



STEELE COUNTY Times



4-H WEEK 2017:
STEELE COUNTY PARADE
OF CHAMPIONS. **A4-5**

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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2017

Bloomington, Minnesota



Owatonna Forward moves to next phase

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

A grassroots, citizen-driven effort to move Owatonna forward into the future is ready to move onto the next phase. The group of about 25 citizens calls itself Owatonna Forward. Members are aiming to connect all citizens and

invest in a shared vision for the future of Owatonna.

Since the group began meeting a few years ago, it has been gathering different perspectives and dreams from the community at large. More than 2,000 public surveys have been completed and 400 people have attended various meetings, according to Seth Madole, a member of Owatonna Forward. "We have finished the listening phase,"

Madole said. "They have provided their thoughts on the strengths, opportunities and threats (of Owatonna)," he added.

The next phase, Madole said, is to launch 12 destiny drivers, which will summarize and categorize the input from the community. Some of the destiny drivers include talent recruitment, housing, safety, parks and recreation, education and sense of community.

SEE OWATONNA, A3

STAFF PHOTO: RICK BUSSLER
Wearing lime green T-shirts, Owatonna Forward members took to the streets of downtown Owatonna during the annual Homecoming Parade Friday afternoon to distribute bags and literature promoting the work of the group. Owatonna Forward is hoping to connect citizens and create actions that will drive results and help ensure a prosperous Owatonna.

Board to re-interview for top job

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

After the top choice turned down the Steele County Board for the administrator position, commissioners are planning to look again at the other top two candidates.

At last week's board meeting, commissioners set a special board meeting for Thursday, Oct. 12 to re-interview Jennifer Bromeland, city administrator for Jackson and Scott Goldberg, the environmental services director for Steele County.

In late September, Michael Plante of Wabasha County rejected the county's offer to replace Laura Elvebak, who resigned earlier this year and has since filed a lawsuit against the board claiming sexual harassment and Minnesota Open Meeting Law violations.

Plante, along with the other two candidates, had been interviewed and introduced during a public meet-and-greet in mid-September. The board offered the position to Plante, but things fell apart during contract negotiations.

The board has several options in picking a new administrator. They include picking one of the two remaining candidates, going back to the original pool of applicants or starting the entire process over.

"They certainly can go any direction, but their intention seems to be going with one of the two finalists," said Janice Fransen, interim county administrator.

During last week's meeting, the board also set the county's preliminary budget for 2018 at \$24 million, which represents a 4.8 percent increase over the current year. The proposed increase accounts for \$1.1 million in additional expenses, according to Fransen. She said the board's intention is to pair down the budget more in the weeks ahead.

The biggest items in the proposed increase are salary and benefits for employees and capital outlay, Fransen said.



STAFF PHOTO: RICK BUSSLER

Pastor Sandy Miller stands in front of the steeple at First Lutheran Church in Hope where the cross is falling apart. Church members hope an upcoming Swedish Meatball Supper will help them raise enough funds to repair the steeple.

Rural congregation seeks help in repairing steeple

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

Meatball supper set for Hope church

Nearly a century after the original steeple was affixed to First Lutheran Church in Hope, the cross is in desperate need of repair.

Worried that the cross will simply fall apart, parishioners at the tiny Steele County church are hoping that an upcoming fundraiser will rescue them before something catastrophic happens. The church is hoping to raise some of the money needed to complete the \$30,000 project.

"We are grateful and blessed that the cross of Christ has been a beacon in the community," said Pastor Sandy Miller. Since the church opened its doors on Dec. 24, 1921, the cross has provided that "there is hope in Hope, and our hope is in Jesus Christ," she said.

Miller says it's important to keep the cross towering over the Hope community for many years to come. As she looks at the cross, she said, "I see something that will stand for all eternity, despite what's going on in the world."

First Lutheran is hosting a Swedish Meatball Supper featuring hand rolled meatballs with gravy on Sunday, Oct. 15 from 3 to 7 p.m. The food will be served cafeteria style, and takeout orders will also be available.

Meatball suppers had been a tradition for decades at First Lutheran up until a few years ago. Since the last supper in 2014, the church has undergone a major remodeling project.

"We have completely refurbished the church since 2014," Miller said, noting the church built a new entry way and made the structure handicap-accessible. A new roof and new siding have also been added to the church.

Last September the church experienced a major hardship when

heavy rains that caused major flooding throughout the region flooded out the basement. Luckily, insurance covered most of that damage.

Miller said half of the proceeds from the meatball supper will go towards the steeple project while the other half will benefit the Ellendale food shelf.

The steeple project, which is set to get underway in January, is slated to make the cross weather resistant, repair the cracked old wood wheel and replace the shapes on the steeple itself. Miller said birds have been building nests in the steeple and the wood has been rotting away.

According to Miller, the church has some memorials and leftover insurance money for the steeple project.

"It was non-negotiable to get this done. It needed to be done," she said. "The cross is our priority."

Like many small rural churches, First Lutheran has struggled over the years. It saddens Miller that there seems to be "not as much interest in going to church" with the younger generation.

But since Miller came to the congregation in 2010, it has more than doubled church attendance. There are currently about 50 people attending each Sunday.

"We feel so blessed that the Lord has allowed us to keep ministry here," Miller said. "We're just a very simple church with a simple group of people, but the spirit is here" she added.

IF YOU GO...

Swedish Meatball Dinner
Sunday, Oct. 15
3-7 p.m.

Proceeds to benefit food shelf and steeple project

First Lutheran Church Hope

ALWAYS AWESOME

Group honors 6 distinguished Blossoms

BY LEMAR NELSON
STAFF WRITER

A crowd estimated at 250 gathered in the Liberty room of the Blooming Prairie Servicemen's Club Saturday night to honor six Blossoms that have made significant impacts in the lives of other people.

The Forever Blossoms group of the foundation sponsored the deserving

personalities for the awards on a night that featured lively conversation, a delicious roast beef and shrimp dinner, and remarks from the six honorees.

Following the dinner, Ed Foundation President Julie Noble explained the foundation and its purpose, and also read the list of donations to the club in the past year. Emcees Doug and Judy Myers then introduced the various presenters to give the awards.

SEE AWESOME, A3

A Royal Couple

STAFF PHOTO: HOWARD LESTRUD

Bloomington has a new royal couple as Mitchell Oswald was crowned king and Rachel Pirkil queen at Blooming Prairie Homecoming festivities Monday night. Oswald is the son of Phil Oswald and Kathy Paulner while Pirkil's parents are Tim and Lori Pirkil. Other king candidates were Jake Ressler, Max Romeo, Ethan Arett and Lucas Noble. The other queen candidates were McKenna Hein, Linnea Sunde, Ayren Ingvalson and Emma Christianson. See Page 3A for more details on this week's homecoming festivities at Blooming Prairie.



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AREA DEATHS

Owen Nagel, 75
Joseph Wurst, 80

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