

STEELE COUNTY Times

HOLIDAY Extra

Wednesday, December 23, 2020
www.SteeleCountyTimes.com
Blooming Prairie, Minnesota



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Despite a recent diagnosis of lung cancer, Donnavon Eaker of Ellendale is celebrating the holiday season with confidence that she will beat it. "I'm not ready to hang it up yet," she says.

"I let my faith be bigger than my fear."

Donnavon Eaker
Fighting Cancer

Faith plays key role in Eaker's cancer fight

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

Writing out Christmas cards is normal for many people, but for Donnavon Eaker it is something she hasn't done for quite some time. That's until this year. And the reason it is finally happening comes as she is fighting the battle of her life.

"I haven't been able to do Christmas cards in over 30 years," Eaker said from her home. "I am just thankful I can do them."

Just last month Eaker was diagnosed with non-small lung cancer. She began treatment at Mayo Clinic in Rochester on Dec. 4. Eaker, who has operated the award-winning Steve's Meat Market in Ellendale for the past 47 years, is being forced to step away from something she loves to do.

For several months, Eaker said, she experienced what she thought was a bad cold that produced a rattle when she was breathing. She eventually thought it may have progressed to pneumonia. She also began to notice her energy level just wasn't the same, but she attributed that to stress. It wasn't until she began spitting up blood that she knew something was drastically wrong.

Doctors performed a CT scan and discovered cancer in the brain, bones, liver, lymph nodes and a tumor in the lung. After they delivered the diagnosis, they asked Eaker how badly she wanted to fight it. "I will fight

SEE **FAITH PLAYS, A9**

The gift of good news

This week the Steele County Times presents its fourth annual Christmas gift to readers. It's the gift of good news.

While good news isn't exactly foreign to this newspaper, we have made an extra effort to load our pages this week with good news stories. We are deviating from the usual practice of placing all types of news on the main pages. Unfortunately, our society is bombarded with negativity that flows through to the news pages of the local newspaper.

Our writers are sharing stories this week that are inspirational, hopeful and uplifting. And what could be a better gift than that, especially after a tumultuous year of dealing with a worldwide pandemic.

We found that there is no shortage of holiday cheer and spirit being shared around Steele County and elsewhere this holiday season. We offer a sampling of how people are enriching the lives of other people.

As you sit down with your families this holiday season, we hope you will share with others in the good news that we have uncovered throughout our greater community.

Better yet, please spread this good news with your friends, neighbors and other family members who may not normally read this newspaper. Let them know what they are missing.

We wish you the most enjoyable holiday season filled with happiness and joy. Merry Christmas!

Rick L. Bussler
Publisher

Mrs. Claus



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A child peers through the window to get a glimpse of Mrs. Claus at work in the General Store at the Village of Yesteryear, where The Steele County Historical Society hosted its Lighted Village Walk this past weekend.



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AREA DEATHS

Margery A. Ilk, 92, Blooming Prairie
Darrell A. Thoen, 81, Waltham
Earl M. Wheeler, 88, Owatonna
Jeannette Preston, 87, Owatonna

Serving Blooming Prairie and Steele County since 1893

OUR VIEW

History's most reprinted editorial answers important Christmas question

The most famous editorial in American journalism was published 117 years ago in the New York Sun, as a reply to a letter from 8-year-old Virginia O'Hanion. The editorial was titled "Is there a Santa Claus?" and its most memorable passage was this reassuring declaration: "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus."

The editorial was written in less than a day by a self-effacing journalist named Francis P. Church, who was a veteran editorial writer at the Sun.

The response from Francis Pharcellus Church to Virginia O'Hanion's letter has since become history's most reprinted newspaper editorial.

In a world that seems to carry so much uncertainty right now, it seems only appropriate that we take a moment to reflect on the magic of the holiday season.

The Steele County Times takes great pleasure in presenting this novel editorial:

Dear Editor,

I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, "If you see it in The Sun, it's so." Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?

Virginia O'Hanlon
115 W. 95th St.

Virginia O'Hanlon, a real girl, wrote a real letter.
Is there a Santa Claus?

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! How dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God he lives and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay 10 times 10 thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.



YOUR VOICE

Give a child a Christmas

To-the-Editor:

Santa and his elves are busy this year working with your local businesses to get our letter out!

The primary purpose of *Santa Anonymous* is to help out persons in need without anyone else knowing they were given assistance. This project is administered through your Chamber of Commerce and has been going on in the *Blooming Prairie* area for more than 28 years. Your generosity has helped brighten Christmas for many children and families.

These funds go to the local ministerial association to help local families. We are determined to help as many children as possible. This means that caring people like you will realize that one of the great joys of the holiday season is knowing your gift has brought some joy to a child, some dignity to a family. Every penny, every dollar counts.

If you wish to become involved with *Santa Anonymous* this holiday season, please leave your "annual dues" of $25 with Farmers and Merchants State Bank in Blooming Prairie. Write the check to Santa Anonymous. And giving beyond the "dues" is totally acceptable!

It has been written *"that the best portion of one's life is their little, nameless unremembered acts of kindness and love."* It is in this vein of thought that *Santa Anonymous* functions.

May you and those near and dear to you have a most joyous and blessed Christmas knowing that your nameless act of kindness made Christmas a bit more happy for a less fortunate person right here in your community.

GOD BLESS YOU!

Santa Claus
Santa Anonymous

Finding peace and hope in a life of uncertainty



Hot Pursuit
RICK BUSSLER

By all accounts this has been an extraordinary year with little to no cheer filling our lives. The cheer-o-meter has been running on low, perhaps even non-existent, for most of the year.

With a worldwide pandemic followed by great social unrest to a remarkable election that divided our country, 2020 has produced significant uncertainty in all of our lives. For many of us, we simply don't know where to turn to next.

It has been a tough year for us to cover the communities we serve. The news hasn't always been the greatest, and we struggle to keep positive and build hope for a better tomorrow. So much has been taken away from us that has never happened before.

Despite all the negativity that permeates our lives, there is hope. We are showing each other that we can get through the tough times. We will survive all the dreaded events of 2020.

As we have done for the past several years, our staff went in search of Christmas miracles for this week's holiday edition. It's what I affectionately refer to as our "Good News Edition." It's my Christmas gift to all of our wonderful readers. I think we need a jolt of cheer and positivity this year more than ever before.

We uncovered a variety of stories, features, photographs and columns that truly put things into perspective. Hope, inspiration, joy and happiness are looming out on the horizon. We just need to take the blinders off and look for it.

One of my favorites is a teenager from Owatonna who decorates his neighborhood with holiday lights and music. Nolan Baker is only a junior in high school, but he has been decorating his house and a couple of his neighbors' homes for four years. He is definitely far beyond his years in maturity. If he's a symbol of what our country has to look forward to in the years to come, we are definitely in good hands.

I struggled with another story. I had planned to share about how Ellendale residents rallied around one of their own by hosting a benefit in early December. Their efforts were nothing short of a miracle, but unfortunately the man at the center of the rally, Ralph Diaz, died on Sunday as he awaited

SEE **A PERFECT, A14**

GUEST COLUMN

'Tis time for merry mistletoe

BY JAN MITTELSTADT TIPPETT

If you like lights, trees, poinsettias, helping others, and celebrating the birth of Jesus, this is the best time of the year. Even if this year doesn't offer all the same parties, caroling, church services, it's still the best time of the year.

Christians link Dec. 25 with Christmas, the Star of Bethlehem and the birth of Christ. It's a great time to have a birthday party for Jesus. Others celebrate the Festival of Lights, Kwanzaa, Hogmanay, Las Posadas, Hanukkah and any number of other things. Whatever it is that is being celebrated, it's easy to get swept up with the trappings and trimmings of the season.

The trapping and trimmings also mean sadly, for some, this is not a ho-ho-ho time. Depression creeps up with its ugly feet. Illness and death occur. People are homeless and hungry. There are terrible things that are happening in the world and all around us. Truth is hard to determine. There's talk, talk, talk with conflicting views – in voices louder and louder, all saying that what they are saying is true and proper and really know way to know for sure.

Life isn't a Hallmark movie. Expectations can't be met. There's not enough time to do all the things that we think we need to do. But, dear readers three, perhaps this is the one time of year that we can focus on kindness and the lyrics of the Christmas carols and enjoy our freedoms, our lives, the music, and all the positive things in our lives.

And we can help others in ways too numerous to mention. Non-profit agencies and foundations continue with the annual appeal, hoping for the end of the year gifts to keep them merry and bright.

Christmas, as we celebrate it, is a mix of tales and beliefs, traditions and times that have been developed in various countries at various times, many of which have little or nothing to do with Christ or Christianity.

The date is conjecture. There is no historical evidence that Jesus was born on Dec. 25. The date, as the birthday of Jesus was officially adopted in 354 by Bishop Liberius of Rome. Some believe it was selected as a way to help smooth the transition from paganism. Festivals celebrating the winter solstice had long been held far and near.

The Christmas tree, for example, is from pagan times. Scandinavians worshipped trees. Later, much later, the Christmas tree came into English tradition when Queen Victoria married Prince Albert who brought the idea from his native Germany in 1840. It traveled to the United States soon thereafter.

Mistletoe was prominent in the tradition of the Druids. Santa Claus, a corruption of the Dutch Sint Nikolaas, received his now traditional appearance from cartoonist Thomas Nash in 1863. And according to scholars who study such things, there really was (and still is) a Santa Claus. The original jolly old man was a fourth century Bishop of Myra in Asia Minor.

It is time for peace on earth and goodwill to all. Jolly eggnog. Merry mistletoe. Happy Christmas.

Jan Mittelstadt Tippett is a retired newspaper editor and publisher who returned to Steele County five years ago. She can be reached at jtippett@midco.net.

YOUR VIEW

Appreciates anniversary story

To-the-Editor:

Thank you so much for the nice article in today's paper (Dec. 16, Married & Merry on Irwin and Donna Arndt). My folks love it and are so honored. You did an outstanding job. Thanks again so much!

Julie Ebeling
Owatonna

STEELE COUNTY Times

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Office Manager ..... Sherrie Pechan
Sports Editor ..... Alex Nuehring
County Writer ..... Chris Baldwin

DEADLINES
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Web: 11 p.m. (Daily)
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SUBSCRIPTION RATES
Steele, Dodge, Freeborn & Mower $49
Elsewhere in State $52
Out of state $56

A state and national award winning weekly
MINNESOTA NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION

2020—9 state awards
2019—7 state awards
2018—6 state and 4 national awards
2017—2 state and 3 national awards
2016—8 state and 6 national awards
2015—7 state and 4 national awards
2014—3 state and 3 national awards
2013—7 state and 2 national awards
2012—2 state awards
2011—4 national awards

(Awards presented by the Minnesota Newspaper Association and the National Newspaper Associations)

'We hope that when they open them that they have a smile on their face.'

Gail Buckingham
Exchange Club of Owtonna



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Gail Buckingham and fellow Exchange Club of Owatonna members sent out holiday greeting cards in order to brighten the spirits of local seniors.

Exchange Club sends holiday cards to elderly

BY CHRIS BALDWIN
STAFF WRITER

With the COVID-19 pandemic still affecting daily lives, the holiday season has become a bit less cheerful for some who are cooped up due to imposed restrictions.

In order to bring a smile to their face and brighten their holidays, the Exchange Club of Owatonna came up with the heartwarming idea of sending out holiday cards to local seniors within care facilities.

"We couldn't do any of our programs this year like our firefighter banquet or our police banquet," said Gail Buckingham, the club's president. "We're trying to find things in the community to better the community."

While brainstorming, Buckingham and her fellow exchange club members zeroed in on the idea of sending holiday greeting cards to area seniors who might otherwise have to spend Christmas away from their loved ones.

"It was really a 'wow' moment," Buckingham said of the idea. "We hope that when they open them that they have a smile on their face." In total, the Exchange Club of Owatonna sent out 100 cards with messages to local seniors.

What started as a fun idea quickly spread, as two other exchange clubs in the county teamed up to help out. The Moonlighter's Exchange Club and the Exchange Club of Steele County both helped out with the Moonlighter's sending out their own batch of cards.

"We're out there in the community doing good things for good people," Buckingham said of teaming up with the other two clubs. "Hopefully we get to do it again." One idea that has already been floated is to send Valentine's Day cards.

Although the year seemed like a dud at first glance the Exchange Club of Owatonna is finding creative ways to continue their legacy of bringing a positive impact to the community. "We do miss our regular projects, but being self-creative out in the community by making a difference in people's lives that's what our challenge is all about," Buckingham said.

One of the recipients of the cards was Emily Hermann of Benedictine Living Community in Owatonna. "They all appreciate the thought," Benedictine Wellness Coordinator Casey Bakewell said of the residents' reaction. "Emily said 'oh, how nice'."

With their usual programs sidelined temporarily due to the pandemic, Gail Buckingham and her fellow exchange club members are looking for more fun ways to help the community. "If there's anybody in the community that needs some projects done, do not hesitate to reach out," she said.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Benedictine Living Community resident Emily Hermann opens one of the exchange club cards with Benedictine CNA Becky Johnson. Hermann was one of 79 residents who received a card.

Mayo using streamlined process for COVID patients

As fall and winter begin, patients will increasingly experience illnesses with symptoms similar to COVID-19. Mayo Clinic wants to help patients get answers quickly and easily.

Earlier this month, Mayo Clinic began combining the triage and testing process for COVID-19, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). For some children, the process also will include group A *Streptococcus* (strep throat). There will be a single process for screening, testing and sharing results at Mayo locations across the Midwest. Patients experiencing symptoms will call the COVID-19 Nurse Line at 507-293-9525 or answer questions about their symptoms using the Check Symptoms assessment tool in its Patient Online Services. This tool is available to Mayo Clinic patients 18 and older with a home address in Iowa, Minnesota or Wisconsin. If people do not have insurance or are unable to cover the test cost, they should call the COVID-19 Nurse Line and inquire about billing options.

Mayo Clinic will:

- Determine what tests patients need based on their symptoms.
- Direct them to a local testing site if they meet criteria for testing.
- Provide instructions for scheduling their test.

At the test site, Mayo Clinic staff will collect specimens using appropriate precautions. If a patient requires more than one test, staff may need to collect more than one specimen.

Specimens will be sent to a Mayo Clinic lab for analysis, with results expected in 24 to 72 hours. Mayo Clinic will contact patients who are positive for any of the illnesses that they are tested for and advise as to the appropriate next steps.

Results will all be available on Patient Online Services or by calling an automated phone line at 877-838-2050. Patients should have their Mayo Clinic number and date of birth ready when they call.

'A perfect Christmas present'

Vaccine arrives in Steele County

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

The COVID-19 vaccine has arrived in Steele County just in time for the holidays.

"It's a perfect Christmas present," said Amy Caron, the county's public health director. "It's the news we have been waiting months for."

Caron said the Owatonna hospital began vaccinating its employees on Monday. The first shipment of Pfizer/BioNTech went to the hospital while the public health agency received Moderna over the weekend.

The health director will be vaccinated next Monday afternoon. She said the rest of her staff of 40 workers will be offered the vaccine, though they will not be required to get it. Caron is still in the process of surveying her own staff to see how many will be vaccinated.

In addition to public health, workers and residents in long-term care facilities, first responders and other EMS personnel will be vaccinated beginning next week. Caron said it will take approximately eight weeks to vaccinate all of those workers. The reason it will take that long is because everyone has to be vaccinated twice, she added.

The general public will have to wait until April or May to get vaccinated, according to Caron.

"Our goal is to get this rolled out as quickly and efficiently as possible," said Caron.

While the vaccine has arrived, the number of positive cases has finally slowed down. In the past week, there have been 88 new cases, bringing the county's total to 2,429. For the first time in eight weeks, there has not been a death in Steele County related to COVID-19.

Caron also reported there are 32 people hospitalized, including some in intensive care.

"I am cautiously optimistic," Caron said. "It has slowed down, but it still isn't at a point where it's good."

In Dodge County, 79 new cases were reported over the past week, raising the county's total to 1,128. Eighteen people from Dodge County are currently in hospitals, according to Caron.

Freeborn County added three more deaths over the past week and now has 17 COVID-related deaths. Freeborn has 1,869 positive cases. In Mower County, there have been 3,228 cases with 23 deaths.

Caron said she recommends people refrain from large groups over the upcoming holidays.

She said it's important that people stick in smaller groups of 10 or less people within their own households.

"It's going to be difficult for people over the holidays as this will take a toll on their mental health," said Caron, adding that people did the right thing over the Thanksgiving holiday to slow the spread of the virus.

Caron said it has also been helpful in recent weeks that people haven't been able to gather indoors at bars and restaurants.

Fareway donation helps small businesses

Fareway Stores, Inc. recently announced a second round of donations to local chamber of commerce affiliates in each of the communities Fareway serves in Minnesota, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota.

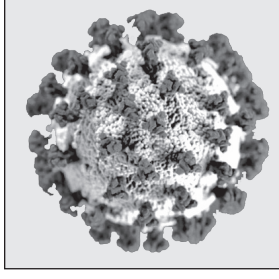
Gift cards totaling $1,000 will be provided to each community chamber to help small businesses and their employees facing challenges due to the pandemic.

Fareway has stores in Owatonna and Faribault. It just opened a new store in Byron last month.

"We are excited to continue our support of small businesses and their employees during this holiday season," said Fareway President and CEO Reynolds W. Cramer. "As small businesses continue to face challenges, we hope this relief reduces some of the stress our community business partners are facing."

About the Cover

The child in the photo within the holiday header on today's front page is Cadyen Martin, the son of Jared and Nick Martin of Hayfield. The child shown on the holiday header on the top of the second section is Kadence Johnson. His mom is Terri Johnson of Owatonna. Thanks to Skye DeVoe of Medford for sharing these holiday photos with the Times.



COVID-19 UPDATE

World..... 76,900,000	U.S. 18,000,000	MN 399,000	Steele..... 2,424	Dodge 1,127	Freeborn..... 1,869
Deaths 1,700,000	Deaths 319,000	Deaths 4,931	Deaths 9	Deaths 3	Deaths 17
Recovered..... 43,400,000	Recovered..... 4,880,000	Recovered..... 342,000	Recovered..... 1,170	Recovered..... 550	Recovered.....
					Mower..... 3,228
					Deaths 23
					Recovered.....

AS OF DEC. 21, 2020

BLOTTER SPOTLIGHT

Burglary: On Dec. 11, Owatonna Police began burglary investigations in the 1800 block of 4th Ave. SE at 8:36 a.m. and the 300 block of Main St. E. at 5:07 p.m.



Behind The Badge
SHERIFF SCOTT ROSE

Blessed are the peacemakers

It's been tough year for law enforcement.

Since the COVID-19 shutdown last spring, our deputies have dealt with an alarming increase in mental health cases – multiple suicides, suicidal threats, domestic assaults, child abuse cases, and more. The cumulative stress of multiple incidents like this over long periods of time can really take a toll on these men and women, especially in this tight community that we love!

We were already dealing with a brutal election year where local, state, and federal politicians jumped on the anti-law enforcement bandwagon, promoting the false narrative of systemic racism within law enforcement. Then in May, the Floyd incident happened followed by days and weeks of rioting in the Twin Cities and around the country – fueling an already strong anti-law enforcement movement across the country. Then it was DEFUND the Police, then RE-FORM the Police, now I think the latest buzz term is RE-IMAGINE the Police. All of these so-called leaders and politicians arguing for new and improved changes in law enforcement tactics, most of which we already do here in Dodge and most of greater Minnesota – but hey, it sounds great, it gets them on the news, and it gets votes apparently.

The events of 2020 have added a tremendous amount of pressure and stress on these amazing men and women, on top of their already stressful job. Chaplains and counselors have worked tirelessly throughout the year here in Minnesota working with officers struggling with the cumulative stress – some officers who can describe in detail the taste of their gun barrel.

Who in the world would want to sign up for a job like this?

First of all, it's not a job – it's a calling. A calling that 99% of the population would never consider taking on. These are very special men and women. They are our local heroes. Heroes who simply signed up to make a difference. They signed up to do their little part to help make our community a better place for us to raise our families and kids in. They are such an important part of our great community.

This week, as you celebrate Christmas and the birth of Christ, take a minute to say a prayer for the men and women who are celebrating in their squad cars and in their 911 Dispatcher chairs this week, spending time away from their families to make sure you can safely spend this amazing holiday with your family.

Merry Christmas to all from your friends at the Dodge County Sheriff's Office.

Blessed are the Peacemakers.

Scott Rose serves as the Dodge County Sheriff. He is in his second term as sheriff.

CRIME BRIEF

Police recover stolen vehicle, drugs found

An equipment violation turned up a stolen vehicle for police in Owatonna.



Jonathan Miller

On Dec. 13, a patrol officer stopped a vehicle for a lighting equipment violation. The vehicle had Minnesota dealer plates, which require police to dig a little further to check the status of the plates. The officer ran the VIN and soon learned the vehicle had been stolen from Owatonna.

During a search of the vehicle, a backpack was located that contained a cell phone and methamphetamine, police said. On the cell phone was an image of the driver, Jonathan Miller, 32, of Waseca.

Police arrested and jailed Miller. He has since been charged with fifth-degree possession of a controlled substance and driving after revocation.

The stolen vehicle case remains under investigation. According to police, the vehicle had been reported stolen in connection to a burglary at Seykora Automotive on Dec. 7.

COURT NEWS
Steele County

The following case was heard in Steele County District Court the week of Dec. 7 with Judge Karen R. Duncan presiding:

Emilie K. Perkins, 25, Shakopee, previously appeared and was convicted of felony motor vehicle theft. Perkins was sentenced to $125 and 30 months in Shakopee State Prison.

The following case was heard in Steele County District Court the week of Dec. 7 with Judge Joseph A. Bueltel presiding:

Miguel A. Carreon, 27, Minnetonka, previously appeared and was convicted of felony burglary. He was sentenced to $4,076.30, 27 days in county jail, no alcohol or controlled substance use, psychological evaluation, obtain permission to leave the state, no possession of firearms and 5 years of supervised probation.

The following misdemeanors and petty misdemeanors were heard in Steele County District Court the week of Dec. 7 – 13:

BLOOMING PRAIRIE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Milton J. Castro Benavides, 29, Owatonna, invalid license and no insurance, $375; Emmanuel Flores Amilcar, 19, West St. Paul, speeding, $115; Mahamed A. Mohamed, 34, Edina, speeding, stay of adjudication, $115 and 1 year of unsupervised monitoring without conviction; Clayton J. Novak, 20, Austin, hands free violation, $125; Adam C. Zuehlke, 33, Wells, DWI, $600, no alcohol or controlled substance use, chemical assessment and 1 year of supervised probation.

MN State Patrol Rochester

Andres Aragon, 26, Owatonna, speeding, $125; Abel K. Belay, 23, Brooklyn Center, speeding, $125; Chazz O. Bien, 24, Coon Rapids, seat belt, $100; Izac M. Brunner-Rongey, 22, Manley, IA, speeding, $135; Brody L. Crawford, 24, Albuquerque, NM, speeding, $135; Kari L. Dorle, 29, Maplewood, speeding, $115; Homero A. Gutierrez, 33, North Mankato, speeding and no insurance, $325; Larry D. Haberman, 49, Owatonna, revoked license, $275; Dustin D. Hanson, 44, Waseca, seat belt, $100; Hayden P. Kennedy, 19, Rockford, IL, speeding, $135; Quentin J. Kubista, 22, Blooming Prairie, speeding, $125; Kari L. Larranaga, 39, Albuquerque, NM, speeding, $115; Ronald D. Lewison, 79, Owatonna, vehicle weight violation, $575; Becky A. Lovgren, 39, Owatonna, revoked license, no insurance and seat belt, $500; Leah M. Major, 40, Olathe, KS, speeding, $135; David A. Marder, 24, Palm Beach, FL, speeding, stay of adjudication, $70 and 1 year of unsupervised monitoring without adjudication; Michael Medrano, 31, Mesquite, TX, expired registration, $105; Jesse C. Moen, 30, Lonsdale, speeding, $125; Larry G. Noble, 73, Fridley, speeding, $115; Jennifer L. Oleary, 48, Springdale, AR, speeding, $215; Anna L. Orland, 36, Watseka, IL, speeding, $135; Emily M. Perkins, 30, Albert Lea, speeding, $215; Tony L. Roe, 45, Albert Lea, seat belt, $100; Daniel A. Rodsenske, 37, Austin, possession of marijuana, $125; Nicole A. Schaub, 41, Owatonna, suspended license and seat belt, $300; Joseph C. Sperber, 60, Stillwater, hands free violation, $125; James S. Storlie, 74, Fountain City, WI, speeding, $115; John A. Stubbs, 21, Odessa, TX, speeding, $115; Michael J. Suchy, 58, Creston, IA, speeding, $115; Diane K. Thiemann, 57, Dodge Center, speeding, $135; Walter Yoanis, 61, Charlotte, NC, speeding, $135.

OWATONNA POLICE DEPARTMENT

Faisal Abdullahi, 30, St. Cloud, revoked license, $275; Alexander C. Corona, 28, Owatonna, DWI, 90 days in county jail, no alcohol or controlled substance use, do not enter liquor establishments, chemical dependency evaluation, attend MADD impact panel, obtain permission to leave the state, 216 hours of community service and 3 years of supervised probation; Cadnaan M. Deeq, 22, Minneapolis, expired tabs and suspended license, $305; Franklin J. Dowling, 35, Owatonna, expired tabs, $105; Brandy M. Duntz, 44, East Grand Forks, revoked license, $275; Jared L. Gardow, 28, Owatonna, suspended license and no insurance, $475; Tracy M. Gardner, 42, Salisbury, NC, suspended license, $275; Hector U. Garza Monsivais, 28, Owatonna, speeding, $275; Larry D. Haberman, 49, Owatonna, revoked license, $275; Keith D. Haskell, 58, suspended license, $275; Allen M. Krippner, 67, Owatonna, license plate impoundment, $375; Devin J. Maas, 16, Owatonna, muffler violation, $125; Dylan J. Maas, 17, Owatonna, speeding, $115; Philip M. Miller, 29, Owatonna, stop sign, $125; Angel G. Morales Torres, 28, Owatonna, revoked license, $275; Virginia A. Peterson, 22, Blooming Prairie, failure to obey traffic control device, $125; Scott J. Pfeifer, 33, Owatonna, trespassing, $175; Brent A. Podein, 51, Owatonna, assault-dangerous weapon, stay of adjudication, $50, 2 days in county jail, no alcohol or controlled substance use, do not enter liquor establishments, psychological evaluation, obtain permission to leave the state and 3 years of supervised probation; Alex Salazar, 30, Faribault, DWI, $206, 7 days in county jail, no alcohol or controlled substance use, do not enter liquor establishments, alcohol assessment, attend MADD impact panel and 1 year of supervised probation; Nicole A. Schaub, 41, Owatonna, suspended license, $275; Alyssa S. Smith, 22, Claremont, possession of marijuana, $125; Maria E. Solis, 50, Owatonna, speeding, $135; Manuel J. Stamm, 32, Owatonna, invalid license, $125; Nyariri K. Thor, 26, Owatonna, no insurance and revoked license, $475; Melissa J. Toot, 23, Faribault, suspended license, $275; Jesus Vazquez Zavala, 28, Medford, violation of order for protection, $375, 12 days in county jail, obtain and maintain employment, do not enter liquor establishments, cognitive skill training, obtain permission to leave the state, domestic abuse evaluation, no possession of firearms and 1 year of supervised probation; Heather M. Walters, 44, Waseca, revoked license, $275.

STEELE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Jolene L. Aase, 45, Medford, speeding, $115; Brayden D. Bengtson, 19, Maple Grove, speeding, $215; D'Shawn J. Chillis, 27, St. Paul, revoked license, $275; Sean R. Gerlach, 19, Medford, stop sign, $125; Devin C. Gwilt, 23, Blooming Prairie, speeding, $115; Vickie L. Haverkamp, 51, Owatonna, speeding, $115; Donald E. Johnson, 74, Owatonna, failure to yield, $125; Guadalupe C. Lenz, 33, Waseca, speeding, $135; Taiyja J. Moore, 28, Inver Grove Heights, revoked license, $275; Blake D. Oakland, 29, Medford, violation of no contact order, $125 and 180 days in county jail; Gustavo A. Perez-Carreon, 28, Owatonna, invalid license, $175; Kayla M. Sanchez, 23, Waseca, criminal vehicular operation, $125, 30 days in county jail, obtain and maintain employment, no alcohol or controlled substance use, do not enter liquor establishments, psychological evaluation, obtain permission to leave the state and 2 years of supervised probation; Alyssa S. Smith, 22, Claremont, speeding, $135; Dustin G. Smitty, 20, Blooming Prairie, permit violation and no insurance, $325; Leng Vang, 37, Owatonna, hands free violation, $125; Alex J. Vasquez, 20, Owatonna, invalid license, $175; Jessica M. Wilkemeyer, 33, Blooming Prairie, speeding, $215.

POLICE BLOTTER
Steele County

Blotter Spotlight:
Burglary: On Dec. 11, Owatonna Police began burglary investigations in the 1800 block of 4th Ave. SE at 8:36 a.m. and the 300 block of Main St. E. at 5:07 p.m.

STEELE BLOTTER BLOOMING PRAIRIE POLICE

Dec. 14
Suspicion: Police received a report of suspicious activity in the 200 block of 2nd St. SW at 5:51 p.m.
Dec. 16
Theft: Officer took a theft report in the 200 block of 4th St. NW at 10:52 a.m.

Dec. 17
DWI: Officer made a DWI arrest at Highway Ave. N. and Center Ave. N. at 11:53 p.m.

OWATONNA POLICE

Dec. 11
Suspicion: Police responded to suspicious activity in the 3100 block of Cedar Ave. N. at 12:50 a.m. They issued a citation.
Theft: Officer took a theft report in the 700 block of Cedar Ave. S. at 1:22 p.m.
Arrest: Police arrested a motorist during a traffic stop in the 1600 block of Cedar Ave. S. at 6:47 p.m.
Dec. 12
Fraud: Officer took a report of a fraud incident in the 200 block of Pearl St. E. at 8:03 a.m.
Welfare: Officer conducted a welfare check in the 300 block of Havana Road SE at 2:06 p.m.
Dec. 13
DWI: Officer made a DWI arrest at 26th St NW and 4th Ave. NW in Clinton Falls Township at 12:09 a.m.
Assault: Police responded to an assault in the 200 block of Fremont St. E. at 12:53 a.m.
Property: At 4:51 a.m., police arrested a subject after recovering stolen property in the 200 block of 16th St. SW
Fraud: Officer took reports of fraud incidents in the 400 block of Elm Ave. S. at 10:18 a.m. and the 500 block of State Ave. NW at 3:03 p.m.
Vandalism: Property damage was reported in the 3900 block of Cabela Dr. NW at 4:25 p.m.
Dec. 14
Suspicion: Police responded to suspicious activity in the 200 block oarrests

STEELE COUNTY

f Pearl St. E. at 12:39 a.m. They issued a citation.
Theft: Officer took a

SEE **BLOTTER, A16**

WARRANTS: The following individuals have active warrants in Steele County. The Sheriff provides this information as a public service

1. Christopher Cummins – failure to appear - $500 bail
2. Jeremy Danielson – check forgery - $5,000 bail
3. James Davis – domestic assault – no bail
4. Cadnaan Deeq – escape registration - $500 bail
5. Rey Diaz – escape tax - $5,499 bail
6. Katrina Doig – false name - $2,000 bail
7. Abdikadir Dubat – give a false name - $200 bail
8. William Durham – domestic assault - $2,000 bail
9. Andrew Eineke – check forgery - $2,000 bail
10. Mark Erschens – DWI – no bail
11. Trisstian Evans – domestic assault - $3,000 bail
12. Aundrey Ezequal – assault – no bail
13. Francis Feeley – domestic assault - $3,000 bail
14. Romero Fernandez – criminal sexual conduct - $200,000 bail
15. Jequinnson Fisher – DWI – no bail
16. Tony Fisher – drugs – no bail
17. Rogelio Flores – DWI, revoked license - $12,000 bail
18. Cody Fonner – domestic assault - $3,000 bail
19. Kewana Freeman – card fraud - $5,000 bail
20. Ethan Frye – assault – no bail

Disclosing active warrants promotes public safety and aids in the identification and apprehension of wanted individuals



How Robotic Pets Can Help Isolated Seniors Avoid Loneliness


THE SAVVY SENIOR
Brought to you by: Prairie Manor Care Center
Prairie Manor Care Center & Heather Haus
220 3rd St. NW, Blooming Prairie
583-4434

Dear Savvy Senior,

I recently read an article about robotic pets being a great substitute for pet-loving seniors who can't have or take care of a pet any longer. What do you think of this? My mother, who has some dementia, is living in an assisted living facility that doesn't allow pets. And because of COVID, we haven't been allowed inside the facility to visit her since March. I've been thinking about getting her a robot pet to help cheer her up but would like to know if they are worth buying, and if so, where can I go to find one.

Locked Out Daughter

Dear Locked Out,

There have actually been several studies on this topic that has shown that robotic pets – which are lifelike interactive pets – can have a positive impact on many lonely, socially isolated seniors, especially those who have dementia. This is particularly important now as the pandemic has caused millions of high-risk, vulnerable seniors to isolate as a means to protect themselves from the coronavirus. Here's what you should know.

Robotic Pet Studies

In 2018, the New York State Office for the Aging was the first state in the U.S. to test the robotic pets with isolated seniors and results showed that using pets to lower social isolation was highly successful, with 70 percent of pilot participants reporting a decrease in isolation after one year. Subsequent programs done in aging agencies in Alabama, Florida and Pennsylvania have also shown positive results

Other clinical studies conducted by AARP, UnitedHealthcare, and other clinicians and have also found that robotic pets can help to?enhance the well-being and quality of life of lonely or isolated individuals and those living with dementia and other forms of cognitive decline, by providing a level of interaction and comfort from a lifelike companion.

Where to Look

If you're interested in getting your mom a robotic pet, a top option is Ageless Innovation's Joy for All Companion Pets – see *JoyForAll.com*.

They offer cats, a kitten and a pup that look, feel and sound like the real thing – minus the feeding, watering, litter box or backyard cleanup, and the vet bills. With prices ranging between $65 and $130, these soft, plush animals have built-in sensors, "vibrapurr" or "barkback" technology, and brushable fur, making them surprisingly realistic.

Insert four batteries, and the cats, which come in four different shades to mimic real breeds, can open and close their eyes, lift their paws, and move their head and body. If you pet them in the right spot – like on their belly or back side – they'll let out a purr.

If your mom is more of a dog person, you can also buy a stuffed golden puppy, accessorized with a red bandana, that will bark if he's feeling happy, sad, or needy. At only four pounds, the stuffed pup is easy to play with and won't weigh down even the most fragile frame.

Some other robotic pet options you should look into include Tombot's Jennie ($399; *tombot.com*), a lapdog that barks on command and has realistic facial features; AIBO ($2,900; *us.aibo.com*) by Sony, which is a plastic puppy that has lifelike expressions and a dynamic array of movements; and Paro the Seal ($6,120; *pararobots.com*), which is marketed as a "carebot," designed specifically for people with dementia.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit *SavvySenior.org*. Jim Miller is a contributor to the NBC *Today* show and author of *"The Savvy Senior"* book.

Aurora dedicates new addition



FILE PHOTO

On Dec. 17, 1989, Aurora Lutheran Church of rural Owatonna dedicated a new addition to the existing church. Aurora constructed a 24-foot by 36-foot floor as well as a basement. "Many people from the congregation donated time, talent and labor," said Helen Larson, a member of the church. "In fact, on some days, there were so many people, Lorne Stockwell couldn't keep them all busy."

Reminiscing about old holiday traditions

Editor's Note: Sherrie Pechan, office manager at the Times, found some interesting tidbits related to past holiday traditions. We share some holiday history this week in place of the regular history, which will return next week. Happy Holidays!

CAROLING

Surprise your neighbors by showing up at their door with a friendly group singing Christmas carols. Kids especially love to participate in a musical medley. This joyous tradition is even easier thanks to printers, which allow everyone to grab a lyrics sheet before heading out to share some songs from your favorite Christmas movies. (Those 12 days of Christmas get tough to remember once you get past the "five golden rings.")

MAKE GARLANDS OF POPCORN AND CRANBERRIES, OR PAPER RINGS

Although it may seem strange to decorate Christmas trees with food, many of us have childhood memories of stringing a pattern of popcorn and cranberries with a needle and thread– and snacking on the treats while trying not to poke ourselves. This is **a distinctively American tradition**. After all, popcorn and cranberries are native to our continent. So, forget the breakable glass and ceramic ornaments, and try this old-time idea with your own kids. If they're too young to handle a needle, another type of homemade garland can be made with brightly colored construction paper taped into a chain of rings. Either way, it's a personal touch for your tree–even if it doesn't last until next year.

SET UP A TOY TRAIN AROUND YOUR TREE

Another way to make your tree look like it's right out of the past is to encircle it with a toy train track. First made in the late 1800s by toy train company **Lionel**, electric trains soon became a popular Christmas gift, and the tracks were a natural fit around the base of the family tree. Young children today still love trains, so surprise them on Christmas morning with a working train gliding through the wrapped presents under the tree. To get your little ones excited about their upcoming present,

ORANGES IN CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS

Snuggle a bright orange in the toe of everyone's Christmas stocking this year. Some say the orange stands in for the gold coins Saint Nicholas gifted three poor young women in a famed Christmas legend. But even less than a century ago, oranges were a rare tropical treat for those who lived far from Florida. Oranges are easy to come by today, but just for a few minutes on Christmas, they can remind us of how thankful our ancestors would be for the gifts we take for granted.

MISTLETOE

Kissing under the mistletoe is an old tradition that's referenced in numerous songs and stories. But hanging the pretty little plant over the doorway and smooching under its berries has faded from many people's memories. Just remember your holiday etiquette: Those kisses need to be consensual.

CHRISTMAS BACK HOME ON THE FARM

Twas the night before Christmas back home on the farm,
The Cattle were chewing their cuds in the barn.
The feedbags were hung by the mangers with care,
In case Old St. Nicholas chanced to stop there.

When what sailed right under some low hanging boughs,
But a miniature sleigh and eight undersized cows.
With a little old driver so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

More strongly than tractors his little cows came,
And he whistled and "soo-bossed" and called them by name.
Now Dolly, now Debbie, now Pammie and Flossie,
On Cora, on Countess on Dinah and Bossie,
To the top of the barn, to the front of the stall!
Now dash away, dash away, dash away all!

As I fastened the door and was turning around,
Down the hay chute St. Nicholas came with a bound.
He was dressed in blue denim from collar to cuff,
And his clothes were all covered with hayseed and stuff.
His eyes – how the flashed as he opened his pack,
And pulled out some gifts for the heifers out back…
More grain for the cows, some straw for their stalls,
Lime for the alleys to stop those bad falls.

He spoke not a word but went straight to his work,
And filled all the feedbags, then turned with a jerk.
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the hay chute he rose.

I stood there a moment, my head hung in shame,
I'd forgotten my cows when Christmas-time came.
So I patted Ol Granny as I turned out the light,
Happy Christmas, you cows, and to all a good night!

Merry Christmas to all!

Reprinted from Land O' Lakes Mirror

Hormel Historic Home offering virtual holiday tour

The Hormel Historic Home is inviting you to enjoy a behind the scenes tour of the historic house decorated for the holiday season.

The holiday tradition is strong at the HHH, but the pandemic has once again required us to temporarily close our doors (through at least December 18 under the Governor's November covid-19 restrictions) which has limited our ability to share our annual traditions with guests from all over. Many hours go into planning and executing the decorating strategy each year and we are passionate about sharing it, so we produced a virtual tour with the lead decorator, Kim Guzman. In the video Guzman shares her inspiration and motivation behind the beautiful d?cor and offers tips and tricks that will help you embrace the holiday season.

Follow Kim and HHH Executive Director Holly Johnson through the home to be inspired by the lovely d?cor and be a part of the HHH holiday tradition in 2020.

A link to the 27 minute video is available for purchase for $5 on the HHH website www.hormelhistorichome.org and will be available until January 31, 2021.

The Hormel Historic Home is grateful for the support of so many in the community. We rely on membership gifts, donations and gift shop sales to fulfill our mission. If you are looking for ways to help please visit https://hormelhistorichome.org.

Wear a mask in public spaces.
Get tested if you have any symptoms.
Answer if your health department calls.
MINNESOTA STAY SAFE MN

Jensen Heating, A/C, & Plumbing
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Registered Showroom
• Quality plumbing & heating products for your remodeling or new home construction.
• Serving our area for over 40 years.
• We'll treat your home as if it were our own.
THE BOLD LOOK OF KOHLER

OWATONNA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
INSPIRING EXCELLENCE • EVERY LEARNER • EVERY DAY
OWATONNA PROUD

Students return to previous learning models in January

Owatonna Public Schools has reaffirmed their commitment to return students to the previous learning models of grades E-5 in-person and grades 6-12 hybrid on Jan. 11.

On Wednesday, Dec. 16, Governor Walz outlined a plan to return elementary students to in-person learning and the District will be utilizing the Governor's guidance to transition students back to the previous learning models.

For grades E-5, there will be no distance learning on Jan. 7 and 8 as E-5 staff will be preparing for the transition back to in-person learning. Friday, Jan. 8 will be a transition day for grades 6-12 and no distance learning will be scheduled on this date.

As per the Governor's order, all activities may start practices on Monday, Jan. 4. This includes all middle and high school activities. Every program will still have to adhere to health mitigation guidance provided by the Minnesota Department of Health.

In an effort to keep students and staff safe and attending school, and allowing more students to attend every day in the future, please continue vigilance with regard to social distancing, masking up and refraining from attending large gatherings.

Speech team fights through obstacles

BY EMMA HOWE
OHS MAGNET WRITER

Speech at OHS provides a way for students to express thoughts and feelings creatively. OHS Speech Team members take great pride in their achievements throughout the years.

This year, the speech team has conducted all virtual meets compared to other activities such as sports that have faced cancelations and postponements. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the speech team will have to learn to debate through a screen.

The captains for the speech team this year at the OHS seniors Ashton Jensen, Lily Sampson and Junior captains Julia Christenson, and Reid Stauffer. The captain at the Owatonna Middle School is Hannah Parrish, an eighth grader. The speech team is welcome for anyone to join from grades seven to twelve. To join, Anderson would give the student who would like to join a link to register for a speech team. Then if that student has any questions regarding speech they would then email Nancy Benson in the activities office. The speech team google classroom code will also be given to them to stay updated.

The students of the speech team are very high spirited. There are many reasons to join a speech team. Jenson said, "It is an activity that can improve a skill that I already am good at. This skill will also pay dividends in the future." Speech increases people skills and gives more confidence.

COVID-19 has made every sport and activity to make some adjustments. Ms. Anderson, speech team coach said, "So far it's going pretty well considering all the changes! We have two new coaches this year, Ms. Betsy Cole OHS business teacher and Mr. Mark Anderson OMS art teacher, who will add a lot to our team with fresh ideas and a multitude of resources and technical skills." The Speech Team will begin their practices in January and have their first meeting the first weekend in February. The Speech Team is excited to kick off their season.

Sending some moo thanks



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Members of the Midwest Dairy Association perform a surprise visit to Lincoln's Nutrition Services team recently. They acknowledged the work the nutrition team is doing to provide healthy meals to families during the pandemic. Involved in the praise are back row, from left: Norm Spindler, Tracy Heide and Ceedron Hanson and front row: Melissa Weber and Trisha David. The woman in the middle is a representative of the Midwest Dairy Association.

A commitment to education for the Sullivans



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Sullivan family consists of Greg and Julie along with their children Ty, Jay and Josie.

Meet the Sullivan family in this week's feature.

Julie is principal at Owatonna Middle School. Prior to OMS, Julie was principal at Wilson Elementary and assistant principal at Owatonna High School. Before becoming an administrator in the district, Julie taught English and coached girls' cross country.

Greg is a chemistry teacher at Owatonna High School and he has been there for 28 years. He used to coach the girls' golf team and has been the b-squad boys' basketball coach for a number of years.

Greg and Julie have three children: Ty, Jay, and Josie, who are all graduates of Owatonna High School.

We are #OwatonnaProud to have the Sullivan family as a part of our community!

Owatonna Students of the Week

Elementary

Camden Zimmerman



First Grade
Parents: Travis and Sarah Zimmerman
Camden is a joy to have in our first grade class! He is respectful, responsible, and comes ready to learn every day! Camden is so good at including others and being a role model by doing the right thing – even when no one's watching.

Zoe Halliwell
Fifth Grade



Parent: Frederick Halliwell
Zoe Halliwell is persistent in accurately completing school work and challenging herself to grow academically. Zoe is a caring and empathetic student, who also tries to guide others in their academic endeavors. She is a strong leader and true asset for Wilson Elementary.

High School

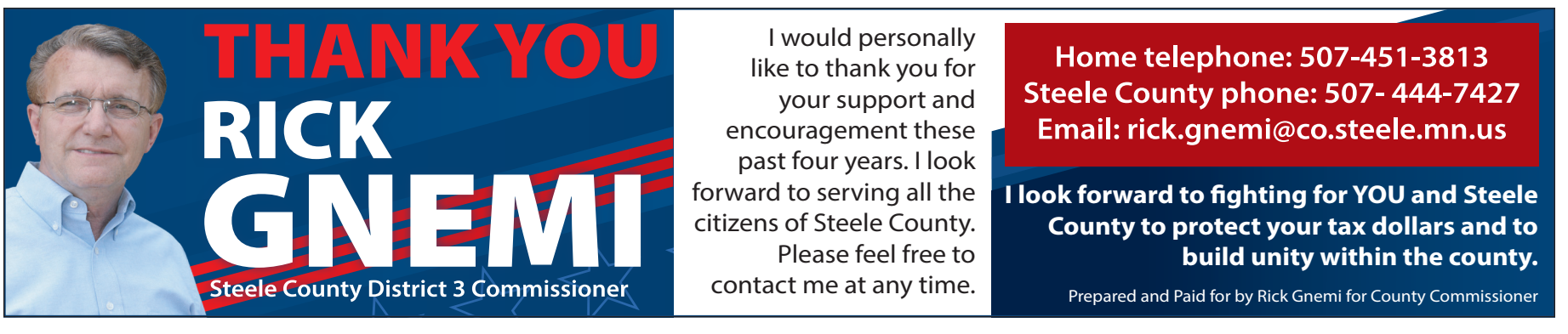
Anna Fox
Sophomore



Parents: David and Amie Fox
Anna is a responsible, kind, and enthusiastic student. She engages in classroom discussions and works well with her peers. Anna volunteers to help others and she often takes on extra work. She is definitely not afraid to take on a challenge.

School Calendar

- **Dec. 24-Jan. 1:** Winter Break/No School
- **Jan. 4:** School Resumes (Distance Learning)
- **Jan. 4:** School Board Organizational Meeting/Work Session (5:30 PM)
- **Jan. 7:** No School Grades E-5, Transition Day
- **Jan. 8:** No School Grades K-12, Transition Day
- **Jan. 11:** School Resumes Following Previous Learning Models (E-5 In Person, 6-12 Hybrid)
- **Jan. 15:** End of 2nd Quarter
- **Jan. 18:** No School/MLK Day/Staff Development
- **Jan. 19:** No School Teacher Work Day



Blossom star makes Vikings All-State Team

BY ALEX NUEHRING
SPORTS EDITOR

Blooming Prairie wide receiver/linebacker Mitchell Fiebiger had an unforgettable senior season, leading the Awesome Blossoms to a perfect 5-0 record and helping them win the Section 1A Championship. His season became even more impressive when he was named to the annual Minnesota Vikings All-State Football Team.

The Vikings All-State Team is made up of senior student-athletes from all classes of football in the state. The student-athletes who make the team are selected by the Vikings in conjunction with the Minnesota Football Coaches Association.

Fiebiger was one of 32 players who made the team and the only one from Class A.

He's looking forward to competing against players from other classes.

"I'm very excited and pumped up to go out and play," he said.

In addition to being the only player from Class A on the team, Blooming Prairie Head Coach Chad Gimbel said he's the first Awesome Blossom to be selected to this prestigious team.

Fiebiger mentioned that being one of the few players selected for this team makes this honor meaningful to him.

"This honor means a lot to me especially because not very many people get to do what I'm going to be doing so it's a very special thing," he said.

Gimbel said he's a worthy recipient of this honor because he plays the game the right way.

"He makes huge plays on offense and defense," he said. "If you watch our games, he is a player that you will notice as the best player on the field."

He noted that what makes Fiebiger such a good football player is his passion for the sport, his love of contact, his competitiveness, intensity and relentlessness.

Fiebiger added that his passion for the game has helped make him such a skilled football player.

Gimbel said his passion for the game is evident during the offseason, practices and games.

"In the offseason he lives in the weight room, either at school or at home, and went to a number of football camps during the summer the last two years. At practice he is intense, has fun on the field [and is always] focused on getting better. During games he loves to compete, it's as simple as that," he said.



STAFF PHOTO BY ALEX NUEHRING

Blooming Prairie senior receiver Mitchell Fiebiger gains some yards after the catch during the first half of the Awesome Blossom's 49-6 win over the Randolph Rockets in the Section 1A Championship.

His competitive nature helped Fiebiger become a four-year starter for the Awesome Blossoms. After starting at offensive guard as a sophomore, he moved to receiver as a junior and has made his biggest impact the past two seasons.

Last season, he caught 21 passes for 523 yards (24.9 average), six receiving touchdowns and ran the ball four times for 32 yards. On defense, he recorded 134 total tackles, 21 tackles for loss and three sacks.

With his help, Blooming Prairie went undefeated and won its first-ever football championship.

"He was a huge part of our success last year," said Gimbel. "He was a thumper in the middle of our defense– when he tackled guys they never fell forward. His hard hitting was an intimidating factor in the middle of our defense. On offense he was a big play guy, but also a very good blocker that opened up big holes for our run game. In the biggest of games, he would always make a huge play on offense."

This season, he was once again one of the Awesome Blossoms' best players. He caught 30 passes for 589 yards (19.6 average) in just five games, nine receiving touchdowns and ran the ball three times for 15 yards and one touchdown. On defense, he compiled 73 total tackles, six tackles for loss, three and a half sacks and one interception.

In addition to helping Blooming Prairie win its third straight section championship, he said Fiebiger became a leader of the Awesome Blossoms by working hard, playing hard, giving his best effort and playing with passion.

"[He was] a leader by example in these areas on and off the field," Gimbel said.

Whether on and off the field, Fiebiger enjoyed his whole high school football career, but he said the most enjoyable part was the entire 2019 season.

He plans on playing collegiate football but is not sure which school yet.

Division I football player has local ties

BY ALEX NUEHRING
SPORTS EDITOR

Less than 1% of all high school football players get the opportunity to play at the Division I level and even fewer get to play for a team in a Power Five conference yet two of them have ties to Steele County.

The more well-known one is Jason Williamson, who led the Owatonna Huskies to back-to-back state championships before joining the University of Minnesota football team.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Kellen Diesch is the starting left tackle for Arizona State University. He has ties to the Blooming Prairie area.

The less well-known one is Kellen Diesch, the starting left tackle for Arizona State University (ASU), whose ties to Steele County include multiple family members who grew up in Blooming Prairie. His dad, Mark Diesch, his uncle, John Diesch, and aunt Sharon (Diesch) Kelly, all graduated from Blooming Prairie High School. His late paternal grandparents, Gordon and Marcella Diesch, lived and farmed in Blooming Prairie. Gordon also graduated from Blooming Prairie High School.

Due to COVID-19, Kellen Diesch's first season with the Sun Devils has been anything but normal. However, when he and his teammates have gotten to play, he's performed well.

In their season opener against the then-ranked No. 20 team in the country, the USC Trojans, he and the rest of ASU offensive line surrendered just one sack and paved the way for the Sun Devils to run for 258 yards. Unfortunately, the Trojans showed why they were ranked in the top 25 by rallying from a 13-point deficit and winning 28-27.

After two consecutive games were canceled, Diesch and ASU faced the UCLA Bruins in week four. The ASU offensive line once again helped its team run for more than four and a half yards per carry (165 yards on 35 carries), but they gave up five sacks and UCLA won 25-18.

A few weekends ago, the Sun Devils got their first win of the season in dominant fashion, beating the University of Arizona 70-7. Diesch and the rest of the ASU offensive line had their best game yet, paving the way for their teammates to run for seven touchdowns and more than five yards per carry (259 yards on 50 carries) and didn't surrender any sacks.

Before grad-transferring to Arizona State, he played three seasons for the Texas A&M Aggies after a redshirt freshman year.

At Texas A&M, Diesch earned a bachelor's degree in business. He's pursuing a master's degree in liberal studies at ASU.

One silver lining of COVID-19 is the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I Council granted all fall athletes another year of eligibility so Diesch will get to play for ASU again next year and he'll have one more year to figure out what he wants to do after graduation.

Premier volleyball player earns another honor

BY ALEX NUEHRING
SPORTS EDITOR

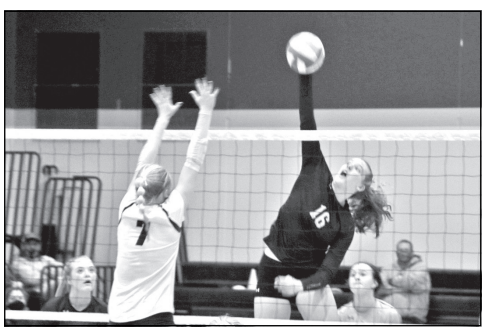
Medford volleyball star Kinsey Cronin saved her best season for last and in the past month the senior middle hitter has reaped the benefits. She recorded her 1,000th career kill in the Tiger's season finale against Maple River on Nov. 20, and she recently achieved an even more impressive accomplishment when she was named a first-team All-Conference player.

When Cronin learned that she was one of the seven volleyball players from the Gopher Conference to make the first team, she was grateful and humbled.

"I was extremely honored. I know the hard work everyone in the conference puts into volleyball and the amount of heart that goes into the game, and to be a part of that is an honor," she said.

This honor is meaningful to her because volleyball is one of her main passions.

"Volleyball is my passion because it has been a home for me. I have found an amazing support system and have seen so much growth as a person through volleyball. I owe so much of myself to volleyball and the people I who surrounded me," she said. "Volleyball is my passion because it has created a family and home for me."



STAFF PHOTO BY ALEX NUEHRING

Medford senior middle hitter Kinsey Cronin goes up high for a powerful kill attempt during the second set of the Tiger's 3-0 win over United South Central on Thursday, Nov. 12. She was one of just seven Gopher Conference volleyball players who were named first-team All-Conference and the only one from Steele County.

Cronin has made her family and home community proud by always striving to be the best volleyball player she could be.

When asked what makes her such a strong volleyball player, she said her vision and devotion to the game are keys to her success.

"I am able to see the court and I am always looking for ways to grow. Even with the pandemic I made sure to keep my body strong with core exercises and the weight room," she said.

Thanks to that dedication, she's been a varsity starter since her freshman year and earned numerous honors. Cronin made second-team all-conference her junior year. Not including all-conference, her volleyball awards include making the Class A all-tournament team during her sophomore and junior year and the Class A first team all-state her junior year and senior year.

Even though her current skill level has earned her numerous awards, she wants to become even better.

"I can improve my serving by working on my jump serve. I would also like to speed up my blocking," she said.

Despite those areas of improvement, the Tigers achieved a lot of success during Cronin's high school career, including two berths in the state tournament.

The highlight of her high school volleyball career came at the state tournament when Medford beat Mayer Lutheran, who were two-time defending state champions, in the first round.

While that may be her top moment, she greatly enjoyed every day she got to spend with her teammates and coaches and that unfortunately makes it that much harder to know she won't get to play for the Tigers again.

"The team has truly become a family to me and leaving them is one of the hardest things I have to do. Also, leaving behind Coach Missy who from the start has put her faith in me and I can't be more grateful for it as it has brought me so much confidence as a player and leader," Cronin said. "I will miss Medford and all of the opportunities and support the volleyball family has given me."

She plans to play volleyball at the collegiate level, but is still uncertain which university she'll attend.



BP City Council lowers 2021 tax levy

BY ALEX NUEHRING
STAFF WRITER

The Blooming Prairie City Council certified the 2021 tax levy, discussed its designated fund balance and received an update on the potential annexation of Dollar General at its meeting on Monday, Dec. 14.

The budget for 2021 originally included a 5% tax levy, but due to the financial hardship many families have faced as a result of COVID-19, the city brought the levy down to 3.09% by cutting previously planned projects.

"This just isn't the year to start a street improvement project," said City Administrator Andrew Langholz.

The new 3.09% tax levy represents a $23,781 increase in the city's budget.

The main part of that increase, $18,750, will be used mostly on street maintenance. Langholz said that cost went up by $15,000 this year. The remaining $5,031 will go towards paying off projects that have already occurred.

The motion to approve the 2021 tax levy carried unanimously.

The city council also decided to heed that advice of its auditor, setting aside six months' worth of taxes or half its operating budget in the city's designated fund balance, which is basically a rainy-day fund.

Later, during the city administrator's report, Langholz stated that Dollar General has made a formal request to be annexed by the city of Blooming Prairie.

If the annexation of Dollar General comes to fruition, it would add 1.34 acres to the city and add one more taxable business, which would benefit the city's budget.

In other business:

· City Attorney Jason Iacovino reported that, despite COVID-19, the city's police force has been kept busy this year. "The number of calls they've received in 2020 is pretty close to what they had in 2018 and 2019 combined," he said.

· The council discussed performance evaluations of Langholz, David Johnson, Pat Wehner, David Hoffman, Mark Lang, Dan Peach, Brad Busho and Laura Larson. The council accepted and agreed with the positive performance evaluations for each person evaluated.

The next city council meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 11. It will include two new city council members, Greg Johnson and Marcy Sundine, who are replacing Mary Kittelson and Tara Gimbel who didn't seek reelection.

Hwy. 14 expansion winds down first year of construction in Steele, Dodge counties

This past year has brought great news to residents of Steele and Dodge counties as well as other motorists who use Hwy. 14 between Owatonna and Rochester.

Construction activity on the Hwy. 14 expansion project between Owatonna and Dodge Center is wrapping up for the season as winter settles in across the region. Progress was made this year, but it may not have been easily evident, if your vantage point was from the current route of Hwy. 14.

So here is a quick update of some of the work that occurred in 2020 and then key elements that we expect to see in 2021:



STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

Construction workers continue to work on a bridge deck for the Hwy. 14 project south of Claremont during a recent December afternoon that featured unseasonably warm temperatures. Work is wrapping up for the season, but it will begin in earnest again this coming spring. The new roadway will run about a mile south of the existing highway between Owatonna and Dodge Center.

BRIDGE BUILDING

· The Dodge County Road 1 crossing of Hwy. 14 was completed this year and opened to traffic to allow for additional county road closures for bridge construction.

· Bridges over Hwy. 14 that connect county roads were built, but still need work for completion at Dodge County Road 3 and Steele County Road 16. The Dodge County Road 3 will be at an interchange once the project is completed to connect to the county road that also connects to Claremont.

PAVING

Approximately four lane miles were paved on the project this year. Much of the work is in the vicinity south of Claremont

OTHER WORK

• The new highway alignment is where agriculture work existed. The clay subsoil needs to be dried out before it's included in the roadbed as the new highway is built. Significant earth moving work occurred to accomplish this to ensure a quality road that meet's MnDOT's specifications.

◦ The new highway alignment also requires numerous drainage features to not only perpetrate existing drainage but also to treat runoff from the new roadway. Over 50 new drainage culverts crossing the new roadway were installed, along with eight storm water ponds.

◦ You may have seen news coverage recently about a dedicated deer crossing passage along the new alignment. This was identified through Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and MnDOT personnel and an established drainage structure was increased in size to provide the height and width to accommodate deer as a way reduce vehicle-deer crashes.

COMING UP IN 2021

• More paving will be completed along the remaining 12.5-mile new route.

• Completion of the Dodge CR 3 and Steele CR 16 bridges.

• Construction and completion of the Hwy. 14 interchange at Hwy 56 and Dodge County Road 5.

• Depending on construction progress and weather, traffic could be on the new Hwy. 14 alignment in late 2021 or into 2022.

Owatonna School Board OKs 2021 tax levy

BY CHRIS BALDWIN
STAFF WRITER

During the regular December session, the Owatonna School Board adopted the district's final 2021 levy.

The 2021 levy was certified at $18.2 million, representing an increase of 1.54% over last year's levy, leading to a $276,326 increase in taxes. Out of the over $63 million in revenue 82% is slated to come from state funding, with property taxes accounting for 12.5%.

More than $11 million of the $18.2 million levy was voter approved with another $7 million set by state law. "We've been really consistent from year-to-year, we really try as a district to not increase our levy, if we do not have to," Amanda Heilman, director of Finance and Operations for the Owatonna School District, told the board.

After reviewing the proposed 2021 levy the board unanimously approved the $18,205,783 levy. This comes after voters rejected an increase in the levy in November. This increase would have generated an additional $300 per students in 2022 and 2025.

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

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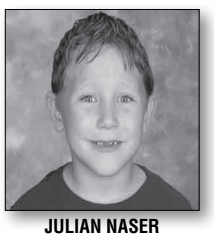
7	3	1	5	6	9	8	4	2
6	9	4	1	8	2	5	3	7
4	1	8	9	3	7	6	2	5
3	6	2	8	5	1	4	7	9
5	7	9	2	4	6	3	1	8
8	2	3	7	9	4	1	5	6
1	5	6	3	2	8	7	9	4
9	4	7	6	1	5	2	8	3

New Richland • Hartland • Ellendale • Geneva

PANTHER OF THE WEEK



JULIAN NASER

This week's Panther of the Week is **JULIAN NASER**. Julian lives in New Richland with his dad Jacob and older brother Adrian. Julian is in Mrs. Lassahn's second grade class at NRHEG.

He can always put a smile on anyone's face with his great sense of humor and awesome personality! Julian loves sharing stories and respects his teachers and classmates. He also loves answering questions and is always ready for the next challenge. Julian enjoys playing football outside every day at recess.

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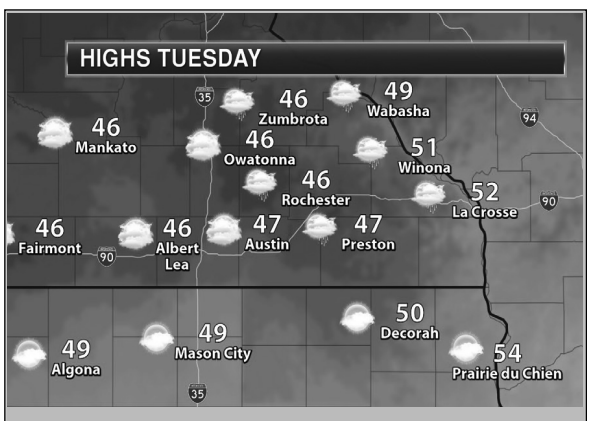

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12 KIDS OF CHRISTMAS!



Jesus has been waiting for a Big for a year and a half. Jesus is sweet, caring and can be a little shy at times. He is working on building more self-confidence and understanding his emotions. If he could be anything when he grows up, Jesus said he would like to be a doctor in Rochester because he thinks they are the best! The best Big for Jesus would be someone who enjoys being active, has a positive attitude and could help Jesus build his self-esteem.



Serenity has been waiting for a Big for 2 months. She is known for her kind heart, silly personality and optimistic attitude. Her love for staying active through passions like running, hiking, playing sports and being outside are just a few of the qualities that make her so unique. Serenity is hoping to find a Big who enjoys adventures, staying active, being creative and could be a consistent role model in her life.

Help end the wait for Serenity. YOU could be the Big who ignites her potential. Become a Big today.

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For more information about JESUS or SERENITY, call Megan at 507-414-0308 or visit www.bbbsofsouthernmn.org/beabig.

'He is at peace'

Friends mourn the loss of Ralph Diaz

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

It's not the outcome family and friends had hoped for, but they are now taking comfort in knowing Ralph Diaz is in a better place.

Diaz died suddenly Sunday morning in Pittsburgh while awaiting a double lung transplant. He ended up getting pneumonia in the past couple weeks and had at least one stroke, according to Ruth Hagen, a friend and co-worker of Diaz's at RJ's on 5th Ave Bar and Grill in Ellendale. Diaz was 51.

"It was very unexpected," said Hagen. "It's so unfortunate."

Diaz left with his sister before Thanksgiving for Pittsburgh where he was on the waiting list to receive a double lung transplant. He was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis in February 2019.



Ralph Diaz

Hagen shared how the hospital had found a set of lungs for Diaz two weeks ago. However, the lungs had a puncture in them and could not be transplanted to Diaz. "It's like you dangle a bone in front of a dog," Hagen said of the situation. "It was depressing when he didn't get those lungs. He should have had those lungs two weeks ago," she added.

While Hagen and others are wrestling with how to understand what has happened to Diaz, they are taking comfort in knowing that he's not suffering any more.

Hagen has also taken comfort in the fact that she was able to share photos and a video of the Rally for Ralph that took place in Ellendale on Dec. 6 before he died. More than 600 people showed up for a benefit. "It made him feel good that people really loved him," Hagen said.

Hagen encourages people to say prayers for Diaz's family and friends. She said Diaz was loved by so many people. "He has left a huge hole in our community," she said.

In honor of Diaz and his memory, RJ's Bar is closed until at least after Christmas. "It's time to reflect on his memory," Hagen said.

Funeral services are pending.

Diaz grew up in Blooming Prairie. He has worked for a number of restaurants and bars in Blooming Prairie, Geneva and Ellendale over the years. He most recently took over as manager of RJ's after his sister purchased the business about a year ago.

During Diaz's absence, employees along with his brother Louie had been running RJ's.

"I'm just so glad he's not suffering," Hagen said. "He is at peace."



SUBMITTED PHOTO

More than 600 people cleaned out the baked goods during a Rally for Ralph Dec. 6 in Ellendale. Handling the bake sale are, from left: Rhonda Haried, Peggy Wallerich and LuAnn Hanson.

FAITH PLAYS: *key role in Eaker's cancer fight* FROM A1

this," she told the doctors. "I'm not ready to hang it up yet."

Eaker is taking two kinds of chemotherapy, including Keytruda, a relatively new drug that is immunotherapy for advanced non-small lung cancer. She says Keytruda helps "pump up your own natural immunity." While chemo doesn't penetrate the brain, Keytruda will get at it, she said.

There are many different side effects with Keytruda, according to Eaker. She said the side effects depend on weight, age and type of cancer among other things. "There are lots of side effects, but this thing ain't for sissies," she said.

The first positive sign Eaker has noticed is that she no longer has a rattle when breathing.

Fighting cancer isn't anything new for the Eaker family. Her husband, Steve, lost his battle to brain and lung cancer in 2006 at the age of 55. But, as Eaker said, things were different in his case as he has two collapsed lungs from earlier in life and nothing could be done for him. "We had no hope for him, but I have hope," she said, adding cancer treatments have changed so much in the past 14 years.

She takes comfort in knowing that the meat market is in good hands with her daughter, Rachael Lee, and their employees. "She learned good from mom and dad," Eaker said.

Eaker calls Lee her hero. "She constantly encourages me," Eaker said. "When I need a pep talk, she helps me get through the day."

When Eaker found out she had cancer, she couldn't believe it. "My daughter told me that we got through this with dad, we will get through this with you," she said fighting back tears.

Another hero in Eaker's life is Blooming Prairie area accountant Tamzen Johnson, who has been taking Eaker to her doctor appointments in Rochester.

Eaker takes refuge in knowing "cancer is no longer a death sentence," she said. "We will have victory over the C-word. Many of us live with cancer every day."

She is leaning on her faith during this difficult chapter of life. "I let my faith be bigger than my fear," said Eaker. "I know Jesus is surrounding his arms and protecting me. I can't imagine anyone without faith. It would be such a deep hole."

Eaker is confident that her family, doctors, Jesus and chemo will help her survive cancer. "I have to believe this… the alternative isn't so good," she said. "If I don't have hope, it's a darn lonely road to go down."

Being away from the meat market hasn't been easy for Eaker. She started crying to her daughter upon realizing she will not be able to see her customers on the busiest day of the year on Christmas Eve. Instead Eaker will be getting chemo.

Asked what her greatest wish for this holiday season is, Eaker replied: "That we can get rid of the coronavirus and 2020 can go away. 2020 should be wiped off the face of the earth."

Eaker takes comfort in celebrating Christmas this week. She had most of the decorating done prior to getting the cancer diagnosis. "I was feeling miserable, but I got it done," she said, adding she had some help from other family members.

"I love Christmas, I love the lights and I love decorating," Eaker said.

Despite the latest setback, Eaker is finding joy in the season. Last Friday she put on a bright red shirt that proclaimed "Joy" while marveling at her Christmas tree and other decorations.

"I felt so good," she said.

MnDOT launches "Name a Snowplow" contest

The Minnesota Department of Transportation is seeking creative, witty and fun names as part of a new effort to name eight snowplows in the agency's fleet – one snowplow for each MnDOT district in the state.

Name ideas can be submitted on the MnDOT website at www.dot.state.mn.us/nameasnowplow. The submission form will be open until Friday, Jan. 22 and all Minnesotans are invited to participate. The link will also be shared on MnDOT's social media channels.

In February, MnDOT plans to share some of the best name ideas and invite the public to vote on their favorites. The eight names that get the most votes will then make their way onto a snowplow in each district.

Follow @mndot on Instagram and Facebook, and @MnDOT on Twitter.

Keeping alive a tradition since 1888

The Johnsons

Farming has been a tradition for the Johnson family for the past 132 years.

Dale and Lori Johnson live on the century-old farm southwest of Owatonna. They farm along with Dale's two brothers, Daryl and Craig. They raise corn and soybeans conventional and no till. About three-fourths of their crop is stored at home while the rest is delivered to the local elevator in the fall.

The Johnsons milked Brown Swiss cows until 1992 and raised hogs until 1999.

"I started farming first because I was brought up on a farm, and I thought it was the best place on earth to raise a family," said Dale. "I also wanted to keep our family farm tradition going since it began in 1888," he added.

Dale's mother passed away in 1973. "That really instilled in me that I wanted to come home from college and help my dad," Dale said. "I never second guessed my decision."

Dale and Lori were married in 1975. They have three adult children: Justin, Brandon and Kelsey. "Growing up on the farm helped establish a healthy work ethic and prepared them for their futures," Dale pointed out. He noted 4-H has also been a great part of their lives and something their children took great pride in.

One of the greatest joys Dale gets out of farming is planting a crop in the spring, following it all summer long and determining in the fall when to start harvest. "The goal all along is to harvest a good crop, receive a good price in the fall and hopefully with only a few small bumps along the way," he said.



Another joy for the Johnsons is watching their grandchildren enjoy the surroundings of the farm. Some activities they enjoy doing with the grandchildren are riding four-wheeler into the woods, riding the combine or tractor, planting and harvesting vegetables in the garden and running free exploring the animals and land, which they most likely don't get to see in town.

Dale says their farm is always looking for ways to conserve the land for the future. "We want this farm to be in the family for years to come," he said, noting his 93-year-old father always plants a tree whenever he has a chance. Dale's brother has started beekeeping and planted wildflowers to help with pollination. "What an experience that has been," Dale said.

In addition to farming, Dale also works at Owatonna Ford. Both Dale and Lori have been 4-H leaders and active in church. Dale enjoys being on the township board.

Dale and Lori Johnson operate a crop farm southwest of Owatonna along with Dale's two brothers, Daryl and Craig.

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Margery A. Ilk, 92, Blooming Prairie


Margery A. Ilk

Margery A. Ilk, age 92 of Blooming Prairie, passed away peacefully on Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2020 at The Cedars of Austin.

Margery Ann Olson was born April 26, 1928 in Hector, Minn., the daughter of Henry and Edla (Ahl) Olson. On June 30, 1947, she married Richard J. Ilk in Hector. The couple moved to Palo Alto, Calif., where Richard worked as an aeronautical engineer.

In 1949, they moved to Blooming Prairie, where Margery mainly stayed at home to raise their children and helped her husband with bookwork at their gas station, the Elk Oil Company. In later years, she worked alongside her husband as a receptionist at H & R Block. In addition, she worked as a cook and server at the Blooming Prairie Serviceman's Club.

Margery's faith was very important to her and was a devoted member of the United Methodist Church in Blooming Prairie. Margery was a leader with the Girl Scouts, active in the American Legion Auxiliary, was an Election Judge, loved getting together with her lady friends for Bridge Club; she was an avid golfer and had a great time playing golf every Tuesday on Ladies Day at the Blooming Prairie Country Club, where her proudest accomplishment there was a hole-in-one. What fun she had!

Her hobbies included, cooking, knitting, and hardanger embroidery. She especially loved flowers and planting them. Some of Margery's favorite pastimes were going to auctions, garage sales and collecting antiques with her husband, Richard. She was the best mom, mother-in-law, grandma, great grandma, sister, sister-in-law, aunt, and of course, THE BEST COOK!

Survivors include her two sons, Craig (Carole) Ilk of Pittsburgh, Pa., Mark (Jana) Ilk of Sacramento, Calif.; two daughters, Nancy Ilk of Blooming Prairie, Sue (Bryan) Rossow of Austin; eight grandchildren: Laena, Mark Jr., Joseph, Kasey, Mariesa, Kyle, Tom, and Becky; 11 great grandchildren; sister, Alice Beske, brother, Howard "Shorty" Olson; sister-in-law, Donna Linse; and many nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Henry and Edla Olson; husband, Richard Ilk in 2011; grandson, Joshua Ilk; brother, Harold "Spike" Olson; and sister, Helen Andrews.

Margery will be buried beside her husband in Fort Snelling Cemetery, Minneapolis, at a later date. In lieu of flowers, if you choose to send a card to the family, please include your favorite memory of Margery. Charitable contributions are the donor's choice.

Worlein Blooming Prairie Funeral Home in Blooming Prairie is assisting the family with arrangements. Condolences may be expressed to the family online at www.worlein.com.

Jeannette Preston, 87, Owatonna


Jeannette Preston

Jeannette Ann Preston, age 87, of Owatonna passed away Dec. 17, 2020 at the New Richland Care center.

Mass of Christian Burial will be 11 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 29, 2020 at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Owatonna with burial to follow at Forest Hill Cemetery. Friends may greet the family one hour prior to the funeral at church.

Jeannette was born in 1933 in Owatonna to parents Robert and Margaret (Morsen) Peterson.

Jeannette started to clean houses, a career she would continue until retirement at the age of 77.

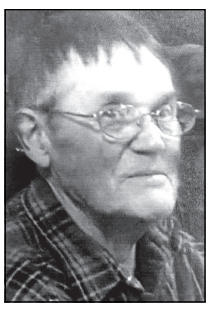
She and her husband Lyle love to ride motorcycles and would often take long trips on the weekends for many years.

Jeannette is survived by husband, Lyle of 44 years; one child, Gene Hickok, Owatonna; one grandchild and one brother, Jim Peterson, Milwaukee.

She was preceded in death by one son, Dan Hickok; siblings, Dalloyd (Betty) Peterson, Jim (Joan) Peterson, Ron (Rose) Peterson, Don 'Butch' (Doris) Peterson, Delores Davis, John Peterson and Kathleen (Milt) Gilbert.

For more information or to leave an online condolence message go to www.megercares.com.

Darrell A. Thoen, 81, Waltham


Darrell A. Thoen

Darrell A. Thoen, 81, a lifelong farmer from Waltham, died on Friday, Dec. 11, 2020 in Franklin, Minn.

He was born on Aug. 12, 1939 to Truman and Evelyn (Dahlby) Thoen in Kensett, Iowa where he lived until 1951 when his family moved to a farm south of Austin. They later moved to a farm near Blooming Prairie.

Darrell was a 1957 graduate of Blooming Prairie High School and served in the National Guard.

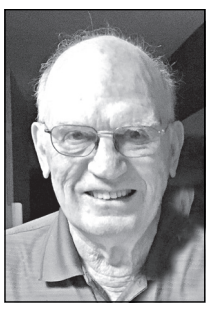
Darrell's passion was farming and he farmed his entire life. In addition to farming, he was a seed and chemical dealer. Darrell was an avid catfish fisherman, enjoyed spending time with family and friends and traveling back to Iowa.

Survivors include his very special friend, Kathy Welshons of Franklin; sisters, Virginia (LaVerne) Kehret and VaLois Thoen, both of Austin; many nieces, nephews and other relatives and friends.

He was preceded in death by his parents, brother, Robert Thoen and sister-in-law, Elaine Thoen.

Due to the COVID pandemic, services will be held at a later time.

Earl M. Wheeler, 88, Owatonna


Earl M. Wheeler

Earl Mason Wheeler of Owatonna died Dec. 18, 2020 at Homestead Hospice House in Owatonna.

A private family Mass took place Tuesday, Dec. 22, 2020 at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Owatonna. Visitation was one hour before the funeral liturgy at the church. Burial took place at Concord Cemetery in Old Concord with Military Honors provided by his friends and fellow members of the Steele County Funeral Unit. You may view a live stream of the Funeral Mass on St. Joseph's Facebook page. A Knights of Columbus Rosary was also recited at the church.

Earl was born July 20, 1932 in Concord Township, rural Dodge County the son of Lyle and Vera (Mason) Wheeler. Earl attended high school in West Concord and graduated in 1950. After high school, Earl worked for his dad in the construction business until he enlisted in the Navy in 1952. While in the Navy Earl spent six months on the Mediterranean Sea and was able to tour ports in Europe.

He was united in marriage to Phyllis Wiggins in 1953 in Dodge Center. Phyllis was able to join her new husband while he was stationed in Norfolk, Va. until he was honorably discharged in March of 1956.

Upon returning from the Navy, Earl continued his electrical training and worked for Kriesel Electric, Smith Owatonna Electric and other shops in the area for the next 45 years until his retirement.

Earl was a active member of St. Joseph Church, volunteering his time and talents, including being a Boy Scout Leader. Earl stated he was never bored. He filled his time with the American Legion, the Knights of Columbus and the Elk's. He was a member of the Steele County Funeral Detail for over 20 years. At home he was busy making wine and wood carving.

In retirement, Earl and his wife Phyllis traveled to several countries. He enjoyed an annual ice fishing trip with his five sons was a "Must" each year.

Earl leaves behind his wife of 67 years Phyllis, his children Michael (Becky) of Mantorville Patricia (Ritchie) Nyland of Elko/New Market, Paul (Jeanne Kitayama) Haines, AK David (Renee), John (Donna), and Matthew, all of Owatonna. Sixteen grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. Earl's sister-in-law Sherril Wheeler and brother -in-law James (Sharon) Wiggins.

He is preceded in death by his parents, infant son Phillip and two brothers, one sister and one brother-in-law.

Memorials may be directed to St. Joseph Church or the American Cancer Society. For more information or to leave a condolence message go to www.megercares.com.

STEELE COUNTY Times

Always local, all the time.

Recipe Corner

Old Fashioned Butter Cookies

1 C softened butter
1 C white sugar
1 egg
1 tsp vanilla
2 T orange juice
1 tsp baking powder
2-1/2 C flour (about)

Cream butter and sugar, then add egg, vanilla and orange juice, mix well. Mix in dry ingredients. You can refrigerate if you need to, or you can roll out and cut out your cookies right away. Bake at 400º for about 6 to 10 minutes, or until you can see a little browned edge. Cool on wire rack and frost with butter cream frosting.

Butter cream frosting:
3 C powdered sugar
1/3 C softened butter
Combine until well mixed and add 1 tsp vanilla, and 1 to 2 T milk. Mix well and frost and decorate cookies! These cookies keep well, and the recipe doubles just fine. They are very tasty cookies, enjoy!

Sponsored by STEELE COUNTY Times

Merry Christmas to all!


NANCY VAILLANCOURT

Some families when gift giving do so by the rule of three: one gift to play with, one gift to wear, and one gift to read. Here at the Blooming Prairie Branch Library, we wholeheartedly agree that at least one gift, preferably more, should be one to read!

While recently watching a Facebook Live Christmas tour of Reykjavik, Iceland, I was reminded of the Icelandic tradition called *Jolabokaflod*, which translates to "Christmas book flood" in English. A book flood sounds like a wonderful idea. National Public Radio reported that *Jolabokaflod* started during World War II, when paper was one of the few things not rationed in Iceland. Because of this, Icelanders began giving books as gifts since other items were in short supply.

Ever since 1944, the Icelandic book trade has sent out advertisements to each household in November when the Reykjavik Book Fair happens. People use this to order books to give to their friends and family on Christmas Eve., turning them into a country of bookaholics to this day. After all the presents are open, everyone grabs a cup of hot chocolate and cozies up to spend the rest of the evening reading their books. I love that idea – books and chocolates definitely go together.

Did you know that the average American reads 12 books per year, according to Pew Research Center? It seems like in 2020 we may have upped that average. One of our regular readers at the library, Joan Severtson, has read 92 books as of Dec. 17. She is hoping to make it to 100 by the end of the year! (I think she will do it!)

Merry Christmas and a Happy Reading New Year!

Keeping your Christmas Plants healthy


Mastering Gardening
LORRIE RUGG

If you have received a living plant for the Holidays let's discuss how to take care of them. They bring a smile to my face, I love plants and brighten up your home during the winter season.

First, we had better talk about the Poinsettia plant. In the last few years, we are seeing more colorful plants on the market. Growers are literally painting them. I have been at a greenhouse where they place the plants on a large bench that moves and overhead sprayers apply the paint. It does not harm the plant, and the result is orange, blue, and purple colored poinsettias.

Place your poinsettia in a sunny window or the brightest area of your room. Make sure your plant is not next to a cold window or door, they do not tolerate cold temps very well. Overwatering is the No. 1 killer, it can lead to root rot. Water your plant when the soil dries out. If your plant came with a foil covering make sure the water can drain out the bottom.

Christmas cactus is another popular plant during the holiday time. They are notorious for dropping buds when they are stressed. Try to limit the number of times that you move the plant when you get it home. Adequate

SEE **KEEPING, A14**

BIRTHDAYS

Dec. 23
Jeffrey (Heifer) Ingvalson
Morgan Jo Hagen

Dec. 24
Jolean Zilm
Kaylene Jensen
Lavon Hernandez
Noel Wright

Dec. 25
Kylin Bishop
Rick Klemmensen
Bob Hansen

Dec. 26
Diane Lembke
Piper Winn
Owen Jones
Tricia Steckelberg
Leah Krell

Dec. 27
Tara Gimbel
Carsten Ingvalson
Jeffry Zimmerman
Macy Lembke
Lydia Brown
Mason Brown
Harper Schwindel

Dec. 28
Thomas Braaten
Madeline Sorenson
Jakson Vermilyea
Joel Burr
Benji Bishop
Carter Bishop
Maya Lembke
Tyler Watkins

ANNIVERSARIES

Dec. 21
Tom & Chris Butler

Dec. 26
Paul & Bernice Stender | Wally & Jean Wilke

Dec. 28
Chad & Kari Forystek


HAYFIELD

This weekly feature sponsored by:
Dornink & Sons Carpentry
Gene Dornink
507.206.8449

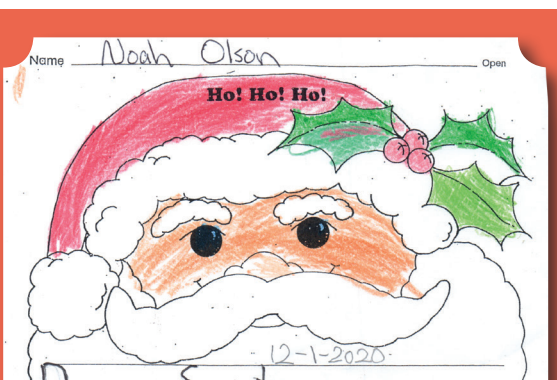
ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS...

COVID isn't stopping Santa from tracking who's been naughty or nice!

Behind all the COVID plaguing our country, the Steele County Times has still been able to establish a connection with the North Pole. We are providing Santa's elves and Santa himself with wish lists from first graders at Blooming Prairie. We're certain Santa will share his magic, but it may depend on whether you're on the naughty or nice list! MERRY CHRISTMAS!



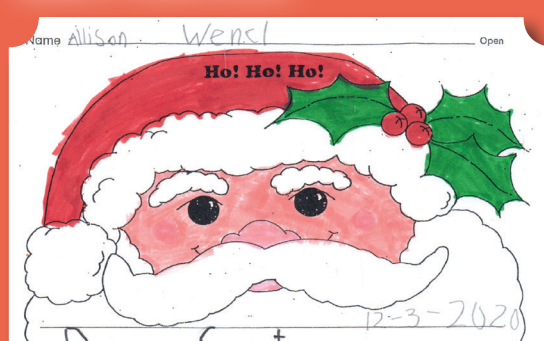
Name Noah Olson Open



12-1-2020

Dear Santa,
microscope.
a big alligator
and little alligator
Stufes.
Luv Noah

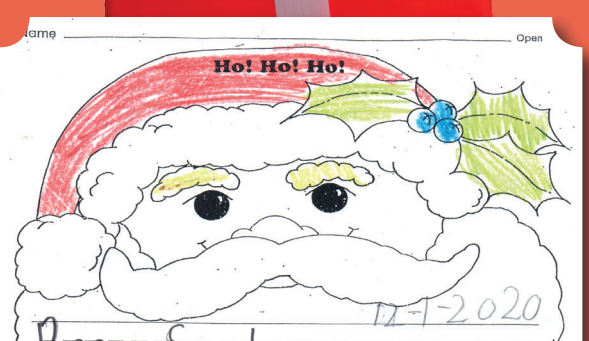
Name Allison Wenzl Open



12-3-2020

Dear Santa,
How are you doing?
I would like a our
generation doll puppy
and puppy house set.
I Love you Santa
and Mrs. Clause I
hope you travel safely
Love, Allison Wenzl

Name Open



12-1-2020

Dear Santa;
How is Rudolph?
For Christmas
may I have a
new coloring book?
Have a Merry
Christmas.
Your Friend,
Zaya Dreher

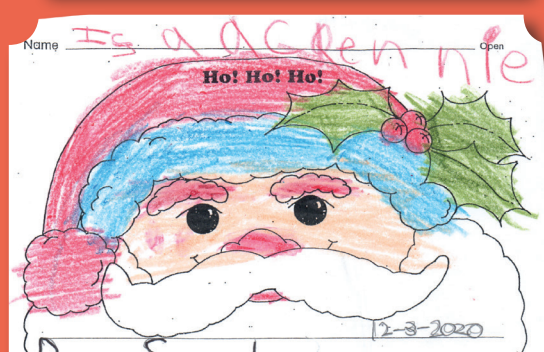
Name Brody Open



12-3-2020

Dear santa.
How do you make toys?
I want a snowboard for
Christmas. I can't wait
To see my family
Your Friend
Brody

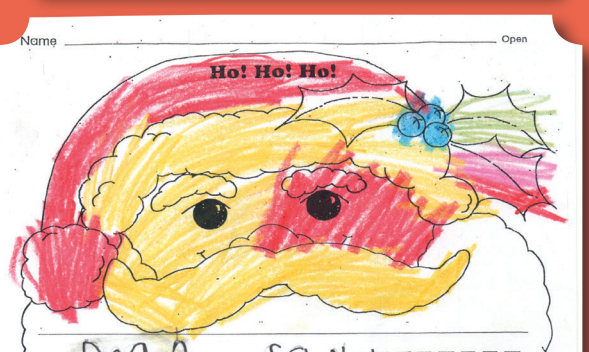
Name Isaac Kennie



12-3-2020

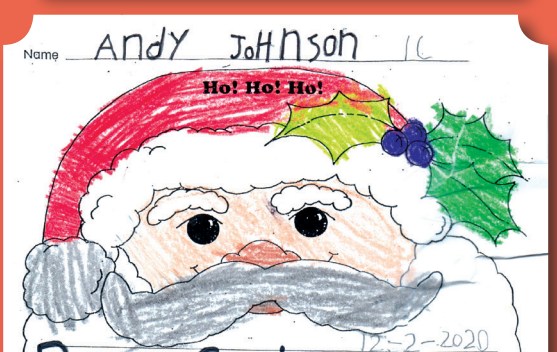
Dear Santa,
How are the
randear? I wood
like a new blue bike.
I hope you have
a good Advent
Your friend,
Isaac Kennie

Name Open



Dear santa
how was my ele
this summer?
Please santa
Will you get me
a robiox toy
I will leave
You cookies
Love Jackson sc Higgins

Name Andy Johnson 1C



12-2-2020

Dear Santa. For
christmas I want
a cotton candy
maker and a
Hoverboard travel
safe on christmas
Eve your friend
Andy Johnson 1C

Name Bennett Wenzl Open



12-3-20

Dear Santa.
How do you make
the toys?
Could you please
bring me a elf
a pistol a remote
control boat a drone
with comeras.
Thank you Santa.
Bennett wenzl

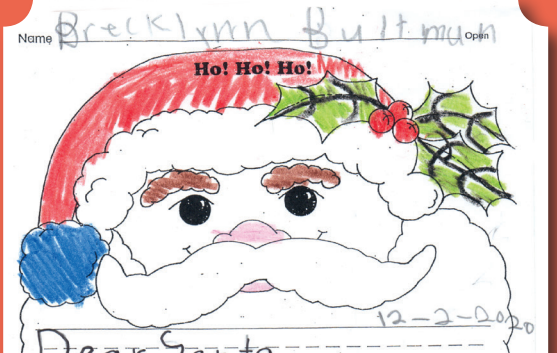
Name Open



12-3-2020

Dear Santa,
Do you miss MY
Reindeer Molly?
Can you ples get
Me a ipod for
Christmas? I Love
you soso much!
Your friend,
Lila Schiller 1B

Name Brecklynn Bultman Open



12-2-2020

Dear Santa
Does Mrs. Claus
like to dance? I want
Alvin, Simon and Theodore
dolls for Christmas
please Stay safe
your friend,
Brecklynn Bultman





Santa Letters 2020



Dear Santa,
How many reindeer do you actually have? I've been a great awesome blossom for Christmas. I would like a new bike and helmet. I hope you have a good Christmas.
Your Friend,
Cassadee Wilkemeyer

Dear Santa,
How are the elves? I would like some tractors for Christmas. Hope you are good.
Love, Rowdy

Dear Santa,
How are you? I want a new pencil box and a very fluffy body pillow because my twins have one but I don't.
Your friend, Meriam

Dear Santa,
How do you get out of a chimney? I want a finger ring for Christmas. I can't wait to open presents. I really want you to eat cookies!
Your Friend, Avery

Dear Santa,
How is Mrs. Clause? I want a real dog for Christmas. Stay safe!
Your Friend, Sadie

Dear Santa,
How is Mrs. Clause? I would like a new bike. I will leave milk and cookies. I will leave carrots for the reindeer.
Your Friend,
Odin Holtberg

Dear Santa,
Where do elves come from? I would like LOL dolls and more Hatchimals. I hope you and Mrs. Claus are doing well.
Your Friend,
Emma Tromic

Dear Santa,
WWE, Toys, Blanket, Bed, Dinosaurs, Football, Soccer Ball, Cell Phone, Legos, Stuffy Turtles, Love,, Santi

Dear Santa,
How are the reindeer? I would like a big crybaby for Christmas. I can't wait to bake Christmas cookies!
Your Friend,
Meredith

Dear Santa,
How are you? I would like makeup, kitten, and sticky nails. Enjoy your cookies and milk.
Your Friend,
Jacquelyn Schieck

Dear Santa,
Does Mrs. Clause have magic like you? Are you friends with Jesus? Are reindeer girls? I have been a good girl. Please come to my grandma's house to see me.
There will be cookies.
Love, Brooklyn Simon

Dear Santa,
How do you make toys? I would like an X-Box for Christmas. I can't wait to go snowmobiling.
Your Friend,
Crosby

Dear Santa,
How do the reindeers fly? Can I please have a radio for my bedroom?
Love, Bella
P.S. The cookies will be by the door.

Dear Santa,
How are you and the elves? I want a LOL Camper for Christmas. Hope you have a good Christmas.
Your Friend,
Emily Kasperek

Dear Santa,
Is Rudolph real? I would like a big doll vet set.
Your Friend,
Willow Bartell

Dear Santa,
What did you do last summer? I would like a Barbie camper for Christmas. Please be safe on Christmas Eve.
From,
Amelia Johnson

Dear Santa,
How is Mrs. Clause? How do you get all those toys delivered? How do you get in a house if there is no chimney? I would like an X-Box card for Christmas. I can't wait to open the presents. I really want you to be safe.
Your Friend,
Jaelin

Dear Santa,
How are the elves? I want a double stroller. I am excited to open gifts.
Your Friend,
Olivia E.

Dear Santa,
How do you make the toys? I would like a PS5. I can't wait for Christmas.
Your Friend,
Peyton

Dear Santa,
I have been good this year. Please bring me cars and dinosaurs. I will leave you cookies and reindeer food.
Your Friend,
Joey
To Santa,
How do you make toys? I would like fake nails for Christmas. I can't wait to open presents.
Your Friend,
Skylar

Dear Santa,
How are the reindeer? I would like a snowboard for Christmas.
Your Friend,
Trysten

Dear Santa,
I would like a real phone. Thank you for giving to all the children!

Dear Santa,
How is Rudolph? How are the elves doing? I would like bluey toys, spider-man toys, and Hulk toys.
Love,
Levi Reinke

Dear Santa,
How are you doing? I would like a Nintendo Switch, a Super Mario case, and a Nerf-gun. Please take care.
Your Friend,
Laila Ebeling

Dear Santa,
What time do you deliver presents? I would like dolls. I really want you to stay safe!
Your Friend,
Lyanne

Dear Santa,
How are the reindeer?
I would like RC Can for Christmas.
Your Friend,
Landon

Dear Santa,
How are you? I want a semi with a flatbed trailer. How is Mrs. Clause?
Your Friend,
Reed

Dear Santa,
What does Mrs. Clause do? Please bring 42083 Lego Tech, No set or 42082, 42081, 42080 Lego Technic.
Thank You!
Greyson

Dear Santa,
How do you get all the presents? I want an iPad for Christmas and I want AirPods. I am excited for Christmas Day!
Love,
Kennedy

Dear Santa,
What do you feed your reindeer? I want a plastic browning machine gun and firefighting books.
Your Friend,
Eli P.

Dear Santa,
How are you? I hope the reindeer are doing good. I would like an iPhone 12 and a X-Box and FS2021. Thank You.
Your Friend,
Tate Young

Sponosored by these local businesses.

Johnson, Doerhoefer & Miner P.A.
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS
314 E. Main St.
Blooming Prairie
507-583-7528
685 W. Bridge St.
Owatonna
507-451-9136
133 N. Broadway
New Richland
507-465-3810

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TRY HOPE BUTTER FOR YOUR BAKING!
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SALINAS AUTO REPAIR INC.
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Robert Salinas
Family-Owned
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Blooming Prairie
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STEELE COUNTY Times

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Mike's REPAIR
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870 32 Ave. NW, Owatonna
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507-455-0388
(After hours 507-455-0483)

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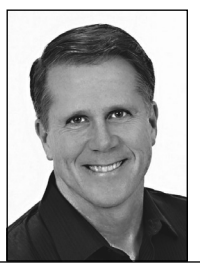
Appliances & TV
GE, Frigidaire, Direct Tv, Danby, Crosley, Broan, Jenn-Air, KitchenAid, Maytag, Panasonic, RCA, Samsung, Toshiba, Whirlpool
Geneva, Mn
507-256-7258

misgen auto parts
507-684-2100
12880 SW 72nd Ave, Ellendale



The birth names of God



Pastor Scott Peterson
NEW BEGINNINGS CHURCH
OWATONNA

Mat 1:20-23 NASB -.... an angel of the Lord appeared to him (Joseph) in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for** *(because)* **He will save His people from their sins." 22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."

His names at birth were Jesus and Immanuel. Jesus is the best translation in the Greek of His real Hebrew name Yeshua. And Yeshua is actually a derivative of the Hebrew name for Joshua and Joshua came from "Jehoshua."

There were only two men in the Old Testament that had the name Joshua. And both of them were instrumental in leading Israel out of bondage into freedom.

Joshua, the one that followed Moses, was not born with the name Joshua. His birth name was Hoshea. And Hoshea means salvation. But Moses changed his name; he took the "Je" from Jehovah -which is the name for God, and he added the letters to Hoshea to get "Je-Hoshea" or Jehoshua. Therefore, Moses changed Joshua's name from "salvation" to "God is salvation."

Later it was shortened to Joshua. But Jesus' name was not Joshua. And it was not Jehoshua. Jesus' name was Jeshua, "JE" comes from Jehovah, and the literal translation of Jehovah is, "I AM that I AM" which is only attributed to God.

The "J-E" on the front of the name literally means I AM. So, Jesus' name was not "God is salvation," but rather "I AM salvation." He was saying to the whole nation of Israel, and to the world, "I AM here" and "I AM the Messiah." He is saying to you today "I AM your salvation." He is the only one who was ever named "Jeshua-Yeshua." Listen to me carefully, there is no salvation apart from being saved through faith in Christ. Jesus came to save us from our sins. He saves us from the penalty of sin completely and totally.

His other name at birth was and still is "Immanuel" meaning "God with us." God became a man to help us get back to Him through His sacrificial death on the cross We were separated from God because of sin. God the Father cannot have any fellowship with sinners, because of their sin. And so Jesus became our mediator. He became our go-between. He brought us to God, and He brought God to us. That's why His name is Yeshua and Immanuel.

Will you accept Him today? The steps to your salvation are simple: Believe he died for you and was raised from the dead, confess your sin in a simple prayer of your own, choose to follow Christ, confess that He is Lord of your life and simply trust Him for your salvation.

And have a very Merry Christmas!

AREA WORSHIP SCHEDULE

LUTHERAN

AURORA LUTHERAN
6329 SE 28th St., Owatonna
Interim Pastor:
Rev. Dale Svendsen
507-451-2819
office@auroralutheranchurch.org
Worship: Sunday at 9 a.m.
Sunday School: 10:15 a.m.

COMMUNITY LUTHERAN – ELCA
106 Third St. SE., Geneva
Pastor Kristen Venne
507-256-4288
Worship: 8:30 a.m. Sunday

FIRST LUTHERAN – AFLC
503 Radel Ct., Ellendale
Pastor Richard Sliper
507-684-2451
Men's Bible Study:
8 a.m. Saturday
Worship: 9 a.m. Sunday
(Kids church- 9 a.m. and Confirmation- 10:15 a.m.)
Jesus and Me: 3:30-5 p.m. Tuesday & Thursday
Call to Prayer:
7 p.m. Tuesday
Bible Study:
9:30 a.m. Wednesday
Wednesday School:
6:15-7 p.m. followed by Youth Group- 7-9 p.m.

FIRST LUTHERAN – ELCA
434 First St. SW., Blooming Prairie
Senior Pastor:
Rev. Heidi Heimgartner
Associate Pastor:
Rev. Mike Walerius
507-583-6621
firstlutheranbp.com
Worship Service- 9 a.m.
Sunday School- 10 a.m.

FIRST LUTHERAN – LCMC
8953 SW 37th Ave., Hope
Pastor Sandy Miller
507-451-3854
Worship: 9 a.m. Sun.
Sunday School, Adult Ed:
10:15 a.m. Sun.

GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN – LCMS
2500 7th Ave. NE., Owatonna
Pastor Greg Schlicker
507-451-4125
goodshepherdowatonna.com
Indoor Worship: Sundays 9 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.
Online Worship: Sundays 9 a.m. or anytime on website

MOLAND LUTHERAN – ELCA
7618 NE 84th Ave., Kenyon
Pastor Nancy Edwardson
507-789-6661
Worship: 10:45 a.m. Sun.
Sunday School: 9:30 a.m.

PONTOPPIDAN LUTHERAN – ELCA
9651 SW 75th St., Ellendale
507-465-8366
Worship: 10:15 a.m. Sun.
Sunday School: 9 a.m. Sun.

REDEEMER LUTHERAN – LCMS
1054 Truman Ave., Owatonna
Pastor Kirk Griebel
507-451-2720
Worship: 9 a.m. Sun.
Education Hour: 10:15 a.m. Sun.

RED OAK GROVE LUTHERAN – ELCA
30456 Mower-Freeborn Road, Austin
Leandra Anderson, Pastor
507-583-2038 or 507-437-3000
www.roglutheran.org
Worship: 9 a.m. Sun.

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN – LCMS
4532 SE 84th Ave., Claremont
Pastor Alan Broadwell
507-528-2404
Worship: 10:30 a.m. Sun.
Sunday School: 9:15 a.m.

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN – LCMS
28959 630th Ave., Sargeant
Pastor Collin Duling
507-251-5568
Worship: 10:15 a.m. Sun.
Sunday School: 9 a.m.

ST. JOHN LUTHERAN-ELCA
1301 Lincoln Ave. Owatonna
Pastors Dave Klawiter and Jacie Richmond
507-451-7293
stjohnowatonna.org
Worship: 5 p.m. Thursday & Saturday;
8 a.m. & 10:30 a.m. Sunday
Summer Services:
8 a.m. & 9:30 a.m. Sunday

ST. MICHAEL'S LUTHERAN – ELCA
30450 570th Ave., Waltham
Pastor Dwight DoBell
507-567-2474
Worship: 8:30 a.m. Sun.

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN – LCMS
202 E. Park Ave., Hollandale
Pastor Jesse Krusemark
507-567-2272
Worship: 8:30 a.m. Sun.
Sunday School: 9:45 a.m.

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN – ELCA
2781 SW 92nd Ave., Meriden
Pastor: Rev. Dean Smith
507-451-2165
Sunday Worship Indoor: 10 a.m.

TRINITY LUTHERAN – ELCA
609 Lincoln Ave., Owatonna
507-451-4520
tlcowatonna.org
Senior Pastor:
Rev. Todd Buegler
Associate Pastor:
Rev. Amanda Floy
Deacon: Kris Oppegard
Sundays 9:30 a.m. - online at facebook.com/tlcowatonna and tlcowatonna.org/worshiplive
Watch the video of our full service on Spectrum (channel 181) and Jaguar TV (channel 900) (Tuesday-4:30 p.m.; Wednesday-6 p.m.; Sunday-11 a.m.) and at owatonnalive.com.

TRINITY LUTHERAN – ELCA
104 First St. SE., Hayfield
Pastor Paul Hauschild
507-477-2248
www.trinityhayfield.org
Worship: 8 a.m. & 10:30 a.m. Sun.
Sunday School: 9:15 a.m.

TRINITY LUTHERAN – LCMS
108 Third Ave. SW., Medford
Pastor Mark Biebighauser
507-451-0447
Worship: 8 a.m. & 10 a.m.
Education Hour: 9 a.m.

TRINITY LUTHERAN – LCMS
57043 300th St., Waltham
Pastor Jesse Krusemark
507-567-2272
Worship: 10:30 a.m. Sun.
Sunday School: 9:15 a.m.

ZION LUTHERAN – ELCA
7126 SW 98th St., Ellendale
Pastor: Rev. Dean Smith
Sunday Worship Indoor: 8:30 a.m.

OUR SAVIOR'S LUTHERAN – ELCA
1909 St. Paul Road, Owatonna
Senior Pastor:
John Weisenburger
Associate Pastor: Lisa Carlson
507-451-4853
oursaviorsowatonna.com
Worship: 8:15 a.m.- Traditional, 9:30 a.m.- Sunday School/Adult Education
10:45 a.m.- Contemporary

CATHOLIC

CHRIST THE KING
205 Second Ave. NW, Medford
507-451-4845
Father James Starasinich
Mass: 5:30 p.m. Sat.
Mass: 9 a.m. Mon. & Fri.

CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS
307 SW First St., New Richland
Father Brian Mulligan
507-234-6244
Mass: 5 p.m. Saturday

HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH OF LITOMYSL
9946 SE 24th Ave Owatonna
Father John Wilmot
507-583-2784
www.litomysl.webs.com
Sunday Mass at 8:15 a.m.
Litomysl Finance Council:
2nd Thursday
Litomysl Pastoral Council:
2nd Thursday every other month

SACRED HEART CATHOLIC
150 NE Second St., Hayfield
Father John Wilmot
507-477-2256
Mass: 5 p.m. Saturday
Reconciliation: 3:45 pm Saturday

SACRED HEART PARISH
810 S. Cedar Ave., Owatonna
Father Swaminatha Pothireddy
Parochial Vicar
507-451-1588
www.sacredheartowatonna.org
Mass: 5 p.m. Saturday;
8:30 a.m. &10 a.m. Sun.
Spanish Mass:
11:45 a.m. Sun.
Daily Mass: 7:15 a.m.
Reconciliation: 4 p.m. Sat.
Adoration: 8 a.m. – 10 p.m. Thurs.

ST. COLUMBANUS CATHOLIC
114 E. Main St., Blooming Prairie
Father John Wilmot
507-583-2784
www.stcolumbanuschurch.com
Mass: 10:30 a.m. Sunday
Reconciliation: 9 a.m.
First Friday & Saturday

ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC PARISH
512 S. Elm Ave., Owatonna
Father James Starasinich
507-451-4845
Saturday Mass: 4 p.m.
Sunday Mass: 8 & 10 a.m.
Reconciliation:
3-3:30 p.m. Sat.
Daily Mass:
8 a.m. Tues., Wed. & Fri.
(Communion Service 8 a.m. Thursday)
Adoration Chapel available Mon. – Fri. 7 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.
Key fob required after hours or weekends

CHRISTIAN

CHRIST COMMUNITY COVENANT
540 SE 18th St., Owatonna
Dr. V. Brent Carlson, Pastor
507-451-1032
Worship: 9 a.m. Sun.
Sunday Connections:
10:15 a.m.

PENTECOSTAL

FIRST UNITED PENTECOASTAL
230 Locust Ave., Owatonna
Pastor Eliazar Talamantes
507-363-2240
Worship: 10 a.m. Sunday;
6:30 p.m. Wednesday

METHODIST

BLOOMING GROVE UNITED METHODIST
43089 180th St., Medford
(Seven miles west of Medford on CR 23)
Pastors JJ & Stefanie Morgan
507-835-8726
Worship: 8:30 a.m. Sun.
Sunday School: 9:45 a.m.

ELLENDALE UNITED METHODIST
200 Sixth St. NW., Ellendale
Pastor Randy Cirksena
507-684-2731
www.ellendaleumc.org
Worship: 10:30 a.m. Sun.
Sunday School: 9:15 a.m.

OWATONNA UNITED METHODIST
815 E. University, Owatonna
Rev. Lisa J. Vick Pastor
507-451-4734
www.owatonnaumc.org
Traditional Worship (Pathways):
9 a.m. Sunday

NON-DENOMINATIONAL

CEDAR CREEK
30 E. Main St., Hayfield
Pastor Aaron de Neui
507-477-2255
www.cedarcreekchurch.org
Worship: 10 a.m. Sun.

DESTINY CHRISTIAN
2515 Harvest Lane NW, Owatonna
Pastors Rich and Amy Pettet
507-456-4775
www.destinycc.org
Worship: 9 a.m. Sunday
6:30-7:30 p.m. 1st and 3rd Wednesday

ELEVATION NORTH
2002 Austin Road, Owatonna
Pastor Doug Jones
507-363-3099
www.elevationnorth.blogspot.com
Worship (English):
10 a.m. Sun.
Sunday School: 10:30 a.m.
Worship (Spanish):
2 p.m. Sun.
Bible Study: 6:30 p.m. Wednesday
Spanish Evangelism & Prayer: 7 p.m. Friday

NEW BEGINNINGS
332 14th St. NE., Owatonna
Pastors Scott & Joan Peterson
507-413-0209
Worship: 10 a.m. Sun.

MENNONITE

PRAIRIE MENNONITE
13638 750th St., Blooming Prairie
Bishop Dennis Martin
507-583-7532
Worship: 10:30 a.m. Sun.
Sunday School: 9:30 a.m.
Prayer Meeting: 7:30 p.m. Wed.

MORMON

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
404 31st St. NW, Austin
Bishop Rick Bremner
507-433-9042
Worship: 9 a.m. Sun.

PRESBYTERIAN

ASSOCIATED CHURCH
Presbyterian Church (USA) and United Church of Christ
800 Havana Road, Owatonna 507-451-1546
www.associatedchurch.org
office@associatedchurch.org
Sunday Worship: 9 a.m. (Fellowship, Church School, and Adult Discussions follow)
Wednesday Activities: Sept – May (see website for schedule)

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
109 E. Main St., Hayfield
Pastor Kirk Johnston
507-477-2631
Worship: 9:30 a.m. Sun.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
P.O. Box 66, Claremont
507-528-2320
Pastor Douglas Walters
10 a.m. Worship

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
2373 Seventh Ave. NE, Owatonna
Pastor Brian Beavers
651-955-4032
Worship: 11 a.m. Sat.
Bible Stud: 9:30 a.m. Sat.

UCC

CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
211 Main St. S., Medford
Rev. Richard Waters
507-451-4596
Worship: 10 a.m. Sun.

ASSEMBLY OF GOD

VIBRANT LIFE ASSEMBLY OF GOD
702 Third St. S., Ellendale
Interim Pastor Wendell Anderson
507-684-3421
www.vibrantlifeag.com
Worship: 9 a.m. & 10:30 a.m. Sunday
Kids Church: 9 a.m.

BAPTIST

FIRST BAPTIST
104 First Ave. NE, Blooming Prairie
Pastor Matt Fennell
507-583-2673
Worship: 10 a.m. Sun. & 6:30 p.m. Wednesday
Sunday School: 9 a.m.
Bible Study: 11:30 a.m. Sun.

FIRST BAPTIST (OWATONNA'S OLDEST CHURCH)
123 E. Main St., Owatonna
Pastor Carla Nelson
507-272-9834
www.firstbaptistowatonna.com
Fellowship: 9:30 a.m. Sun.
Worship: 10:30 a.m. Sun.

BETHEL BAPTIST
1611 Hemlock Ave. Owatonna
Pastor Michael Simmerman
507-451-8548
www.bethelowatonna.com
Worship: 9 a.m. & 10:30 a.m. Sunday

ASSEMBLY OF GOD

VICTORY LIFE
105 2nd St NE Geneva
Pastor Diane Butler
507-402-0960
Worship on Sundays
Prayer Service: 7:30 a.m.
Church Service: 9:30 a.m.
Children's Church: 9:45 a.m.

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KEEPING:
your Christmas Plants healthy FROM A10

watering and good light will help it looking great. A common question is "how do I get my cactus to bloom again?" To get them to bloom again, it all depends on light and temperature. To initiate flower buds, they need to be in two weeks of 14-16 hours of dark and 8-10 hours of light. Place your cactus in a cool room in mid-October and leave the lights off. The temp should be around 60 degrees. Reduce watering and only water when the soil feels dry. Once the buds open, you can move it into your main room to enjoy!

You might receive cyclamen, one of my favorites. They like high light and cool temps, so they can tolerate that cooler window spot. They are grown from a tuber so make sure to water them underneath the leaves and not in the center of the plant. You don't want the water to sit in the center, as it will cause the tuber to fail.

A frosty fern is another plant that you see right now. They like bright, but indirect light. Soil moisture and humidity are the key factors to keep these guys happy. Low humidity causes browning foliage and shriveling. Place your plant on a tray filled with pebbles, keeping water in the tray to help with humidity levels.

If you received a fresh floral arrangement from your local florist remember to keep the container filled with fresh water to keep it looking good. I do short educational videos on our Steele County Extension- Master Gardeners Facebook page. I started them when we shut down in the spring to share my gardens and will continue them this winter with houseplant care tips. So like our page and follow along with gardening information throughout the year.

Lorrie Rugg is the coordinator of the Master Gardener program in Steele County. Her column appears in this newspaper regularly.

A PERFECT:
Christmas present FROM A2

a double lung transplant. It's certainly a sad ending, but I was encouraged by his friends and employees who are taking comfort in knowing he won't suffer any longer. They also shared a story about how Diaz "squealed with delight" after seeing a video of the rally shortly before his death.

If I could be granted one wish for everyone, it's simply this: We need to get back to the basics of family, friendship, being kind to one another and treat each other with respect. I hope my holiday gift to you will help you achieve those core values.

Uncertainty is abounding in life right now. But just remember that there is certainty in knowing that God sent his only son, Jesus Christ, into the world thousands of years ago to save us all.

Don't let the uncertainty of life get the best of you. We can find peace and hope that things will get better. Let's start by going in hot pursuit of recognizing the good that many people have to offer the rest of us.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

BLOOMING PRAIRIE TOWNSHIP ELECTION NOTICE 2021

Filings for office of treasurer: 2-year term
Filings for office of supervisor: 3-year term

Will be open to file for office December 29th through January 12th. Applications for candidacy can be picked up and returned to the clerk's office along with the $2 filing fee.

Missy Anderson
Blooming Prairie Township Clerk

12/23

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STEELE COUNTY Times

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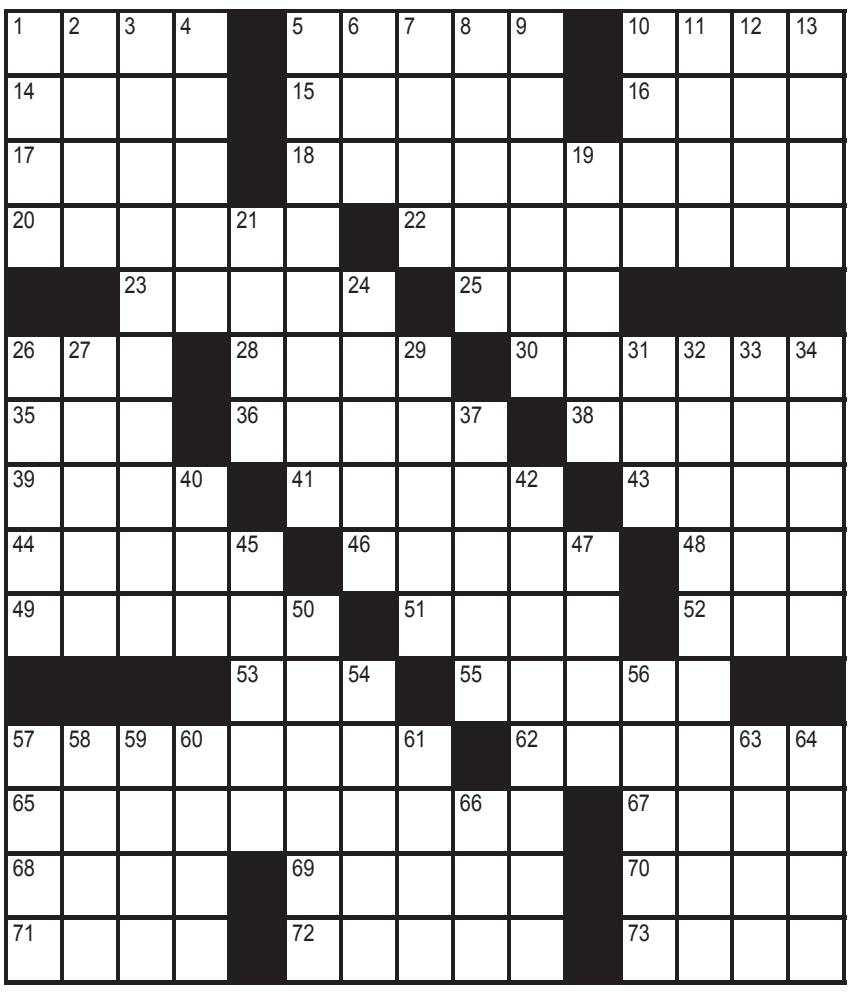
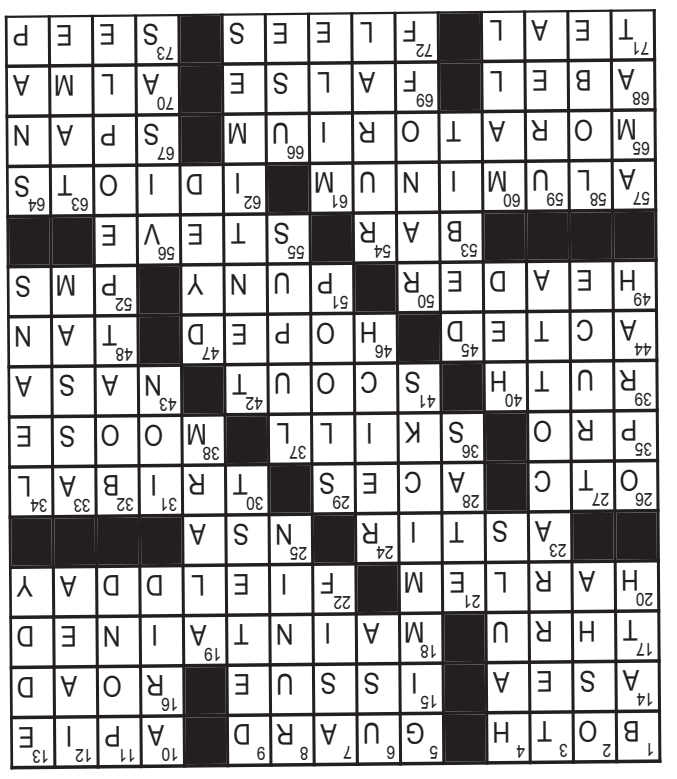
Crossword Puzzle of the Week



ACROSS
1 Opposite of neither
5 Protect
10 "Four and twenty blackbirds baked in ---"
14 On the ocean
15 Publish
16 Route
17 Via
18 Serviced
20 Cotton Club setting
22 Jamboree
23 Up
25 Intelligence agency
26 Not traded on a stock exchange
28 Top guns
30 Ethnic
35 In favor
36 Adeptness
38 State animal of Maine
39 The Sultan of Swat
41 Talent seeker
43 Shuttle operator
44 Behaved
46 Wished
48 Beat
49 Accidental dive
51 Feeble
52 Some foreign Government heads
53 Except
55 Comic --- Martin
57 Light metal
62 Knuckleheads
65 Suspension
67 Duration
68 First to die in the Bible
69 Untrue
70 Egyptian dancing girl
71 Dabbling duck
72 Absquatulates
73 Drip slowly

DOWN
1 Tub
2 Workplace regulation agency
3 Unglazed brownish-red earthenware
4 Pulls
5 Ingenious sales devices
6 World's largest economy
7 Expression of incredulity
8 Scrap
9 Despise
10 Parched
11 Small lake
12 U N nuclear watchdog
13 Swirl
19 Warning signal
21 Touchdown forecasts
24 German state
26 O founder
27 Temporary peace
29 Single-masted sailboat
31 Electrically charged particle
32 Maritime refugees
33 Tea-growing Indian state
34 Inclines
37 Southern hemisphere constellation
40 "He'd make a lovely corpse" (Dickens: "Martin Chuzzlewit")
42 1,000%
45 Kind of card
47 Artificially-colored
50 Went on the lam
54 Like Mayberry
56 Travel stamps
57 "I --- my wit's end"
58 Projecting part of the brain
59 Common fertilizer ingredient
60 Shopping center
61 Height of Denver
63 Dull
64 Sudden
66 Employ



12-23-20

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Riley has been waiting for a Big for 1 year. He is a funny young boy who loves being outside and staying busy. Some of Riley's favorite activities include camping, reading, going to the beach, playing video games and bowling. He also hopes to learn to snowboard someday! The best Big for Riley would be someone who can encourage him to try new things and demonstrate what it means to be a good friend.

Help end the wait for Riley. YOU could be the Big who ignites his potential. Become a Big today.



Hannah has been waiting for a Big for 9 months. Her quirky, fun-loving personality and love of fishing and dancing are a just a few of the things that make Hannah unique. Hannah would like to go window shopping, do pottery, walk her dog, talk, listen to music, color or go to Petco with her future Big – as long as they don't have to see the snakes.

Help end the wait for Hannah. YOU could be the Big who ignites her potential. Become a Big today.

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ASK THE MOTOR MEDICS®
By Shannon Nordstrom and Russ Evans

Dear Motor Medics,
I have a 2011 GMC Yukon with 4-wheel drive and auto transmission. For several years I have been having issues with the 4x4 not working. Sometimes it will work but other times I get a service four-wheel drive message on the dash and it will not engage. There have also been a couple times where I was driving down the road and it has switched into 2-wheel drive from 4 on its own. When I have been to a shop, they cannot duplicate the issue so they cannot fix it. Are their any things I should look for?

Anthony in Reading Pennsylvania

The four-wheel drive systems in these vehicles are not deeply complicated but if a shop cannot see the issue when it is in their shop they will not have anywhere to start looking. The four-wheel drive uses an electric shift motor on the transfer case which is also a feedback sensor to the 4x4 module. If that sensor fails it cannot tell where the motor is, and it will act like yours. This is just one possibility and is quite common. A shop will scan the system for codes and if any are related to the shift motor and no wiring issues are found we often start there. Other items like the shift module can be problematic or the electronic coupler and its wiring on the front axle. These areas should also be checked closely for failed parts.

Take care, The Motor Medics

Dear Motor Medics,
I have a 1945 Jeep that was a military vehicle. It was a US Marines truck used on base in the United States and ended up with our family when its service was done. We have kept it in good running shape over the years and about five years ago it had a frame off restoration of everything. The engine has about 5k miles on it and all the parts were upgraded to be compatible with today's fuels. We are moving overseas for a five year stay due to work and we will be storing it in a locked cold storage detached garage where it is now while the house is being rented. What should we do to prepare it for storage?

Richard in Kalamazoo Michigan

The first thing we do is make sure it is in good shape going in which you have done. Fill up the fuel tank to prevent rust and make sure to add the proper amount of fuel stabilizer with rust protection additive. Change the oil if not done already and drive the vehicle for over half hour to burn off any moisture in the oil then park it. Once cool, fog the cylinders with fogging oil and drain the carburetor. Disconnect the battery put jack stands under the frame to take pressure off the springs and tires. We also like to seal the exhaust and intake to prevent rodents from entering. Ask you local shop for more details.

Take care, The Motor Medics

12/24

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BLOTTER: FROM A4

theft report in the 2700 block of 18th St. SW at 7:26 a.m.
Hit and Run: At 4:43 p.m., a hit and run accident occurred in the 700 block of State Ave. NW.
Shoplifting: At 6:11 p.m., a shoplifting incident occurred in the 2100 block of Bridge St. W.
Mental Health: Police responded to a mental health incident in the 2600 block of Hemlock Ave. NE at 7:57 p.m. Dec. 15
Suspicion: Police responded to suspicious activity in the 3900 block of Cabela Dr. NW at 9:13 a.m.
Hit and Run: At 2:33 p.m., a hit and run accident occurred in the 1200 block of 21st Ave. NW.
Dec. 16
Shoplifting: At 2:36 p.m., a shoplifting incident occurred in the 400 block of North St. W.
Shoplifting: Police arrested a subject for shoplifting in the 300 block of Park Dr. NW at 4:30 p.m.
Suspicion: Police responded to suspicious activity at Main St. E. and Lincoln Ave. S. at 7:39 p.m. They issued a citation.
Dec. 17
Warrant: Officer made a warrant arrest in the 600 block of Cedar Ave. N. at 8:38 a.m.
Arrest: Police assisted another agency with arresting a subject in the 200 block of Phelps St. E. at 11:11 a.m.
Fraud: Officer took a report of a fraud incident in the 300 block of School St. E. at 1:10 p.m.
Theft: Police received a theft report from the 3700 block of 9th St. NW at 2:40 p.m.

STEELE COUNTY SHERIFF

Dec. 11
Criminal Sexual Conduct: Deputies began an investigation of criminal sexual conduct in the 4100 block of 66th St. NW in Medford Township at 7:38 p.m.
Dec. 12
Littering: At 1:04 p.m., littering occurred at 28th St. SE and Austin Road in Owatonna Township.
Dec. 13
DWI: Deputy made a DWI arrest at 39th Ave. SW and Highway 14 W. in Owatonna Township at 2:31 a.m.
Domestic: Deputies responded to a domestic disturbance in the 4100 block of 66th St. NW in Medford Township at 9:09 a.m. They arrested a subject at the scene.
Dec. 15
Warrant: Deputy made a warrant arrest at the detention center at 7:29 a.m.
Dec. 16
Restraining Order: At 1:19 p.m., a restraining order violation occurred in the 4100 block of 66th St. NW in Medford Township.
Dec. 17
Crash: Deputies arrested a subject following a motor vehicle accident with injuries at 76th St. NW and 70th Ave. NW in Deerfield Township at 7:26 p.m.

ARRESTS
Steele County

BLOOMING PRAIRIE POLICE

Jwokamer Pele Debock, 24, arrested at 12:06 a.m. Dec. 18, DWI, held for court.

OWATONNA POLICE

Timothy Isaac Schmidt, 38, arrested at 1:30 am. Dec. 13, DWI, held for court.
Jonathan Michael Miller, 32, arrested at 5:45 a.m. Dec. 13, felony possession of stolen property and revoked license, held for court.
Shannon Marie Huinker, 48, arrested at 4:36 p.m. Dec. 13, domestic assault, held for court.

STEELE COUNTY SHERIFF

Sirena Tasha Un, 30, arrested at 12 p.m. Dec. 11, warrant arrest, $1,000 bail.
Alexander James Anderson, 33, arrested at 11:29 a.m. Dec. 11, felony probation violation, held for court.
Matthew Allen Techau, 42, arrested at 12:52 p.m. Dec. 11, probation violation, held for court.
Christopher Cory Lewis, 20, arrested at 2:45 a.m. Dec. 13, DWI, held for court.
Kristin Faye Olson, 35, arrested at 9:30 a.m. Dec. 13, domestic assault/assault, held for court.
Kent Douglas Schmidt, 54, arrested at 2:13 a.m. Dec. 14, DWI, held for court.
Brian Deandre Ward-Dye, 29, arrested at 2:45 p.m. Dec. 14, warrant arrest, held for court.
Teriann Powell, 38, arrested at 11:17 p.m. Dec. 17, warrant arrest, $500 bail.

COURT NEWS
Dodge County

The following misdemeanors and petty misdemeanors were heard in Dodge County District Court the week of Dec. 6 – 13:

DODGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Brad D. Gray, 39, Claremont, possession of marijuana, stay of adjudication, $75, 90 hours of community service and 1 year of supervised probation; Malcolm D. Lee, 26, Dodge Center, revoked license, $280; Matthew J. Lyman, 47, Mantorville, parking violation, $32; Siobhan M. McKee, 28, Claremont, disorderly conduct, stay of adjudication, 6 months of unsupervised probation; Robert J. Novotny Jr., 19, Hayfield, no insurance and speeding, $420; Peyton J. Schouwieler, 20, Dodge Center, theft, stay of adjudication, $1,000, cognitive skill training, 100 hours of community service and 1 year of supervised probation; Alan Torres-Amacende, 28, Dodge Center, unnecessary noise, $100.

KASSON POLICE DEPARTMENT

Joshua R. Chapman, 18, Dodge Center, failure to obey traffic control device, $130; Rick J. Gavin, 47, Preston, seat belt, $105; Erica P. Wilkinson, 28, Kasson, parking violation, $32; Eleanor L. Wintheiser, 37, Rochester, parking violation, $32.

MN DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Joshua R. Carstensen, 41, Mantorville, lend, borrow or transfer a license tag, $680; Clem D. Ross, 59, Claremont, loaded firearm violation, $180.

MN STATE PATROL ROCHESTER

Siati R. Abikar, 43, Rochester, speeding and no license, $320; Ian A. Acuna Alfredo, 43, Bryant, AR, speeding, $140; Vanessa R. Austin, 39, Rochester, speeding, $220; Carter J. Behnken, 21, Waltham, speeding and suspended license, $320; Brandon T. Day, 46, Oronoco, speeding, $120; Rylie N. Ehmke, 25, Hayfield, speeding, $120; Terence S. Harrington, 55, Byron, DWI, $980, 30 days in county jail, Ignition Interlock, chemical dependency evaluation, do not enter liquor establishments, no alcohol or controlled substance use and 2 years of supervised probation; Marcus M. Peterson, 27, Kenyon, speeding, $120; John W. Walbruch, 72, Mantorville, stop sign, $130; Marina C. Young, 44, Rochester, cancelled license and no insurance, $480.

WEST CONCORD POLICE DEPARTMENT

Hollie J. Phoenix, 44, Rochester, revoked license, $280.





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STEELE COUNTY Times

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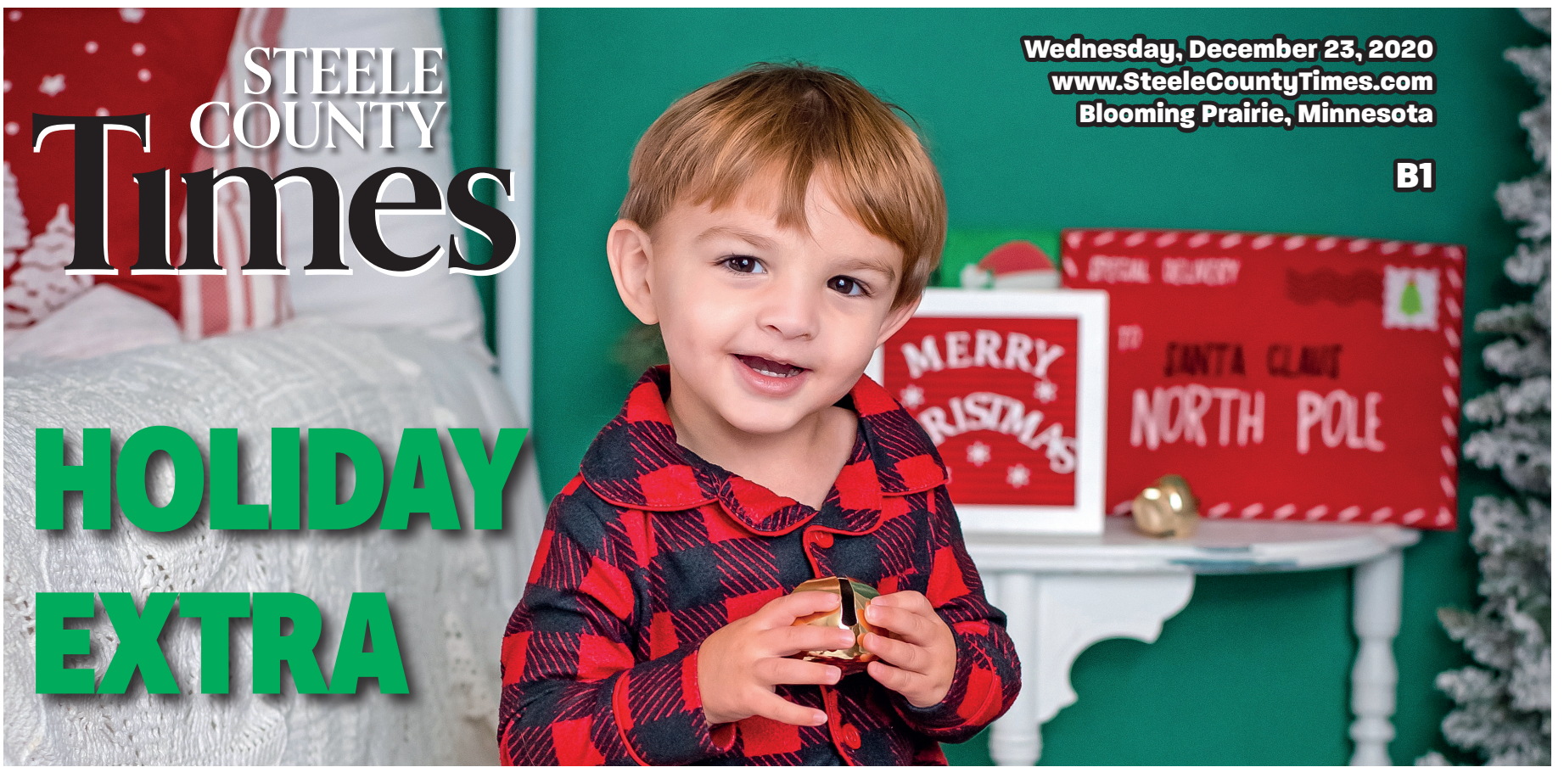

HOLIDAY EXTRA



STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

A junior in high school, Nolan Baker of Owatonna has created a holiday light show in his neighborhood. The lights are synchronized to holiday music on FM radio stations: 87.9, 90.9 and 94.7. He has been designing the show since he was in seventh grade.

A teen filled with holiday magic

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

He may not be dressed as Santa Claus, but an Owatonna teenager could just as well be as he is filling his neighborhood with holiday magic.

Nolan Baker recalls touring a drive-thru Christmas light display in Hayfield with his family when he was 10-years-old. He was so intrigued at the time by the "lights dancing to music" that he wondered what it would be like to do something like it on his own.

As a seventh grader in 2016, Baker put his thoughts into action to create his very own light show synchronized to holiday music for his neighborhood. And now, four years later, two of his neighbors have joined in the fun by letting Baker design light shows for them. Baker has designed the light shows at 401 and 421 Murray St. and 1014 Lincoln Ave.

Baker strings coruscating lights around his property at 421 Murray St. Motorists can simply drive up and tune their radio stations to 87.9 as they pass the house to enjoy synchronization of music and lights.

He began four years ago with a single song, but this year his playlist has grown to five holiday favorites: "Carol of the Bells," "The Nutcracker Suite," "The Little Drummer Boy," "We Need a Little Christmas" and "Here Comes Santa Claus." Baker finds that most people stay around for at least five minutes of the 15-minute display.

Baker estimates there are about 3,000 lights while the other houses have about 2,000 each. Most of the lights are strands shaped to look like other objects, including flakes, trees, stars and snowmen. He takes existing items on the property like windows and trees to wrap the lights around.

His favorite part of the display is at 1014 Lincoln Ave. where there are red archways that he built three years ago.

The holiday show lights up the night sky every night from Thanksgiving until New Year's Day. The show runs from 5-10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, 5-11 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 5 p.m.-midnight on holiday nights.

Baker says the busiest nights are Thursday through Saturday. "I can usually look out my window anytime between 5 p.m. and 10p.m. and see five cars at one time just at my house." He estimates at least 400 vehicles pass by the normally quiet residential area on the busy nights.

The greatest satisfaction Baker gets out of doing the holiday show is knowing that people are having fun watching it. "The fact that so many people are coming and watching it is good to know," he said, adding Christmas gives him a special reason to offer the show.

As a self-professed "computer geek," Baker says he enjoys the technology side of putting together the holiday show. "It's cool to me that I can program something and it works," he said, noting he works on the programming throughout the year. Putting together a light show consists of three parts: design, programming and set up.

He has inherited his love for computer programming from his father, Rod, who works in the IT department at Federated Insurance. The younger Baker started developing interest in computers when he was in sixth grade. "It grows over time. It's a chain reaction," he said of his interest with computers.

Asked if he feels like "Mr. Christmas" with his gift to others, Baker modestly replied: "Little bit."

OWATONNA HOLIDAY LIGHT SHOW

421 Murray St.:
87.9 FM
401 Murray St.:
90.9 FM
1014 Lincoln Ave.:
94.7 FM

Hours:
Sunday-Thursday:
5-10 p.m.
Friday & Saturday:
5-11 p.m.
Holidays: 5-12 p.m.

BP native stars in first ever mystery on Disney Channel

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

Josh Braaten continues his acting career by starring in an upcoming first of its kind for Disney Channel.

The Blooming Prairie native will star as Ben Campbell in a new time-travel mystery series, "Secrets of Sulphur Springs." The series, which is geared toward kids and families, premieres Friday, Jan. 15 with a special one-hour uninterrupted programming event at 7 p.m. on the Disney Channel.

New episodes of the series will air Fridays from 7-7:30 p.m. beginning Jan. 22.

Set in the fictional Louisiana town of Sulphur Springs, the series follows 12-year-old Griffin Campbell whose world has been upended by his father, Ben. Ben has moved the family from Chicago to take ownership of an abandoned hotel property, the Tremont. The family moves into the Tremont in hopes of

SEE **BP NATIVE STARS, B4**



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Blooming Prairie native Josh Braaten stars in a new mystery series that will begin airing in January on the Disney Channel. The time-travel mystery series, "Secrets of Sulphur Springs," follows 12-year-old Griffin Campbell, whose family has just uprooted their lives to move to a new town and take ownership of an abandoned hotel in hopes of restoring it back to the lively vacation destination it once was.

Remodeled home grocery store 'more open' for the holidays

BY ALEX NUEHRING
STAFF WRITER

If they haven't seen it already, the next time Blooming Prairie community members enter Vandal's Family Market, it will look quite a bit different.

That's because the family-owned grocery store has undergone a significant remodel since the end of November.

Co-owner Brady Holmberg said a team of about 28 people from SpartanNash, Vandal's main grocery distributer, did the majority of the remodeling throughout the week of Monday, Nov. 30. They tore down old shelves and put up new ones; shortened the aisles and made them taller so there's more room at the ends of the aisles; and took down an old cigarette display, which made the sightlines around the tills more open so staff can see customers come in and greet them.

"The whole store is more open so customers can move around a lot easier," he said.

Holmberg said that this reset was much more extensive than when SpartanNash's staff has come by in the past and took months of planning.

"A normal reset gives us a better idea of what products are selling and move a few things around, but this type of reset is pretty rare," said Holmberg. "Replacing the shelves was going above and beyond."

He added that replacing the shelves and shortening the aisles took just one week thanks to such a large team coming in to make it happen.

The following week, Holmberg worked on striping and waxing the floors and last week he's was working on adding new tiles and some clean-up.

"There's a lot of clean up and adding in new products over the next couple weeks to give our customers much more selection," he said. "Adding about 700 new products to a store this size is pretty crazy."

The influx of new products benefits customers and the store.

"More variety brings less chance that all of a specific product will be out of stock and products that aren't selling well will be replaced by products that are selling well," he said.

Holmberg said that the addition of new products and clean-up is winding down now and should be completely finished soon.

"It will definitely all be done by the end of the year," he said.

Holmberg said customer's reactions to the changes have been very positive.

"People are thrilled about the added selection and the layout now that there's more open floor space," he said.

He added that the layout may take some to get used to, but it makes a lot more sense. For example, the peanut butter is now next to the jelly and bread and the salad dressing has been moved in front of the produce case.

Given all of the positives, Holmberg said that making this move was a pretty easy decision.

"We're always trying to move forward and give the community a better grocery store," he said.

He added that Vandal's will stick with its COVID-19 business hours, 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., especially since a lot of their staff are teenagers and they have to be done working by 7 on school nights.

Despite the pandemic causing some people to shop less frequently, he reported that sales have been good this year, but expenses have also going up so he's doesn't know yet if it's been a net gain.

Even though there may or may not be a net gain at the end of the year, he and the rest of the staff at Vandal's Family Market know how the community appreciates them, especially during the pandemic.

"It's been great, people are literally thanking us everyday for what we're doing," he said. "When you work so hard, it's great to have the appreciation of the community."



STAFF PHOTO BY SHERRIE PECHAN

Vandal's owners Brady and Brandy Holmberg are excited about some recent changes they have made to their grocery store in Blooming Prairie. The Holmbergs operate the store with her brother, Waco.

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FILE PHOTO

Calab Svenby along with his wife, Val, and daugther, Cici, enjoy a football game in Medford in early November. The community rallied behind Calab in an extraordinary way by providing him with a check of more than $15,000 from various fundraisers.

Medford sacks cancer in an effort to help one of its own

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

Just in time for the holidays, the Medford Tiger Touchdown Club has a heartwarming story to share about helping a family in need.

Sacking cancer and helping one of their own have been foremost on the minds of Medford area residents over the past few months.

In the end, the TTC reached out to Calab Svenby in a big way. Medford football players presented him with a check of $15,393 over the weekend.

"It is an incredible amount for our town to pull together," TTC wrote on Facebook. "A huge thank you to everyone that donated and helped along the way. Calab, Val and Cici were blown away by the support of so many."

Of the money raised, $7,559 was donated at drop off locations around Medford, $4,280 came from virtual bingo through Owatonna Live, the elementary school raised $2,420 and a fundraiser from the Hat Chic collected $1,134.

Svenby, 30, has been battling stage IV colorectal cancer, the second-most common cause of cancer death in the U.S., for the past year. He has been in and out of the hospital for much of the year.

He just recently completed his last round of chemotherapy.

Svenby graduated from Medford in 2009. During his high school days, Svenby was active in football, wrestling and baseball. His brother, Ty, has credited Calab's tenacity with football in helping him through this crisis.

In a Facebook posting, TTC wrote: "To Calab, this battle has been life changing. You have taken it in stride. You show us all we need to be thankful for what we have and to fight for what we want. May you continue to battle strong against cancer and have many brighter days ahead of you."

The club isn't quite done yet with helping Svenby. It is planning a raffle at the Medford Muni once it opens back up. More details will be released when they are available.

Diabetes Coin War

NRHEG elementary school raises $3K for diabetes research

BY DEB FLEMMING
NEWS EDITOR

Fifth-grade teacher Olivia Erickson knows first-hand what it's like to have type 1 diabetes. She was diagnosed with the autoimmune disorder nearly 14 years ago, when she was in fourth grade.

She said her classmates had a hard time understanding her diagnosis and struggled with being inclusive.

"They were concerned I was contagious," Erickson said. "That was really hurtful.

"I didn't do anything wrong. I couldn't have prevented this."

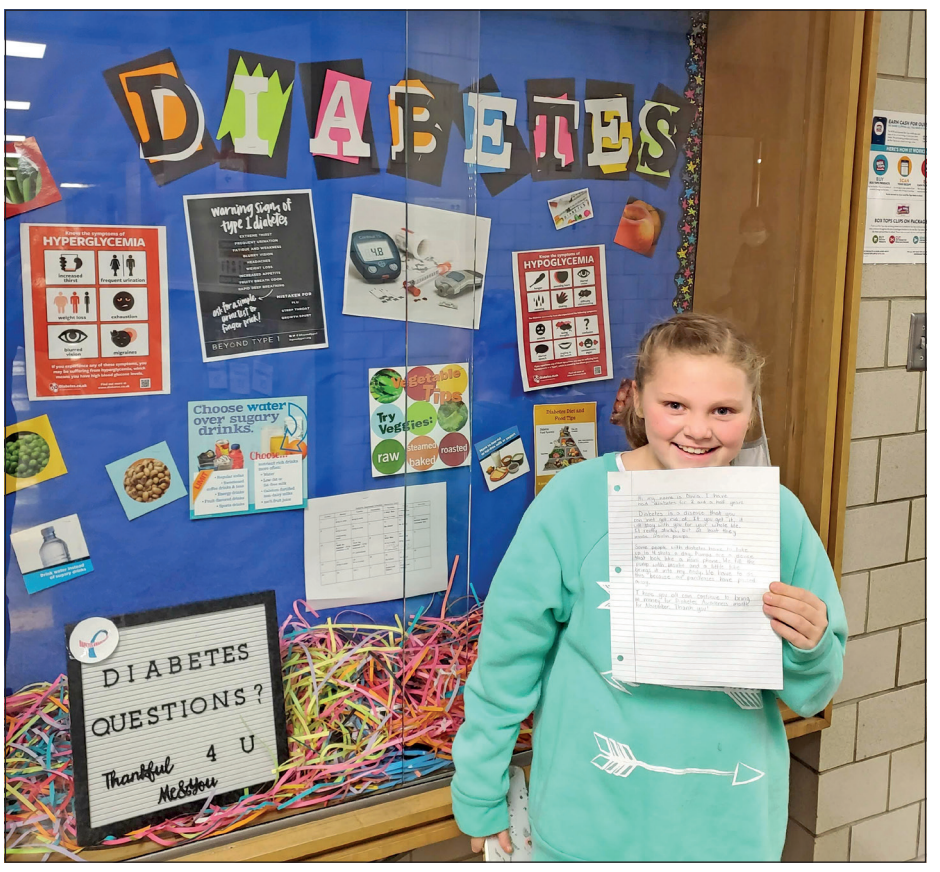
Erickson was the only student with diabetes in her middle school and one of the students she is currently teaching was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes two-and-a-half years ago.

"I wanted students and staff to know, it's not something to be scared of," said Erickson, who spearheaded the school's "Diabetes Coin War" fundraiser to raise awareness about diabetes.

More than 200,000 children in the United States have diabetes.

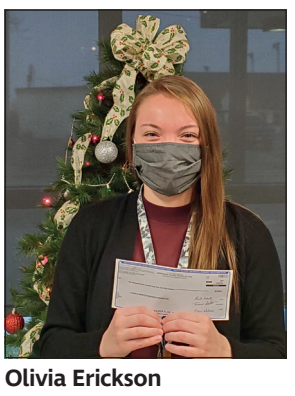
Most suffer from type 1 diabetes – like Erickson and her student – which means their bodies don't produce insulin. They need to take insulin as a shot or through an insulin pump to keep their blood sugar in the healthy range. Those with type 2 diabetes produce insulin, but they either have too little insulin or the insulin doesn't work well.

Each day during the awareness campaign, when the students were attending school in the Hybrid model, staff answered questions from students and read facts about diabetes over the loudspeaker.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Olivia Wilkenson, a fifth grader at New Richland-Hartland-Ellendale-Geneva Elementary School, shared what it is like to have type 1 diabetes with fellow students and encouraged them to donate their coins to diabetes research during Diabetes Awareness Month in November. The students and staff raised $3,000 in their Diabetes Coin War for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.



Olivia Erickson

During one of the question-answer session, Olivia Wilkenson, the fifth grader with diabetes, got a chance to speak to her fellow students over the loudspeaker.

"Diabetes is a disease that you can not get rid of," she said. "If you get it, it will stay with you your whole life. It stinks, but at least they have made insulin pumps."

In addition to the daily facts, students and staff participated in several activities throughout the month including dressing in blue on Thursdays and Fridays, crazy hair or hat day, a Walk for Diabetes in phy-ed class, along with a grade level coin war that raised $2,639.70.

Staff activities raised another $125 and an additional donation of $235.30 put the total raised for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation at $3,000.

A pizza party will be provided to the second and fifth grade classes. They raised $926.71 and $924.72 respectively. The rest of the grades will be getting participation popcorn, once school resumes.

Keeping the faith



Steele Talkin'
STEPHANIE KIBLER

Typically, I do not talk a lot about faith often. The faith journey is and always has been a personal one. However, I have been using the phrase "it's about keeping the faith." In realizing this, I had to pause and ask myself "why?" Why suddenly am I saying to people "keep the faith." What does is mean to keep the faith? Continue to believe in, trust in, or support someone or something when times are difficult.

So many people are struggling right now and over the past months it seems to be easier to point fingers, and to complain about the things that are out of our control. We are getting angrier and less settled, it has become easier to talk about how things are affecting us as individuals and not how they affect the community as a whole. We are becoming a ME, MY, I society. This is what is prompting my response.

Tis' the season to give thanks, and a perfect opportunity for us to reflect on what is truly important. A perfect time for us be thankful for all that we have, and to set aside the worries of all that we don't have.

Did you know that practicing gratitude uses the same part of the brain that churns out negative emotions like anxiousness and fear? 2020 has challenged us like nothing else we have experienced, we could all use less anxiety and more cheer.

As 2021 arrives, I will strive to share this gratitude in my daily interactions with all that I encounter. What does that look like? I will practice "Gratitude 1-2-3" coined by Emiliana Simon-Thomas, Ph.D., science director at UC Berkeley's Great Good Science Center.

? Be specific about what you're saying thank you for. To get the most out of a thank-you, begin by saying specifically what you are thanking the other person for, *"Thank you for helping me with my groceries."*

· Acknowledge the effort involved. *"I know you are busy, thanks for taking the time to help me."* By doing this we make the other person feel understood and validated.

? Describe how it benefits you. *"Your generosity has given me the extra touch that was needed for my holiday season to be a happy one."*

It won't take as long as you think. Gratitude 1-2-3 may sound like it takes up a lot of time, but it doesn't. "If you start practicing it, you can get through it in 15 or 16 seconds," Simon-Thomas said.

I hope that each of you have a Happy Holiday and that we can ring in 2021 with gratitude and faith.

Stephanie Kibler lives in Ellendale and serves on the city council. She is also the executive director of the Freeborn County Historical Museum in Albert Lea. Steele Talkin' is a regular column featuring authors representing various organizations throughout Steele County.

The final clue has been revealed



Becky Noble of the Blooming Prairie Chamber of Commerce has revealed the final clue for this year's Medallion hunt in Blooming Prairie.

Snow or no snow, the medallion will be found.

This week's clue:

The past three clues have helped plant the seed

to make finding the medallion a reality

The excitement is growing by now you should be knowing!

The previous clues:

No. 1: It's that time of year
The colors of Christmas now appear
The Medallion Hunt will give you cheer.

No. 2: As you hunt it will become clear
A medallion is very near
Open your minds and wherever you go
Don't forget to look high and low.

No. 3: Head east or west
Which is the best
The main idea is to find the treasure
Then home you go
For tell and show.

A reminder that the person who finds the medallion should stop by the Steele County Times office at 411 E. Main St. to claim a couple prizes.

Don't let Mother Nature's snowless efforts discourage you from tracking down the medallion.

Santa visit just one of many events for Medford Civic Club



STAFF PHOTO BY DEB FLEMMING

Medford Civic Club elves gave Santa a hand during his recent socially distanced drive-thru visit to Medford. The elves directed traffic and handed out goody bags to more than 100 youngsters. Pictured, from left to right, are Tanya Miller, Santa, Jenny Jones, Alyse MIller and Mia Amberg.

BY DEB FLEMMING
NEWS EDITOR

In-mid March, the Minnesota Department of Health urged swift action to limit the spread of the COVID-19 and to reduce its impact on communities and the state's health care system. Recommendations included canceling events with more than 250 people. At the time there were a total of 14 cases of travel-associated COVID-19 cases confirmed in Minnesota.

About two weeks later, Medford Civic Club President Erin Sammon announced the cancellation of Straight River Days, the club's largest event of the year. In doing so, she said, the club would try to hold some of the activities planned for the celebration during the summer and fall.

"We still wanted to be able to do things," said Sammon, adding that anything the club did would have to be safe and appropriate given COVID-19.

One of the club's first activities during the pandemic was a sidewalk chalk design contest.

In July, the club held its Explore Medford Selfie Scavenger Hunt, an event that kicked off the Straight River Days celebration the previous year. Participants took selfies at each of nine pre-determined locations and posted their pictures on Medford Civic Club's Facebook event page for a chance to win prizes.

For the holidays, the club partnered with the Medford Fire Department in hopes of putting smiles on faces of area youth. The two groups hosted Santa for a socially distanced drive-thru visit.

Santa's annual visit normally would have taken place inside the fire hall. But COVID-19 restrictions forced the event outside. Past activities have included decorating cookies, playing games or drawing pictures to send to the troops.

The club also added a new event this holiday season: The Medford Griswold Holiday Light Challenge. Participants of the holiday light display contest submitted the address of their light displays and civic club members took pictures of the displays and posted them on Facebook to allow area residents to vote for their favorites. Winners will be announced on Christmas Day.

Next year, Sammon said, she's hoping the club can partner with Trinity Lutheran Church to tie the club's holiday light contest with the church's Christmas Light Scavenger Hunt.

With more than 20 members, Sammon said, the Medford Civic Club works to host events that appeal to all age groups and cost little or nothing to attend.

"We have a great group," said Sammon, adding that a couple of members don't even live in town. "We all take turns at events. We have planners and we have our support people."

Events, and all that go with them, are getting easier and easier for us, said Sammon. That will come in handy next year.

June will be the 50th anniversary of Medford Civic Club and Straight River Days. Sammon said she's hoping next year's celebration will be the biggest and best yet.

Many of the current club members were very young – or not even born – in 1971 when the Medford Civic Club and the community celebrated the first Straight River Days.

"We know how much fun we had as kids," said Sammon.

For more information about joining the Medford Civic Club, visit the club's Facebook page.

Teacher shares special bond outside of the classroom

Big Brothers searches for mentors to be paired with kids



SUBMITTED PHOTO

With wide smiles, St. Mary's first grade teacher Lynn Peterson shares a special moment with Paige, a fifth grade, earlier this fall. Peterson has been matched with Paige through the Big Brothers Big Sisters organization, a program that aims to bring teenagers and adults closer to children who need companionship in their lives.

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER

Lynn Peterson can't seem to get enough of children.

By day, she teaches 18 first graders at St. Mary's School in Owatonna where she has been for the past 24 years. She is the mother to two, adult children who are in college or just finished college. And to top it off, she just recently began devoting time to a girl through the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) organization.

Peterson is actually following in the footsteps of her own sons, Brett and Evan, who while they were in high school, volunteered to be "bigs" for "littles" through the same organization. In the case of Brett and Evan, they were "bigs" at different times for the same child, something that isn't very common for BBBS, Peterson said. She admits the interaction they had with the child inspired her to want to get involved with BBBS. "I saw the impact they had on that child's life," she said.

"I love kids," Peterson said. "I'm with kids all the time," she said, adding BBBS gives her another opportunity to have a great relationship with another child.

She reached out to BBBS this fall wishing to be matched with a child. After interviewing with the organization and waiting a couple months, Peterson was matched with Paige, a fifth grader from Owatonna. When BBBS provided her with details about Paige, Peterson said, "It immediately sounded like a good fit. She just sounded like a great little girl."

Peterson is thrilled to be coming into Paige's life this holiday season and beyond because Paige had been waiting for a match for quite some time. Peterson said she felt an immediate connection to Paige.

Paige and Peterson share many similar interests, according to Peterson. Among them are going to parks, a passion for drawing and a love for singing.

Peterson admits that she doesn't really have a talent for singing, but she loves to listen to Paige sing. "When we are at the park, she will burst out into song," Peterson said.

While COVID-19 has curtailed many events this year, one activity they were able to enjoy was a Halloween outdoor event by West Hills. The event featured horseback riding, wagon rides and S'mores. "We got to spend some time together. It was our favorite event so far," said Peterson.

During normal times, "bigs" and "littles" are encouraged to get together at least twice a month. However, that has not been possible because of the pandemic.

Paige recently received a cell phone so she is able to communicate with Peterson by calling or texting. "She prefers texting over talking on the phone," Peterson said.

Peterson said Paige, who lives with a grandparent, has experienced "a rough road" already in her young life. Peterson expects the impact of their relationship to be huge. "I hope to be a permanent part of her story, make a difference and show stability to her," she said.

BBBS requires a commitment of at least one year. But Peterson is already planning for the long haul. "I hope to be in her life for a long time," she said. "She has become really important to me. I can't imagine not being a part of her life," she added.

There are currently other children waiting to be matched with teens or adults. For more information, contact BBBS at 507-414-0308 or visit www.bbbsofsouthernmn.org/beabig.

Peterson recommends other people get involved with BBBS.

"You can make a difference in someone else's life and have your life changed as well," she said. "The impact it has on your own life is unbelievable. It can make you a better person just by giving someone else time and a chance."

BP NATIVE STARS: *in first ever mystery on Disney Channel* FROM B1

restoring it to the lively vacation destination it once was.

On the first day at his new school, Griffin hears rumors that the hotel is haunted by the ghost of Savannah, a girl who disappeared decades ago. He soon meets and befriends Harper, a thrill-seeking classmate, and soon they discover a secret portal that allows them to travel back in time and uncover clues about the town mystery.

People will want to watch all 11 episodes of the series, said Braaten, who graduated from Blooming Prairie in 1995, during an interview with the Times last week. "They are awesome cliffhanger episodes."

"It's such a well-written, well-produced and a really grounded series."

The new, mystery series made Braaten think about all the cool mystery shows like "Back to the Future" that he watched as a child while growing up outside of Blooming Prairie during the 1980s. "I have so many cool memories of watching those shows," he said.

As the lead actor in the new series, Braaten said he is excited to be a part of something where more is unraveled during each episode. He said a "secret or two" will be revealed about him as the father in the series.

"It's a family mystery show," Braaten said. "People of all ages will find it entertaining and mildly spooky. It makes you feel like a kid on Halloween."

A large part of the series was filmed in an "awesome old house next to a swamp outside New Orleans," said Braaten, adding that the filming reminded him of his childhood back home. "I feel like I'm 12-years-old and getting ready to fish at the Cedar River," he said.

Braaten said the series is "a return to programming for the entire family." He said there is a little something for everybody in the series.

After graduating from Winona State University with a degree in theatre, Braaten went to the Chicago area for one year. He soon got hooked up with someone from Hollywood and has since enjoyed a 20-year career acting in movies and TV shows.

He is perhaps best known for his lead role in the sci-fi period drama "Horizon" and his recurring role on FX's "American Horror Story."

"I went from nobody to being on TV. It was a whirlwind," Braaten said, adding he has been in nearly 50 shows during his career.

He said he remembers his first acting role during the Great Pumpkin play in elementary school in Blooming Prairie. He eventually went on to star in the lead role during his senior year in the musical Tintypes under the direction of Frank Vorlicek.

Braaten said he was a "shy but artistic kid" in school and he credits Vorlicek and others for getting him out of his comfort zone during high school. "For whatever reason he saw something in me," Braaten said of Vorlicek. "He had such an artistic approach to everything he did."

Asked when he fell in love with acting, Braaten shared about how he watched Batman on TV with his grandpa. "I remember telling my grandpa that I want to be him (referencing the guy in the suit)," he said. His grandpa replied, "Oh, you want to be an actor." Braaten admits he didn't think it would be a realistic career path at the time.

"I have been lucky enough to find what I'm good at," Braaten said. "It's a gift I have been given. It's important that I work hard at it and do my best to share it with people."

Braaten added he has come to terms with the realization that no doesn't really mean no. It just means he may not be able to do something at that moment, referencing the more than 1,500 auditions he has done for parts during his career.

He said the most fun gig he's had so far in his career was American Horror Story, a 1970s spoof about a semi-pro basketball team. "I got to relive my Blooming Prairie High School glory days of basketball with short shorts and big hair," Braaten said.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Laura Gebur, directs the Owatonna High School Carolers in a song during the ensemble's only concert this year – a live-stream video concert aired by Owatonna Live. To watch the concert, visit www.owatonnalive.com.

'It's the essence of Carolers to sing for as many people as you can'

BY DEB FLEMMING
NEWS EDITOR

Laura Gebur admired the Owatonna High School Carolers for years. So it was no surprise when she auditioned for the group her sophomore year.

"I had seen the Carolers perform every single year since kindergarten, said Gebur. "I was inspired by how happy they made people and the joy they brought people."

As a Caroler during her sophomore and junior years, there were lots of rehearsals and holiday performances – after school into the evenings, on Saturdays and even a couple of Sundays.

What she could never have imagined as an awe-struck youngster who enjoyed listening to the Carolers was the deadly virus called coronavirus. COVID-19 restrictions put a halt to all of the Carolers' public appearances this year. The group wasn't allowed to sing in the schools, in the downtown stores or at the nursing homes.

"It's sad," said Gebur, one of the student directors of the Carolers this year. "It's the essence of Carolers to sing for as many people as you can."

Instead, they practiced and practiced – to perform only one concert, a live-stream video concert aired through the internet by Owatonna Live.

"We just barely got the video done before we were shut down," said Chris Harris, choir director at Owatonna High School for the past 18 years.

"As disappointing as everyone may be about this, the kids did get some semblance of an experience," said Harris. "To me, that was the important thing."

Gebur agreed. "I'm just grateful that we got to do anything."

When students were attending school in-person, Harris said, the Carolers were able to rehearse together because the choir room was large enough to accommodate the appropriate social distancing. Live performances would have been another matter altogether.

Harris said the ensemble would have needed a 60-by-30-foot space to perform in social venues and maintain proper social distancing.

"We wouldn't have been able to fit into venues," said Harris. "And, even outside, it takes a lot of space."

As the senior director of the Carolers, Gebur said, she helped choose the songs, pick the order, run rehearsals and maintained a group chat that allowed the Carolers to communicate with one another. The junior director of this year's Carolers was Liz Granowski.

For the concert, the ensemble sang about half of the songs in its repertoire. "I missed out on some of my favorites," she said.

Of all the things she missed doing with the Carolers this year, Gebur said, it was singing at the various churches in town. The acoustics in the churches – especially with more traditional holiday songs like Silent Night or What Child is This? – are amazing, she said.

Gebur, who is thinking about attending St. Thomas College in St. Paul to major In social work next year, said she'll never forget her time with Carolers.



Laura Gebur

"It's definitely my favorite high school experience – bringing joy and happiness to others," she said. "It's a bonding experience, too. I made a lot of good friends."

Harris fully expects the Carolers to be back next year, with a full schedule of public appearances.

Tryouts will be held in October, he said.

Early donors hope others will contribute

BY DEB FLEMMING
NEWS EDITOR

Unlike so many other things associated with the holiday season, the new lights that cascade from the trees in Central Park and snowflakes that don the lampposts and band shell didn't just magically appear.

Two years ago the Owatonna's Holiday Lights Committee, spearheaded by Cindy Stelter, owner of Central Park Framing and Finds, kicked off a fundraising effort to replace the city's 40-year-old decorations.

The first of the new lights were unveiled just before Thanksgiving during a virtual lighting ceremony held in Central Park.

"We're excited," said Stelter, pointing to 100 new strings of white lights cascading from the trees and new presidential snowflakes. "It looks great."

And there's more to do – not just in the park itself, but throughout the downtown area, said Stelter and Tom Brick, owner of Owatonna Shoe who is also a member of the Holiday Light's committee.

Brick got the idea of cascading the lights on the trees during a trip he and his wife took to Vienna last December.

"It was magical," he said, explaining that the lights in Vienna get pinned to the top of trees and hang loose.

Installation and take down are much easier and he said, the lights should last longer because they don't get as tangled up in the trees.

The price tag of purchasing new lights and snowflakes for the entire downtown area is estimated to be between $200,000 and $250,000.

And like the lights and decorations themselves, the needed funds to purchase them won't magically appear either.

"I plan to go door knocking," said Brick. "We just need to have new Christmas lights next fall."

Earlier donors to the Holiday Lights Fund agree.

"Central Park is a community treasure," said donor Sharon West, adding that she wants to see even more light – in the park and throughout downtown.

Caring on a family tradition of civic pride and community involvement, West said the burden of paying for the lights shouldn't be put on the business community.

"Let's decorate; let's celebrate," said West, adding that the entire community benefits from a beautiful light display.

West's father, Steve Pfiel, owned Pfiel Cedar Street Variety in downtown Owatonna when she was growing up. He was the first president of the Chamber in 1946 and she said he started the Community Chest in Owatonna.

"He not only promoted his store," she said. "He promoted Owatonna."



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Central Park in downtown Owatonna is all decked our for the holiday season thanks in part to the hard work and financial donations of some key players.

Since retiring from her position as human resource manager of Truth in 2000, West has remained active in the community. She is an Emeritus Chamber Ambassador and currently serves on three committees of Steele County Historical Society, the city's Airport Commission, the Owatonna Foundation Board of Trustees.

West said she's confident Owatonna can have a beautiful holiday light display, if the entire community pitches in to pay for it.

"I would just like to see lots of people who love Owatonna and the holidays step up and support the holiday lighting effort," said Judy Meister, another earlier contributor to the fund.

Meister approached the Chamber about donating to the fund after reading in a Chamber newsletter that the old decorations were on their last leg.

"Central Park is such an integral part of Owatonna," she said. "We need to provide for the generations to come."

"My donation helped purchase the first two big snowflakes," said Meister who has lived in Owatonna for 48 years.



Judy Meister



Sharon West

When she first saw the lighted snowflakes on the lampposts, she said she thought to herself: "That's pretty cool and I'm glad I did it."

She wants others to feel that way too. "If they make a contribution, they could drive by and say I was a part of that."

Professionally, Meister worked for 24 years as controller for A J Lysne Contracting and 10 years as controller of Express Employment Professionals of Owatonna for Betsy Lindgren.

Now retired, Meister's list of civic activities is also extensive.

She's currently president of her townhome board and is a member of the Woman's Club of Owatonna.

She served on the Owatonna City Council from 1997-2001, as president the last 2 years of her term. She also served on the city's Economic Development Authority and the United Way Board. She is a past member of the United Prairie Bank Advisory Board and has done volunteer financial work for the Owatonna Foundation. A longtime member of the Exchange Club of Owatonna, Meister is a past president and chaired the Book of Golden Deeds committee for 10 years.

Federated Insurance, located across from Central Park, also has donated to the fund.

"Federated is ecstatic to be involved with this," said Mike Kerr, who was recently appointed the organization's president and chief executive officer.

When you think about this time of year, there is a whole lot to be thankful for, Kerr said at the lighting ceremony.

"A lot of businesses are saying we are in this together and we really are in this together," he said, adding that this is a great time to support each other.

HOLIDAY LIGHTS FUND

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Walter Cowan's could barely contain his excitement as officer Andrew Van Osdale helps him try on mittens as a Target employee stands in the background. Walter's mother said her son wouldn't have been able to purchase gifts this year without the Shop with a Cop program. "It was a good experience for him," she said.

A twinkle of holiday magic

Cops pair up with kids to shop for Christmas

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RICK BUSSLER



Police officers and children create a traffic jam with their carts in the Target store as they go in search of gifts during the Shop with a Cop program.



Louis Niedzielski checks out the toy department with officer Derrick Quinlan of Owatonna Police during Shop with a Cop. Each child was allowed to spend $150 to purchase gifts for themselves and other family members.

There seemed to be a twinkle of holiday magic in Walter Cowan's eyes as he hit the Target store in Owatonna Dec. 9.

With the help of Owatonna police officer Andrew Van Osdale, Cowan, of Blooming Prairie, loaded up a cart of gifts for himself as well as the rest of his family. It was all part of the Shop with a Cop program sponsored by the Steele County Salvation Army.

His mother, Rachel Cowan, said there was no way he would have been able to enjoy a holiday season of gifts without Shop with a Cop. "With COVID, things are tight right now," she said.

Walter came away with a new jacket, gloves and boots as well as some other new clothes.

"He loved it," Rachel said. "It was a nice experience for him to get to know that cops are nice people. They are not enemies, but friends," she said.

The officers mix a little conversation and fun in with the shopping experience. Officer Derrick Quinlan was shopping with Louis Niedzielski who picked out a large, toy gun. "Do you think your 1-year-old brother can shoot that gun," Quinlan asked. Niedzielski had a hard time focusing on the rest of shopping after picking out the gun.

As they went through the store, Quinlan advised Niedzielski to hop on the front of the car "so we can get there quicker." At one point, the officer looked at a cart full of toys and told the child, "Let's go get the most important thing on the list–underwear."

Victoria Edwards of the Salvation Army said 21 children from throughout Steele County received the opportunity to shop with police officers this year. The kids were provided $150 to spend on their families.

Edwards enjoys watching the children and the police officers buzz around the store shopping. "It's all about the bonding with the officers," she said. "It makes the kids feel good. They can contribute to the present giving – buying gifts for mom and dad and their siblings."

The children are recommended to the Salvation Army by social services. The families of the kids have typically experienced hardships in their lives, including parents who may be unemployed or have low paying jobs.

"We are very compassionate and understanding," Edwards said. "If we can help them, we'll definitely do it."

Edwards calls the shopping experience heartwarming. "It's a once in a lifetime experience for each child," she said.

Steele County Sheriff Lon Thiele coordinated the effort for the officers involved. Besides the sheriff's office, police departments from Owatonna and Blooming Prairie had officers involved in the program. There were 14 officers involved in this year's shopping.

"When you can interact with a child that had an unfortunate year, putting a smile on a child is priceless," Thiele said. "It's all about helping out our community."



Blooming Prairie police officer Dan Peach accompanies Alexia Bussert of Owatonna through the Target store as they find gifts for Alexia's family.

"It was a nice experience for him to get to know that cops are nice people. They are not enemies, but friends."

Rachel Cowan
Mother of Child Involved

The gift of toys for needy kids

BY DEB FLEMMING
NEWS EDITOR

More than 1,200 children in Steele County will find gifts under their Christmas trees this year thanks to Toys for Tots of Steele County.

"People went out of their way to try to provide something this year," said Toys for Tots Coordinator Don Overlie of Owatonna.

He said COVID-19 presented more than a few challenges.

Normally, the organization's volunteers shop for the children's gifts with money donated throughout the year. This year, Overlie said he had to get a bit more creative.

"We shopped by asking the larger stores to do the shopping for us," he said, adding that they did not purchase bikes this year because the bikes need to be the right size and kind for the child.

Distribution of the toys at Trinity Lutheran Church was also modified.

Parents traditionally come into the building and shop from what's been donated or purchased. Not this year.

When signing up for the program, parents were asked to list the type of toys their children might want.

"We had to do the bagging," said Overlie, who added that volunteers spent the entire weekend before distribution bagging up the unwrapped toys. When the parents arrived to pick up their gifts, volunteers delivered them to the cars.

Toys for Tots of Steele County has been in existence for nearly 40 years. It operates within the national U.S. Marine Corp Reserve Toys for Tots program, which began in 1947. The local group also provides gifts to Steele County Social Services' Adopt-A Family program.

Its objective is to collect and distribute new and unwrapped toys to Steele County needy children at Christmas. Cash and gift cards received are used to purchase toys as per directives from the national Toys for Tots organization.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Sgt. Dakkota Moreno, United States Marine Corps Veteran, spent some time at the local Toys for Tots drive in Owatonna this holiday season.



FILE PHOTO

The Bikers of Blooming Prairie continue to lead the way when it comes to fundraising for the Toys for Tots in Steele County. Even though the group couldn't hold its annual ride this year because of COVID-19 restrictions, the group raised $11,570, helping Toys for Tots to meet its primary goal of sending a message of hope to America's less fortunate children through the gift of a toy.

Christmas Bird Count sees large number of waterfowl

BY CHRIS BALDWIN
STAFF WRITER

Bird counters across Steele County participated in the worldwide Christmas Bird Count this past weekend. The count, conducted each year by the Audubon Society, aims to provide scientists with important data.

"This is the 49th year for us," said Darryl Hill, who organized the bird count in Steele County nearly a half-century ago and continues to spearhead it. "It's the largest scientific project in the world using volunteers."

The Owatonna count on Saturday, Dec. 19, centered around Havana Township in a 15-mile diameter. Each count tallies up the numbers of birds separated by species and reports in to the Audubon Society, which crunches the numbers. "It's to find out about birds, where they are and what the population is," Hill said.

"Environmentally, you can consider birds to be the canary in the coalmine and when they crunch the numbers and look at worldwide or regional numbers of birds that's a direct relationship to the quality of the environment," bird counter in the field Gary Johnson said. "They can tell is it improving or is it degrading."

During the bird count field spotters like Johnson and Hill travel throughout the circle and count any birds they can spot while feeder counters monitor their birdfeeders from home. Feeder counters play a crucial role, but count a little differently.

"They count the most they see at one time," Hill said. This is to mitigate the fact that birds might come and go at any given feeder. "The majority of counters are birdfeeder counters."

Both Hill and Johnson began the day counting at Lake Kohlmeier in Owatonna



PHOTO BY CHRIS BALDWIN

Bird counters Darryl Hill and Gary Johnson spot ducks and geese at Morehouse Park in Owatonna for the annual Christmas Bird Count.

where they tallied up a large number of geese and ducks. "We counted close to 3,000 geese," Hill said. The large number is primarily attributed to the warm weather throughout the early part of the winter. Last year, there were no geese at Kohlmeier, as the lake was completely frozen over.

"Something happened this year that's never happened before," Hill said, recounting the flocks of geese that flew in and out of the lake. "We sat in our cars and counted, putting it down. It went until there was nothing left."

Throughout the day the counters will record many different species of birds, with waterfowls making up a large percentage of those. "We spotted a golden-eyed duck," Johnson said of a unique species they spotted at Kohlmeier. "So far that's our oddball species of the day."

"Right now, we have 10 different species of birds," Johnson said during the midday break at Morehouse Park in Owatonna. "Once we get into the country, we would like to start cranking that up, we'd love to end with 20 different kinds of birds."

Despite the pandemic, Hill and Johnson were certain that the count would go off without a hitch. "There's more people at home to watch feeders," Hill said. "The only real difference is we're each taking a car in the field when in the past there were two of us to a car."

The Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 19 with volunteers from across the county ready to help spot. The final results will be tabulated and sent to the Audubon Society.

GUEST COLUMN

Santa's secrets are revealed

BY DON HEINZMAN

Santa Claus has written a book.

The secret life of Santa Claus has been revealed.

In his book, he reveals how he uses a special dust from the Fairies to make a magical Christmas live all year in the minds and hearts of boys and girls and adults of all ages.

That same dust makes his reindeer fly, shrinks the toys so they all fit in his sack and enables him to go down the chimney.

He tells that and more in his book: "Santa's Magic Christmas" in which he answers questions children have asked over the 15 years of him giving the gift of joy and happiness to thousands who have sat on his lap.

This year children are not sitting on his lap. In fact, Santa is zooming for eight-minute intervals with kids

who made an appointment, from his kitchen. So far he has talked to 300 young and old and anticipates talking to 500 by Dec. 23. You can learn all the zooming details at www.santasnorthpole-experience.com. (There is a charge for the zooming experience, Go to WWW Santasnorthpolexperience.com

for directions.) While the 500 appointments have been taken, you can buy his book. With a twinkle in his eye he has spread the spirit of Christmas to young and old.

One day, a 94-year-old woman sat on his lap and just asked for "Peace on Earth" and then she leaned over and kissed him.

Santa says older people come to him and relive the Christmas when they were young and they love to show their grandchildren their photo with Santa.

The youngest child who sat on his lap was two days old.

Looking back on his favorite memories, Santa remembers one young lad who told Santa he had enough toys and to give his to a boy who didn't have any.

Another boy wanted to be Santa, who advised him to look for someone who was in need of something the boy could provide. One day, he saw his elderly lady neighbor go out on her front porch barefoot to get the paper. The magic hit him. He saved his money, bought her a pair of slippers and placed them on her porch. He felt the joy of Christmas when he saw her get the paper wearing those slippers.

Santa hears all kinds of pleas. Some children ask him to make their grandparents ill with cancer better. He takes them aside and together they say a little prayer for that grandparent.

Sometimes Santa hears messages that make him sad.

One day a girl, 6, who had little muscle control wanted a hug. He asked the parents what they wanted for Christmas. They replied, "They wished that their child won't live long.

There are many humorous moments. One boy told Santa he wanted a toilet. That wish was granted

the following year.

When some kids ask for a pet, Santa advises them to talk to their parents about that. He says you wouldn't want a pet in Santa's sleigh to "wet" and cause soggy presents.

Mrs. Bonnie Claus has a page in the book telling how she is an expert cook, particularly making his favorite sugar cookies. She even uses the magic dust to Santa learned how to make Christmas magic at the Jim Cunningham International University of Santa Claus where he has earned his doctorate degree in Santa Clausology.

Why did he write the book? His favorite poem "The Night Before Christmas" doesn't mention

"Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer" who prances with all of the other reindeer in HIS book.

The book is colorfully and artistically illustrated by Alan Margolis from Ohio. You can find it on Amazon and at Barnes and Noble book stores. (His web site is: www.santasnorthpole-experience.com.)

So what does Santa want for Christmas? On the first page of his book, Santa is shown down on one knee before the manger with the baby Jesus.

He writes, "Christmas is a magical season. Let's remember the real reason. Our Christmas tradition

started long ago with the celebration of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Ever since, the Christmas celebration brings together family and friends with lots of love and giving."

That's Santa's wish for everyone: "All I want is for everyone to be happy."

His final words are: "We are all Santa Clauses

when we give gifts of love and happiness – and feel: "Santa's Magic of Christmas."

(Special note: Santa dictated the contents of his book to Arlyn Grussing, a retired Bloomington city planner who has been very active in the sports activities and the Optimist Club. He and his wife Bonnie have four children. Santa told Grussing that on every Dec. 26, he has his long hair cut short and his beard cleanly shaved and lets it all grow out the whole year transforming him into a natural Santa for another year.)

Don Heinzman is a retired journalist who worked in community newspapers for more than 50 years. He has provided editorial guidance for the Steele County Times in the past. He lives in Bloomington.

A window into Owatonna's Christmas spirit

BY ALEX NUEHRING
STAFF WRITER

The Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism was forced to cancel the annual Lighted Holiday Parade because of COVID-19 restrictions, but that wasn't going to stop the chamber from spreading a little Christmas cheer.

As a substitute for the parade and a way to keep the Christmas spirit alive and well in downtown Owatonna, the chamber organized two new holiday events: the Holiday Cruise, which took place on Friday, Dec. 4, and the Downtown Holiday Window Contest.

The chamber's Director of Conventions and Tourism Karen Pehrson said the window contest provides the people of Owatonna and visitors with a safe way to get in the holiday spirit.

"We thought it would be a good way to get the community, business owners, residents and visitors excited about the holidays," she said. "We also thought it would be a fun competition for the holiday season and bring some attention to local businesses that have struggled financially due to COVID-19."

Downtown businesses have decorated their window sills in the past, but she said the chamber asked business owners to ramp it up a bit this year and bring more cheer to the downtown area.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Santa Claus took a seat in the front window of the Owatonna Shoe store last week, allowing passersby to take pictures with him through the glass. Here, Nate Skala takes a picture of his children, Shelby, Carson and Jayden.

Pehrson also said festive windows are also a good way to attract visitors to come into their stores.

If that weren't enough, the businesses whose windows receive the most and second-most votes are awarded chamber bucks, which is basically a gift card that can be used at all chamber-member businesses. First place receives $100 and second place receives $75.

Thanks in part to that incentive, she said more businesses than anticipated registered to participate in the contest.

"I thought we would have six to seven businesses participating in the contest, but we have 12 which I thought was really good," she said. "Also, we hoped to get 150 votes and we've gotten double that so far."

Pehrson said one reason there's been so many votes cast is because community members want to support local businesses.

"People are excited about it, especially since small businesses have struggled so much this year. Everybody wants to pull together and help each other out," she said.

She's also seen a lot of businesses come together to help each other.

Owatonna community members and visitors still have time to cast their vote as the contest will run until New Year's Day. They can vote by following a link on the Owatonna Chamber of Commerce and Tourism's Facebook page or by following the link here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6JLLV6J.

Winners will be announced on the chamber's and Visit Owatonna's Facebook page on New Year's Day.







Lights and laughter in the air, Smiling faces everywhere, Drifts of snow and boughs of holly, All the things that make us jolly…

All signs point to a merry Christmas, and we can't think of a better place to spend the season than here at home with all of you. We are truly grateful for your kindness and support, and we wish you all a happy holiday season.

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Moving Kids Forward



Drug court grad takes the high road, glad he 'rode it out'

BY DEB FLEMMING
NEWS EDITOR

Third District Court Judge Joseph A. Bueltel described Jeffry Sipes as a humble, calm and present person.

"When he speaks up, he can say some really pleasant things that are inspiring for me and others," Bueltel said last week during a computerized graduation ceremony that followed a regular Drug Court session on Zoom.

"I wish I could shake your hand," Bueltel said.

Bueltel, Drug Court Coordinator Nicole Gram, several probation officers, Sipes and other drug court participants attended the computerized graduation ceremony.

Sipes is the 67th graduate of the Steele Waseca Drug Court (SWDC).

Since its inception in July 2014, Gram said, the drug court program has served 208 participants with 101 of them either withdrawing – to serve their jail or prison time or transfer to another drug court – or being terminated because of new criminal behavior or rejection of services.

As an alternative to incarceration, drug courts throughout the country reduce the costs of repeatedly processing high-risk, high-need substance abusers through the courts, jails, and prisons while providing offenders a pathway to recovery.

Participants are required to abstain from substance use, to be accountable for their behavior and to fulfill the legal responsibilities of the offenses they have committed.

There are currently 41 participants in the local drug court.

SWDC's five-phase program is rigorous and takes participants a minimum of 18 months to complete, according to Grams. Weekly, or monthly, court attendance is required depending on which phase of the program a participant is in. Recovery-related programming includes treatment, support meetings, mental health meetings, completion of a cognitive skills program that help to change behaviors and at least three hours of self-help recovery meetings each week.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Jeffry Sipes became the Steele Waseca Drug Court's 67th graduate last week.

In addition, all participants submit to a minimum of twice weekly random testing.

Other requirements for graduation from the program include completing treatment, making meaningful connections in the recovery community, obtaining a valid driver's license, GED/Diploma, employment and compliance with child support and payment of any fines, fees or restitution.

Sipes, who entered the program in March 2019 on a felony fifth-degree controlled substance charge, completed the program in 21 months. The charge carries a mandatory prison sentence of 21 months.

Gram also said that Sipes had violated his probation and was at risk of losing his stay, as well as at risk of serving one year and one day in prison.

While participating the drug court, Sipes was tested for drugs and alcohol 132 times and on graduation day, he'd been sober for 665 days.

In a telephone interview, Sipes said he's glad to have this chapter of his life behind.

"Everyone has some kind of intervention that comes into their life, mine just happened to be this DUI," said Sipes. "Had I not gotten stopped, I may have kept going."

"When I came into drug court, I just did what needed to be done – I owned it," said Sipes. "I'm the one who sat on the barstool, drank and got in the car and drove it …I made the choice."

To his fellow drug court participants still in the program, the 60-year-old's only advice: "Just hold on. It's a good program. No, it's not a smooth ride, but ride it out."

GUEST COLUMN

Remembering Christmas Eve in 1937

BY REV. RUSSELL RUDOLF

We lived on a farm in North Dakota. On Christmas Eve the cows were milked earlier than normal. Before going in for supper, Dad harnessed the horses. Supper was eaten earlier than normal. After getting dressed to go to church, Dad hitched the team to the sleigh.

As you picture the sleigh, please don't visualize one of those fancy ones you've seen in movies with shapely curved steel runners and fancy seats… think in terms of a farm sleigh with heavy wooden runners. Built to fit on that sleigh was a wooden box with a wind shield in front and a door on back and on each inside benches.

After hitching the team to the sleigh Dad would bring it to the house. At the house he would put a covered pail with hot coals into the sleigh. There were five of us who would enter the sleigh: my mother, my baby sister, Dad, Herb (the hired man – Dad's nephew – son of an older brother) and me.

Beacon of the Prairie

We were members of St. Andrew's Lutheran Church – a rural church between two communities. The church was 13 miles from Zeeland (to the southwest) and 20 miles from Wishek (to the northeast). It was known as the "Beacon of the Prairie."

I think we lived about six miles to the northeast. It would take us two and one-half hours to get to the church. Dad would let mom, my sister, and me out to go into the warm church. Herb and Dad would unhitch the horses from the sleigh – the church had a barn in which to place the horses.

During the worship service, the women and children sat on the left side of the nave. I sat with my mother and my sister. All the men sat on the right side of the nave. I've often wondered why the women were on the left and the men on the right. I suspect (just a guess) that by having the men on the right, the women on the left were free from the tobacco, masculine, manure and alcohol odors.

The original sod church (still standing) was built in 1893 for a cost of $385…plus 15 days of labor from each adult member. In 1906 the parish built a larger church. It measured 26-by-60 feet. It had a bell tower, which measured 60 feet to the top of the cross. All the interior furnishings were made of oak in the Gothic style. The walls as well as the ceiling were finished with embossed metal. It had a balcony.

In 1990 the church was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

My great great-grandmother Katharina Rudolf – wife of Ludwig, Sr. – was the first person buried in that cemetery. My parents were married in that building.

Lighting the candles

Near the end of the service, the deacons would come to the front to light the candles on the Christmas tree. My mother permitted me to leave her so I could sit in the front pew to admire the lighted tree. We were too poor to have a tree in our house. I'm not sure but I think the prayers were recited while the tree was lighted. When the "Father Unser" (The Lord's Prayer) was over, the men began extinguishing the candles. I went back to sit with mom.

The men all left the church while the women remained and visited. The men went out to hitch the horses to their sleighs. One by one they came to get their family. I'm sure Dad had another fire in the pail to keep us somewhat warm on the trip home. Musty horse blankets helped keep us warm.

Signing off..

What else do I remember about that Christmas? Herb gave me a cattle truck that had a battery and lights.

When I think back to those days, I wonder if I would have had the quality of faith that would have insisted that in the depth of winter I would harness horses, hitch them to a sleigh, place them into a stall in the barn at the church, and re-hitch them to the sleigh just for a Christmas Eve worship, a six-hour plus excursion, so a young son could remember the aroma and remember the beauty of God's lighted Christmas tree… and, so continue his journey within the grace of God.

Merry Christmas!

Rev. Russell Rudolf is retired and lives in Owatonna.









A Wish Trimmed With Joy

To our fine friends and neighbors here in the community, we wish you a most merry Christmas and a wonderful New Year! May 2021 bring much happiness to you and yours.

Thank you for re-electing me to serve you as state representative in 2020.

JOHN PETERSBURG
STATE REPRESENTATIVE



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A tinge of guilt comes over me followed by a saddened tear.
I say another lonely prayer that only God can hear.
I turn the bedside light off and quickly settle in, but it will be a few more hours before my night comes to an end.
I lie here all but motionless, eyes wider than the sky,
I try to think of happy thoughts, but I still break down and cry.
I punch my flattened pillow and lie flat on my back.
I'm thinking of my soldier who's bravely serving in Iraq or elsewhere.
I finally stop my crying and a calm sets in my heart.
For I know this year will quickly pass, then we'll no longer be apart.
My eyes are feeling heavy now, so I send God one last prayer.
"God please protect my soldier while fighting over there!"

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Star Tribune TOP 150 WORKPLACES 2020

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2020 has been a challenge for everyone, and we join with all of you looking forward to a return to normal as soon as possible in 2021.



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