other engineering service ranges.

Hedlund addressed the current 8% increase in a cover letter to council.

The new rates for the city of Sauk Rapids became effective Jan. 1 and will remain in place until Dec. 31.

Cities and private businesses continue to struggle with many of the same issues, Hedlund wrote.

Those issues include attracting and retaining talent, high medical insurance rates, significant inflationary effects, replacing equipment and keeping current with technology.

Hedlund stated those factors had a bearing on how SEH determined its rate schedule for engineering services for the city.

"We recognize the need to address these issues, provide top-quality service and remain competitive in the industry," Hedlund wrote.

The company's design fees for standard municipal improvement projects that are based on a percentage of the average construction bids will not increase, Hedlund said.

SEH serves local government, regional and state agencies, federal agencies, and industrial, commercial and private-sector clients.

Hedlund works in St. Cloud. The company's headquarters are based in St. Paul.

Pedestrian trail from front

Benton County acquired right-of-way for the trail when reclamation work was done on County Road 55.

Headley said the county would not have to come up with matching funds until 2028, and that he received a letter of support from Julie Fandel, Rice city clerk.

That letter, dated Jan. 2, was sent to Jeff Lenz, a MnDOT District 3 engineering specialist and program coordinator based in Baxter.

Bend in the River Regional Park is more than a mile south of Rice. Getting there by walking or biking requires using a high-speed county highway with narrow shoulders, Fandel wrote.

Fandel confirmed citizens named the project a top regional park and trail priority in 2017 when the city updated its comprehensive plan.

"Thank you for considering the county's funding request," she wrote. "Our residents say they would enjoy being able to walk or bike safely to the county

park. Bend in the River is truly a beautiful place."

Commissioner Steve Heinen asked about the county assuming total responsibility for the trail.

Headley said the county would try mirror the agreement it has with Sauk Rapids for trail maintenance.

"Because this trail falls entirely within the city limits of Rice, we would ask the city to be responsible for a certain level of maintenance," Headley said. "We are probably not going to snowplow the trails inside the park because they are gravel, and it's a rural park. Whether or not the city snowplows is its choice."

Board chair Jared Gapinski said the county would not have any sort of maintenance agreement in place by the Jan. 12 application deadline.

Gapinski said Benton County would bring the issue up with the city of Rice in future discussions.

Commissioner Ed Popp motioned to support a resolution for the county to act as project sponsor and provide matching funds and a resolution agreeing to operate and maintain the trail for the duration of its useful life.

Both motions were seconded by Commissioner Scott Johnson and unanimously approved.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION CORNER

Craft Club Fridays

This monthly gathering is designed for individuals aged 55 years and above who have a passion for crafting and want to connect with fellow craft enthusiasts. Bring any projects and supplies from home and share ideas, gain inspiration and foster new friendships. Light refreshments provided. Registration is free, but register in advance for each monthly class you are able to attend. 2024 meetings Jan. 19, Feb. 23, March 22, April 19 and May 17. Nov. 17 and Dec. 15.

Friday, Jan. 19, 10 a.m. to noon — Sauk Rapids Government Center, 250 Summit Ave. N., Sauk Rapids.

Cribbage Club Fridays

Love playing cribbage and want to meet like-minded enthusiasts. Bring your cribbage board and cards to partake in a morning of friendly competition and camaraderie. Light refreshments provided. Registration is free, but register in advance for each monthly class you are able to attend. 2024 meetings Jan. 5, Feb. 2, March 15, April 5 and May 3.

Friday, Feb. 2, 10 a.m. to noon — Sauk Rapids Government Center, 250 Summit Ave. N., Sauk Rapids.

To register or for more information on programs and costs, contact Sauk Rapids-Rice Community Education at www.isd47.org/ce or 320-258-1577.

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Official newspaper of Benton County, the cities of Sauk Rapids and Rice and Independent School District 47

The deadline for most news and advertisements in the Sauk Rapids Herald is 5 p.m. Wednesday. Exceptions are obituaries which have a deadline of 10 a.m. Thursday.

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Letters to the editor are welcomed. Letters must be signed with first and last name and include address and phone number. Letters should be 350 words or less. The political letters to the editor policy can be found online under "Contact Us."

Corrections/Clarifications: The Sauk Rapids Herald strives for accuracy. If you would like to report a factual error, call 320-251-1971.

Advertising: Star Publications staff have no authority to bind this newspaper and only publication of an advertisement shall constitute final acceptance of the advertiser's order.

OBITUARIES

Joyce C. Saldana

Joyce C. Saldana was born in Sartell to Clarence and Pearl (Doucette) Smitten Nov. 11, 1929. She passed away Dec. 17, 2023, at The Good Shepherd Community in Sauk Rapids. Joyce married Peter Saldana in San Francisco, California, in 1947. They lived in Sartell until 1963, and then moved to rural Sauk Rapids. After retirement, Peter and Joyce became snowbirds in Arizona. Joyce moved permanently to Tucson, Arizona, after Peter died in 1994. She returned to Minnesota in 2021 and moved to The Good Shepherd apartments in



Joyce C. Saldana

December 2022.

Joyce is survived by her children Michelle (Ray) Ratasky, Jeanne Reiter, Anne (Charles) Ogletree, Jonelle Saldana (Mike Konz), Peter Daniel Saldana (Shanda) and Nona (Brian) Ewell; son-in-law Dan Guemmer;

grandchildren Jennifer, Mike, Michele, Marcia, Casey, LaDonna, Jared, Angela, Ben, Jocelyn, Myles, Brandon, Evan, Gianna and Luke; great and great-great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews, relatives and friends as well as her beloved cat Lily Buttons.

She was preceded in death by her parents; husband Peter; children Georgia Weyer, Christine Guemmer and Amy; son-in-laws William Reiter and Leonardo Weyer; her only sister Sue Galarneault; and grandson Mark Reiter.

Mom taught us many things over the years: a love of cooking, a love of

animals, a fierce love of family and forgiveness, even if we didn't always agree.

Mom enjoyed cooking, knitting, reading, coloring, RFD TV and snuggling with her cat.

Special thanks to Centra Care Hospice and the staff at Good Shepherd Sunny Lake.

Mass of Christian Burial will be Friday, Jan. 26, at Annunciation Church in Mayhew Lake. Visitation at 10:30 a.m., Mass at 11:30 a.m. Inurnment immediately following Mass in the parish cemetery. Memorials preferred.

R-1-1P

Benton County commissioners

approve fee schedule

Department heads summarize key changes for new year

BY TIM HENNAGIR | STAFF WRITER

Benton County residents will pay more for conditional use permits, fingerprints collected by the sheriff's office and electronic data supplied by the attorney's office.

Those fee schedule changes and others were presented during a Dec. 19, 2023, public hearing prior to county board approval of Benton County's 2024 fee schedule.

The new fees became effective Jan. 1.

Each year, county department heads are asked to review and possibly update various fees for presentation at the final board meeting of the year, said county administrator Montgomery Headley.

Roxanne Achman, land services director, shared the following planning and zoning, assessor and recorder changes: Variance application fees increased from \$354 to \$554 plus recording fee; conditional use permits increased from \$354 to \$454 plus recording fee and interim use permits changed from \$354 to \$454 plus a recording fee. Assessing fees per hour have increased from \$45 to \$50 this year.

Monthly index computer printout fees changed from \$20 plus \$0.25 per page to \$20 plus \$0.50 per page, and single-use service fees changed from a \$5 one-time charge plus \$1 per page to a \$5 one-time charge plus \$0.50 per page. Achman also reported the county's removal of a previously charged \$20 felony name change fee.

Sheriff Troy Heck presented the following

fee schedule changes: Fingerprinting changed from \$10 to \$15, civil process changed from \$50 to \$75; added civil standby at \$75 per hour for any requests longer than 15 minutes; writ of execution changed from \$50 to \$75, writ of execution commission changed from 4% of total to 4.5% of total and writ of execution not found changed from \$50 to \$75.

Heck also reported added copies of writ of execution now cost \$5 and eviction changed from \$50 to \$75.

Auditor-treasurer Christine Scherbing shared one fee change. The county's tobacco retail license fee increased from \$125 to \$150.

Human services director Sandi Shoberg shared several fee changes. Her department has removed its legally licensed family daycare fee, child care licensing inspection fee and child care licensing renewal inspection fee — set at \$100 every other year.

Headley shared attorney's office fee schedule changes on behalf of county attorney Karl Schmidt: Electronic data supplied on a DVD now costs \$5 and electronic data on a 64 GB USB drive now costs \$25.

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Odele M. Maciej

Mass of Christian Burial was Jan. 4, 2024, at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Rice for Odele M. Maciej, age 86, of Rice, who died Dec. 31, 2023, at her home. The Rev. Glen Krystosek and the Rev. David Maciej celebrated and burial was in the parish cemetery.

Odele was born Aug. 7, 1937, in Elmdale to Anthony and Monica (Kaiser) Schlichting. She married Ernest Maciej in Elmdale on May 5, 1958. Odele was a housekeeper at Super 8 in St. Cloud for many years, retiring



Odele M. Maciej

in 1997. She also worked at Sauk Rapids-Rice Public Schools for many years. She was a member of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church where she assisted with funeral lunches, bake

sales and church bazaars. Odele enjoyed gardening, canning, crafts, campfires, meat raffles, polka music, playing cards and dice (knowing that the double and triple pots were hers). She was an energetic, fun, strong-willed, independent lady, who was a mom to everyone.

Survivors include her children Jeanne Borgmann of Wilmington, North Carolina, Linda (Blair) Morey of St. Cloud, Dale (Angie Hines) Maciej of Brainerd; grandchildren Anthony, Jake, Sara, Christine, Samantha,

Grant, Zachary, Nicholas, Tyler, Alexander and Joshua; great-grandchildren Jayden, Lauren, Alivia, Brianna and Kylie; brothers Gerald of Rice and Robert (Barb) of Bemidji. She was preceded in death by her parents; spouse, Ernest in 2003; sons David, Michael, Gary and Kevin; and brother Dennis Schlichting.

In lieu of flowers, memorials are preferred.

Obituary, guest book and video tribute available online at www.williamsdingmann.com.

R-1-1B

Hurley F. Hommerding

Mass of Christian Burial was Jan. 3, 2024, at Annunciation Catholic Church in Mayhew Lake for Hurley Hommerding, age 83, who passed away at the St. Cloud Hospital. The Rev. Thomas Knobloch officiated and entombment was at Hilltop Mausoleum in Sauk Rapids.

Hurley was born Aug. 24, 1940, in St. Cloud to Anton and Catherine (Jones) Hom-



Hurley F. Hommerding

merding. He married Mary Pappenfus Sept. 13, 1969, at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Sauk

Rapids. Hurley worked as a truck driver for Saldana and also drove van for Rice Elementary School students. He was a member of Annunciation Catholic Church in Mayhew Lake. Hurley was a hard-worker, and enjoyed trips to the casino, fishing, putzing in the shed, boating, lake life and spending time with family.

Survivors include his wife Mary of Sauk Rapids; daughters Lisa Hommerding of Rice

and Robin (Jeff) Petron of Rice; grandchildren Toni, Brandon, Adrian, Brady and Carter; and great-grandchildren Alayni and Bryxtyn. He was preceded in death by his parents; son Rick on March 27, 2010; brothers Sonny, Harold, and Quinton; and sisters Lavonne Buttweiler and Mary Kay Thompson.

Obituary, guest book and video tribute available online at www.williamsdingmann.com.

R-1-1B

Edward "Eddie" Luebesmier, Jr.

Celebration of Life will be 4-8 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 11, 2024, at Williams Dingmann Family Funeral Home in Sauk Rapids for Edward Luebesmier, age 84, who passed away Dec. 30, 2023 at Glenwood Retirement Village. There will be a prayer service at 7:30 p.m. at the funeral home in Sauk Rapids.

Eddie was born Sept. 26, 1939, in St. Cloud to Edward and Alvina (Buersken) Luebesmier. He married



Edward "Eddie" Luebesmier, Jr.

Ramona "Mona" Steichen Nov. 28, 1961, at St. Mary's Cathedral in St. Cloud. The couple lived in St. Cloud all their life where they

raised three children. Eddie was a truck driver for Consolidated Enterprises, MTW, Landy Packing and retired from Hardrives in 2004. He also worked as a heavy equipment operator and mechanic. Eddie was a hard worker and a member of the 49ers Union.

Survivors include his daughter Cheryl (Steven) Sweeter of St. Cloud; sons Robert (Carrie) of Melrose and David (Meghan) of St. Augusta; brothers Melvin of St. Cloud and Jim of California;

grandchildren Brandon, Tyler and Lucy. Ed was preceded in death by his parents; wife Mona on June 17, 2023; grandson Joseph; brothers Francis "Franky," Ervin, Vernon and Donald.

In lieu of flowers, memorials are preferred.

A special thank you to Glacial Ridge Health Care System and Glenwood Retirement Village for all the wonderful care provided to Eddie.

Obituary, guest book and video tribute available online at www.williamsdingmann.com.

R-1-1B

Weird winter weather trend has presidential link

The Minnesota State Climatology Office recently released voting results for the top five weather-related events of 2023. The top vote-getter has a presidential link.

Before revealing that interesting bit of trivia, here are the other four entries:

No. 5 — “Big mess” snowstorm clobbers Minnesota (Jan. 2-5, 2023): The new year greeted Minnesota with a large, messy winter storm as a concoction of heavy snow, freezing rain, sleet, rain and thunderstorms pounded parts of the state. The storm produced widespread accumulations of over 1 foot, with 15.1 inches for a storm total in the Twin Cities metro area, making it the 14th-largest snowstorm on record since 1884.

No. 4 — The drought of 2023: For the third year in a row, significant drought conditions developed. Interestingly, this series of annual droughts ebbed and flowed, with different parts of the state being the epicenter of the drought. The year 2023 was no exception.

No. 3 — Smoky skies in May and June: Smoke from wildfires affected Minnesota again in spring and summer 2023. On May 18, a Canadian cold front ushered in a mass of thick smoke that caused air to be in the “unhealthy” category. This event was eclipsed by a June 14 event that landed Minnesota the unhealthiest air quality listing in the country.

No. 2 — Very wet (and snowy) winter: A pattern of persistent storminess from December 2022 through February 2023 brought record precipitation to parts of Minnesota. Rochester had its wettest meteorological winter on record. St. Cloud and the Twin Cities metro area had their second wettest winter, and Duluth had its third wettest winter on record. Looking at the entire winter from October to April, Duluth had its snowiest winter since record keeping began at the airport with a whopping 140.1 inches.

No. 1 — Where’s December? After Halloween, winter weather decided to go missing in action for the rest of 2023. The year just passed appears to rival the champion of warm Decembers. That occurred in 1877 when Rutherford B. Hayes was president. Fast forward to 2023, when a strong El Nino and the lack of snow cover boosted average temperatures about 10 degrees above normal through Dec. 22, 2023. Just like in 1877, residents peered to the skies waiting for the “other shoe to drop.”

Here’s a quick hit of Rutherford-related trivia to exit this column before the snow starts flying again and the urge to oust the columnist-turned messenger passes.

Hayes took office amid a constitutional crisis and left office defending his reputation.

He died Jan. 17, 1893. During the American Civil War, Hayes served in the Union Army and earned a reputation for bravery in combat.

Hayes won the Republican nomination for president in the 1876 United States presidential election and faced Democratic nominee Samuel J. Tilden.

In one of the most contentious elections in U.S. history, Hayes lost the popular vote to Tilden and neither candidate secured enough electoral votes.

According to the U.S. Constitution, if no candidate wins the Electoral College, the House of Representatives selects the president.

Hayes secured a victory when a congressional commission awarded him 20 contested electoral votes in the Compromise of 1877.

The electoral dispute was resolved with a backroom deal whereby both Southern Democrats and Whiggish Republican businessmen acquiesced to Hayes’ election.

They did so on the condition that Hayes end both federal support for reconstruction and the military occupation in the former Confederate States.

Biographer Ari Hoogenboom has written that Hayes’ greatest achievement was to restore popular faith in the presidency and to reverse the deterioration of executive power that established itself after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln in 1865.

Hayes is little remembered in the United States, but he is treated as a national hero in one nation: Paraguay. Hayes agreed to negotiate a long-held border dispute between Argentina and Paraguay, and the decision gave Paraguay 60% of its land.



FROM THE DOGHOUSE
BY TIM HENNAGIR

The views expressed by our columnists are the opinions and thoughts of the author and do not reflect the opinions and views of newspaper staff and ownership.



O my soul, moves to awe and wonder

“Lament is usually a surprising personal discovery,” said the Rev. Mark Vroegop, pastor and author.

In “Dark Clouds Deep Mercy,” Vroegop explains that we usually do not seek out lament, but rather lament finds us.

Lament is a passionate expression of grief or sorrow, and the surprising nature of lament to most Christians is that in lament, there is grace to complain. And disunity, often causes complaint.

Has something awful happened in your circumstances? A lost job, loved one or marriage? Maybe you know someone who is hurting. Grumbling and complaining can grow in us a root of bitterness. Lament, however, moves us from complaining into trust.

As I have been journaling this season and grieving losses, I found that when I read the Psalms, it felt like the authors took pages out of my journal. How can this be? That’s when you know that lament has found you.

I purchased “Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy” as a way to continue learning how to restore joy. What I found was that naturally, my cries and pleas to the Lord that I was journaling were moving into trust and prayer before purchasing the book. All praise to God.

Vroegop uses the Psalms to create an outline for lamenters to practice moving into trust: Turn, complain, ask and trust. These are common themes we can see in almost every Psalm. It’s not common for anyone to see or hear your lament, but I will give you one of mine in hopes it will help those who benefit by example — as I did when Vroegop provided one of his laments to his readers.

Turn: Jesus, O my soul cries out to you, for there is no other that has the ability to save me. You are in control.

Complain: I was dreary in the depriving desert. Repeatedly I ran to you, filled up in your word, allowed it to direct my steps, then headed back into the wilderness. Dust whipped into my face and my mouth was parched dry with no water in sight. Cold, with arms tired from clenching covering tighter to me, I leaked out that I was waning. Friends told me to survive. They buffeted me to count it all joy that I was suffering, asked discouraging questions and then accused me of sin when I was merely sad. You know I sought you if any of this was true, Lord, and if it interested you? Repent, repent, lower, lower and lower



LIFE BY FAITH
BY MERCY NYGAARD

I descended. They continued their accusations and at last, I clapped my hand to my mouth toward them.

Ask: Why do you choose to harden hearts and soften others, and why do you allow the arrows to pass through your fingers? I beg you to give me strength to continue to love. What do you want me to do?

Trust: I will remember your wonders. I will sing of your mercies. I will cling to you and your every word. I will forgive those for they know not

what they do. I will follow the truth — your truth, and not go into the labyrinth the enemy lays out. I will continue to ask you to show me what interests you. There were those who walked slowly with me, offering water from their limited supply as everyone has personal trials. Their water came directly from you, our source of life-giving water. Only those with the light and life of Jesus can give life that points directly to your glory. Recognizing I’ve tasted and seen that the Lord is good, this water from life-giving friends was familiar. They didn’t point to their gifts, criticism, or anything other than you. In you I have put my trust.

Lament moves us forward to acceptance in trusting. Without it, we are stuck in the dusty desert. Lament helps us see what we learn through loss: God’s glory is worth every trial, and we come out stronger as the dark clouds part. It is a cautious strength, however, knowing that more trials lay ahead in this sojourning venture of life on earth. God strengthens us for what lies ahead, because God never promises that following Jesus will be full of earthly prosperity and comfort, but rather full of picking up our cross and continually dying to advance the good news of Jesus. Jesus’ our savior, rescues us from the grip of the enemy and gives us eternal life with him in heaven. This obliterates gun-shyness.

Unity is loving others and helping others walk in the light, so that we may have fellowship with each other and so that the watching world will know that we are Jesus’ disciples by how we love one another. The more unknown and pain 2023 revealed, the clearer I saw the importance for all in learning our purpose to glorify God — his word as our authority, Jesus as the only light and life, speak life not criticism, compassion to the hurt, and humility in serving.

God is solidifying head knowledge to heart, and I’m more in awe of his grand mysterious ways.

OPINION

A hot shower



HUMBLE+BOLD
BY RHONDA SILTMAN

I do my best thinking in the shower. It is time alone. The temperature is perfect. Comfortable and soapy, a clean start to the day.

I ponder what I have to do today and other mundane thoughts, but every once in a while, existential questions come to mind.

“Why am I here?” and other complicated thoughts. In the shower or in general? I stop myself and think I better stop this noodling before I am late for work.

One particular morning, I got to thinking about what is involved in making it possible for me to take a hot shower every morning. Weird, right? That is the way I sometimes roll. I did make it to work on time that day, but barely.

Let’s think about it, shall we? Just don’t read this column in the shower; the newspaper is not waterproof nor are your online devices.

First things first, we need plumbing. The water has to come from somewhere and go somewhere. It has to be heated. That involves a water heater. What does a water heater need? Mine needs natural gas and electricity to run the controller. Natural gas is tricky. I don’t know if you’ve heard, but if not installed correctly your house can blow up. Electricity is a whole other bailiwick. If not installed correctly, your house can burn down. Blowing up or burning down would dramatically infringe on the experience mentioned above. We rely on experts to be certain it is all installed correctly.

Then there is this question of who is paying for all this? Me, of course, but who sees to it that the supply of water, gas and electricity is uninterrupted and billed properly? That would be the municipali-

ty. I know this because they send me a bill every month.

Now we are going down a rabbit hole. Who runs the utilities? Where does the water come from? Where does the gas come from? Where does the electricity come from?

My head started to hurt, and I thought to myself that I best wrap this up or I really am going to be late for work. Plus, I am getting pruney.

It is complex and complicated to enjoy a simple pleasure in life. Do we take it for granted? Do we have gratitude for the technology and people involved to simply take a hot shower? Have you ever taken a lukewarm shower with low water pressure? It is the worst. I have got to stop staying at one-star motels.

I am going to take a turn here. Not out of guilt, but gratitude.

According to Wikipedia, 60% of the world’s population does not have flushing toilets, let alone a shower. Two million Americans are without plumbing, not counting the homeless. When you read more about that statistic, it is truly stunning.

Electricity is better. Ninety percent of the world’s population has electricity, but that still leaves just under a billion people without it. One hundred percent of Americans have electricity, again minus the homeless. If you have electricity, you can still take a hot shower as long as you have water and can pay your bills.

It easy it is to take the simple pleasures for granted. I do it, maybe you do, too.

If we have gratitude for what we have, maybe we can be more empathetic for those who do not.

Welcoming incoming kindergarteners

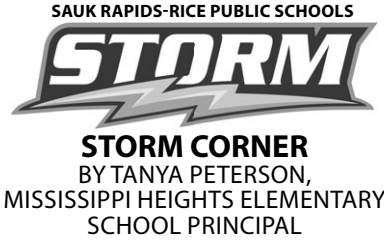
As the calendar has now changed to 2024, the elementary schools have begun planning for the incoming kindergarten students we will be welcoming in the 2024-25 school year.

Kindergarten is an exciting time for both our future students as well as the families who care for them. The teachers and staff also share this excitement and want to provide the very best experience possible.

The adventure of starting kindergarten is about new learning experiences, meeting other students, making new friends and exploring new ideas. For some students, this will be their first school experience, while others may have been attending preschool or structured daycare. Whatever their prior experiences, we are confident we will provide a positive learning experience for all.

As a school district, we know and value the partnership among school, home and community, and we recognize this partnership is critically important to the success of every child. We look forward to welcoming new students into the Sauk Rapids-Rice school community.

As families who support these young children, we congratulate and thank you for taking this first step and trusting Sauk Rapids-Rice Public Schools



STORM CORNER
BY TANYA PETERSON,
MISSISSIPPI HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

to be the beginning of their educational journey. If we know that you have a child who is kindergarten eligible, you can expect a mailed letter the week of Jan. 8.

However, if you do not get a letter, we do not know that you have a child who is eligible.

We encourage these caregivers to notify the school of your intent for them to be enrolled. Official registration begins Feb. 1. Registration needs to be completed for every incoming kindergartener even if they have attended preschool programming within the district. If you need assistance, please reach out to the school office; we are happy to help you.

Once students are registered, they will be invited to an open house event, which takes place March 13. This is a come-and-see event at the elementary school they will be attending. If you are unable to attend open house, we encourage you to call the elementary school to confirm your registration was complete and to pick up a Storm Kinder Kit.

We are excited for your child to join the Storm family and continue their lifelong learning journey with us. Starting kindergarten is an important time in your child(ren)’s life, and we want this experience to be positive, memorable and fun.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dim view of Pleasantview

By Ken Hill, Sauk Rapids

Now that the building is built and landscaping done, I am surprised there is no suitable field for softball, soccer, football or physical education classes at Pleasantview Elementary School.

To see physical education classes cross a busy

11th Street to find space for their activities is a step backward and a safety concern. In summer, the old Pleasantview fields were often busy with softball, soccer, football and sometimes other activities. The planners and those who fought to defeat earlier bond issues were short sighted. They degraded physical education and changed the neighborhood forever.

Flag opposition

By James A. Hovda, Rice

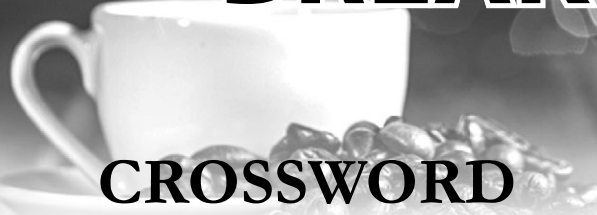
I’m forced to express my disgust with some of our good folks at the State House, marching on to create a new state flag.

No matter which flag, current or proposed, someone or a group will be unhappy. Erasing our

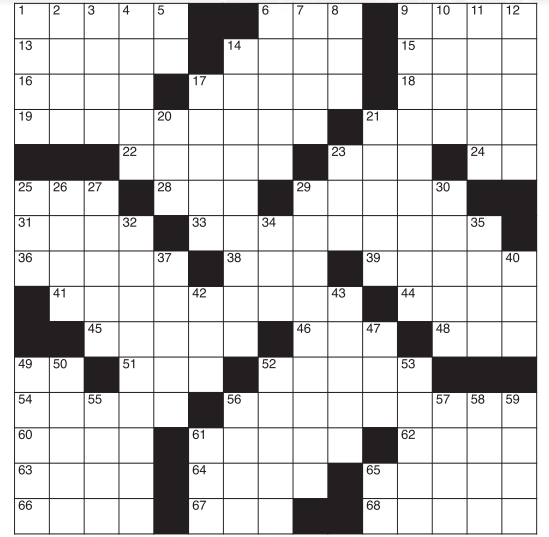
history is just plain wrong. Dollar wise, this is more than replacing a few flags, which is costly. All the Minnesota State Patrol car doors will have to be redone — another costly issue.

Whose idea was this anyway? I cannot find any of my friends in favor of this flag change. Fire the flag commission and move on.

COFFEE BREAK



CROSSWORD

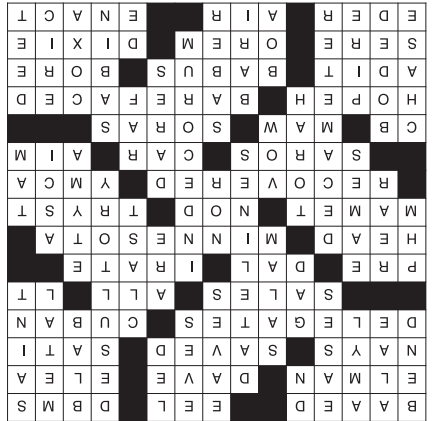


CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Bleated
- 6. Snakelike fish
- 9. Database management system
- 13. Russian-American violinist
- 14. Wendy’s founder Thomas
- 15. Ancient Italian-Greek colony
- 16. Negatives
- 17. Rescued
- 18. Self-immolation by fire ritual
- 19. Assigns tasks to
- 21. Island nation native
- 22. Trade
- 23. Detergent brand
- 24. Famed NY Giant
- 25. Before
- 28. Split pulses
- 29. Extremely angry; highly incensed
- 31. Body part
- 33. American state
- 36. David __, US playwright
- 38. Move one’s head slightly
- 39. Secret rendezvous
- 41. Improved
- 44. A place to exercise
- 45. 18-year astronomical period
- 46. Automobile
- 48. You can take it
- 49. A radio band
- 51. Jaws of an animal
- 52. Short-billed rails
- 54. Chinese province
- 56. Shameless and undisguised
- 60. Horizontal passage into a mine
- 61. Adult males
- 62. Fail to entertain
- 63. Dried-up
- 64. City in north-central Utah
- 65. Southern U.S.
- 66. German river
- 67. Oxygen
- 68. Make law

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Curved segment
- 2. Wings
- 3. From pentane (Chemistry)
- 4. Gradually gets into
- 5. Commercial document (abbr.)
- 6. Overhang
- 7. Christmas and New Year’s have them
- 8. Type of bulb
- 9. Lacking a plan
- 10. Tattle
- 11. Rockers like it “heavy”
- 12. One who’s been canonized
- 14. Indicate time and place
- 17. Nobel Prize winner in physics
- 20. The voice of Olaf
- 21. Fragmented rock
- 23. They __
- 25. Master of Philosophy
- 26. Backside
- 27. Landmark house in L.A.
- 29. An act of undue intimacy
- 30. From which a later word is derived
- 32. Equal to 10 meters
- 34. Neither
- 35. Computer language
- 37. Sacred book of Judaism
- 40. A woolen cap of Scottish origin
- 42. A way to dedicate
- 43. Challenges
- 47. British Air Aces
- 49. Large, influential bank
- 50. Portended
- 52. Cavalry-sword
- 53. Vaccine developer
- 55. Napoleonic Wars general
- 56. Italian Seaport
- 57. Hip joint
- 58. __ Clapton, musician
- 59. Insect repellent
- 61. Decorative scarf
- 65. Delaware



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XCEL ENERGY MINNESOTA NATURAL GAS RATES

Interim Change in Natural Gas Rates Starting January 1, 2024

XCEL ENERGY'S RATE INCREASE REQUEST

Xcel Energy has asked the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) for permission to increase its natural gas rates by approximately 9.6% or \$59.03 million. Xcel Energy's last request for an increase to natural gas rates was in 2021.

State law allows Xcel Energy to collect higher rates on an interim (temporary) basis while the MPUC reviews Xcel Energy's request. The interim rate increase for 2024 is 8.5% or \$51.2 million, over current rates. Because this increase only applies to the base rate portion of customers' bills exclusive of fuel costs and certain rate riders, the interim rate request is uniformly billed as a 20.89% increase of that portion of the bill, or \$6.06 per month for an average residential customer. This increase appears on your bill as an interim rate adjustment.

Typically, final rates become effective within 10 months of the date of the Application, unless the review period is extended by the MPUC. If final rates are lower than interim rates, Xcel Energy will refund customers the difference with interest. If final rates are higher than interim rates, Xcel Energy will not charge customers the difference.

WHY IS XCEL ENERGY ASKING FOR AN INCREASE?

A number of factors are driving the need for this case. The Company has continued to make capital investments in its natural gas system since it's last rate case and continues to incur costs to serve its customers. Recovering these costs is critical to the Company's ability to continue to provide safe, reliable, and affordable natural gas service to its customers long into the future. At the same time, unprecedented inflation has affected the cost of our operations, from materials and supplies to paying our employees and contractors. In addition, labor shortages, coupled with wage increases and supply chain shortages and delays across industries, have impacted how the Company must manage its operations and labor.

WHAT IS XCEL ENERGY DOING TO CONTROL COSTS?

Xcel Energy's average residential natural gas rates are among the lowest in the nation, and residential natural gas rates will remain among the lowest if this proposal is approved. We are committed to doing all we can to keep costs low for our customers while delivering the safe, reliable energy they depend on. To do so, we are:

- Reviewing and monitoring our business to minimize operating and maintenance cost increases.

- Leading the nation with our energy conservation programs that help customers manage their energy use and save money on their bills.
- Working with local and state agencies that provide

HOW WILL THE RATE CHANGE AFFECT MONTHLY BILLS?

The proposed rate increase will affect individual monthly bills differently, depending on natural gas use and customer type. The proposed rate increase affects only those charges that recover the cost of providing service to our customers – approximately 45% of your total bill. This rate increase does not affect the wholesale cost of the gas, which is passed on to you directly without markup. Your monthly bills will continue to vary due to changes in the wholesale cost of natural gas and individual natural gas use.

The typical residential gas customer uses 73 therms per month. On average, the proposed \$59.03 million rate change would increase the bill for a typical residential natural gas customer by \$6.93 per month or \$83.16 annually.

PROPOSED CHANGES FOR MONTHLY NATURAL GAS BASE RATES

The following chart shows the current and proposed customer charge and distribution charge for each customer class with average natural gas usage.

PROPOSED CHANGES FOR MONTHLY NATURAL GAS BASE RATES				
Customer Type	Present Monthly Customer Charge	Proposed Monthly Customer Charge	Present Distribution Charge (per therm)	Proposed Distribution Charge per Ccf (or therm)
Residential	\$9.00	\$11.00	\$0.274927	\$0.376599
Small Commercial	\$20.00	\$30.00	\$0.219738	\$0.278538
Large Commercial	\$50.00	\$50	\$0.184101	\$0.265771
Small Demand – Commodity	\$175.00	\$175.00	\$0.084775	\$0.145368
Small Demand – Demand			\$0.882000	\$0.932000
Large Demand – Commodity	\$275.00	\$275.00	\$0.084775	\$0.145368
Large Demand – Demand			\$0.882000	\$0.932000
Small Interruptible Tier I	\$150.00	\$170.00	\$0.148846	\$0.205463
Small Interruptible Tier II	\$150.00	\$170.00	\$0.148846	\$0.184917
Medium Interruptible Tier I	\$300.00	\$300.00	\$0.084775	\$0.145368
Medium Interruptible Tier II	\$300.00	\$300.00	\$0.084775	\$0.130831
Large Interruptible Tier I	\$450.00	\$450.00	\$0.079765	\$0.130725
Large Interruptible Tier II	\$450.00	\$450.00	\$0.079765	\$0.117653
Large Firm Transport	\$300.00	\$300.00	\$0.084775	\$0.145368
Large Firm Transport – Dmd			\$0.882000	\$0.932000
Small Interruptible Transport	\$175.00	\$195.00	\$0.148846	\$0.205463
Medium Interruptible Transport	\$325.00	\$325.00	\$0.084775	\$0.145368
Large Interruptible Transport	\$475.00	\$475.00	\$0.079765	\$0.130725
Large Interruptible Transport combined with Negotiated	\$300.00	\$300.00	\$0.031725	\$0.031725

The chart below shows the effect of the interim and proposed rate change on monthly bills for customers with average natural gas usage.

AVERAGE MONTHLY BILLS				
Customer Class	Average Monthly Usage in Ccf (or therms)	Average Monthly Usage in Ccf (or therms)	Average Monthly Bill— Interim Rates	Average Monthly Bill— Proposed Rates
Residential	73	\$67	\$73	\$74
Small Commercial	186	\$157	\$169	\$173
Large Commercial	1,311	\$968	\$1,029	\$1,059
Small Demand	7,765	\$5,403	\$5,763	\$5,825
Large Demand	17,821	\$11,861	\$12,615	\$12,818
Small Interruptible	6,639	\$3,620	\$3,858	\$3,932
Medium Interruptible	46,065	\$20,958	\$21,836	\$23,163
Large Interruptible	713,546	\$313,983	\$325,968	\$341,268
Large Firm Transport**	133,497	\$18,990	\$22,602	\$25,702
Small Interruptible Transport**	6,639	\$1,248	\$1,491	\$1,559
Medium Interruptible Transport**	195,706	\$19,406	\$22,940	\$28,774
Large Interruptible Transport**	2,098,693	\$71,065	\$85,037	\$93,580

** Transportation classes bill estimates do not include the cost of gas

HELP WITH PAYING YOUR BILL

If you are having trouble making regular payments on your Xcel Energy account, contact us as soon as possible. We'll work with you to arrange a payment plan and connect you to other resources that can help.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR REVIEWING XCEL ENERGY'S REQUEST?

The MPUC, the Minnesota Department of Commerce – Division of Energy Resources, the Office of the Attorney General – Residential Utilities Division, public interest groups, and large commercial and industrial customer groups will investigate our proposal.

The MPUC will hold public hearings and accept written comments about our rate increase request. Customers and others will be able to comment on our rate increase request at the public hearings. You may add verbal comments, written comments, or both into the record. Notice of the public hearing dates and locations will be published in local newspapers, included in monthly bills, and at: https://www.xcelenergy.com/company/rates_and_regulations/filings/minnesota_natural_gas_rate_proposal. (Make sure "Minnesota" is selected in the top left-hand corner.)

MORE INFORMATION

Xcel Energy's current and proposed rate schedules are available at:

Xcel Energy
 Web: xcelenergy.com/MNGasRates
 Phone: 800-895-4999
 414 Nicollet Mall
 Minneapolis, MN 55401

Minnesota Department of Commerce

Web: <https://www.edockets.state.mn.us/EFiling/search.jsp>. Select 23 in the year field, enter 413 in the number field, click on Search, and the list of documents will appear on the next page.

U.S. Mail: 85 7th Place East, Suite 280, St. Paul, MN 55101
 Phone: 651-539-1500 or 800-657-3602

Citizens with hearing or speech disabilities may call through their preferred Telecommunications Relay Service.

SUBMIT COMMENTS

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission is asking customers to comment on Xcel Energy's request for a rate increase. Send comments to, or contact the MPUC's Consumer Affairs Office for assistance with submitting comments:

Online: <https://mn.gov/puc/get-involved/public-comments/>

Be sure to reference docket number 23-413.

U.S. Mail: 121 7th Place East, Suite 350,
 St. Paul, MN 55101
 Phone: 651-296-0406 or 800-657-3782

IMPORTANT

Comments will be made available to the public on the MPUC's website, except in limited circumstances consistent with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. The MPUC does not edit or delete personally identifying information from submissions.



Vikings season ends with whimper

Any hopes the Minnesota Vikings had of making the playoffs this season were effectively ended on New Year's Eve, when they received a 33-10 drubbing at U.S. Bank Stadium from the rival Green Bay Packers. The 7-9 Vikings have lost five of their last six games, and it's becoming increasingly clear this team will need to address some major weaknesses this offseason if they want to be competitive in the future.



SPORTS COLUMNIST
BY ANDY THAYER

First and foremost, the Vikings need to find a capable quarterback. Kirk Cousins's contract expires March 15, which will leave Nick Mullens and Jaren Hall as the only signal callers on the team's roster. Yikes.

If we want to simplify things, the primary reason the Vikings have a losing record is because Cousins suffered a season-ending Achilles tendon injury back in October. After a brief honeymoon period with Josh Dobbs, his play abruptly crashed back to Earth. Nick Mullens is what we thought he was — a turnover machine with limited arm strength. Jaren Hall clearly couldn't process the Packers' defensive looks and showed even worse accuracy than Dobbs and Mullens. It's fair to say the Vikings have not had a starting-caliber NFL quarterback under center for the past two months, and no NFL team is going to consistently win under those circumstances.

The 2007 New England Patriots went 16-0, and then missed the playoffs the following year when Tom Brady was injured. You can't expect backup quarterbacks to carry an NFL team to the playoffs when the starter is injured in the first half of a season, especially when the team's roster is thin at multiple other positions.

The Vikings also have gotten substandard play from their interior defensive line, at edge rusher, from their interior offensive line and at cornerback. All four of those position groups will need to be addressed this offseason. Danielle Hunter, by far their best defensive player this season, will be a free agent, along with Jordan Hicks, Dalton Risner and other starters from these already fallow position groups. This will be tough to do considering that the team is projected to have only \$37 million in cap space and the need to add a quarterback.

The Vikings will have nine draft picks this offseason, and it's going to be critical for them to put those to good use. Will the Vikings trade up in the first round for a top-tier quarterback prospect? Will they move a player from a position where they have some quality depth like safety or wide receiver to plug some of their gaps? The Vikings have had a lot of early-round whiffs in their drafts dating back to 2016 or so, and that's the primary reason this team is lacking in depth and cost-controlled players in their prime years. If the Vikings don't hit on multiple picks in this year's class, things are going to get ugly very quickly.

The Vikings have a 7-9 record despite their Pro Bowl-caliber quarterback not playing since October. While that record is disappointing for a team that had higher hopes for this season, it's not surprising considering the circumstances. Had Kirk Cousins stayed healthy, I have little doubt the Vikings would have been a playoff team this season. Unfortunately, that's how things go sometimes, and now the Vikings are staring down the grim reality of a long offseason with a threadbare roster, minimal salary cap room and a glaring hole at the most important position in sports. This exact scenario is the downside of a competitive rebuild approach, and it might be time for the Vikings to consider tearing things down to generate cap space and more draft picks for the future.

Salmonella case linked to Busseto Charcuterie Sampler

ST. PAUL — Minnesota Department of Health and Minnesota Department of Agriculture officials are warning Minnesota consumers not to eat Busseto brand Charcuterie Sampler containing prosciutto, sweet sopressata and dry coppa. The item was available for purchase at Sam's Club and other retailers.

One Minnesotan reported becoming ill in December after consuming a Busseto Charcuterie Sampler purchased at Sam's Club. The person was not hospitalized. MDA staff collected and tested an unopened package of Busseto brand Charcuterie Sampler from the person's home. The product tested positive for salmonella.

Health officials recommend not eating any Busseto brand Charcuterie Sampler from LOT number L075330300 with the expiration date of April 27, 2024. It is not yet known which of the individual components of the sampler may have been the source of contamination or whether similar products are affected. The investigation to determine the scope of the problem is ongoing.

Since many cases of salmonella infection (salmonellosis) do not seek health care and get tested,

the number of ill people is likely to be larger than the identified case. People who consumed the product, become sick and are concerned about their health should consult their health care provider.

Symptoms of salmonella infection include diarrhea, abdominal pain and fever. Symptoms usually begin within 12 to 96 hours after exposure, but they can begin up to two weeks after exposure. Infections usually clear in five to seven days, but about 28% of laboratory-confirmed cases require hospitalization.

Many salmonella infections in otherwise healthy people do not require medical treatment. More serious infections occasionally occur.

For those who seek health care, most do not require antibiotics. However, antibiotic treatment may be warranted in some cases.

Approximately 1,000 salmonella infections are reported each year in Minnesota. More information on salmonella and how to prevent it can be found on the MDH website at www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/salmonellosis/index.html.

MDH is working with the MDA on this ongoing investigation.

POLICE ACTIVITY REPORT

Sauk Rapids Police Department Dec. 25-31

Dec. 28, 9:49 a.m. — A caller on the 900 block of North Benton Drive reported seeing a stroller with a sheet draped over it near a donation box. The caller notified police to check the stroller to ensure no one was inside. Law enforcement reported the stroller was empty.

Dec. 30, 12:59 p.m. — A civilian brought a purse that was found in a driveway on the 200 block of Ninth Avenue South to the police department. The person said camera footage showed it falling out of a vehicle that provided Door Dash delivery service the night before. The police looked through the purse, identified the rightful owner and returned the item.

Dec. 31, 9:06 p.m. — A female caller on the 1200 block of Second Avenue North reported a stuffed panda with a card that said the word "love" on it being placed on her vehicle. The woman was checking with law enforcement as to whether there was a court order prohibiting a specific person from being near her residence. There was no order on file and no way to determine whether the person had been there. Officers advised she call back if she notices other suspicious activity.

Incidents: Miscellaneous calls 21, suspicious activity reports 19, traffic stops 15, Toward Zero Death calls 11, welfare checks 9, child calls 8, alarms 6, police proactive visits 6, agency assists 5, animal calls 5, disturbances 4, permits 4, property calls 3, utility problems 3, vehicle calls 3,

civil complaints 2, domestic calls 2, harassment calls 2, human services reports 2, parking calls 2 and suicidal person calls 2.

Rice Police Department Dec. 18-31

Dec. 23, 7:35 p.m. — A vehicle was observed facing west on the south side of West Main Street near the 300 block. The vehicle had appeared to be driven through a field as there was a lot of grass on the passenger side of the vehicle and in the tires. There was no indication the vehicle had been stolen. The vehicle was off the roadway and not a hazard, so law enforcement monitored its presence until eventually CarCo was notified to tow the vehicle and store it at its lot. The vehicle owner was notified.

Dec. 30, 12:16 a.m. — A loud crunch was heard while law enforcement met on the 400 block of East Main Street. An officer observed that a van had backed into a concrete pole near gasoline pumps. There was damage to the vehicle and an advertisement sign, so police notified the parties that the issue was civil as it took place on private property. The officer informed the property staff and driver that insurance could be contacted if they wished anything to be done; the officer also provided contact information in the event a police report is needed.

Incidents: Miscellaneous calls 14, traffic stops 14, agency assists 5, suspicious activity reports 4, assists 3, 911 calls 2 and permits 2.

PUBLIC NOTICE

**ORDINANCE NO. 15
AN INTERIM ORDINANCE TEMPORARILY PROHIBITING NEW SOLAR PROJECTS IN THE CITY OF SAUK RAPIDS/MINDEN TOWNSHIP ANNEXATION AREA**

The following is the official summary of Ordinance No. 15 approved by the Sauk Rapids City/Minden Township Joint Planning Board on December 19, 2024:

"AN INTERIM ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING A MORATORIUM ON NEW SOLAR PROJECTS WITHIN THE JOINT PLANNING AREA OF THE JPB. It is the intent and effect of this Ordinance to temporarily prohibit the construction, development, or conversion of Solar Projects until the JPB can study the appropriateness of current ordinance requirements and adopt amendments if necessary."

A printed copy of the ordinance is available for inspection by any person during regular office hours at JPB Hall.

A complete, printed copy of the ordinance amendment is available for inspection by any person during regular office hours at the City Clerk/Administrator's office.

Adopted this 19th day of December, 2023

R-11-B

Upcoming AUCTIONS

Sunday, Jan. 7th at 11:00 am
Sauk Rapids Estate

Sunday, Jan. 14th at 11:00 am
Sauk Rapids Estate & Consignment

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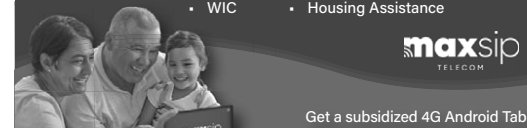



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Wrestling

Barz wins 21st match of season, places 3rd in Fargo

BY TOM FENTON | STAFF WRITER

Vance Barz is not exactly backing away from competition.

The Sauk Rapids-Rice senior is doing whatever possible to prepare for what he hopes is a medal-winning February and March. Barz competed in the Rumble on the Red Invitational Dec. 29, 2023, at the Fargodome in Fargo, North Dakota.

The event features a large number of top-quality teams and individuals.

Barz, ranked No. 1 in Class AA at 133 pounds, was the lone Storm varsity wrestler to compete as coach Derik Gilbertson placed several other wrestlers in the junior varsity tournament to get them more experience as they develop.

Barz went 6-1 at 133 to place third while improving his record to 21-3. After winning his first two matches by technical fall, Barz dropped a 4-2 decision to Parker Kamm, of Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial, in a tight 4-2 decision. Kamm is ranked No. 10 in Class A at 139.

Barz rallied to win four straight bouts, including a revenge-getting 2-0 decision over Kamm in the third-place match.

The Storm will compete at the Foley Invitational Saturday, Jan. 6, at Foley High School in Foley. They also will wrestle in a Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted triangular Friday, Jan. 12, and in an Elk River invitational Saturday, Jan. 13.

Showcase provides changed look, feel

Storm use 3-day event to try different things

BY TOM FENTON
STAFF WRITER

The annual Granite City Showcase often serves as an opportunity for Sauk Rapids-Rice boys hockey coach Brady DeGagne to play the role of mad scientist.

The three-day, three-game, eight-team hockey extravaganza offers DeGagne a bit of experimenting with his roster and systems. Though the games count in the standings, the format has a different feel than regular-season games — a good thing considering the grinding schedule the team plays post-holidays.

Results of the experiment were mixed for the Storm. SRR went 0-2-1 in the tournament and will take a 4-6-2 record into the meaty part of the season.

“We always look forward to the Showcase as a time to really figure out what our roster will look like toward the end of the season,” DeGagne said. “It’s a chance to find some missing pieces to the puzzle and compete. We plugged some different players in different spots and shook lines up a little. Overall, we saw some great things from a few



PHOTOS BY TOM FENTON

Sauk Rapids-Rice junior forward Hunter Behling (right) races to the puck while being watched by Dylan Mees, of Mankato East, at the Granite City Showcase Dec. 27 at the Municipal Athletic Complex in St. Cloud. The Storm scored twice in the third period and skated to a 2-2 overtime final.



Storm sophomore forward Elijah Fitch skates to the net at the Granite City Showcase Dec. 27 at the Municipal Athletic Complex in St. Cloud. Fitch scored an unassisted goal for Sauk Rapids-Rice in the third period of the 2-2 tie.

of our guys, just not all of them the way we had hoped.”

Day 3 of the tournament tends to be the most unpredictable as players battle fatigue.

Things got a little

weird in the Storm’s finale with Litchfield/Dassel-Cokato Dec. 29 as they gave up three second-period goals in a 5-3 loss to the Dragons.

Teagan Dodge, Jett Wheeler and Bryden

Prelvitz each scored for the Storm, who lost 7-0 to Monticello on Day 2 of the tournament Dec. 28. SRR trailed 1-0 into the second period when goaltender Zander Parker left with an injury after stopping 20 of 21 shots.

The Storm had third-period goals from Elijah Fitch and Chase Hiltner Dec. 27, helping the team clinch a 2-2 tie with Mankato East. Reid Omvig stopped 18 of 20 shots in goal for SRR.

“Our record in the tournament was not what we had wanted, but these kind of events are a great way for the boys to grind a little and commit to the culture we’ve established,” DeGagne said. “Our big takeaway for the week was that our offensive zone play has gone a little stale. We need to do a better job of attacking the net and moving the puck through the middle of the ice.”

The Storm faced Sartell Jan. 4 at Sports Arena East in Sauk Rapids before Windom visits for a 1 p.m. game Saturday, Jan. 6. SRR plays Tuesday, Jan. 9, at Brainerd and then hosts Northern Edge at 3:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 13, in Sauk Rapids.

SRR	1	1	1-3
LDC	1	3	1-5
SRR: First period: 2.			
Dodge (Hiltner) 16:32. Second period: 3. Wheeler (Dodge, Nick Anderson) 1:13. Third period: 7. Prelvitz (Fitch) 14:45. Goalie: Landon Jennings 13 saves of 18 shots on goal.			
MONTI	1	3	3-7
SRR	0	0	0-0
Goalie: Parker 20 of 21, Omvig 15 of 21.			
EAST	1	0	1 0-2
SRR	0	0	2 0-2
SRR: Third period: 2. Fitch (unassisted) 0:24 power play. 4. Hiltner (unassisted) 10:22. Goalie: Omvig 18 of 20.			



Sauk Rapids-Rice sophomore defenseman Chase Hiltner battles for the puck as the Storm faced Mankato East at the Granite City Showcase Dec. 27 at the Municipal Athletic Complex in St. Cloud. The Storm dropped games to Monticello and Litchfield/Dassel-Cokato in the final two games of the showcase.

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SPECIAL OFFER

Split decision



PHOTOS BY TOM FENTON

Sophomore forward Kaitlyn Lindberg attacks the Litchfield/Dassel-Cokato net during the first period of the Storm'n Sabres Holiday Classic Dec. 29, 2023, at Bernick's Arena in Sartell. Lindberg scored a shorthanded goal, but Sauk Rapids-Rice/Sartell fell 5-1 to the Dragons, ending a three-game winning streak.

Storm'n Sabres go 1-1 in holiday tournament

BY TOM FENTON
STAFF WRITER

Though its winning streak stopped at three, Sauk Rapids-Rice/Sartell girls hockey head coach Bre Hess hopes her team's recent string of success propels the Storm'n Sabres into a big January.

The team stayed home for the holidays, hosting three teams in the Storm'n Sabres Holiday Classic Dec. 28-29, 2023, at Bernick's Arena in Sartell. SRR/S split its games, defeating New Ulm 4-3 in the opener before closing the tournament with a 5-1 loss to Litchfield/Dassel-Cokato.

The Storm'n Sabres entered the New Ulm game with a two-game

winning streak and used a three-goal third period to extend it.

Faith Torborg's goal with six seconds remaining in the second period set the tone for the third straight victory for SRR/S. The Storm'n Sabres had third-period tallies from Brooke Pogatchnik, Sella Grams and Megan Hess, whose game-winner came on the power play with 1 minute, 26 seconds remaining.

"We really had to work together as a team the entire game against New Ulm," Coach Hess said. "They were a skilled team, and we knew that going into it, so we were highly motivated to continue our winning streak."

A depleted lineup

could not hold off an L/DC team that has played well for most of the season but had struggled scoring. The Charging Dragons broke out of that slump against the Storm'n Sabres, scoring four times in the second period.

Sophomore Kaitlyn Lindberg's shorthanded goal 3:58 into the opening period was all the offense the Storm'n Sabres mustered.

"That was a tough game because we had a short bench," Coach Hess said. "We had some girls gone due to family events, injuries or illness. We took the second period off because we were tired, and I think we learned how important it is to

play a full three periods of hockey."

The Storm'n Sabres took a 4-11-1 record and was attempting to win their fourth game in five tries against the St. Cloud Crush Jan. 9 at the Municipal Athletic Complex in St. Cloud. They will host Willmar in a Central Lakes Conference game Thursday, Jan. 11.

LDC 1 4 0-5

SRR/S 1 0 0-1

SRR/S: First period: 1.

Lindberg (Pogatchnik) 3:58, shorthanded. **Goalie:** Dorn 20 saves of 25 shots on goal.

NU 1 0 2-3

SRR/S 0 1 3-4

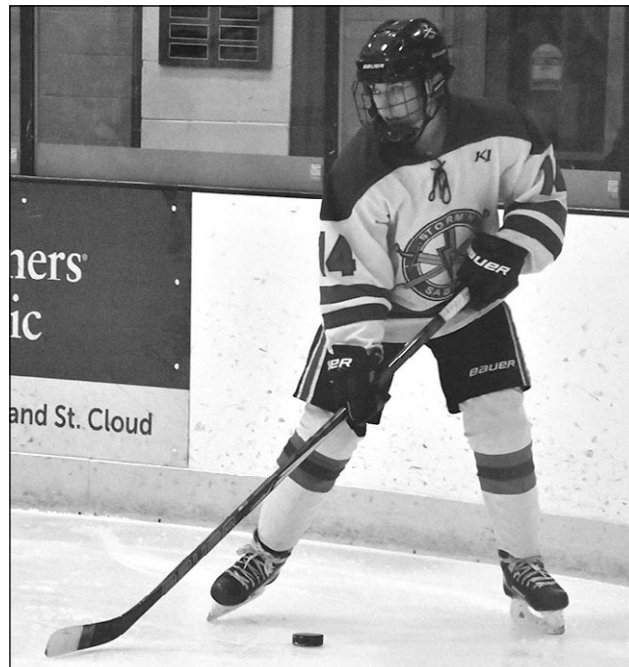
SRR/S: Second period:

2. Torborg (unassisted) 16:54.

Third period: 4. Pogatchnik (Emily VanVickle, Grams) 4:48; 5. Grams (unassisted) 6:03; 6. Megan Hess (Liz Krueger, Torborg) 15:34 power play **Goalie:** Dorn 31 of 34.



Freshman forward Olivia Johnson skates the puck through the neutral zone in the Storm'n Sabres Holiday Classic Dec. 29, 2023, at Bernick's Arena in Sartell. The Storm'n Sabres lost 5-1 to Litchfield/Dassel-Cokato.



Senior defender Liz Krueger keeps her eyes on the action while controlling the puck during the Storm'n Sabres Holiday Classic Dec. 29, 2023, at Bernick's Arena in Sartell. Sauk Rapids-Sartell was 1-1 in the tournament.

Back on bench



PHOTO BY TOM FENTON

Sauk Rapids-Rice boys basketball coach Jason Allen coaches his team during the 2022-23 season in Sauk Rapids. Allen, who returned to the team Jan. 2, missed the previous four games after being placed on administrative leave due to his conduct after the Storm defeated Tech Dec. 15, 2023, in St. Cloud.

Storm basketball coach reinstated after investigation

BY TOM FENTON | STAFF WRITER

Jason Allen admits his emotions got the best of him. The focus moving forward for the Sauk Rapids-Rice boys basketball coach is to learn from his mistakes and be the leader he said his Storm team deserves.

Allen was placed on administrative leave after allegations of inappropriate conduct were made against him after the Storm defeated Tech 69-67 in a Dec. 15, 2023, game at Tech High School in St. Cloud. Allen was seen celebrating and gesturing toward the Tech crowd during the wild post-game celebration, resulting in him being placed on leave during the investigation.

"It was an exciting win, and the environment was probably the biggest we've played in," Allen said. "I let my emotions get the best of me at the conclusion of the game. That's something I can't let happen as a leader, and I'm sorry to the community and everyone who is involved in Storm athletics. It's a learning moment. I'm a passionate coach who wears my emotions on my sleeves, and I just didn't handle it the way I should. I'll be better, and it's something that won't happen again. I knew I messed up."

Allen was reinstated Jan. 2 and was back on the floor leading his team through their first practice of 2024 after superintendent Bradley Bergstrom said the investigation was complete.

"The allegation was investigated, we had a resolution, and he is back with the team," Bergstrom said. "I'm glad that he's back behind the bench and coaching the team, and I'm looking forward to his continued growth as our boys basketball coach."

Assistant coach Dwight Summerville assumed the role of head coach in Allen's absence, posting a 3-1 record. The Storm defeated Brainerd, Becker and section rival Buffalo under Summerville. Their only loss was 66-64 to defending Class AA state champion Albany in Day 1 of the Breakdown Granite Classic Dec. 29, 2023, at St. John's University in Collegeville.

Storm unfazed by close loss

SRR responds to Albany defeat with huge win over Buffalo

BY TOM FENTON
STAFF WRITER

The Sauk Rapids-Rice boys basketball team knew the annual Breakdown Granite City Classic would be a chance to display their talents against some of the state's best. Though the results were a two-game split, the Storm provided a potential exciting glimpse into their playoff future. Twenty-four hours after seeing a massive comeback fall short in a 66-64 loss to defending Class AA state champion Albany Dec. 29, 2023, at St. John's University in Collegeville, SRR proved it can

forget about a tough loss and respond in a big way. The Storm defeated Section 8AAAA rival and ninth-ranked Buffalo 74-49 in front of a large Sauk Rapids-Rice High School crowd Dec. 30, 2023, in Sauk Rapids.

Rather than sulk about the loss, SRR took immediately took out is frustration on the Bison, making shots from everywhere while playing stifling defense. "The Buffalo win was super-big because we had to bounce back from a tough loss," said Austin Kunz, who scored 33 points in the two games. "With Buffalo being in our section, it mattered even

more. We played good team defense, started out hot and didn't let them back into it."

Junior Spencer Swenson was all over the floor for the Storm, leading the team with 27 points on 9 of 13 shooting to go along with 12 rebounds. He was 7 of 8 from the free-throw line. Freshman Isayah Cook had 18 points, making 8 of 14 shots, while Hudson Omoke had 11 and Kunz 10.

"That was a big-time bounce-back game," assistant coach Dwight Summerville said. "Buffalo had a hard time matching up with us, and we took advantage of some mismatches, as well. We played solid defense for the most part and moved the ball well on the offensive end."

Anticipation was huge for the SRR-Albany matchup. The Huskies lost two key starters from last year's championship team, but remain loaded — something they proved quickly by scoring the game's first 15 points.

Kunz said the slow start was a group effort and is not to be repeated.

"We need to come out with our best every game and play as a team no matter the circumstances," Kunz said. "We played poor team basketball, and we can't afford for that to become the usual. We need to show that was a one-time thing."

Swenson scored eight points and had 12 rebounds, and Cook added eight points and 12 rebounds.

"We came out very sluggish, but I'm proud of the way we battled back," Summerville said. "Having our lowest scoring output



PHOTOS BY MIKE KOSIK

Sauk Rapids-Rice senior Austin Kunz puts defensive pressure on Albany's Zeke Austin against Albany in the Breakdown Granite City Classic Dec. 29, 2023, at St. John's University in Collegeville. Kunz scored 23 points to lead the Storm.

of the season and still only losing by two was promising."

The Storm began a five-game, nine-day stretch with a home game against Monticello Jan. 4 and also hosted Sartell Jan. 5.

Section 8AAAA member St. Michael-Alberville visits SRRHS Tuesday, Jan. 9. The Storm hit the road for games at Fergus Falls Thursday, Jan. 11, and Moorhead Saturday, Jan. 13.

Boys basketball
page 16

PHOTO BY MIKE KOSIK
Sauk Rapids-Rice senior Walker Loesch goes up for the block in the Breakdown Granite City Classic Dec. 29, 2023, at St. John's University in Collegeville. The Storm started a five-game, nine-day stretch against Monticello Jan. 4.



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SRR falls short twice in tournament



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Sauk Rapids-Rice girls basketball team members — Ella Jevne (from left), Alexis Swanson, Sienna Petermeier, Olivia Mohs, Courtney Paulsen, Josalynn Morford, Lauren Schloe, Alison Schreifels, Kristen Kimman, Megan Anderson, Maleeah Schmitt, Kelby Moore and Taylor Lamoureux — celebrate Paulsen surpassing 1,000 points for her career Dec. 28, 2023, against St. Anthony Village in the Monticello Holiday Tournament in Monticello. Paulsen is the eighth SRR player to reach that milestone.

Paulsen eclipses 1,000-point mark

BY TOM FENTON
STAFF WRITER

As a whole, holiday cheer was a bit hard to find for the Sauk Rapids-Rice girls basketball team. Courtney Paulsen, however, provided a bit of post-Christmas happy thoughts.

Paulsen surpassed the 1,000-point mark for her career at the Monticello Holiday Tournament. It was a bright spot in a two-day, two-game event that saw the Storm fall to the host Magic and St. Anthony Village Dec. 28-29, 2023, at Monticello High School in Monticello.

Entering the Monticello Holiday Tournament on a two-game winning streak, the Storm were unable to carry that momentum, losing to the Magic 69-51 Dec. 28 after falling to St. Anthony Village 66-63 a night earlier.

Paulsen surpassed 1,000 points early in the loss to St. Anthony Village, finishing with 25 points. She has perfected the knack of driving to the basket, drawing fouls and making free throws. Paulsen was 14-for-14 from the free-throw line.

“It was a very big milestone, and I am very happy that all of my friends and family were there to celebrate with me,” Paulsen said. “Being consistent and committed definitely helped me reach this.”

First-year head coach Brooklyn Harren said Paulsen’s contributions to this season’s team are nearly impossible to measure.

“She has consistently been our leading scorer, but she contributes so much more than scoring,” Harren said. “She plays with heart and at maximum effort all game. She puts her body on the line to make hustle plays and does a great job at reading both ends of the floor. She leads through her actions, which inspires and motivates her teammates.”

The losses dropped SRR to 4-6 heading into the post-holiday portion of the schedule that be-

gan with a nonconference game Jan. 4 at Dassel-Cokato High School in Cokato.

The Storm got 17 points and eight rebounds from Paulsen in the loss to Monticello. The Magic started quickly, jumping to a 38-25 halftime lead and maintaining control the rest of the way. Seven other players scored for SRR, led by Sienna Petermeier with seven.

In the tournament opener, the Storm trailed 39-32 at halftime and clawed their way back into it before falling short.

“Both teams played a great game,” Harren said. “Our team played hard the whole game against a hard and talented team.”

Petermeier added 10 points for SRR while Lauren Schloe had seven.

Paulsen said she believes her team can win

games in the second half of the season, but she added they need to take better care of the ball.

“Our team has a lot of potential, but we need to control our turnovers and learn how to finish games strong,” Paulsen said.

The Storm host Cathedral at 2 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 6, at Sauk Rapids-Rice High School in Sauk Rapids, and will travel to Sartell to face the Sabres Tuesday, Jan. 9. SRR returns home to face Rocori Friday, Jan. 12.

SRR 25 26-51
MONTI 38 31-69

SRR: Paulsen 17 (8R), Sienna Petermeier 7, Lauren Schloe 6, Alexis Swanson 6, Olivia Mohs 5, Ella Jevne 4, Josalynn Morford 3 and Alison Schreifels 3.

SRR 32 31-63
SA 39 27-66

SRR: Paulsen 25 (14-14 FT), Petermeier 10, Schloe 7, Olivia Mohs 6, Josalynn Morford 6, Alison Schreifels 5, Alexis Swanson 2 and Ella Jevne 2.



PHOTO BY TOM FENTON

Storm senior Courtney Paulsen dribbles up the floor as a Fergus Falls player chases in a Dec. 14, 2023, game at Sauk Rapids-Rice High School in Sauk Rapids. Paulsen scored 25 points in a Dec. 28, 2023, game against St. Anthony Village to surpass the 1,000-point mark for her career.

Allen from page 13

The Storm responded with a convincing 74-49 victory over ninth-ranked Buffalo Dec. 30, 2023, at Sauk Rapids-Rice High School in Sauk Rapids and established themselves as a top contender for the section tournament.

Allen did not attend the past four games, instead watching the games online when available.

“It was hard being away from the boys,” Allen said. “Basketball is really my life. It saved my life whether it was coaching or playing. Not being in the gym and around them was tough. It was one of the toughest things I’ve ever dealt with, but it gave me some time to reflect on things I have to do better. When you make mistakes, you’ve got to own them, and that’s the only way to grow. There’s nobody else to blame.”

Allen said not knowing what the result of the investigation would be was tough but added he is grateful for Summerville and the rest of the coaching staff for keeping the team on track during his absence. He also realizes that with his team’s 6-2 start, including the eye-opening win over Buffalo, the program will be under scrutiny the rest of the season.

“Our boys didn’t miss a beat,” Allen said. “They just kept playing and that helped keep my spirits up. The best thing about this is I get a chance to show young men how I made a mistake as an adult, and now I’ve got to be better. To be able to navigate that in front of them is awesome.”

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RI-1B-TV

Boys basketball

from page 14

PHOTO BY MIKE KOSIK
 Sauk Rapids-Rice junior Keller Hanson races to the basket in the second half against Albany in the Breakdown Granite City Classic Dec. 29, 2023, at St. John's University in Collegeville. The Storm fell behind 15-0 in the 66-64 loss to the defending Class AA state champions.



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Alex Lucas

Leading the **STORM**

What do you enjoy most about being on the boys swimming and diving team? One of the most fulfilling aspects of being a part of the boys swimming and diving team is the meaningful connections I have the opportunity to establish.

What has been the highlight of your swimming career? The highlight of my swimming career thus far was breaking five minutes in my 500-yard freestyle at state last year. One of my most significant accomplishments was earning the position of captain on the swimming and diving team and receiving the title of Most Valuable Teammate from the Minnesota State High School League.

What other activities are you involved in at school or in the community? I hold the position of president of the student council, and I also serve as an editor for our yearbook. What life lesson has being involved in activities taught you? Participating in various activities has taught me that leadership is not always about being the fastest or the strongest, but about fostering connections with others, inspiring teamwork and navigating challenges together as a team.

Of all the things you have learned in high school, what do you think will be the most useful as an adult? The most useful lessons for adulthood revolve around the importance of recognizing everyone's unique story and the significance of treating others with kindness. The understanding that each person has a distinct background, experiences and struggles has taught me to approach individuals with empathy and with an open mind.

What teacher or coach has made an impact on your life? Every teacher or coach has had a profound impact on my life, but one individual who particularly stands out is my swim coach, Jason Tangen. Consistently prioritizing the well-being and needs of his athletes, he exemplifies dedication and selflessness. Jason interacts with everyone he encounters with kindness and respect, qualities that inspire me to bring these qualities in my daily life. What is your least favorite fashion trend? Not wearing a winter coat when it is 20 degrees below zero outside.

Dinner and a movie: What's on the menu and big screen? For dinner, we will be having a delicious lasagna and we'll be enjoying the series "Survivor." The combination of the savory lasagna and the suspenseful adventures on the screen promises a perfect evening.

What are your post high school plans? To attend North Dakota State University for a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in hopes of becoming a nurse anesthetist.

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A new year



RUMINATIONS WITH MARY
MARY BARRON-TRAUT

Every year it starts. The media lauding the benefits of making New Year's resolutions and the general public enthusiastically committing to new lifestyle choices only to forget them within a few weeks.

I'm a participant in this cycle, too. My resolutions mirror those of many.

My first resolution, usually, is to get more exercise, and this can get a bit tricky.

In my current job, I sit a lot. I remind myself that during breaks I need to walk the hallways to accumulate some steps; however, this thought process lasts again for the first week, and then I make excuses. I convince myself that the exercise I get from doing chores in the afternoon is enough,

Barron-Traut page 2B



PHOTOS BY EMILY BRETH
Patrick Plante stands in his tiestall barn with his dog Nov. 28, 2023, on his farm near Little Falls. Plante milks 50 cows, and his herd consists of mainly Holsteins.

Prospering from challenges

Plante builds farm, never deters from a problem

BY EMILY BRETH
STAFF WRITER

If there is one thing that never scared Patrick Plante, it was a challenge. Buying a farm site in 1989, prior to seeing it, Plante had his work cut out for him.

A herd of 50 milking cows, which are mainly Holstein with a few Holstein-Angus crossbreds, can now be found in the tiestall barn on Plante's farm near



The cows on Patrick Plante's farm lie in the tiestall barn Nov. 28, 2023, at his farm near Little Falls. The cows are milked twice a day with automatic takeoff units.

Little Falls. Plante's fiancée, Cathy, works off the farm, but Plante's full-time employee tends to cow care and milking while Plante does all

the fieldwork.

Plante did not always plan on buying a farm, and it was not until he needed a way to pay the bills that he

considered starting his own dairy operation on a farm site that had been foreclosed and was up for auction. Plante was told the farm was in rough shape, which is probably why he won with a low bid.

"Anything that would have discouraged me at the time would have made me try to strive higher (because) I don't turn away from a challenge," Plante said. "When I first came (to the farm site), I couldn't turn around in the yard with a vehicle; it was that full of junk."

Plante page 2B

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Barron-Traut from front

but logically I know I'm not getting the aerobic workout I need to help my heart because farm chores mainly maintain muscle mass. This year, I plan to commit to a goal of walking between chores and milking — at least three times a week. It will help not only me but our dog, Trixie, because she's become just as much a couch potato as me.

A second resolution revolves around eating more healthily. This one is a stickler too because my hubby is a meat-and-potatoes guy. With a freezer full of beef along with potatoes dug from the garden ripening in the cellar, I'm sort of stuck in that type of cycle. The obvious solution here is digging a bit deeper in the freezer to find the frozen green beans also gleaned from my garden. Additionally, with the money we save from not buying beef from the grocer, I could buy some leafy greens to add to the mix. I figure this resolution will last a bit longer than my resolve around exercise.

Having too many resolutions is not a good practice because there's more likelihood that they will be broken, but there's one more that I must work harder on this year. Keeping the farm account more up-to-

date. This has been an issue for many years. Don't get me wrong, it's not like I never do them, but it gets done sporadically at best. Usually, during the second week in March, I'll sit down and do a total update of the checking account by downloading all transactions into the Quicken program. At that point I can categorize each transaction into what type of expense it is; this gives a handy idea as to how our spending compares to last year. I'll do this again maybe around June, but then other parts of life set in, and the next thing I know it's mid-December and the end-of-the-year books are due. This leaves me scrambling to give my husband an answer as to how we are set regarding our expenses and income. This is not the type of resolution I can break.

This covers most of the changes that I'd like to make in my life, and I think they should be manageable. I just have to revisit them every several days, and then remember to cut myself some slack if I've strayed. It shouldn't be too difficult to get back into the routine.

When I asked my hubby if he intended to make any resolutions this year, he shook his head and asked about mine. When I shared them, he got that impish look in his eye and suggested that I resolve to cut chocolate out of my life. I answered his look with daggers of my own; there are just some mountains that I will not climb.

Plante from front

Getting the yard and driveway drivable was the first challenge Plante faced. After clearing the yard and hauling in 2,000-3,000 yards of crushed tar, the path was finally a road. However, this was not the only place Plante needed to haul in fill. Before he could build a machine shed, 25,000 yards of fill was needed.

"There is 4-6 feet of fill on everything on one side of the driveway," Plante said.

After growing up on a dairy farm close to his current farm, Plante worked other jobs for about five years and then bought a farm with his brother. Soon after, Plante decided to sell his share to his brother and buy a farm of his own.

Since the foreclosed property was near his parents' farm, he was able to use their equipment to get started. While Plante was busy making his farm look like a farm, he also helped with fieldwork at his parents' farm, which was how he paid them for the use of their machinery.

By 1993, Plante was running the farm on his own without the use of his parents' equipment. Plante also worked to improve his cropland.

"At first, I averaged 60-bushel corn, and now I average around 200 bushels," Plante said.

While getting his fields up and running, Plante also tackled another challenge: the farm's unusable milking barn.

"The manure and other refuse was over the top of the tie stalls throughout the barn, from wall to wall," Plante said. "I was worried to put cattle in right away because of the



PHOTO BY MARK KLAPHAKE
Patrick Plante adds fuel to his combine before going in the field Oct. 17, 2023, on his farm near Little Falls. Plante has made many improvements on his farm since buying the property in 1989.

risk to their health."

Getting to work to clean the barn and make it livable, Plante put off rebuilding the house. He said the barn being an early priority is the reason the original house is still standing. It was later remodeled, twice, and he still lives in it today. When he first moved to the farm, the upstairs had almost no roof. However, the farm had bigger priorities.

"The house didn't make me money to pay bills," Plante said.

Once the barn was clean and safe for cattle, Plante moved his first herd of 20 into the barn in 1991. Slowing growing the herd, Plante milked with buckets to keep costs down until he was able to buy and install a pipeline in 1999.

"I was taught to pay for things as I

go, so I was never in debt," Plante said. "I did more manual labor with wheelbarrows and pitchforks. I never thought about who could do this for me."

Plante said that his dad understood how challenges inspired his son and would say things to motivate Plante forward.

Plante page 3B

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Patrick Plante sits in his powered parachute on his dairy farm near Little Falls. Plante used to feed all of the crops he grew, even if it meant having to buy more steers to raise, but recently has started to sell cash crops.

Ag Connection with

Amy Robak



Amy Robak, is a lead environmental specialist at Centra Sota Cooperative and specializes in animal facility improvements, nutrient and pest management, and soil health implementation.

Family: I grew up on a family dairy operation in Foley. I currently reside in Little Falls on a beef operation with my husband, Jason, and two children, Bryce and Mariah.

Schooling: University of Wisconsin-River Falls with a Bachelor of Science concentrating on environmental conservation and technical writing. United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service technical service provider and certified crop advisor licensing.

Years in practice: 14 years.

What led you to a profession in agronomy? Growing up on a dairy farm, agriculture has always been a passion of mine. My interest in conservation grew when I completed my FFA supervised agricultural experience, which focused on nitrogen reduction strategies in Central Minnesota. My FFA adviser, Alan Stemper, had a huge impact on my life as to why I continued my career in agriculture. He continued to push my skills and development in this area throughout my col-

lege career. This led to the career I choose today, along with national recognition as a National FFA Star in Agriscience and American Society of Agronomy Golden Opportunity Scholar.

What does a typical work week look like for you? My work varies from week to week. They typically consist of multiple farmer interactions working through USDA-NRCS government contracts and overall soil health implementations for that operation. Each week I continue to work closely with local with the Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS offices to help bridge the gap between the public and private sectors.

Tell me about the grant-writing portion of your job and why that is important for Central Minnesota. Grant writing is a huge portion of my position. This allows me to help farmers find additional funding to help implement large on-farm improvements and soil health practices. This helps offset the initial cost of different implementations to reduce overall farm risk.

When you first began this position, what was one thing that surprised you about the job or industry? It surprised me that there was a lack of women in the agriculture field. Over the past decade, there have been more women involved in agriculture careers.

How has technology changed your job, and describe one interesting innovation you use? Agriculture technology has typically been the last industry to adapt to innovations. Recently the most interesting on-farm innovation is robotic vectors that help animal operations operate more efficiently. A recent innovation I use is irrigation moisture probes that help make accurate water management recommendations to conserve our groundwater resources.

What is a common problem or case you have seen on farms over the last two years? Explain. Record keeping tends to be a common problem in agriculture today. With the increase

in government oversight and agriculture innovations, keeping records of all farm activities is vital for the success of an operation.

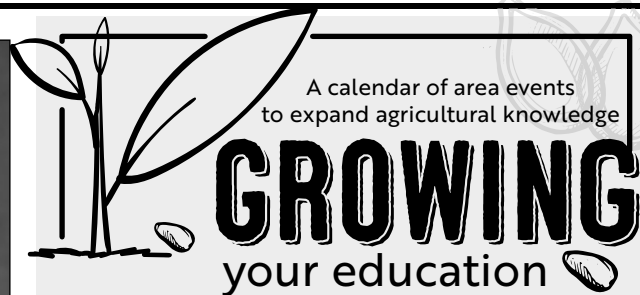
What motivates you to remain in this industry? Helping my producers improve their operations for future success keeps me motivated to remain in the agriculture field. Seeing the on-farm improvements that increase farm resiliency is the most rewarding aspect of my job.

What is one piece of advice you have for agricultural producers as they consider preparing soil for the next planting season? Remember that soil is a living organism that requires nurturing. Utilizing soil health principles (maximize continuous living roots, minimize disturbance, maximize biodiversity, maximize soil cover and implement animals back on the landscape) will help conserve the longevity of the soil to produce maximum outputs.

times because it makes him appreciate when good days comes along.

Plante now has a fully functional farm. Having to build everything besides the barn and house, and putting a lot of work into both of them as well, Plante built himself not only a home but a way of life.

"This isn't a trial run; your life is a one-time deal," Plante said. "If you spend every day working a job you hate, what do you have to look forward to? Life itself isn't easy; life is a mindset, and it's what you make of it."



A calendar of area events to expand agricultural knowledge

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Minnesota Beginner Farmer Institute

The Minnesota Beginner Farmer Institute is a workshop series geared toward young or beginning farmers who are either joining an existing farm or starting their own farm and who are using their farm as a business for profit.

The 2024 four-part workshop — held in Clearwater Jan. 9, Jan. 16, Jan. 23 and Jan. 31 — is free to attend, and lunch is provided. The class will run from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. with doors opening at 9:30 a.m.

Registration is required at z.umn.edu/BF23.

Institute participants will tackle questions like: "What is a business plan and what does my banker want to see when I'm applying for a loan? What can I take for a business deduction and when is the best time to market my grain?"

Topics include business planning and goals, taxes, business entities, financial statements, record keeping, grain marketing and land rent. Each workshop will have educational handouts and presentations.

Contact University of Minnesota Extension Educator Nathan Hulinsky at 218-828-2680 or huli0013@umn.edu with questions.

Strategic Farming: Let's Talk Crops 2024

Discuss key issues and questions around commodity crop production facing Minnesota farmers through the "Strategic Farming: Let's Talk Crops" webinar series. This live, online program will provide up-to-date, research-based information to help optimize crop management strategies. Sessions will be held over Zoom — which can be accessed via your computer, phone or other mobile device — and will run from 9-10 a.m. Wednesdays, Jan. 10, 2024, through March 27, 2024, aside from Jan. 17 when no session will take place due to the Minnesota Ag Expo.

Sessions will be informal and open to all interested. Each session will start with a brief presentation by the discussion leaders for the day, followed by discussion framed around farmer/participant questions on the topic.

For more details and to register, visit z.umn.edu/strategic-farming.

Not able to attend a day? No problem. Sessions will be recorded and posted for viewing later at your convenience.

Topics and speakers:

— Jan. 10: Grain Prices and Marketing Strategies Given Current Geopolitics and Soybean Crush Capacity. Speaker Frayne Olson, North Dakota State University crops economist and marketing specialist.

— Jan. 24: Big Data and Corn Genomics — What does it all mean for you? Speakers Candice Hirsch, University of Minnesota Corn geneticist, and Jeff Coulter, UMN Extension corn agronomist.

— Jan. 31: Pushing Soybean Maturity to the Max. Speaker Seth Naeve, UMN Extension soybean agronomist,

— Feb. 7: Making Herbicides Work Better Part 1: Making choices and adjustments to ensure a successful application. Speaker Tom Peters, Extension sugar beet agronomist.

— Feb. 14: Making herbicides work better Part 2: Demystifying adjuvants. Speakers Joe Ikley, assistant professor and extension weed specialist at North Dakota State University, and Greg Dahl, adjuvant development adviser.

— Feb. 21: What pays for soybean insect management? Speaker Bob Koch, UMN Extension soybean entomologist.

— Feb. 28: Thirsty Cover Crops — Do They Impact our Cash Crops? Speakers Anna Cates, UMN state soil health specialist, and Dan Smith, nutrient and pest management outreach specialist from the University of Wisconsin Madison.

— March 6: Fertilizer — How to get your best ROI. Speakers Dan Kaiser, UMN Extension nutrient management specialist, and Jeff Vetsch, UMN researcher at Southern Research & Outreach Center.

— March 13: Are we smarter than the average European corn borer and corn rootworm? Speaker Fei Yang, UMN Extension corn entomologist.

— March 20: Efficacy matters: Fungicides for managing specific corn and soybean diseases. Speaker Kiersten Wise, University of Kentucky professor and Extension plant pathologist.

— March 27: Look Out! An Update on Emerging Soybean and Corn Diseases. Speaker Dean Malvick, UMN Extension plant pathologist.

Risk Management Webinars

The University of Minnesota Extension will host a three-part winter webinar series titled "Economic Risk as a Cattle Owner: LRP, Business Entities and Bulletproof Feeders."

Zoom meetings will be 8-9 p.m. Jan. 17, Jan. 31 and Feb. 14.

This webinar series will help answer cattle owner's questions on Livestock Risk Protection, risk protection for business entities with a focus on beef cattle, and how to consistently capture the most money for your feeder calves.

Farmers, 4-H members, ag business professionals who work with farmers and those interested in beef cows are invited to attend.

Register at the links below.

— Jan. 17: Market outlook and navigating Livestock Risk Protection. Charley Fetzer, of Commodity and Ingredient Hedging LLC, will join to help producers better understand LRP and how to make it work for individuals' operations. Register at z.umn.edu/BeefJan17.

— Jan. 31: Establishing Business Entities for Risk Protection. Clint Fischer of Braintrust Ag will guide the group through the role of business entities in risk protection. While this session will have a cattle focus, all types of farm business will benefit from this discussion. Register at z.umn.edu/BeefJan31

— Feb. 14: Building a Reputation for Bulletproof Feeders. University of Minnesota Extension's Dr. Joe Armstrong, DVM, will present on how to provide the best opportunity for feeders to bring the most, and consistent prices from buyers. Register at z.umn.edu/BeefFeb14.

Registration is required for each webinar. Participants will receive a Zoom link following registration as well as recordings should they be unable to attend the live session.

Contact Armstrong at armst225@umn.edu or 612-624-3610 with questions.

Plante from page 2B

"My dad knew me better than I did because he always told me, 'You will never grow anything other than weeds (on your farm),' which only pushed me harder," Plante said. "He would never put me down though."

After creating the farm he has today from nothing, Plante said he now enjoys his life and never has a day he wakes up complaining about his job. He also said he likes to have bad days at

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EAB survival in warm winter

BY RYAN MURPHY,
DEPARTMENT OF FOREST RESOURCES
AND JULIE WEISENHORN,
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION

Emerald ash borers generally have a one-year life cycle that can

extend to two years in a vigorously growing ash tree. EAB larvae live under the bark of ash trees and damage the tree's outer sapwood and vascular tissue, or phloem, that carries food from the leaves to the rest of the tree. These tunnels girdle the trunk and branches, interrupting the flow of water and nutrients.

A tree can be killed by EAB in as little as two years.

While subzero temperatures are not the most pleasant conditions for us, they can be a factor in helping to control pests. Research has shown that if temperatures get down to 30 degrees below zero for 24 to 48 hours, a significant number of EAB larvae will likely be killed. Typical cold temperatures in Minnesota may be part of the reason that EAB has progressed more slowly through the state than in others such as Michigan and Ohio.

Warmer winter temperatures mean EAB larvae will be more likely to survive. If temperatures warm more quickly in spring or stay warm longer into fall, larvae can feed over a longer time. This may result in a larger number of larvae emerging after one year instead of over a two-year cycle.



PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION
Emerald ash borer larvae live under the bark of ash trees and damage the tree's outer sapwood and vascular tissue. Warmer winter temperatures mean EAB larvae will be more likely to survive.

Another factor that can make EAB damage in ash trees worse is drought conditions during previous growing seasons. Imagine being stressed from everyday life and then you get the flu. As for all living creatures, stress makes plants more susceptible to pests and diseases and less able to recover from damage.

Lack of snow cover is another issue that may stress trees. Snow is an excellent insulator that protects roots by moderating soil temperatures. If the area suddenly has an extreme drop in temperature that causes the ground temperature to also drop, people may see greater than usual root death.

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Temperature fluctuations can increase respiratory stress in calves

I have spoken with several dairy farms in Central Minnesota over the past month and some have complained about respiratory problems with their calves. They are not alone.

In central Minnesota, our mid-day weather has been damp with inconsistent temperatures and these fluctuations increase stress on calves. This article will share behaviors and strategies calf managers can use to reduce this stress on the future of their herd.

Many managers observe the pattern of increased incidents of respiratory disease in calves following cold weather. This concern is well warranted because there is a lot on the line. Early detection and treatment of respiratory stress is important to the calves' immediate health and her long-term career in the milking herd. Evidence suggests that cows who were treated more than once for respiratory disease as calves produce 10% less milk in their first lactation, and 15% in their second lactation. These effects on milk production have not been demonstrated in calves only treated once, underlining the importance of quick and effective treatment. Heifers that suffered pneumonia as calves are older on average at first calving compared to heifers that did not get sick.

A strong place to start evaluating your cold-weather calf management is with prevention. Fresh air through proper ventilation is essential to preventing respiratory issues, especially in calves. Fresh airflow through pens removes stale air, harmful ammonia odors and helps to control humidity levels in the calf's environment. A common, though incorrect, approach is prioritizing the protection of calves from cold temperatures at the price of adequate ventilation. Calves should be housed in draft-free environments where no direct wind can reach them. Calf managers should focus on providing deep dry bedding and adequate nutrition as well as calf jackets in cold weather. These tools will allow calves to both keep warm and continually breathe clean fresh air.



UNIVERSITY OF
MN EXTENSION
DANA ADAMS

When appropriate, antibiotics are commonly used on farms as part of their calf respiratory disease protocols. Rather than throwing everything at the proverbial wall and hoping something will stick, work with your veterinarian to choose an appropriate antibiotic treatment, incorporating bacterial culture from previous calves if available. Pneumonia and other infections caused by *Mycoplasma bovis* are particularly difficult to treat. Use antibiotics labeled for *Mycoplasma* and consider identifying *Mycoplasma* through lab testing to inform treatment and prognosis.

When calves do get sick, provide support with anti-inflammatory medications, injectable vitamin supplements and oral electrolytes. If your farm is dealing with an outbreak, work with your veterinarians to evaluate if an intranasal vaccine use can enhance the immune response and be beneficial. Key steps calf managers can take include providing extra bedding and calf coats to sick calves which will assist in them maintaining their body temperature. As energy and protein are necessary for them to respond to the infection, milk should not be withheld from sick calves. Another step calf managers can take is breaking the required daily feeding into smaller amounts that are given more frequently, thus giving calves with lung problems a chance to "catch their breath" during feeding.

Providing adequate ventilation as well as deep dry bedding, adequate nutrition and calf jackets in cold weather will set calves up for success in cold weather. When calves do get sick, calf managers can provide extra bedding, calf coats to sick calves, and continue to meet calf's energy and protein requirements through more frequent daily feedings.

Information for this article was obtained from Penn State Extension and South Dakota State University. Residents of Stearns, Benton, Morrison and Sherburne counties can direct questions to adam1744@umn.edu or 320-204-2968.

Cross to speak at Benton County 4-H meeting

Benton County 4-H wants to motivate the community in a big way.

Aaron Cross, a three-time Paralympian in the sport of archery and a motivational speaker and life skills trainer, will present at a January meeting.

Cross is scheduled to speak at 6 p.m. Jan. 14 inside the sanctuary at First Presbyterian Church, 306 Norway Drive in Foley.

As a University of Minnesota Extension Educator for Benton County 4-H, Ann Olson said Benton County 4-H will host a short meeting of 15 minutes before Cross' hour-long presentation. A question-and-answer period will follow.

Olson said the event is free and open to the public.

Costs are being covered by Benton County 4-H.

Cross, 48, is a quadriplegic who sustained his injuries following a vehicle accident in May 1991.

Taking the outcome into his own hands, Cross has gone on to become a U.S. medal winner in archery at the Paralympic level as well as to participate in skydiving, scuba diving, marathons, triathlons, duathlons, trap shooting, hunting and more.

Cross will share his powerful message about resilience with Benton County 4-H and others at the event.



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Aaron Cross will share a motivational message with Benton County 4-H at 6 p.m. Jan. 14. The free and open-to-the-public event takes place at First Presbyterian Church in Foley.

TILLAGE talk



Producers may know that reduced tillage benefits the soil and agricultural operations, but do they know the benefits of each system? Each month a different conservation tillage system will be highlighted to provide producers with information needed to successfully

switch tillage systems on their operation.

Strip tillage is a conservation tillage method that leaves narrow tilled strips where a crop is planted. The other areas are left untilled. The tilled strips can vary in size but are typically around 6 inches wide.

A special strip tillage machine is used to make these strips and incorporate fertilizer at the same time. This type of tillage can reduce the number of passes in the field and cut down on fuel and fertilizer costs.

Strip tillage is an important conservation tillage with many soil health benefits. The untilled strips leave the soil undisturbed helping reduce compaction, improve soil structure and reduce soil erosion. Incorporating fertilizer improves nutrient management through precise placement. In the long run this can cut down on fertilizer costs.

Strip tillage can also increase the amount of organic matter in the soil. Increased amounts of organic matter can improve crop development by increasing nutrient capacity of the soil, improving biological functions and strengthening soil structure. Strengthening soil structure aids in water infiltration and can improve the drainage of the soil, decreasing the amount of run-off.

Switching to strip tillage can be challenging and take a different mindset. Changes in management will have to be established to have success.

Just like any other type of tillage, proper timing is critical. Moisture levels in the soil should not be too wet or too dry. Changes in weed control can be tricky; increased weed pressure can occur. Careful considerations will have to be made on how to control these weeds, especially in organic systems.

These changes will make strip tillage a successful conservation management tool and increase the health of the soil.

Information provided by the Morrison County Soil and Water Conservation District.

**BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
DECEMBER 19, 2023**

The Benton County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on December 19, 2023, in the Benton County Board Room in Foley, MN. Call to order by Chair Scott Johnson was at 9:00 AM followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. A roll call showed Commissioners Steve Heinen, Scott Johnson, Jared Gapinski and Ed Popp present. Commissioner Beth Schlangen was present at 9:04 AM.

County Administrator Montgomery Headley requested to add two Consent Agenda items: Consent Agenda Item # 11 to consider the 2024 Tobacco License Applications by the Auditor-Treasurer's Office and Consent Agenda item #12 to consider the appointments to the Board of Adjustment, Planning Commission and Solid Waste Advisory Committee by the Planning & Zoning Office. Motion by Popp and seconded by Heinen to approve the amended Agenda. Motion carried unanimously.

There was no one present to speak under Open Forum. Motion by Gapinski and seconded by Popp to approve Consent Agenda items 1 – 12: 1) approve the Regular Board Meeting Minutes of December 7, 2023 and authorize the Chair to sign; 2) approve the Park Commission Appointments; 3) approve the Resolution establishing commitments of fund balance and authorize the Chair to sign; 4) approve the Resolution setting aside net proceeds from tax-forfeiture land sales to County Parks and authorize the Chair to sign; 5) approve the Resolution to delegate the authority to make electronic funds transfer payments and authorize the Chair to sign; 6) approve the contract for outside labor attorney services and authorize the Chair to sign; 7) approve the Tobacco License applications for Shady's Railside and Adam's Tobacco Shop; 8) approve the biennial audit of Benton County Sheriff's Office body camera data; 9) approve the contract renewal with Mayo Medical for SWAT paramedic reimbursement and authorize the Chair to sign; 10) approve the OHV grant with the State of Minnesota and authorize the Chair to sign; 11) approve the 2024 Tobacco License Applications for Mini Mart #4 & #10; 12) approve the appointments to the Board of Adjustment, Planning Commission and Solid Waste Advisory Committee. Motion carried unanimously.

Next, Sheriff Troy Heck presented the Retirement Award to Detective Jerome Kahl in appreciation for 19 years of loyal and distinguished service to Benton County. Kahl's retirement is effective December 28, 2023.

Next, Benton Economic Partnership (BEP) Director Amanda Othout and Minnesota Homeownership Program Manager Greg Krenz (virtual) presented information regarding the 2024 Minnesota City Participation Program (MCP)P). This program uses the Tax-Exempt Bond Housing Pool Allocation to enable communities throughout the state to efficiently provide first-time homebuyer loans in their community without the administrative burden of running their own bond program. The first-time homebuyers access the program through their local lenders and have access to downpayment and closing cost assistance if needed. Participants will not be responsible for paying the application deposit or processing fee this year. This is subject to change however, Minnesota Housing will provide notification in advance of future program years if there is a deposit or processing fee (\$20 per \$100,000 in funding). There will be a minimum usage requirement of 150% of the allocation in order to participate the following year. The benefits of participating in the MCP)P program include: promoting first-time homeownership in your community; access to downpayment and closing cost loans; minimal administrative burden; marketing and outreach support; dedicated funding for your community; no deposit or fee in 2024; and information on loan activity in your area. Allocations are based on the populations in those geographic areas. Benton County has a population of roughly 42,000, which, based on 2023 allocation levels would put Benton County at approximately \$700,000 in allocation for first-time home buyer loans through this program. Motion by Gapinski and seconded by Heinen to approve the 2024 MCP)P Agreement and authorize the execution of the application by the County Board Chair and County Administrator. Motion carried unanimously.

Next, Headley requested the County Board to consider an amendment to the service agreement with BEP to administer Statewide Affordable Housing Aid. Counties will begin receiving Statewide Affordable Housing Aid beginning in December 2023 and annually thereafter. As the name indicates, this State Aid is intended to assist counties and cities in creating affordable housing options. BEP has agreed at its November Board meeting to administer this funding on behalf of Benton County. As stated in the amended BEP Service Agreement, BEP must utilize these funds in a manner consistent with the enabling legislation, which includes returning to the State any funds left unspent four years after initial receipt of the County. Motion by Johnson and seconded by Popp to approve Amendment #2 to the Benton Economic Partnership Services agreement to administer Benton County's Statewide Affordable Housing Aid. Motion carried unanimously.

Next, Headley requested to conduct a public hearing on proposed changes to the Benton County fee schedule. County Departments are asked to review and possibly update their fees each year. Generally, this review has occurred in December, with a public hearing held the last meeting of the year for the County Board to consider recommended changes to the fee schedule. Department Heads shared the following fee schedule changes:

- Land Services Director Roxanne Achman shared the Planning and Zoning, Assessor and Recorder proposed changes:
- Planning & Zoning:
 - Variance Application Fee changed from \$354 to \$554 plus recording fee
 - Conditional Use Permit changed from \$354 to \$454 plus recording fee
 - Interim Use Permit changed from \$354 to \$454 plus recording fee

- Assessor:
 - Assessing fees per hour changed from \$45 to \$50
- Recorder:
 - Monthly index computer printout changed from \$20 plus \$0.25 per page to \$20 plus \$0.50 per page
 - Single use service fee changed from \$5 one-time charge plus \$1 per page to \$5 one-time charge plus \$0.50 per page
 - Removal of the felony name change (\$20)
- Sheriff Troy Heck shared the proposed Sheriff's Office fee schedule changes:
 - Fingerprinting changed from \$10 to \$15
 - Civil Process changed from \$50 to \$75
 - Added Civil Standby at \$75 per hour for any requests longer than 15 minutes
 - Writ of Execution changed from \$50 to \$75
 - Writ of Execution Commission changed from 4% of total to 4.5% of total
 - Writ of Execution not Found changed from \$50 to \$75
 - Added copies of Writ of Execution at \$5
 - Filing No Service changed from \$50 to \$75
 - Legal Not Found changed from \$50 to \$75
 - Securing Property changed from \$50 per hour to \$75 per hour
 - Eviction changed from \$50 to \$75

Auditor-Treasurer Christine Scherbing shared the following proposed change:

- Tobacco Retail License Fee changed from \$125 to \$150
- Human Services Director Sandi Shoberg shared the following proposed Human Services Fee Schedule changes:
- Removed Legally Licensed Family Daycare Fee
 - Removed Child Care Licensing Inspection Fee (initial 1 year) (\$50)
 - Removed Child Care Licensing Renewal Inspection Fee (\$100 every other year)
 - Child Passenger Safety Training – Individuals changed from \$80 to \$96 billed to insurance
 - Removed Rule 25 Assessments (\$200)
 - Removed Footcare (\$20 donation)

County Administrator Montgomery Headley shared the following proposed Attorney's Office Fee Schedule changes on behalf of County Attorney Karl Schmidt:

- Added Electronic Data on DVD at \$5 for each DVD
- Added Electronic Data on USB Drive at \$25 for each 64 GB USB Drive

The Public Hearing on the proposed fee schedule opened at 9:46 AM. No one was present to speak. The Public Hearing on the proposed fee schedule closed at 9:46 AM. There were no emails, letters or other communications to be read into the record. The Departments have not received any comments or concerns from State agencies, cities or townships. No official action was required by an affected Township. Motion by Gapinski and seconded by Heinen to adopt the revised Benton County fee schedule, with changes effective January 1, 2024. Motion carried unanimously.

Next, Headley requested the County Board consider the Personnel Policy Revisions. The revisions include:

- Page 3-4; IT Director and CHS Administrator become Department Heads: other clean-up
- Page 10-20; new language for the DDA Maintenance Program
- Page 35; add Juneteenth Holiday
- Page 47-52; new State required Earned Sick and Safe Time Leave
- Page 87; employee access to personnel records
- Page 103; remove marijuana from list of illegal drugs
- Page 118; remove references to hair color and hairstyles from dress code

Several members of the County Board wished to see an example of what increases would look like with the DDA Maintenance Program before approving. Motion by Heinen and seconded by Popp to approve all changes to the Personnel Policy changes with the exception of the new language of the DDA Maintenance Program (the last paragraph on page 19 of the Personnel Policies). Motion carried unanimously.

Next, Headley requested the County Board appoint an Information Technology Director. Revisions to the County Personnel Policies now designate Information Technology as a County Department Head, whose appointment is thereby a function to the County Board. Headley recommends the appointment of Steve Stang as the Information Technology Department Head. Motion by Johnson and seconded by Gapinski to approve Steve Stang as the Information Technology Director. Motion carried unanimously.

Next, Headley requested the County Board consider the final 2024 Benton County Budget and Levy. This item represents the final Board action on the 2024 budget and levy. A proposed 2024 budget and levy was adopted by the County Board on September 26th. A Truth in Taxation Public Meeting was conducted on December 7th. The final 2024 budget and levy must be adopted and certified to the Auditor-Treasurer by December 27th (within five business days of December 20th). This is a summary of major factors in the Final 2024 Budget and Levy:

- The final 2024 levy increases 5.15%, or \$1,163,356 from 2023, to a total property tax levy of \$23,748,478 ("gross" percentage increase partially offset by expected 1.17% growth from new construction)
- With this proposed change for 2024, the 10-year average levy change for Benton County is a 1.9% increase
- The proposed levy increase falls below the 16.6% expected growth in the County's payable 2024 net tax capacity, which translates into a reduced County tax rate in 2024; the estimated 2024 County tax rate will fall from 48.27% to 43.54% of tax capacity (down from a peak of 77.74% in 2013)
- Based on a median house value of \$272,910 (up 16.6% from payable 2023's median value of \$234,752), a homeowner's County property taxes would increase \$77.57 in 2024, or \$6.46 per month
- The final 2024 operating budget totals \$54,636,319, a decrease of \$7,726,140, or a 12.4% decrease from 2023; most of the reduction is due to a substantially smaller 2024 road

- construction program
 - The final levy increase is comprised of the following major elements:
 - Employee compensation and benefits \$1,558,771
 - Increased interest earnings on idle cash (500,000)
 - Abolish two vacant positions (see note below) (218,134)
 - New positions (see note below) 160,437
 - Increased highway maintenance accounts 104,100
 - Increased DOC billing for central DOC admins costs 75,273
 - New annual cost of Tyler Tax and CAMA systems 52,545
 - All other operating and revenue account adjustments (net) 69,636

Total Levy Change for 2024 \$1,163,356

The proposed budget includes the following "Policy Issues" from County Board action:

- A Staff Appraiser position to allow the County to perform more property valuation work internally (and reduce its reliance on contracted local assessors)
- A Public Safety Dispatcher to increase the amount of time at least two dispatchers are on duty
- In Human Services, an Eligibility Specialist for the resumption of medical assistance eligibility redeterminations (offset by one-time state funding and based on the assumption the position will be eliminated through attrition once state funding is exhausted); and a Social Worker for MNCHOICE assessments, also fully offset by state/federal funding
- In Public Health, a supervisor position due to the creation of a separate department and the need for additional supervisory capacity (fully offset by a new public health grant)
- The proposed budget eliminates two full-time positions – the HR/Safety position in Administration and a Social Worker in Human Services (both positions are currently vacant)
 - Employee compensation and benefits comprise the largest single item in the 2024 levy increase; the final 2024 budget funds general wage adjustments and step increases. Also, the final 2024 budget includes a 10% increase in employee health insurance contributions
 - The County's General Revenue fund balance at the end of 2022 stood at 5.2 months of expenditure coverage, versus a goal standard of 5 months expenditure coverage; the Human Services fund balance equaled 6.3 months of expenditure coverage at December 2022; with the Revenue Fund balance approaching the goal standard, no further Revenue fund balance usage is reflected in the proposed budget; the proposed budget uses \$500,000 from the Human Services Fund to support capital projects, given that fund's solid position.

Headley requested that the County Board first adopt a Resolution setting the 2024 Benton County Property Tax Levy at \$23,748,478. Motion by Popp and seconded by Gapinski to adopt a Resolution setting the Benton County Property Tax Levy at \$23,748,478. Motion carried unanimously.

Next, Headley requested the County Board adopt a Resolution setting the 2024 Benton County Budget as presented. Motion by Gapinski and seconded by Heinen to adopt a Resolution setting the 2024 Benton County Budget as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Next, Headley requested the County Board to adopt the Elected Officials salaries for 2024. State statutes require the County Board to annually set the salaries of the County's Elected Officials by Resolution. The salaries of said Elected Officials shall be as follows:

Auditor-Treasurer	\$92,750
Sheriff	\$139,424
County Attorney	\$143,200

Motion by Heinen and seconded by Schlangen to approve the Resolution setting the 2024 salaries for the Auditor-Treasurer, County Attorney and Sheriff. Motion carried unanimously.

Next, Headley requested the County Board set the County Commissioner Salaries for 2024. Per MN Statutes §375.055, County Boards establish the annual salaries paid to County Commissioners. Such salary shall be effective January 1, 2024. The amount set forth in the Resolution below reflects County Board consensus from the December 12th Committee of the Whole Meeting:

**BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
RESOLUTION 2023 - # _____**

WHEREAS, Minnesota Statute §375.055 requires that the salary of the County Commissioners be set annually by Resolution of the County Board;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Benton County Board of Commissioners that effective January 1, 2024, the salary of each member of the Benton County Board of Commissioners shall be \$32,401 and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the County Administrator is directed to publish this Resolution in the official newspaper of the County and one other newspaper in the County, pursuant to MN Statutes §375.055, Subdivision 1.

APPROVED AND ADOPTED this 19th day of December, 2023.

/s/Scott Johnson
Chair
Benton County Board of Commissioners
ATTEST:
/s/Montgomery Headley
County Administrator

Motion by Popp and seconded by Gapinski to approve the Resolution setting the 2024 County Board member salaries. Motion carried unanimously.

Next, Headley requested the County Board set the County Board Per Diem Rate for 2024. Per the consensus of the County Board at the December 12th Committee of the Whole, the 2024 per diem rate will be maintained at \$70. The Resolution adopting the 2024 Per Diem Rate for 2024 reads as follows:

**BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
RESOLUTION 2023 # _____**

Benton County notice from page 6B

WHEREAS, MN Statutes §375.055 and MN Statutes §375.06 allow the County Board to establish a schedule of per diem payments for County Commissioners for each day necessarily occupied in the discharge of their duties while acting on any committee under the direction of the Board; and

WHEREAS, said statutes also permit County Board members to be reimbursed for necessary expenses, including traveling expenses, while performing the official duties of County Commissioner, as set by Resolution of the County Board; and,

WHEREAS, MN Statutes §375.055, Subdivision 5 provides that County Board members may participate in any group health insurance program instituted by the County Board for County officers and employees.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Benton County Board of Commissioners that:

1. In addition to annual salaries, County Commissioners may receive a per diem payment for attending meetings of commissions, committees and boards when such attendance is designated by the County Board. Pursuant to MN Statutes §375.055, Subdivision 5, members of the County Board shall not receive a per diem for services on the Board of Auditors, the Board of Equalization, or the Canvassing Board. As a matter of County Board policy, per diems shall not be paid for regular and special meetings of the County Board. Per diems for 2024 shall be as follows:

a. Site inspections as part of the duties of a specific board, committee or commission: \$10 per site, not to exceed five sites.

b. All other boards, committees, commissions, when the individual commissioner or the full board is designated by the County Board to serve on said body: a per diem of \$70.

2. County Commissioners may collect only one per diem each day, regardless of how few or many separate duties connected with the office are performed in such day.

3. In addition, pursuant to MN Statutes §375.055 and §375.06, each County Commissioner may be reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in performing the duties of office. Travel in personal vehicles on official County business shall be reimbursed at the current standard mileage rate promulgated by the Internal Revenue Service or at another rate as determined by the County Board. Meals shall be reimbursed according to

the dollars amounts set forth in the Benton County Personnel Policies.

4. County Commissioners shall be eligible to participate in workers compensation and optional benefits programs instituted by the County Board for county officials and employees. The employer-funded portion of health insurance premiums for County Commissioners shall be the same amounts as provided non-union employees.

5. The County Administrator is directed to publish this Resolution in the official newspaper of the County and one other newspaper in the County, pursuant to MN Statutes §375.055, Subdivision 1.

APPROVED AND ADOPTED this 19th day of December 2023

/s/Scott Johnson
Chair

Benton County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

/s/Montgomery Headley
County Administrator

Motion by Johnson and seconded by Gapinski to adopt a Resolution setting the County Board per diem rate for 2024. Motion carried unanimously.

The Regular County Board meeting was recessed at 10:30 AM to conduct a Human Services Board Meeting.

The Regular Board meeting reconvened at 10:33 AM.

Next, County Engineer Chris Byrd requested the County Board to consider the Eminent Domain proceedings on CSAH 7 reconstruction. As part of the reconstruction project on CSAH 7, the County needs additional highway easement to be able to construct the roadway and increase the safety. The Department has been negotiating in good faith with landowners to acquire necessary permanent easements. The timeline on this project is crucial. All but 2 parcels have signed highway easements. To keep the reconstruction schedule on track, it is in the best interest of the public to initiate eminent domain proceedings while still negotiating with landowners. It was noted to change the Resolution to say County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 4 instead of CSAH 7. Motion by Schlangen and seconded by Popp to adopt the Resolution to initiate Eminent Domain Proceedings with the noted change (CSAH 7 to CSAH 4). Motion carried unanimously.

Next, Byrd requested the County Board to consider APO solicitation for Federal Funding and Resolution of Local Match Funding. The APO solicited for projects to be considered to receive Federal Funding for fiscal year 2026. The deadline for project submittal is January 12, 2024. We will need to send a Resolution certifying availability of local match funding along with the application. In the County's 5-Year road construction CIP, CSAH 3 is identified as a full-depth reclamation project from CSAH 1 (Mayhew Lake Rd) to Popple Creek. This roadway is eligible for partial federal funding. The roadway does not lie entirely within the planning area of the APO and therefore can only receive a maximum of 80% Federal funds of the costs within the planning boundary. Byrd proposed to request approximately \$1,750,000 of Federal Funds. The remainder of the project would be funded with State Aid Construction dollars. Motion by Popp and seconded by Gapinski to allow APO Solicitation for Federal Funding and adopt the Resolution of Local Match Funding. Motion carried unanimously.

Next, Board members reported on recent meetings they attended on behalf of Benton County.

There were no additional comments under "Comments by Commissioners".

Gapinski/Popp to set the Committee of the Whole Meetings: Tuesday, January 2, 2024, Goal Setting Session at Jack & Jim's, 11025 Duelm Rd NE, Foley, MN 56329, 10:00 AM or upon completion of Regular Board Meeting; Monday, January 8, 2024: 1) ARPA Funds discussion; 2) Cannabis Retail Establishment Registration Discussion; 3) Emergency Management update; 4) Application Services Data Manager update; 5) Space Needs Discussion with GLT Architects, Benton County Boardroom, Foley, 8:30 AM; Tuesday, January 23, 2024 Joint Meeting of Cities, Townships and Counties, Watab Town Hall, 660 75th St NW, Sauk Rapids, MN 56379, 6:30 PM. Motion carried unanimously.

Chair Johnson adjourned the Regular Board Meeting at 11:17 AM.

Scott Johnson, Chair

Benton County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Montgomery Headley,
Benton County Administrator

R-1-1B

CONCILIATION COURT SUMMONS

STATE OF MINNESOTA
COUNTY OF BENTON
IN DISTRICT COURT
SEVENTH JUDICIAL
DISTRICT

Court File No:
05-CO-23-215
Case Type: Conciliation

Shetland, LLC, Firstmark, LLC vs Russell Moss

1. You are summoned to appear at a hearing in this Conciliation Court (Small Claims Court) case. This means you must appear at the hearing scheduled for:

Setting: March 18, 2024

Time: 2:00 PM

Hearing Type: Conciliation
Hearing

Location: REMOTE

Before the presiding judge at the following location:

**Benton County
District Court
615 Highway 23,
PO Box 189
Foley MN 56329
(320) 968-5205**

2. If the defendant does not appear at the hearing, the plaintiff may win this case by default, which means the plaintiff could be awarded a money judgment

against the defendant. The judgment could include the amount the plaintiff requested in the Statement of Claim as well as other fees and costs approved by a judicial officer.

3. If the plaintiff does not appear at the hearing, this case may be dismissed. If the defendant has filed a counterclaim, then a default judgment could be entered against the plaintiff.

4. The Defendant may bring a counterclaim against the Plaintiff. A counterclaim must be filed at least seven days before the Conciliation Court hearing.

Dated: December 20, 2023

Megan Bergman
Court Administrator
Benton County District Court
615 Highway 23,
PO Box 189
Foley MN 56329
(320) 968-5205

cc. ELIZABETH JOANN HALET

Forms and instructions are available on the court's website starting at <http://mncourts.gov/GetForms.aspx?c=10>.

More information about Conciliation Court is available online at <http://mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/Conciliation-Court.aspx>.

If you have questions about this matter, consider contacting one of the self-help centers (statewide or local): <http://mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/Self-Help-Centers.aspx>.

R-1-3B

2024 County "SCORE" Grants Available for Solid Waste Abatement, Recycling Projects, and Tire Recycling

Are you looking for a way to positively impact your community but don't have the funds to bring your idea to life?

Benton County is seeking to enhance existing or promote new solid waste abatement and recycling activities/programs through our SCORE grant application process. Examples of recently funded projects include recycled material playground equipment, composting, and educational plays at schools. These grants are open to the individuals, public and private sectors.

NEW! Benton County Tire Recycling Program. This grant is now open for applications.

For more information about either grant program and to obtain application forms, please access the Benton County Web site at www.co.benton.mn.us or contact the Benton County Planning & Zoning at: Benton County Government Center, 531 Dewey Street, P.O. Box 129 Foley, MN 56329-0129, (320) 968-5065. Applications must be received by February 2nd, 2024 at the above address.

R-1-1B

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MINDEN TOWNSHIP NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to voters of Minden Township, Benton County, State of Minnesota, will be held for 2 week period beginning: January 2, 2024 through January 16, 2024.

Affidavits of Candidacy shall be filed with the Town Clerk between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. from January 2, 2024, through January 16, 2024.

Filing will close on January 16, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.

Filing fee is \$2.00 and must be paid at the time of filing.

Offices to be filled at the March Annual Election are:
Clerk for 2-year term
Supervisor for 3-year term

Absent voting will be at the Clerk's office of the town hall on March 9, 2024, between the hours of 10:00 a.m. to Noon.

The following question will be placed on the March 12, 2024, township election ballot:

*Town Question

Appointment of Minden Town Clerk and Treasurer Shall Option B, providing for the appointment of the Clerk and Treasurer by the town board, be adopted for the government of Minden Township?

Yes
 No

FR-52-2B

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Veteran Car Donations

While we appreciate every donation, in some cases, we find that we are unable to accept certain vehicles, watercraft, and/or recreational vehicles due to the prohibitive costs of acquisition. If you have any questions, please give us a call at (833) 937-2593.

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Enrollment for 2024 Crop Year programs open

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that agricultural producers can now enroll in the Farm Service Agency's Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs for the 2024 crop year. The deadline to complete enrollment and any election change is March 15.

On Nov. 16, 2023, President Biden signed into law H.R. 6363, the Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (Pub. L. 118-22), which extended the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115-334), more commonly known as the 2018 Farm Bill, through Sept. 30. This extension allows authorized programs, including ARC and PLC, to continue operating.

2024 elections, enrollment

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County or PLC, which provide crop-by-crop protection, or ARC-Individual, which protects the entire farm. Although election changes for 2024 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm it will continue for 2024 unless an election change is made.

If producers do not submit their election revision by the March 15 deadline, their election remains the same as their 2023 election for commodities on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the cropland.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice, safflower

seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

ARC and PLC payments for a given crop year are paid out the following fall to allow actual county yields and the market year average prices to be finalized. These payments help mitigate fluctuations in either revenue or prices for certain crops. Payments for crops that may trigger for the 2023 crop year will be issued in fall 2024.

Crop insurance considerations

ARC and PLC are part of a broader United States Department of Agriculture safety net that also includes crop insurance and marketing assistance loans.

Producers are reminded that ARC and PLC elections and enrollments can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products.

Producers on farms with a PLC election can purchase Supplemental Coverage Option through their approved insurance provider; however, producers on farms where ARC is the election are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres for that crop on that farm.

Unlike SCO, the Enhanced Coverage Option is unaffected by an ARC election. Producers may add ECO regardless of the farm program election.

Many universities offer web-based decision tools to help producers make informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations. Producers are encouraged to use the tool of their choice to support their ARC and PLC elections.

For more information on ARC and PLC, producers can visit the ARC and PLC webpage or contact their local USDA Service Center.



Farm Service Agency News
 by Ryan Brunn,
 executive director
 for Benton and
 Mille Lacs counties

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 With Loader
\$388/Month



1025R Tractor
 With Loader
\$299/Month



MIDWEST MACHINERY CO

Offers end January 31, 2024. Financing subject to approval through John Deere Financial. Some restrictions apply; see dealer for details. Monthly payments based on \$1,500 down payment. Payments include installation and setup, but do not include sales tax. Financing offers may require a financing fee.