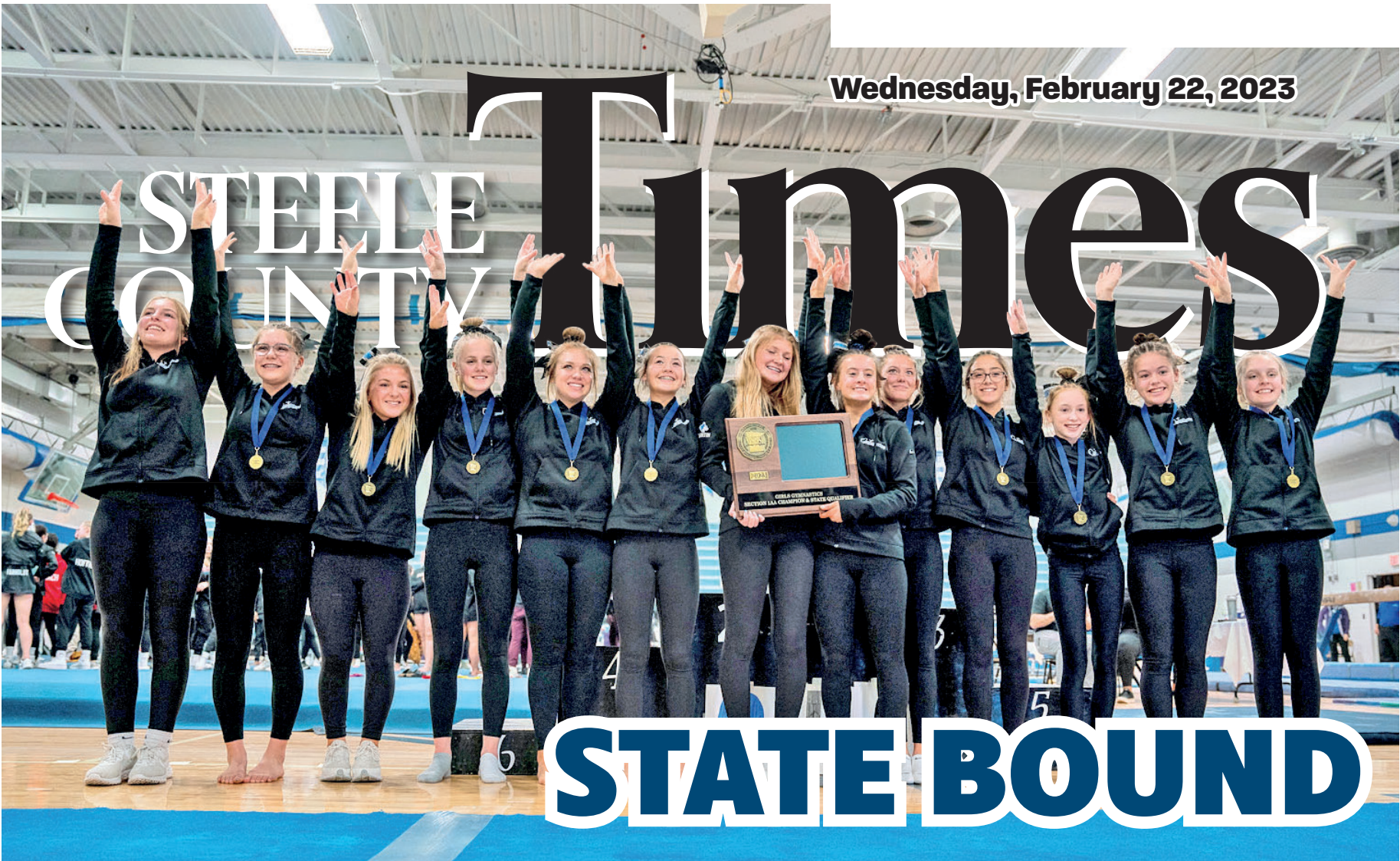




STAFF PHOTO BY JOEY BUNTON
It's a celebration salute for members of the Huskies gymnastics team after they captured the Section 1AA title Feb. 15. They will be shooting for Owatonna's first ever gymnastics title Friday at the Roy Wilkens Auditorium in St. Paul. Team members include, from left: Alivia Sturges, Johanna Spielman, Chloe Myer, Kaelyn Smith, Averie Roush, Kendra Miller, Jayna Martin and Kaitlyn Cobban (holding the trophy), Jozie Johnson, Emma Johnson, Delia Neumann, Dylann Norrid and McKenna Edel.

Tigers, Huskies snag section titles, advance to state tourneys

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

Dreams of competing at the state tournament in 2023 came true for Owatonna gymnastics and Medford wrestling last week as both teams won their respective section titles

to earn a trip to the big show. Gymnastics was able to beat out a field of eight competitors for their title at home in the Owatonna Senior High School gymnasium, while Medford traveled to St. Clair and finished 3-0 with a tight 33-30

win over Lake Crystal-Wellcome Memorial (LCWM) in the championship dual.
Owatonna Gymnastics
After losing veteran gymnast Chloe Myer to a hyper-extended
See STATE on A9 ►



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
It came down to the wire for Medford wrestlers with Mason Degrood fighting from the top position to keep Lake Crystal-Wellcome Memorial's Dietrich Rosin from escaping. Degrood beat Rosin by a 7-6 decision to break the 30-30 tie and send Medford to state wrestling tournament in St. Paul on March 2.

Family: Ariana died doing what she loved



SUBMITTED PHOTO
Ariana Ptacek is being remembered for her love of snowmobiling. She is shown here after earning a trophy in a competition in Wisconsin last year. Ptacek died Feb. 3 after crashing her snowmobile in Michigan.

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER
There is no question that Ariana Ptacek died while doing something she loved. Ever since she was 3 years old, Ariana shared a passion for snowmobiling. She continued riding throughout her childhood, teenage years, and into adulthood. In fact, she even won third place last year at a competition in Wisconsin.
"She was so excited for this year," said Randy Ptacek, Ariana's father. "She was bound and determined she was going to win this year."
Ariana never made this year's race, which took place last Saturday. The 26-year-old died instantly in early February after crashing her snowmobile into a tree in upper Michigan. It has left family members stunned.
"It's such a tragic thing," Randy said. "God decided he wanted to pick up little girl angels right now."
Randy, who has operated snowmobiles for much of his life, hailed his daughter as "one of the best riders I have ever known." He said he knows she was happy at the end of her life. He recalled how Ariana began snowmobiling with an Arctic Cat Kitty Cat when she was 3 years old. "She was all about that. I knew she was going to be a daredevil from day one," Randy said. "It was her favorite activity."
Most notably, Ariana loved to operate the snowmobile going fast, according to Randy. "It was the thrill of it for her," he said, adding she often handled her snowmobile "wide open at 85 mph."
See ARIANA on A17 ►
"It's such a tragic thing... God decided he wanted to pick up little girl angels right now."
Randy Ptacek
Ariana's Father

Merxbauer settles into top role at South Central

BY RICK BUSSLER
PUBLISHER
As Michele Merxbauer settles into her new role as director of South Central Human Relations Center, she is focusing on a couple key initiatives.
First, she wants to bring back "the family feeling" that got lost over the past couple years thanks to COVID-19.
Her other major push will be market-
See MERXBAUER on A11 ►



BP after-prom plans 'Finer Things Bingo'

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER
Jessie Christianson is getting a crash-course in the particulars of bingo.
"It's not just calling the numbers," she said. "I'm learning the ins and outs of gambling."
Even the timing of her event took a hit. "It was supposed to be Feb. 11, but I didn't realize I had to wait a month for the City Council meeting" to approve her gambling permit request.
It's all, as they say, for a good cause. Christianson, the chairwoman for the Blooming Prairie High School After-Prom Committee, has come up with a unique way to raise money: Finer Things Bingo.
"My girlfriends and I were doing purse bingo at an event, and just tossing things around, hashing out ideas," she said.
Purse bingo – where the prize is a designer purse instead of a share
See BINGO on A16 ►

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AREA DEATHS
Evelyn Trom, 88, Blooming Prairie
Marian Simon, 95, Owatonna
Maxine Perendy, 91, Mankato

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County officials choose new recycling firm

BY JONI HUBRED
NEWS EDITOR

“The only difference will be the color of the truck picking up the can.”

Steele County officials last week approved a change in recycling service that residents probably won’t notice. Thompson Sanitation operations manager Jeremy Waters said recycling pick-up dates will remain the same.

There will be a change, though, when it comes to drop-off recycling. The company has entered a purchase agreement for a property at the corner of State Avenue and Kilworth in Owatonna, owner Frank Thompson said.

The current provider, Waste Management, has an Owatonna site on Brady Boulevard, north of Hoffman Drive. Other drop-off points—Medford City Hall, Meriden Township Hall, Vandal’s and the Steele County Landfill in Blooming Prairie, Hope Community Center, and in Ellendale—will remain the same.

Steele County has contracted for recycling for more than 30 years and supplies bins to homes, apartments, and churches, as well as one rural man-

ufactured mobile home park. The program serves 10,456 households and 2,640 apartment units.

Officials issued a request for proposals late last year. The contract with Waste Management had been extended a year and was due to expire in October 2023.

At the time, commissioners expressed concerns about the condition of the Owatonna drop-off point. Especially on weekends—especially long weekends—and after holidays, they said, containers overflow and recyclables end up scattered on the site.

Thompson said his company has plans to put in twice as many eight-yard containers. They will be front-open containers, which are easier for people to access.

In addition, Thompson offered to give officials his cell phone number to pass along constituent concerns, so they can be quickly addressed.

“That’s the advantage of being local,” county board chair Greg Krueger said of the company, which was founded and is based in Clarks Grove.

Waters said the containers will be emptied

daily, and “if we still run into that issue on Monday mornings, we’ll add more containers.”

The Thompson bid was \$1,743 below Waste Management’s, and the company included a 2% price increase per year, as opposed to Waste Management’s 5%. Thompson also asked for fuel adjustments when costs rise above \$5.50/gallon.

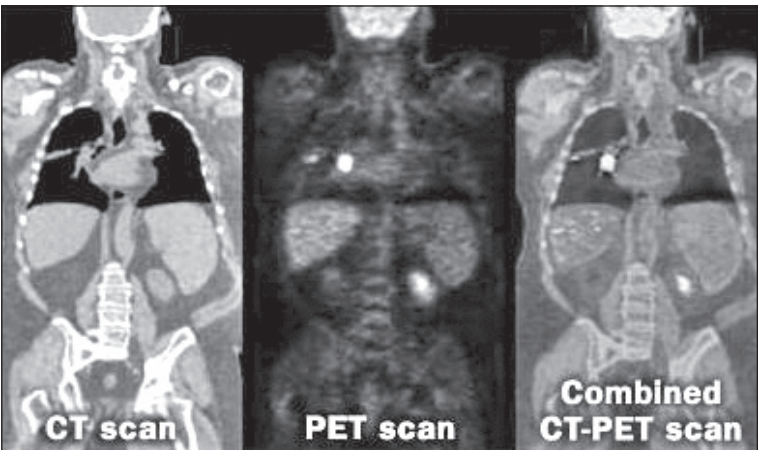
Recyclables will be taken to Recycle Minnesota in Lakeville.

Thompson also included a “revenue sharing” option, which would have dropped the bid to \$53,113, but with an \$85 per ton processing fee, which Waste Management didn’t have. The county would own the recycling commodities, but also be responsible for disposing of nonrecyclables that land in the stream.

“That’s a number we don’t know,” said Planning and Zoning Administrator Dale Oolman. “We don’t know how much in the recycling tubs is good recycling.”

The financial variables led officials to choose the straight recycling contract.

“I think it’s safer for our constituents,” Krueger said.



SUBMITTED IMAGE

Mayo Clinic in Owatonna now offers position emission tomography and computed tomography scanning services to help identify cancer and brain disorders.

Mayo Owatonna adds state-of-the-art radiology service

Mayo Clinic Health System in Owatonna now offers position emission tomography and computed tomography (PET/CT) scanning services to help identify cancer and brain disorders. Mayo Clinic Health System is the first clinic in Owatonna to offer this state-of-the-art technology.

A PET/CT scan is an imaging test, like an X-ray or MRI, that checks for diseases in the body. Health care professionals use PET/CT scans to help diagnose, monitor or treat a patient’s condition. A PET/CT scan often can identify a condition before it shows up on MRIs or CT scans alone.

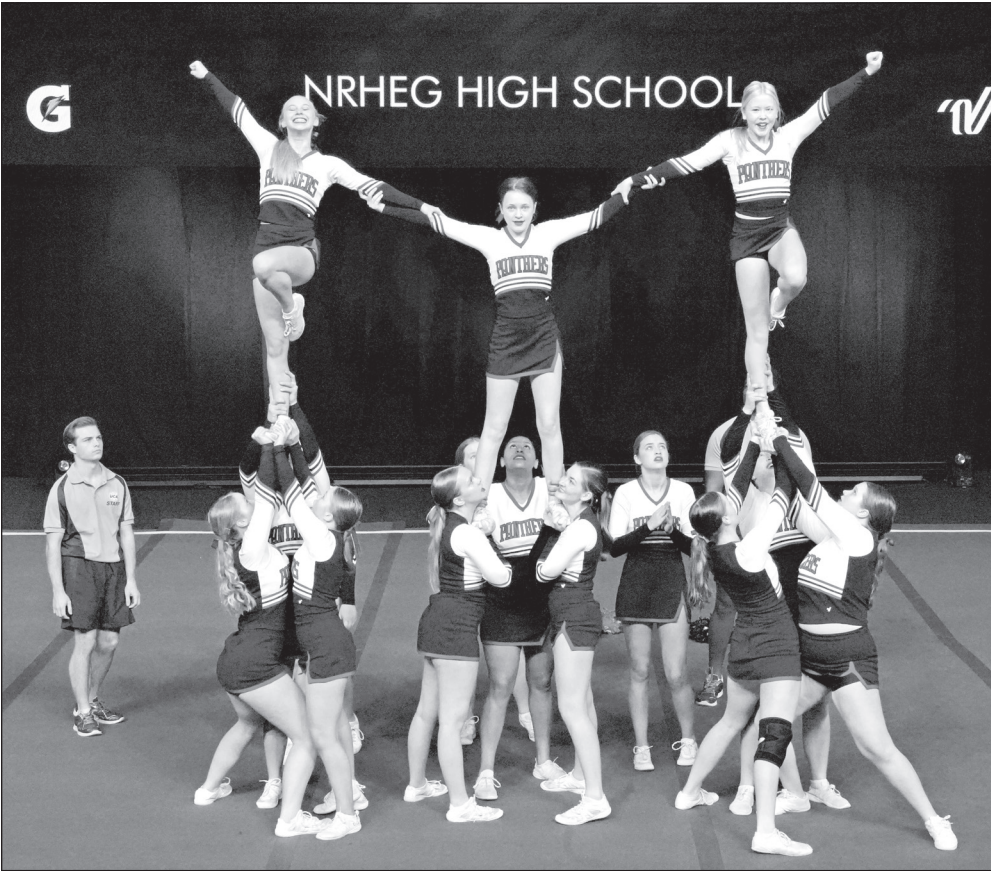
“Until now, our clinicians have referred patients to Rochester when a PET/CT scan was needed,” said David Penn, M.D., director of Radiology, Mayo Clinic Health System – Southeast Minnesota. “Offering this service in Owatonna will be more convenient for our patients. It also will speed up the process of diagnosing a problem for a patient and beginning a treatment plan.”

Mayo is partnering with DMS Health Technologies to provide the PET/CT scanning services in a mobile imaging suite that will visit Mayo Clinic in Owatonna, 200 26th St. NW, every Tuesday. If a patient needs a PET/CT scan, their health care team will work with them to schedule and prepare for the scan.

From start to finish, a PET/CT scan takes about two hours to complete. Patients first receive an injection of a radioactive drug (tracer) into their arm or hand. The tracer collects into areas of the body that have higher levels of metabolic or biochemical activity, which often pinpoints the location of the disease. The patient then lies still on a padded table that slides into the scanner. After the scan is complete, a radiologist will report the findings to the patient’s doctor.

“PET/CT scans are one of the most effective ways to see abnormal activity in the body’s organs and diagnose diseases like cancer and dementia,” said Dr. Penn. “Providing this service locally will improve the quality of care and access for our patients in Owatonna and the surrounding communities.”

STATE CHEER DYNASTY



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Members of the NRHEG Competition Cheer team perform at the National High School Cheerleading Championship in Orlando, Fla. The team placed 11th, just .08 out of going to the final round.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The NRHEG Competition Cheer team poses for a photo at the national cheerleading championship in Orlando, Fla. In the front, from left, are Isabel Stadheim, Grace Wilkenson, Autumn Baseman, Olivia Berg, and Addison Buenger. In the middle, from left, are Brenna Sommer, Maddy Bogue, Ariel Anhalt, Orianna Degen and Eva Wayne. In the back row, from left, are Payton Bunn, Malonna Wilson, Kyera Eustice, Julia Churchill, and Sierra Misgen.

NRHEG cheerleaders place 11th at Nationals

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

After seven months of 2½ -hour practices, it all comes down to 2½ minutes.

The competition cheer team at New Richland-Hartland-Ellendale-Geneva (NRHEG) High School made it all look easy last month, defeating eight teams to bring home the first-place trophy at the state competition for the third straight year.

“That was a huge goal for our kids this year,” said Joni Churchill, one of four coaches for the team.

“Our two performances at state were probably the best performances I’ve ever seen these kids put out on a mat,” she said. “They were amazing, and we finished our final round a full 16 points ahead of the second-place team – which is a ton of points in competition cheer.”

In addition to the win, six athletes were named All-State cheerleaders: Eva Wayne, Grace Wilkenson, See DYNASTY on A16 ►

History display planned for Owatonna chamber

BY JONI HUBRED
NEWS EDITOR

While an Owatonna city council chamber renovation will remove a piece of Minnesota State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children history, a group of residents plans to preserve its story.

The West Hills Commission initially had misgivings about removal of an auditorium stage at one end of the chamber. However, research showed it was originally located on the opposite end, and that allayed some concerns.

The Commission is charged with advising city council members about West Hills preservation. The 160-acre property on State Avenue south of Hoffman Drive NW now houses city offices and a museum that preserves the state school’s history. Other programs and groups rent space in several buildings.

Not surprisingly, the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office got involved with removal of the stage.

“They would like some sort of historical reference to what the room looked like so that it’s not all lost,” said Anne Peterson, Minnesota State Public School museum director.

The stage, Peterson said, was probably moved after a fire in 1904. City council minutes and newspaper articles from that time period had no information.

Its removal, sometime later this year, will be well documented, Peterson said.

She and Nancy Vaillancourt have taken on the task of research for a historical timeline display that will be located in a 6-by-9-foot space near a planned vestibule.

“We want to tell a few stories that haven’t been told,” Vaillancourt said. “Why Owatonna was chosen for the State School and how it became city property.”

“We want the focus to be how Owatonna took leadership and used this property as something good for the city,” Peterson added.

The city was among several competing for the project. Owatonna was considered because of its location and because founders thought the many farm families in the area would gladly take in the children who became wards of the state.

Eventually, the facility became a school for children with developmental disabilities and finally closed for good in 1970. The city purchased the campus four years later.

The story of how Owatonna emerged from a field that included Albert Lea, Red Wing, and Hastings largely comes down to one man who lobbied tirelessly for the city—and the commission has recommended naming the city council chamber in his honor.

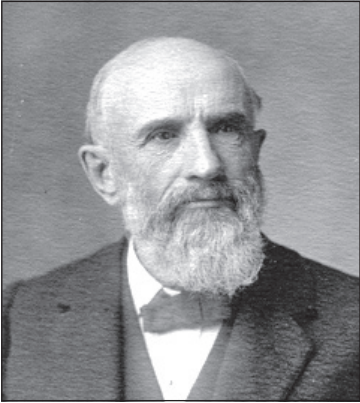
Charles Crandall, often referred to as the father of the State School, served on the commission that decided its location. Each city in the running had a representative in that group, so it took 16 votes to finalize the decision, Peterson said.

Crandall, who during his life was also a state legislator, a newspaper editor, farm owner, and worked in the hardware business, lobbied hard for the uncommitted votes. He even traveled by buggy to Albert Lea to meet with one representative.

“When he returned (after the vote), he was met at the depot by the Owatonna Coronet Band,” Peterson said. “It was a big deal.”

A State School building named for Crandall was demolished years ago, she said.

The commission’s recommendation was only to somehow use the name Crandall; city council members will ultimately decide on a full name for the space.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Charles Crandall is considered the father of the Minnesota State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children.

‘Friends’ seek to support, strengthen BP Library

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

There’s a sign in the Blooming Prairie Public Library that Becky Noble particularly likes. “Better readers make better leaders.” “It’s so important to read to kids when they’re young,” she said, building good readers – and beyond. February is “I Love to Read” month, so what better time to share with residents the latest projects and programs sponsored by the Friends of the Blooming Prairie Library? Noble, who’s president of the organization, called it “a great group of people,” as well as a “good way to support your local library and know you’re giving something to it, financially or otherwise.” In the past year, they’ve provided several educational and entertaining programs for children, including the National Eagle Center from Wabasha and Greg the Great, featuring Blooming Prairie’s own, Police Chief Greg Skillestad.

The Friends gave a set of 25-year-old chairs a complete makeover with upholstery and re-finished arms and legs; bought a new desk for the library work area; hired a local carpenter to build shelving in the Council chambers office for library storage; and replaced metal carts with permanent fixtures. The group regularly funds the summer reading program for kids – which draws up to 150 children – and provides books for every child who attends preschool screening in the school district. The lion’s share of the money used for the projects comes from the annual book sale held by the Friends. They’re also able to share programs with the Owatonna Public Library. For years, Noble said, “there’s been a group of Friends that gets together to sew bags” for people to use to take home the library books they’ve checked out. While they are “good stewards” of the finances, she said, librarian Nancy Vaillancourt is

always on the lookout for grants and other funding opportunities to offset the cost of programs and supplies. “Nancy does so much for everybody else in the community; we try to help make her life easier, because we just want her to be happy.” Still, Noble admitted, she herself doesn’t read as much as she should, “because every time I sit down to read, I fall asleep, but I check out movies quite often when the grandchildren come visit.” “I encourage everyone to stop in and check out the things we’ve done at the library,” she said. There are also monthly book club meetings for adults, as well as story time for preschoolers and early evening activities for families with young children. “One of my favorite things for the kids in the summer is the ‘take-it-apart’ workshop,” Noble said. “They bring in old laptops or computers or toasters and things, and kids get to take them apart and see how they work. They

have such fun programs for the kids in the summer, and it’s such a great way to learn. “Until you get involved, you don’t realize how much the library gets used, and how much it’s changed,” she said. New members of the Friends of the BP Library are always welcome. “It’s dirt cheap, and anybody can join,” Noble said. The group meets from 4:30-5:30 p.m. the third Monday of the month in Council chambers. If you’d rather support the library financially, checks may be made out to “Friends of the Library” and dropped off at the BP Library, which opens Monday through Friday at 9:30 a.m. “We’re so lucky to have Nancy as our librarian,” Noble said. “She’s amazing. She loves this small town, and she’s good with the history of both Blooming Prairie and Steele County. If people need anything, she’s there to help them, so we’re there to help make her life easier.”



Brent Mielke, “The Zoo Man,” brought his reptiles and amphibians to the Blooming Prairie Library in June for a children’s program.

Love in the air



Love filled the air as lots of sweethearts enjoyed a special Valentine’s Dinner at the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Litomysl Feb. 11 in preparation for Valentine’s Day. Sister Franchon Prkl, center, spreads cheer to Joanne and Roger Sorenson of Blooming Prairie.

County to purchase public health van

BY JONI HUBRED
NEWS EDITOR

Steele County officials last week authorized a purchase that will put public health workers on wheels. It will take about a year for delivery of a Ford Transit Cutaway van, which will carry a customized “box.” While the department can use funds from a COVID-19 vaccination grant for the box, Public Health Director Amber Aaseth said, the grant won’t cover the cost of the van, an estimated \$58,015. The purpose of the vehicle, Aaseth told commissioners during a Feb. 14 work session, is to “meet people where they’re at.” “We learned during COVID this is just what

we need to do,” she said. However, Aaseth added, other county departments could benefit from the unit. Emergency Management, for instance, could use it as a first aid station. The county could also advertise on the sides of the vehicle. The Public Health Department could drive the van around to area schools, as well as to the Steele County Free Fair in August, where they typically set up a booth, Aaseth said. “I see this as a program that evolves,” board vice chair Jim Abbe said. “As people see it’s available, they’ll see more uses for it.” Aaseth said a Steele County group visited with other public health departments. See **COUNTY** on A20 ►

SMIF grant jump-starts small-biz leadership academy

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

It was almost as if someone was eavesdropping on Lydia Yahnke, the supervisor of adult/family enrichment programs for Owatonna Public Schools. “Part of my job is to be the student navigator for the adult students,” she said, so at the beginning of the school year, she meets with students one-on-one. “We have an informal conversation about goals for the year, get a holistic understanding of what they bring to the table and where they want to go,” Yahnke said of the meetings. Students share their academic hopes or career plans. “A lot of the students had the desire to be small business owners but didn’t know the steps in order to do that in Owatonna,” didn’t have the resources or connections, a problem she shared during a staff meeting. Then the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation, or SMIF, announced its fall grant cycle. Brian Coleman, the student navigator for Career Pathways at Owatonna High School, spotted something: The

Inclusive and Equitable Communities grant. **The grant** The goal of the funding is to “foster a growing number of communities to build inclusive, welcoming environments and advance equitable opportunities in the lives of all people.” “We always look at what SMIF’s doing, because they have great resources,” said Deb McDermott-Johnson, director of Owatonna Community Education. “So Lydia’s got this (problem) happening with our students – and they fall right into the criteria. How isn’t this a marriage, right?” “We had a need before the grant even came into existence.” McDermott-Johnson got to work, applying for \$20,000 to help create the Small Business Leadership Academy. It’s designed to provide immigrants and adult learners identifying as Black, Indigenous and/or people of color (BIPOC) the opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding – all to navigate the processes leading to a successful business launch in an inter-agency supported environment. In short: Exactly what Yahnke’s students were hoping for.

The school district received \$10,000; it appeared the funding for the research and development of the coursework needed for the academy wasn’t funded. “We’ll take what we can get and be grateful,” McDermott-Johnson said. **The academy** Some of the adult students are already operating small businesses out of their homes, Yahnke said, making baked goods and taking them to farmers markets or using precision cutting machines to design and sell their own clothing line. Those are the students who could benefit from a small business leadership academy, where they would learn about the need for accounting and book-keeping, how to create an LLC, access legal guidance and more. Businesses are heavily regulated, McDermott-Johnson said: “Even the old card table on the corner selling lemonade has raised a few eyebrows.” Class size would be limited to 10 students for the 80-hour course. “That’s a really manageable group size,” she said, “where we can do some in-depth

learning and connection, because we want to support them all along the way to increase the likelihood of success.” The food-based businesses “are most challenging, because of the need for a certified, commercial kitchen,” McDermott-Johnson said. “But if we’ve got the kitchen, we know that we can schedule multiple owners using the same facility.” Retail is another area that appeals to the burgeoning business owners. “We did talk to Ibrahim Hussein, who said he was happy to mentor and provide some space for students to exhibit products,” Coleman said. In his role at OHS, he sees plenty of students who want to start their own businesses, too. “I’ve met with quite a few this year who are working on things,” Coleman said. “When you talk about Career Pathways as a whole, the goal was to streamline from secondary to adult education. That hasn’t changed – it’s what Adult Basic Education has been focusing on for many number of years.” **Community support** In addition to Hussein, who is the executive director of

the Somali American Cultural Society of Owatonna, they have the support of Bill Owens, the executive director of the Owatonna Area Business Development Center. In a letter to SMIF, Owens wrote that he believes the Small Business Leadership Academy will “establish a high probability of a successful business launch, leading to a life-sustaining wage and a more diverse community business network.” McDermott-Johnson said she’s “known of Bill for a long time, met him any number of times, but until we started working on this, I had no idea of the depth of resources that he could draw on. He’s sitting out there with things just waiting for people to ask for them,” she said. “Owatonna is that mecca of small businesses,” Yahnke said, “and we flourish, but we need to spread that wealth of knowledge, bring other folks into the community and embrace them.” “We were built by entrepreneurs; that industrial park was not an accident,” McDermott-Johnson agreed. “We had local folks who

had a vision and have grown companies that are now international. We have the mindset to do this. Why would we not put that expertise to work?” “Ultimately, we want to keep our learners in the community, and help the community grow, and this is a way we think we can do that.” **The future** Business ideas are swirling for adult students and those still in high school. “This is the place to explore,” McDermott-Johnson said of the proposed business leadership academy. “This is where we hope the next great idea will come from – and more storefronts, quite frankly.” Determining success, Coleman said, “is not necessarily whether they make a profit or not. It’s the tools they gain along the way, and how the community embraces them.” After receiving just half of their grant request, how will they address funding? “We’ll certainly look for (more grant) opportunities,” McDermott-Johnson said. “But when we find success, when we find we’re meeting students’ needs.” See **SMIF** on A9 ►

OUR VIEW

Regional wastewater plan long overdue

In December of 2018, engineering consultants with Bolton & Menk laid out wastewater treatment options for Medford city officials.

They could improve their own facility, originally built in 1968, or pursue a regional system with Faribault or Owatonna. Estimates based on several different scenarios showed building costs ranging from \$4.2 million to \$7 million, and regional options settling in around the \$5 million mark.

Consultants noted the long-term costs for building and partnering with Faribault were similar and encouraged further discussions. With new development of its own to consider, that city decided against partnering, as did Owatonna.

Two years later, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) fined Medford over a 40,000-gallon biosolids spill into the Straight River. Today, city officials say the city's wastewater treatment plant needs \$3 million in repairs, which may not buy them much more time.

Owatonna has gone through its own growing pains over the past five years. During that time, costs for a wastewater treatment plant expansion ballooned from \$37 million to \$65 million.

Officials last year asked the State of Minnesota for \$22 million in bonding funds, along with a state grant. Neither materialized.

Over the past several months, Owatonna and Medford city staff have talked about approaching the state together, which will hopefully improve the chances for both cities to get the kind of funding that will take some of the burden of updating infrastructure off ratepayers.

And we're not talking small change. In Medford, residents would see their sewer rates triple without help from the state.

From a dollars-and-cents perspective, this burgeoning regionalization plan works. More importantly, it tells state officials that both cities are serious about doing whatever it takes to best serve their citizens.

We urge residents in both cities to contact their legislators and help ensure these bonding requests don't go down the drain.

Preserving history while the city moves forward



Heart Of Steele
JONI HUBRED

Maybe because I'm a journalist at heart, I've always been fascinated by history.

Local newspapers like the Steele County Times typically have some sort of archive, and I've been fortunate to have worked for papers that have decades of history bound up in volumes. They're a hoot to flip through. The old ads and stories capture the day-to-day life across several generations of residents, and the differences seem stark.

In the early 1900s editions, for example, you may see the names of families suffering through influenza or the meeting minutes of a Ladies Aid meeting. People shared details of their lives back then much the way they do on their personal social media accounts today—but

for all the town to see.

Those stories help us better understand what life was like back then. They also document the lives of those who made special contributions to the community—people like Charles Crandall, who helped ensure Owatonna became home to the Minnesota State Public School.

There are all kinds of challenges to maintaining a historic property; perhaps the greatest is preserving the history itself. A museum showcases the State School's history and honors the lives of the children who lived there.

Now, planning is underway for a historical timeline that will be created as part of the city council chamber renovation. It's an important element, because plans call for removal of a stage in place at one end of the room.

That's the way of time, isn't it? Bricks and mortar change over the years—time leaves its mark, needs change. Buildings rise and eventually fall.

But the heart of our history lies in the stories we share with one another, pass on to our children, and preserve through millennia.

Ditching cable reduces my stress level



Hot Pursuit
RICK BUSSLER

Each month when I pay my cable TV/phone/internet bill, all bundled into one, it just pains me to fork out as much as I have been.

First, I must admit I don't watch much TV. So, it always seemed ridiculous to me to be shelling out the kind of money I was for cable service. Give me the local channels mostly to watch news programs and a few sports channels, and I'm good.

With a few "discounts" applied, it has still come dangerously close to the \$200 mark. I was already having ulcers thinking about what would happen when those discounts were set to come off next month.

I've tried to reason with the cable company in the past, but to no avail. They are head strung on keeping my cable bill off the charts. And, of course, to their greedy benefit.

A few weeks ago, while attending a home show at U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis, I came across a Verizon representative that quickly unwound my anxiety, well kind of. Verizon, which I utilize for cell phone service, had a grand plan to get me internet service and provided me with a couple additional options for watching TV without cable service.

It eerily sounded a little too slick, but they had my wallet busting at the seams in no time with so much extra cash.

I ordered the internet service through Verizon and within a couple days they shipped me a new router to operate the internet. This part saved me about \$50 per month from what I had been paying.

Next, I headed out to the electronics depart-

ment at a store to find an antenna to pick up local channels. The internet service that Verizon offered was going to give me a couple streaming channels on top of everything. And when the Twins season kicks into gear, I'll be searching for a sports channel for minimal cost.

This is where the real savings kicked in. By ditching cable service, I made a one-time purchase of \$50 for an antenna, and now I'll be saving an additional \$75 per month. In case you're keeping track, I'm now saving \$125 per month.

But it gets even better.

For the first time in my adult life, I am going without a home telephone. It has quickly become peaceful without the constant barrage of telemarketers calling my home, though it seems a little bit scary making such a plunge. I'm sure I'll adjust, however.

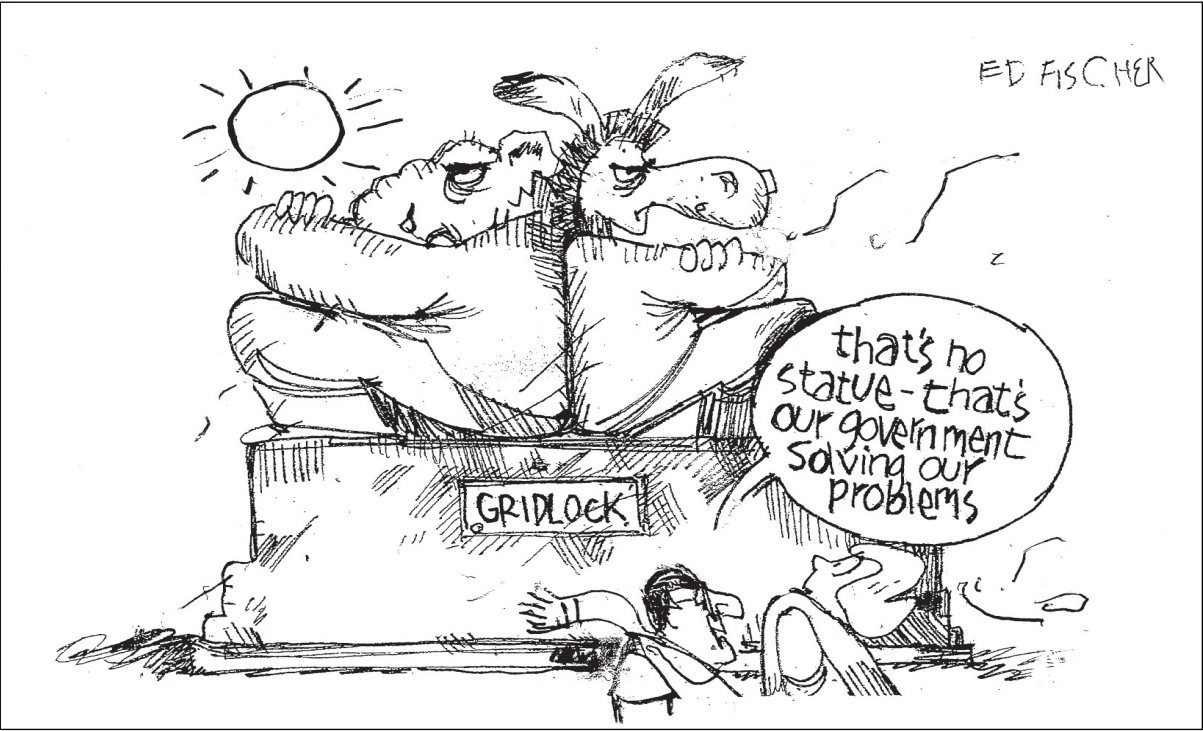
Of course, the home phone was the cheapest of the bundling package coming in at just \$15 per month. But add that onto the \$125, and now I've just put an extra \$140 in my pocket.

After cancelling my cable service late Friday, my phone rang right away Monday morning. Guess who? Why, it was the cable company looking to bring me back because they already missed the expensive love affair we had going on.

To keep me satisfied, they extended an offer of less than half of what I had been paying for several years. Too late as I've already moved on with my new romance with Verizon. It's a courtship that only seemed appropriate to have started in the days leading up to Valentine's Day. I'm thinking Cupid is blushing about now.

Besides the cable service's newest offers still would be more than what I'll be paying Verizon.

Sometimes it pays to go in hot pursuit of tackling cable companies who love to gouge consumers.



GUEST COLUMN

Focused on staffing schools and retaining staff

BY CHRIS PICHA

Saying I'm honored to serve as the director of human resources for Owatonna Public Schools (OPS) just doesn't seem like it carries enough weight to truly embody how much pride I have in our staff, students, and school community. Two of the most important functions of human resources in Pre-K-12 education are to strategically staff schools and to retain staff.

Our human resources department is uniquely situated to impact learning outcomes for students because we lead in the development of recruitment and hiring processes that reflect powerful commitments to high quality teaching and equity.

In staffing our schools, our goals are to create conditions to hire educators who align to our educator and leadership profiles of the district and

assign those educators in a manner that most strategically impacts student learning in equitable ways. Recently, recruitment of educators has been challenging. However, OPS has developed relationships with universities in and outside of Minnesota, we have a well-established student grow your own (GYO) program, and we are working to secure another grant to expand our GYO program, all of which strengthen our recruitment opportunities.

Current research shows that working conditions matter for all educators if we want to have a chance to retain them in our schools. Staff satisfaction is a critical component of our district success. In Owatonna Public Schools, we value the voices of our educators and that is why we have begun evaluating our culture, investing in professional learning for all

educators, empowering employees, promoting a positive environment, and seeking feedback.

In many ways, all of our roles in schools are interconnected with one another. Giving our certified and non-certified staff the same amount of professional learning opportunities is crucial to supporting all staff members. Employees are more likely to stay with an organization that invests in their development.

We have an amazing three-year teacher mentorship program, and we have a partnership with MN State University – Mankato where one to two fellows receive a full-year teaching experience. In addition, we have a half-year teacher internship program, and we will be implementing a paraprofessional mentorship program. All of these programs invest in the development of our staff, which empowers them.

OPS fosters an atmosphere that creates an inclusive space for everyone to get what they need to do their best. Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and encouraging open communication between leaders and staff fosters an atmosphere where employees feel passionate about the work they are doing and want to stay with our district long term.

I am so thankful for the OPS staff. As part of the leadership team, we want our staff to have daily positive experiences, feel empowered, and be engaged. We value employee feedback to help identify areas for improvement and change. If we continue to commit to creating a positive work environment, our district will continue to thrive.

Chris Picha is the director of human resources for Owatonna Public Schools.

STEELE COUNTY Times

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A state and national award winning weekly



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General Excellence

2023—14 state awards	2017—2 state and 3 national awards	2013—7 state and 2 national awards
2022—12 state and 5 national awards	2016—8 state and 6 national awards	2012—2 state awards
2021—16 state awards	2015—7 state and 4 national awards	2011—4 national awards
2020—9 state awards	2014—3 state and 4 national awards	
2019—7 state awards		
2018—6 state and 4 national awards		

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

Retiring Abroad? Tips and tools to help you make an informed decision

Dear Savvy Senior,
What are the key factors to consider when contemplating retiring abroad? My husband and I will soon be retiring and are interested in moving abroad to a country that's cheaper and warmer than the U.S.

Looking Ahead

Dear Looking,
Whatever your reasons for aspiring to retire abroad – a lower cost of living, a better climate, or a desire for adventure – you need to do your homework and learn everything you can about the country you're interested in because it's not an easy move. Here are some different tips and tools to help you make an informed decision.

Researching Tools

If you're in the decision-making process of where to retire, internationalliving.com and liveandinvestoverseas.com are two excellent websites that provide articles, information and lists of the top retirement destinations abroad based on cost of living, climate, health care, housing, visas, infrastructure and more.

Once you pick a country or two that interest you, a smart move is to talk or network with some expats who have already made the move you're thinking about making. They can give you tips and suggestions on many issues, as well as the advantages and disadvantages and day-to-day reality of living in a particular country. Facebook is a good resource for locating expat groups.

But before committing, experts recommend visiting multiple times during different seasons to see whether you can envision yourself living there and not just exploring the place as a tourist. Here are some other factors you



THE SAVVY SENIOR
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need to look into.

Cost of living:

Retiring abroad used to be seen as a surefire way to live beyond your means, and for many countries it still is. But depending on where you move, the U.S. dollar may not stretch as far as you think. To compare the cost of living in hundreds of cities and countries use numbeo.com.

Visa requirements:

If you want to spend just part of the year living abroad or are willing to move from country to country, most countries offer a three or six-month tourist visa, which is easy to get. But if you want to set up permanent residence abroad you might have to jump over a few more hurdles depending on where you want to retire. To research visa requirements in the countries that interest you, visit visaguide.world.

Health care:

Most U.S. health insurance companies do not provide coverage outside the U.S., and neither does Medicare. Check with the embassy (see usembassy.gov) of your destination country to see how you can be covered as a foreign resident.

Many countries provide government-sponsored health care that's inexpensive, accessible, and just as good as what you get in the states, or you may want to buy a policy through medibroker.com or bupa-global.com.

Also know that most people who retire abroad eventually

return to the U.S., so experts recommend paying your Medicare Part B premiums. If you drop and resume Part B, or delay initial enrollment, you'll pay a 10 percent premium penalty for every 12-month period you weren't enrolled.

Housing: Buying a home in a foreign country can be complicated, so it's almost always better to rent first until you're sure you want to permanently reside there.

Money matters:

Opening or maintaining a bank account abroad can also be difficult. You may have to establish a checking account with an institution that has international reach like Citibank or maintain a U.S. bank account that you can access online. Claiming your Social Security benefits, however, should not be a problem as they offer direct deposit to almost every country in the world. See ssa.gov/international/payments.html.

Taxes: You also need to research tax rules in your prospective countries and be aware that even if you're living in another country, as a U.S. citizen you'll still most likely need to file an annual U.S. tax return – see irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p54.pdf.

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.

History from the News Archives

New insurance office

10 Years Ago

Feb. 12, 2013

RICK L. BUSSLER,

PUBLISHER

Four-year-old Rachel Lamison of Medford was one lucky little girl this past Friday afternoon. Along with dozens of other families throughout the day, Rachel got go to the Medford McDonald's re-opening and enjoy the celebrations marking the end of a major remodeling project. To her delight, Ronald McDonald was there bringing smiles to folks of all ages. Ronald McDonald took a few moments to sit down with Lamison and compare feet. Lamison's small feet didn't quite measure up to Ronald's gigantic feet, but it provided some giggles for her.

Sheriff's deputy Darrin Helget thought he was going to give a presentation to the Exchange Club of Steele County on Friday Feb. 7. "I thought my family was here just to watch the presentation," Helget said. He did eventually give that presentation, but that was after he was awarded the honor of being the Exchange Club of Steele County Peace Officer of the Year. "I was set up by chief deputy Hanson," Helget chuckled. Rachel Grunklee, president of the Exchange Club of Steele County, introduced Steele County commissioner Bruce Kubicek and Steele County Sheriff Lon Thiele. Thiele explained when he was nominated as sheriff, he would no longer be able to head up the POR (Predator Offender Registration.) He went on to explain that Helget stepped up and has done a wonderful job running the POR on top of his normal duties. His wife, Mary, and three sons Greg, 14, Jack, 9, and Kevin, 7 were all in attendance to see Helget receive this honor. "I was surprised and had no idea. This is a great honor," Helget said.

20 Years Ago

Feb. 11, 2003

ELSIE SLINGER,

PUBLISHER

Gary Tashima, Ashley Masching, and Elisa Ingvalson earned the right to go to the state competition by earning the Runner-Up spot at the section finals on January 27, 2003, in Pine Island. Both the First Place and the Runner-up teams go on to the state competition, which is hosted



FILE PHOTO

Kim Strand, an agent and part owner of the Farmers & Merchants Insurance Company, stands in front of its new location at 607 E. Main, Blooming Prairie in February 1993. The office is located on the east side of the O'Connor tax building.

by Augsburg College. The Minnesota Music Listening Contest is sponsored and administered by Minnesota Public Radio. Schools compete in teams of three. Blooming Prairie has two teams this year. With four of the six members graduating, there is plenty of room for any newcomers who are interested in next year.

Blooming Prairie High School senior Lynn Chheang signed a Division II letter of intent to play football at the Concordia-St. Paul College recently. Lynn is one of several local athletes that have gained scholarships at colleges – the most recent was Kyle Verley last year, signing on with Concordia as well. Chheang may be playing wide receiver or running kick returns as early as next fall for his college team.

50 Years Ago

Feb. 14, 1973

VICTOR, VERNON

& VRYLE KREJCI,

PUBLISHERS

Duane L Schaar is now the newest member of the Blooming Prairie police force, succeeding Ken Halliday who submitted his resignation to the Village Council last week. Officer Schaar, a native of Buffalo, MN, served as a member of the Madison County Sheriff's Department in Huntsville, AL, and was also a member of the U.S. Army, receiving his discharge in December of last year. Since that time, he has resided in Minneapolis. Schaar, 22, his wife, Linda, and daughter, Jennifer, have already moved to Blooming Prairie.

Pledges and contributions for the Owatonna FFA's dairy judging trip to Wales received a substantial boost last week. The Steele County Exchange Club became one of the first contributors with a donation of \$250. Warren Iversen, general manager of the Blooming Prairie Production Credit Association and treasurer of the Exchange Club is pictured making the healthy donation to this worthy cause. The drive is to make \$3,000 to send the Owatonna FFA dairy judging team to the International contest in Wales.

75 Years Ago

Feb. 12, 1948

FRANK KREJCI,

PUBLISHER

Blooming Prairie's American Legion and Auxiliary will join the Minnesota Legion Memorial Heart Fund campaign, in which the entire nation is taking part. The Kick-off radio broadcast is set for Saturday, February 14th, at 9 p.m. over Station

WCCO, Minneapolis. The broadcast will be the signal to start towards that \$500,000 goal and "sock" America's No. 1 killer – heart disease. Remember the time and date and be sure to tell your friends. Blooming Prairie's Legion and its Auxiliary members plan on holding a public fund raising event to help combat heart disease. Watch for date and further announcement.

Residents of Steele County were thanked today by James E. Olsen, local chairman of the 1948 March of Dimes, for their all-out support of the recent fund-raising drive of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis and its chapter here. "The people of Ellendale gave freely of their time, effort and money to ensure the success of the March of Dimes," Mr. J. E. Olsen said. "They realized the need of keeping up this fight against infantile paralysis, and they responded nobly." Mr. Olsen expressed deep appreciation to the volunteers on the various March of Dimes committees in the county and praised the civic and fraternal organizations for their wholehearted cooperation during the 1948 March of Dimes.

Owatonna Photo News

31 Years Ago

Feb. 13, 1992

TOM SHEA,

PUBLISHER

The Owatonna Business and Professional Women's Club has chosen Judy Kroke, Director of Wee Pals Child Care Center, to be their 1992 winner of the Triple A Woman Award. Kroke was presented the award Feb. 11 at the Owatonna Country Club. The award honors a BPW member who has distinguished themselves in their careers, communities, and their local BPW organization. The criteria for this award is being involved in BPW activities and accomplishments, career achievement, assistance to women, community involvement and efforts toward the Equal Rights Amendment. Kroke will now move on to district competition on Sat., March 28, and then to state competition held during the 1992 BPW convention on April 2 in Austin.

The Owatonna Indian Wrestlers defeated Mankato West 41-9, Tuesday at the OHS gym, and captured outright possession of the Big Nine Wrestling Championship, their second since 1968 when Owatonna dominated Big Nine wrestling. Tuesday the Indians won 11 of 13 individual matches, including a 1-0 decision by Mark Motl in the 145 division and Greg Karstens 13-4 decision in the 189 bracket to remain undefeated for the year.

Open Arms Suicide Prevention Program

- Pancake Breakfast -

Pancakes, French Toast, Scrambled or Fried Eggs, Sausage Links, Juice, Coffee, Milk

8:00 A.M. until 12:00 P.M.

Sunday, February 26, 2023

VFW Hall, Owatonna, MN

\$8.00 advance - \$9.00 at door - Under 5 free

DON'T miss out on Times THIS WEEK!
The Steele County Times is available at the following locations:

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Casey's
Lerberg's
Grocery Store



SHINING KNIGHT
LEYTEN
2nd Grade
PARENTS: Jacob & Heather Miller



SHINING KNIGHT
COEN
Kindergarten
PARENTS: Tony & Jennifer Malepsy

“Leyten is a great Shining Knight for our class! She is a very responsible, organized, thoughtful and enjoys every minute of learning. She always does her very best work and goes above and beyond. She is a considerate friend to all and loves to help out. She lives her faith each day showing kindness for others. Leyten is a very creative students with great leadership skills. Keep up the good work Leyten!”

“Coen is a true Shining Knight! He comes to school excited and ready to learn each day. He tries his absolute best in everything hedeoes and is never afraid to try something new. He goes above and beyond to make sure others are included and feel welcome. Coen is often the first one to help a friend in need. He is a true leader - even when noe one is watching. Coen's smile and positive attitude light up our kindergarten classroom each and every day. Congratulations Coen! We are so proud of you!”

WAS NOMINATED BY MRS. HAARSTAD THIS FEATURE WAS NOMINATED BY MRS. CHOUDEK

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BLOTTER
SPOTLIGHT

Domestic: Owatonna Police responded to a domestic disturbance in the 700 block of Linn Ave. SW at 11:43 p.m. on Feb. 12. They took a subject into custody.

Man faces felony for ‘unlawful voting’

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

A man accused of voting more than once in the same election has been charged with a felony.

Kyle Robert Furniss, 29, of Owatonna, faces one count of election day act-unlawful voting. His first appearance is set for March 23 in Steele County District Court.

Authorities learned of the allegation about a month after the Nov. 8 General Election. A detective reviewed paperwork provided by the Steele County Auditor’s Office.

The documents included a signed absentee ballot form received by the office on Nov. 3, as well as a completed voter registration application dated Nov. 8 and signed by Furniss, the report says.

The application indicates he voted that day in person in Ward 5, Precinct 1.

The complaint says Furniss had never voted before; his wife registered him for an absentee ballot without his knowledge. Furniss reportedly told the detective his wife wasn’t around when he filled it out, and she probably mailed it in for him.

Furniss said a friend was excited about the election and encouraged him to vote; he went “down the street” to the church and voted in person, the report says.

He told the officer he “didn’t put together” the absentee ballot and the Election Day voting. When he got home from the polls, the complaint says, his wife told him it was illegal.

Two Owatonna men faced similar charges after the 2020 election; both of those cases were ultimately dismissed.

Local woman hurt in crash on I-35

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

An Owatonna woman was injured late last week after the car she was driving struck a guardrail, then was hit by a semi-truck.

According to the Minnesota State Patrol report, Marsha Marie Edwards, 42, was driving north on Interstate 35 Friday morning about 6:15 a.m. when her vehicle hit a bridge deck guardrail at Minnesota Highway 21 near Faribault.

After the impact, her car collided with a northbound semi that was driven by Brett Norman Anderson, 35, of Fort Dodge, Iowa.

Edwards was taken to Allina Health Faribault Medical Center for injuries that were described in the report as not life-threatening.

Anderson was uninjured; both drivers were wearing their seat belts, the report says.

In addition to the highway patrol, the Faribault Police Department, Faribault Fire Department, North Ambulance, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation all responded to the scene.

COURT NEWS Steele County

The following case was heard in Steele County District Court the week of Feb. 6 with Judge Karen R. Duncan presiding: Maura R. Cory, 32, Minneapolis, previously appeared and was convicted of felony possession of burglary tools and gross misdemeanor financial transaction card fraud. Cory was sentenced to \$299, 19 days in county jail, obtain and maintain employment, no alcohol or controlled substance use, do not enter liquor establishments, no possession of firearms, chemical dependency evaluation, psychological evaluation, cognitive skill training, gambling assessment and 3 years of supervised probation. The following misdemeanors and petty misdemeanors were heard in Steele County District Court the week of Feb. 6 – 12:

BLOOMING PRAIRIE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Mohamed A. Abbas, 33, Burnsville, speeding, \$125; William R. Behne, 23, Owatonna, speeding, \$115; Iwalani P. Beltran, 18, Aiea, HI, speeding, \$115; Kaylee A. Eggers, 25, Austin, revoked license and no insurance, \$475; Ishmail Kamara, 20, Coon Rapids, speeding, \$125; Kyla J. Kulow, 23, McIntire, IA, possession of marijuana and DWI, stay of adjudication, \$75, 1 day in county jail, no alcohol or controlled substance use, do not enter liquor establishments, therapy, obtain permission to leave the state, 40 hours of community service and 2 years of supervised probation;

Anthony J. Moore, 48, Faribault, revoked license, \$275; Malinda C. Robbins, 41, Austin, expired tabs and no insurance, \$305; Andrea L. Russell, 25, Mankato, expired tabs and no insurance, \$305; Jacquelyn J. Ryks, 32, Austin, revoked license and no insurance, \$475; Keshia E. Schoppers, 37, Austin, passing violation, stay of adjudication, \$125 and 6 months of supervised probation; Michael M. Silva, 43, Hollandale, stop sign, stay of adjudication, \$30 and 6 months of unsupervised monitoring without conviction; Melissa M. Wendt, 37, Owatonna, DWI, \$400, attend MADD impact panel, substance abuse subtle screening inventory and 1 year of supervised probation.

MN STATE PATROL ROCHESTER

Wycliffe K. Alukwe, 39, Bloomington, speeding and no insurance, \$315; Maxx J. Beeler, 19, Inver Grove Heights, speeding, \$135; Blake D. Bladine, 20, Faribault, speeding, \$125; Matthew F. Bluhm, 52, Austin, illegal u-turn, \$125; David H. Cabrera Narvaez, 28, Belmond, IA, speeding, \$115; Jose M. Capetillo Martinez, 20, Kiel, WI, speeding, \$215; Jena L. Erickson, 36, Owatonna, hands free violation, \$125; Anthony L. Esquivel, 24, Claremont, revoked license and no insurance, \$475; Jay S. Gorecki, 47, Rolling Meadows, IL, speeding, \$135; Roseline G. Gray, 43, Clive, IA, speeding, \$215; Anas A. Haji, 19, Owatonna, speeding, \$215; Hanad A. Hayle, 34, Owatonna, speeding, stay of adjudication, \$115 and 6 months of unsupervised probation; Drake

A. Hendren, 24, Lakeville, speeding, \$135; Rashida K. Hewitt, 41, West Des Moines, IA, speeding, stay of adjudication, \$115 and 6 months of unsupervised monitoring without conviction; Malachi J. Holmgren, 23, Medford, speeding, \$125; Samantha R. Kamp, 24, Waterloo, IA, speeding, \$215; Hunter R. Koch, 24, Fort Collins, CO, speeding, \$135; Aaron J. Kocher, 43, Apple Valley, suspended license, \$275; Martin L. Kuo, 30, New Hope, speeding, stay of adjudication, \$115 and 6 months of unsupervised monitoring without conviction; Pa M. Kut, 29, Kansas City, KS, speeding, \$135; James D. Lafon, 61, Des Moines, IA, no license, \$175; Ismael Mendoza Lopez, 28, Austin, TX, speeding and no license, \$235; Christina M. Moore, 36, Owatonna, speeding, \$115; Osman S. Mungani, 52, Owatonna, speeding, stay of adjudication, \$115 and 6 months of unsupervised monitoring without conviction; Khalif Y. Mursali, 43, Owatonna, speeding, \$115; Oluwaseun H. Mustapha, 32, Owatonna, speeding, \$100; Daniel A. Neuwirth, 55, St. Cloud, speeding, \$115; Sabrina M. Peterson, 51, Minneapolis, speeding and child passenger restraint system violation, \$165; Raidyn V. Rusher, 20, Algona, IA, speeding, stay of adjudication, \$100 and 6 months of unsupervised monitoring without conviction; Luis A. Santanasolis, 25, Fort Smith, AR, speeding and no license, \$315; Patrick J. Shannon, 53, Marion, IA, speeding, \$125; Jacob A. Sparrey, 20, Shakopee, speeding, stay of adjudication, \$100 and 6 months of unsuper-

vised monitoring without conviction; Alexander D. Stenzel, 20, Owatonna, speeding, \$135; Brandy Y. Taylor, 36, St. Paul, speeding, \$135; Rosa Velasquez Bonilla, 36, Houston, TX, speeding, \$215; Abel I. Velasquez, 19, Owatonna, speeding and no license, \$375; Jason H. Vorlicek, 50, Ellendale, careless driving, stay of adjudication, \$175, 10 hours of community service and 1 year of unsupervised probation; Edward D. Ward, 72, Kasson, seat belt, \$100; Hayden M. Zeigler, 23, Mankato, speeding, \$135.

OWATONNA POLICE DEPARTMENT

Brandy L. Almany, 44, Waterville, theft, stay of adjudication, \$200 and 1 year of supervised probation; Sara A. Broughten, 36, West Concord, speeding, \$115; Troy R. Chavez, 58, Owatonna, DWI, \$475, Ignition Interlock and 1 year of supervised probation; Quinn R. Christenson, 31, Owatonna, stop sign, \$125; Dillon R. Dale, 27, Blooming Prairie, speeding, stay of adjudication, \$115 and 6 months of unsupervised monitoring without conviction; Ferdinand L. Davis, 35, Owatonna, domestic assault, 90 days in county jail; Eli J. Devoss, 23, Owatonna, DWI, \$400, do not enter liquor establishments, no alcohol or controlled substance use and 1 year of supervised probation; Manuel Garcia, 38, Owatonna, theft, \$905.60 and 1 year of supervised probation; Rudy Gomez Jr., 41, Medford, DWI, \$200, do not enter liquor establishments, no alcohol or controlled substance use and 1 year of supervised probation; Adam S. Heim, 26, Owatonna, DWI, \$400, 1 day in county jail, substance abuse subtle screening inventory, no alcohol or controlled substance use, do not enter liquor establishments and 1 year of supervised probation; Christene M. Hettinga, 53, Owatonna, driving through barricade and expired tabs, \$155; Darron T. Jackson, 41, Owatonna, revoked license, \$275; Mark J. Johnson, 25, Faribault, revoked license and no insurance, \$475; Margaret A. Koan, 62, Owatonna, stop sign, \$125; Jakob R. Kruckeberg, 22, Inver Grove Heights, invalid license and speeding, \$235; Emilio D. Mendoza Alvarez, 26, Owatonna, revoked license, \$275; Annette R. Montelongo, 18, Owatonna, theft, stay of adjudication, \$50, 5 hours of community service and 6 months of unsupervised monitoring without conviction; William E. Mower, 93, Owatonna, failure to yield, stay of adjudication, \$175 and 1 year of supervised probation; Dawn M. Needham, 52, Owatonna, disorderly conduct, \$375

and 1 year of supervised probation; Carlos R. Perez, 23, Owatonna, school bus violation, stay of adjudication, \$200 and 1 year of supervised probation; Je’Meze C. Powell, 21, Owatonna, permit violation, \$125; Kathy J. Quam, 44, Owatonna, stop sign, \$125; Fransisco J. Rodriguez Guterrez, 18, Medford, invalid license, speeding and no insurance, stay of adjudication, \$200 and 1 year of supervised probation; Lucas J. Schwartz, 32, Cloquet, failure to notify owner of collision, \$375; Shane M. Smith, 45, Waseca, revoked license, \$275; Skylar S. Standke, 29, Sioux Falls, SD, revoked license, \$275; Nicholas S. Steward, 40, Rochester, theft, \$50, 4 days in county jail and 1 year of supervised probation; Randy L. Stull, 42, Owatonna, no insurance, \$275; Adam P. Stumpf, 25, Owatonna, revoked license, \$375 and 1 year of supervised probation; Anthony J. Thostenson, 29, Owatonna, sell nicotine to minor, \$125; Pamela M. Trachsel, 64, Owatonna, speeding, \$125; Judea C. Tyson, 21, Owatonna, no insurance, \$275; Medina E. Valdez, 35, Rochester, revoked license, \$275; David J. Vizina, 39, Owatonna, carry pistol without permit and DWI, \$100, no alcohol or controlled substance use, no possession of firearms and 1 year of supervised probation.

STEELE COUNTY SHERIFF’S OFFICE

David Barajas, 30, Medford, revoked license, \$275; Ricardo Esquivel, 18, Owatonna, speeding, \$215; Ana L. Garcia, 31, Medford, speeding, \$115; Israel Garcia, 49, Waseca, speeding, \$115; Noah C. Martinez, 20, North Branch, disorderly conduct, \$50 and 30 days in county jail; Reinaldo Quesada Lopez, 47, Hope, revoked license, \$275; Richard R. Rodriguez, 33, Medford, cancelled license, \$100, 1 day in county jail and 1 year of supervised probation; Paul J. Ulrich, 35, Owatonna, speeding, \$115; Alex J. Wroblewski, 32, Ellendale, revoked license and hands free violation, \$325.

POLICE BLOTTER Steele County

OWATONNA POLICE

Feb. 10
Warrant: Officer made a warrant arrest in the 600 block of Bridge St. W. at 12:54 p.m.
Theft: Officer took a theft report in the 1100 block of Frontage Rd. W. at 3:29 p.m.
Missing Person: Police assisted with a missing person in the 200 block of Fremont St. E. at 6:18 p.m.
Shoplifting: At 6:31 p.m.,

a shoplifting incident occurred in the 1100 block of Frontage Rd. W.
Assault: Officers responded to an assault in the 800 block of Escalade Lane SE at 8:09 p.m.
Feb. 11
DWI: Officer made a DWI arrest at 26th St. NE and Kenyon Road at 12:27 a.m.
Feb. 12
Suspicion: Police responded to suspicious activity in the 300 block of School St. W. at 1:15 a.m. They issued a citation.
Warrant: Officer made a warrant arrest in the 400 block of North St. W. at 6:19 a.m.
DWI: Police made a DWI arrest at 18th St. SE and Cedar Ave. S. at 9:01 a.m.
Juvenile: Police received a juvenile complaint from the 500 block of Academy St. E. at 1:22 p.m.
Feb. 13
Fraud: Officer took a fraud report in the 200 block of Linden Ave. NE at 1:04 p.m.
Theft: Police received a theft report from the 100 block of Vine St. E. at 2:42 p.m.
Fight: Officers responded to a fight in the 400 block of Cedar Ave. N. at 4:43 p.m.
Feb. 14
Restraining Order: Police responded to a restraining order violation in the 500 block of State Ave. NW at 1 a.m. They took a subject into custody.
Domestic: Officers responded to domestic disturbances in the 1900 block of Hartle Ave. SE at 9:31 a.m. and the 1400 block of Autumn Dr. SE at 8:42 p.m.
Theft: Officer took a theft report in the 1100 block of Frontage Rd. W. at 10:47 a.m.
Burglary: Police began a burglary investigation in the 3300 block of Hoffman Dr. NW at 11:57 a.m.
Arrest: Police arrested a motorist during a traffic stop at Rose St. E. and Pine Ave. NE at 2:39 p.m.
Feb. 15
Hit and Run: At 5:09 a.m., a hit and run accident occurred in the 3900 block of Cabela Dr. NW.
Fight: Police arrested a juvenile following a fight in the 300 block of Main St. E. at 11:43 a.m.
DWI: Officer made a DWI arrest at Grove Ave. S. and Academy St. E. at 1:40 p.m.
Theft: Officer took a theft report in the 1100 block of Frontage Rd. W. at 2:13 p.m.
Feb. 16
Shoplifting: Shoplifting incidents occurred in the 1200 block of 21st Ave. NW at 8:01 a.m. and the 1100 block of Frontage Rd. W. at 10:44 a.m.
Disturbance: Officers responded to a disturbance in the 500 block of 15th St. NE at 2:33 p.m.
Warrant: Police arrested a juvenile for an outstanding warrant in the 1800 block of Cedar Valley Dr.
See **BLOTTER** on **A12** ▶

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Nelson hits 100 after life on farm

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

Mervin Nelson has taken the advice of a woman named Ebby Halliday – and he doesn’t even know it.

Halliday, who was born in 1911 and was known as the “First Lady of Real Estate,” offered this advice on her 101st birthday: Don’t smoke, don’t drink, and don’t retire.

Well, two out of three isn’t bad.

“I smoked a little before I was married,” Nelson said, “but then my wife said, ‘I don’t want my kids smoking.’ So I quit.”

“I never drank, though; I was kind of a teetotaler, I guess,” he said. “Not too many of them around.”



Mervin Nelson, who spent his life farming, would rather be playing pinochle or 500, but takes part in a game of bingo on a recent afternoon at Heather Haus. Nelson turns 100 years old today and will celebrate with a white cake with raspberry filling.

And retire?

“I was a farmer all my life. I was still combining corn when I was 95,” said Nelson, who will turn 100 today.

His son, Brian Nelson, confirmed it.

“He combined my 700-800 acres of corn for me that year, when he was 95.”

Of course, things are a little different now: “When I first started, I picked by hand,” Mervin said.

He was born – literally – and raised on a farm near Walnut, Iowa, on Feb. 22, 1923.

“I was born in Mom and Dad’s farmhouse,” Nelson said. “I was delivered by my mom’s older sister. She was pretty special. She took care of older people all her life, but she delivered me.”

He played basketball

and baseball at Audubon High School, and farmed with his family in Iowa until 1945, when they moved to a farm north of Blooming Prairie.

“Land was a little cheaper, so we moved here,” Nelson said.

About 10 years after moving to Minnesota, he met Berniece Duken, “from the little town of Brownsdale.” Brian urged his father to talk about how the two met.

“Well, she was in nurse’s training in Rochester,” Mervin said of the woman everyone called “Bernie.”

His son jumped in: “And he had his fingers caught in a corn picker, and they had to take two of his fingers off – and she was one of your nurses, right?”

“No, I had them off way before that,” Nelson said.

He went on to say he’d been working alone when the accident happened, “but my dad was hauling corn in and heard me hollering. He came over and shut it off.”

The picker took all the skin off, though the fingers remained attached.

Doctors in Owatonna removed the index and middle finger of his right hand, “bandaged it up and sent me home,” Nelson said.

Brian looked surprised.

“Oh, I always thought that was how you met her,” he said.

The real story seemed private, as Mervin flashed his ever-present smile.

“There was always lots of girls in Rochester,” he said. “Some of us would go over there, and I just kind of happened to meet her – but I already had my fingers off when I met her.”

The pair married in December 1957 and had three sons, raising them on the family farm north of Blooming Prairie. She finished



Mervin Nelson turns 100 today – Feb. 22, 2023. He was born and raised near Walnut, Iowa, and moved to a farm north of Blooming Prairie with his family in 1945.

her nursing degree, but stayed home with the boys until they were in junior high.

Bernie eventually went back to work and became one of the first RNs hired at Prairie Manor Care Center.

Meanwhile, Nelson farmed about 500 acres and raised more than 100 head of pigs.

“That’s pretty small, nowadays,” he said.

The couple were married nearly 60 years before Bernie’s death in 2017.

Brian revisited the corn-picking accident.

“So, were you 30, do you think? Five years before you got married?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Nelson said, laughing, “because I remember my mom was afraid I wouldn’t get a wife. If I’d done this now ... and really, not that long ago, the (Mayo) Clinic told me they could do a lot for this yet.”

So is he right-handed?

“I was,” he said, still laughing. “I pretty much eat with my left

“It’s altogether different from when I was growing up to what it is now.”

Merv Nelson
New Centurion

hand now. I write with my right hand, but I don’t know if you can read it or not.”

His sense of humor and positive attitude are never-failing, said Lois Nelson, Mervin’s daughter-in-law.

“He still drives his car; he’s always happy and smiling,” she said. “He’s just a gem.”

Still, he’s had his share of sorrow, losing not only his wife, but a son in 2009 and a grandson in 2019.

He contracted COVID and was quarantined, “but I really wasn’t sick with it. In the past, I’ve had colds a lot worse than COVID.”

The corn picker accident wasn’t his only traumatic injury, either. He fell down the stairs at his farmhouse, breaking his neck.

“He always had his phone in his pocket – except when he fell,” Lois Nelson said. “But he got himself up and called Brian, who was out in the machine shed.”

Mervin knew it was bad: “I didn’t know the damage, but I told Brian, ‘I’ve got to go see a doctor. I don’t know what I did, but it needs to be checked out.’”

Once again, he went to Owatonna, where the doctors quickly transferred him to Rochester.

“So I got my second helicopter ride ever,” Nelson said.

The first? “The celebration of Blooming Prairie,” he said of his flight during one of the city’s annual July Fourth activities.

His particular injury, doctors told the family, See NELSON on A9 ►

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Long-time cook returns to Owatonna Elks Club

BY JONI HUBRED
NEWS EDITOR

Around 14 years ago, Lois Brandel hung up her apron at the Owatonna Elks Club.

She had worked in the kitchen there for 20 years, cooking up meals and snacks for club members and anyone else who stopped by the Lodge at 126 E. Vine St. Brandel was part of the group that put together the Elks' famous Sunday brunch fundraisers.

And she might have kept cooking, but her husband of 45 years, Roland, had been diagnosed with Parkinson's. Lois cared for him at home until he recently entered a nursing home.

Then, a couple of things happened. The Elks needed her help. And she met Julie Bruggemeier.

"One of the girls (in the kitchen) was having surgery, so they asked if would come in and help out," Brandel said. "I loved it."

Bruggemeier, an Elks member, said she and her group of friends do a lot of volunteer work in the



Lois Brandl, left, settled into her lawn chair last year as members of the Owatonna Elks served up Reuben sandwiches in the club's new trailer. Brandl remembers when members built the first stand at the Steele County Free Fair.

less teens, volunteering to put a basket together. Bruggemeier and her friends started including Brandel in their activities, like playing bingo at the club on Thursday nights.

alone during the fair and decided to do something about it.

"I told her to grab a lawn chair and sit by the Reuben stand," she said. "You wouldn't believe the people who stopped to say hello. It was like Lois Brandel Day."

"It was fun to see the people going by that I knew," Brandel said.

With a wide smile, she added, "Of course, the Elks always has the best Reubens."

While she may live alone now, Brandel isn't by herself much. She joins in activities with Bruggemeier and her friends and is included in their group texts. They've become like family to her—and the feeling is very mutual.

"I've always said the most precious thing I can give anyone is my time," Bruggemeier said, "and that's what you get from Lois."



Lois Brandl, front, and Julie Bruggemeier have become fast friends as members of the Owatonna Elks Club. The two share a love for volunteering and getting things done.

"I'm one that likes to get things done."

Lois Brandel
School Board Chair

community. When she met Lois, she found a kindred spirit—someone who pitches in whenever and however she can.

"I'm one that likes to get things done," Brandel said.

She quickly joined a committee for a Kentucky Derby party fundraiser benefitting home-

And then there was the Reuben stand incident.

For years, the Owatonna Elks has sold the sandwiches at the Steele County Free Fair. Brandel was there to see the first-ever Reuben stand, built by club members.

Bruggemeier knew Brandel was home

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Merv Nelson carries his flip phone with him everywhere – except the one time he needed it. He fell down some steps at his farmhouse and broke his neck but was able to get himself to his phone and call for help. Nelson made a complete recovery and now lives at Heather Haus. He turns 100 today.

Nelson hits 100 after life on farm

◀ **NELSON** from A7 often “either kills people or paralyzes them,” Brian Nelson said. “I could still walk, but I wasn’t supposed to, I guess,” Mervin said. “I had a neck brace for 12 weeks, and I just healed finally.” He spent a few weeks at Prairie Manor, doing therapy, then transitioned to Heather Haus. “I knew I couldn’t keep staying out at the farm,” he said. “It was hard out there.” So, after more than 75 years north of town, Nelson decided to stay in town.

“All I do is walk to the table and eat my meals with ... let’s see now ... 14 ladies,” he said. “I’m the only man in the whole place here. They’re a pretty good bunch; I get along with all of them.” Nelson will be the man of the hour at a small gathering on his birthday; Brian and Lois will be there, as will his youngest son, Bruce, and his wife Amy, and his daughter-in-law Rozann. He has six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Nelson has just one

wish, he said: “Just to keep walking around.” He’s in good health and uses a cane but said “sometimes I cheat and walk without it.” In a world that looks very little like it did 100 years ago, Nelson continues to find the positive. “It’s altogether different from when I was growing up to what it is now,” he said. “When I was growing up, we didn’t have any money. That’s the reason I was born out at the farm, I guess – but I never remember going hungry in my life.”

SMIF grant jump-starts small-biz leadership academy

◀ **SMIF** from A3 learning needs, we often reevaluate to see if there are other things in the organization that we can let go of, so we have room for more programming.” As they work through the design and development phase, the plan is to launch the

instructional side of the program this fall. Still, said McDermott-Johnson, “in many ways, this project has been driven by the students. As a staff and community, we’ve jumped in to see how we can pull all of those resources together. That’s part of what makes

community ed unique: It’s a reflection of the folks in our community. “My perfect vision is, the students who begin with us eventually become our instructors and our mentors,” she said. “No better way to learn than from the people who have walked the journey.”

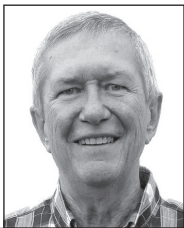
STATE BOUND

◀ **STATE** from A1 knee in training leading up to the Section 1AA meet, Owatonna was forced to turn to some reserve athletes to step into big roles. According to Owatonna head coach Evan Moe, everyone on the team performed up to the best of their ability, which was evident by the Huskies’ winning point total of 145.325. Owatonna took first place as a team in the beam, floor and vault enroute to the section title and earned its third consecutive trip to the state meet. With third- and sixth-place finishes on the team’s resume the past two seasons Moe and his squad will look to take down the coveted state title and bring Owatonna home its first-ever gymnastics state title.

Medford Wrestling After missing out on the state team tournament a season ago with a loss in the section championship, Medford and head coach Dennis Whitman were not going to be denied in 2023. After disposing of Blue Earth Area and WEM/JWP to get to the championship dual, the Tigers fought in a tough matchup against Lake Crystal-Wellcome Memorial (LCWM). The Knights went up 12-3 early, but a hot streak sparked by Medford’s Tommy Elwood, Evan Schweisthal and Charley Elwood turned the tides soon after. Medford continued to pull away late by accruing a 30-24 lead going into the 220-pound matchup, but a pin by the Knights in the penultimate match tied the score at 30-30. As the heavyweights

strolled out to the mat, Mason Degrood held the weight of a state title trip on his shoulders. His dual against LCWM’s Dietrich Rosin saw Rosin take an early lead and nearly end the match early with a pin before Degrood flipped the switch and took control. After nearly allowing Rosin to sink in a cradle and trailing 6-4 due to Rosin earning two near-fall points, Degrood found an escape-takedown sequence that Medford fans will surely not forget anytime soon. The electric response to the cradle attempt saw Degrood slip out, catch his opponent off balance and score the takedown for a perfectly executed three-point sequence. Degrood earned a 7-6 lead from the sequence and never looked back to give Medford its section title plaque and a trip to the state team tournament. See sports section for additional coverage.

President Jimmy Carter is truer than life



Reflections
HOWARD LESTRUD

Flashing a wide, toothy grin, the 39th President of the United States, Jimmy Carter was one of my favorite presidents of the U.S. President Carter, at age 98, has chosen the favorable way to fade away in history. He has entered hospice. Carter actually became a more popular president when stepped out of the presidency. He was regarded as soft by many critics. Carter tried unsuccessfully to rescue the hostages held by Iran. Fourteen lives were lost. Carter was known as the author of six books. President Carter was totally behind diplomatic relations. James Earl Carter Jr. is an American retired politician who served as the 39th president of the



JIMMY CARTER

United States. He was born Oct. 1, 1924 in Plains, Ga. President Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter had four children: John William, James Earl III (Chip), and Amy Lynn. He was notable for: Department of Education, Camp David Accords, Torrijos–Carter Treaties and Department of Energy. I saw President Carter in person one time. That was at former Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey’s funeral. He was on the front steps of the Minnesota State Capitol. Other presidents I have covered for various newspapers include: Dwight D. Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Carter created a national energy policy that included conservation, price control, and new technology. Carter brokered the Camp David Accords, and the second round of strategic Arms Limitation Talks. Carter will go down in history as one of the kindest presidents around. Through his faith, he gives his strength. Carter also finds inspiration in the regular folks he meets thanks to the human rights-focused Carter Center he founded and his work with Habitat for Humanity.



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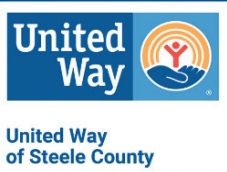


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Financial firm earns top Ameriprise award

Wayne Norrid Wetmore Wealth Management, a private wealth advisory practice of Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC, has earned the Ameriprise Client Experience Award for 2022.

Wayne Norrid Wetmore Wealth Management was honored with this award because of their ability to consistently deliver personalized, goal-based advice and exceptional client service.

Award recipients earned an overall client satisfaction rating equal to or greater than 4.9 out of 5.0 and maintained stellar business results. The award represents an elite group of Ameriprise advisors recognized as leaders for their commitment to making a difference in the lives of their clients.



The Wayne Norrid Wetmore Wealth Management team in Owatonna has earned Ameriprise's Client Experience Award. The team consists of, from left: Jacob Norrid, Christina Wetmore and Brandon Wayne.

As a private wealth advisory practice, Wayne Norrid Wetmore Wealth Management provides financial advice that is anchored in a solid understanding of client needs and expectations and is delivered in one-on-one relationships with their clients. For more information, please contact Brandon Wayne at 507-444-0901 or visit the Ameriprise office at 1850 Austin Rd., Ste.104, Owatonna, MN 55060.

Minnesota to celebrate 7th annual School Bus Driver Appreciation Day

Minnesotans across the state will celebrate the seventh annual School Bus Driver Appreciation Day on Wednesday, Feb. 22.

This large-scale day of appreciation will be realized by school districts, bus organizations and communities hosting a wide range of events, drawing attention to these dedicated professionals and the statewide bus driver shortage.

To recognize this important profession, Gov. Tim Walz has proclaimed Feb. 22 as School Bus Driver Appreciation Day in the state of Minnesota. The I-35W bridge in Minneapolis will also be lit yellow in recognition of School Bus Driver Appreciation Day on the evening of Feb. 21 and into the morning of Feb. 22.

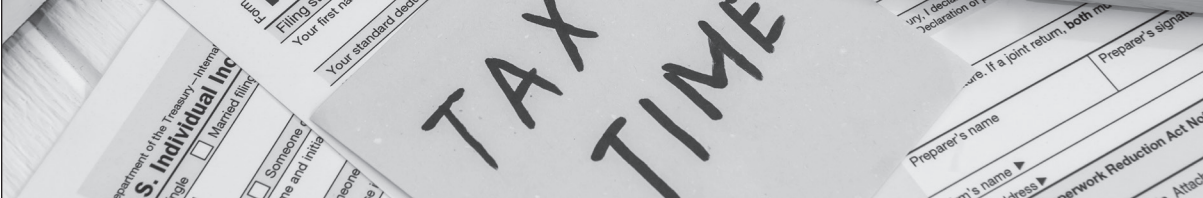
"Minnesota's school bus drivers are in the fabric of our schools and communities. They are often the first adult to greet a student at the start of each school day and the person that ensures each student gets home safely at the end of the day," said Walz. "As a parent and former classroom teacher, I am grateful to Minnesota's school bus drivers for their invaluable contributions to public education and student safety and for their dedication to ensuring our communities are strong, safe, and connected."

The Minnesota School Bus Operators Association (MSBOA) and Minnesota Association of Pupil Transportation (MAPT) first teamed up in 2017 to create School Bus Driver Appreciation Day. This year's event seeks to spark public appreciation for school bus drivers and prompt people to consider school bus driving as a valued, desirable career path.

"From rural country roads to city streets and everything in between, Minnesota school bus drivers are always willing to go the extra mile for our kids," said MSBOA President Bethany Bertram. "Bus drivers are one of the many wonderful professionals who positively impact a student's school experience every day, and we are excited to honor them on School Bus Driver Appreciation Day and call on other Minnesotans to do the same."

School bus drivers make invaluable contributions to public education and their local communities. These professionals safely transport more than 682,000 students to and from school each day throughout the state. Currently, nearly every school district in the state faces a bus driver shortage and is seeking professionals to serve in these fulfilling, flexible jobs.

"Our school bus drivers are facing another challenging year of staff shortages and a very cold and snowy winter, but they are undeterred in their dedication to serving students," said MAPT President John Thomas. "Children are our future, and they need consistent, caring adults in their lives. These professionals give them that stability with a warm greeting in the morning and friendly farewell in the afternoon. We hope that Minnesotans help us recognize the school bus drivers in their communities on Feb. 22 and thank them for consistently showing up for our kids every day."



Taxpayers can now upload more documents to IRS; new online option for 9 notices can help resolve issues faster

WASHINGTON — The Internal Revenue Service announced today that taxpayers who receive certain notices requiring them to send information to the IRS now have the option of submitting their documentation online through IRS.gov.

This new secure step will allow taxpayers or their tax professional to electronically upload documents rather than mailing them in, helping reduce time and effort resolving tax issues.

In this stage of the ongoing effort, nine notices will be available for this feature. This potentially can help more than 500,000 taxpayers each year who receive these notices, which include military personnel serving in combat zone areas and recipients of important credits like the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit.

"This capability is another step forward by the IRS to help taxpayers and improve service," said IRS Acting Commissioner Doug O'Donnell. "This provides immediate benefits to taxpayers, who have nearly instant confirmation that documents were received by the IRS. In turn, this will dramatically speed up the resolution of issues by removing a time-consuming step in the process. This means people can have their issues resolved much faster, including getting refunds to affected taxpayers faster. We will continue to look at improvements like this as we work to transform the IRS following passage of the Inflation Reduction Act last year."

Initially, the online correspondence feature will be available to taxpayers who receive one of nine IRS notices. For the most part, the IRS sends these notices to individual tax filers claiming various tax benefits, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit for low- and moderate-income workers, the Child Tax Credit for families with dependents, the Premium Tax Credit for those who obtain health coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace and members of the military claiming combat zone tax benefits.

Taxpayers receiving these notices can respond securely to IRS online, regardless of whether they have an IRS Online Account.

IRS created the Document Upload Tool

IRS information technology specialists developed a prototype for the Document Upload Tool in 2021. Since then, the IRS has been testing this feature on a limited number of exam-related notices, and 38% of the responses to these notices have used the agency's secure electronic communications rather than traditional mail.

How it works

Language on the notice informs the taxpayer to, "Send us your documents using the Documentation Upload Tool within 30 days from the date of this notice." It includes the link and a unique access code.

The taxpayer can open the link in any browser and then input their unique code, their first and last name and their Social Security, Individual Taxpayer Identification or Employee Identification number.

The taxpayer can then securely upload scans, photos or digital copies of documents (maximum of 15MB per file, up to 40 files).

The taxpayer receives a confirmation that the IRS received their documents, and the IRS employee assigned the case can manage the transmitted documents.

What notices qualify?

Taxpayers who receive one of the following notices with the link and access code can choose to upload their documents:

- CP04, relating to combat zone status.
- CP05A, information request related to a refund.
- CP06 and CP06A, relating to the Premium Tax Credit.
- CP08, relating to the Child Tax Credit.
- CP09, relating to claiming the Earned Income Tax Credit.
- CP75, relating to the EITC.
- CP75a, relating to the EITC.
- CP75d, relating to the EITC and other credits.

Future expansion planned In the coming months and years, the IRS plans to expand this capability to dozens of other notices. In addition, the IRS will offer digital correspondence on a variety of other taxpayer interactions. During live interactions such as phone calls with taxpayers, IRS employees will be able to grant upload access by providing the link and unique access code.

With secure digital correspondence, everybody wins For taxpayers and tax professionals working with the IRS, this new capability reduces the correspondence burden, ensures tax compliance and improves the customer experience. For IRS employees, this reduces paper correspondence, decreases processing time and speeds case resolution.

Source: IRS.gov

Owatonna Schools to receive Youth Skills Training grant

Twelve partnerships across Minnesota, including Owatonna and Faribault, will receive funding to develop and expand programs to offer meaningful career exposure and paid work experience for students 16 years of age and older.

Owatonna Public Schools and Faribault Public Schools are among the partnerships that will be splitting \$1 million in funding. Workforce Development, Inc. serving southeast Minnesota will also receive funding.

The grants are part of the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry's (DLI's) Youth Skills Training (YST) program that was signed into law in 2017 with bipartisan support to create and provide employment training for student learners ages 16 and older in high-growth, high-demand occupations.

"We are thrilled to continue supporting the development of strong partnerships in Minnesota through the Youth Skills Training program. With five years of success to build on, student learners will continue to learn about different industries and participate in safe, meaningful work experiences," said Nicole Blissenbach, DLI commissioner. "Thank you to everyone who has supported this program."

YST grants will be awarded to the following 12 partnerships, which will receive and split \$1 million in funding to be used for programs operating from July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2025. The partnerships will offer safe, meaningful work experience in advanced manufacturing, agriculture, automotive, health care and information technology.

Grants can be used to create programs, recruit students and employers, provide training, transport students and pay for industry-related student certifications. Twenty-five local partnerships throughout the state applied for this sixth round of grants. A seventh round of grant applications will open in winter 2023.

For more information about Youth Skills Training contact Rich Wessels, program manager, at 651-284-5184 or rich.wessels@state.mn.us and visit dli.mn.gov/YST.

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Help is here.

Merxbauer settles into top role at South Central

◀ **MERXBAUER** from A1 ing and advertising to educate the public about what the non-profit organization does for Steele, Waseca and Dodge counties. South Central has served the area since 1964.

“I would like to see us grow in our capacity to serve the community,” said Merxbauer, noting South Central has shifted its focus from the earlier years of doing direct therapy to now offering wide ranging services, including a dual recovery program.

She literally stumbled onto the job last fall. While she was content with her position as deputy director of Olmsted County Housing and Redevelopment Authority in Rochester, she was searching Indeed.com, which is a popular employment website, to make sure a job for her current employer had been listed correctly.

In the course of reviewing the listing, she noticed jobs were popping up for Owatonna and came across the position with South Central.

“I wasn’t looking for a new job,” Merxbauer said. “I accidentally found this position.”

Merxbauer already lived in Owatonna, and she and her husband Eric thought it wouldn’t hurt to apply. “I left a job I loved,” she said. “I kind of had a golden egg over there.”

Merxbauer, 45,

chuckles about how this will be the first time in her professional career that she hasn’t had to commute. Prior to working in Rochester, she had been community development coordinator for the City of Northfield. Her family has lived in Owatonna since 2002.

With an extensive background in social work, most of Merxbauer’s career has been focused on housing. She admits she was not cut out for direct therapy, so she focused on homeless shelters and housing services, which included affordable housing and rental assistance.

“I wanted to save the world, but in a more indirect way,” she said.

Calling herself a nerd, Merxbauer said she gets excited over dealing with policies. She also is known for having high energy and being “annoyingly perky” in her work.

“I don’t sit still well,” she says. “I am a mover and a shaker.”

She began in her new position in November and calls coming to South Central a “good change.” Merxbauer oversees 135 employees with offices in Owatonna, Waseca and Kasson.

Merxbauer points out that South Central functioned as a small business for a long time. However, she says, it’s no longer a small organization and needs to “behave

as a medium-sized business.”

The nonprofit is operated by a board of directors consisting of two county commissioners from each of the counties involved.

“My job is to go out and shout from the rooftops about all the great things we are doing,” Merxbauer said, noting she feels blessed to have walked into an agency that did not need fixing. South Central employs a team of people who are ultimate professionals and do their jobs “amazingly well,” she said.

She refers to South Central as “the region’s best kept secret.” Merxbauer said, “We’re known as the quiet kid on the corner. I want to make the agency more well known in the community.”

She added she will be looking for key partnerships within the community.

Many of the services provided by South Central can’t be found anywhere else in rural Minnesota, according to Merxbauer.

“We want to increase our services and impact to best meet the needs of our community,” she said.

Merxbauer said South Central is a “multi-faceted organization that can assist all members of the family.”

She replaces Gary Hird, who retired last year.



STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

Michele Merxbauer has taken over as director of South Central Human Relations Center in Owatonna. She comes to the agency after focusing on housing in Northfield and Olmsted County for many years.

ABOUT MICHELE MERXBAUER

Career: Director of South Central Human Relations Center
Previous work: City of Northfield and Olmsted County
Hometown: Redwood Falls
College: Bachelor's degree in social work from Concordia Moorhead and master's degree in public administration and policy development from Augsburg
Family: Married to Eric; two children: Grace and Fisher
Community Involvement: Special Olympics and Owatonna Baseball Association
Hobbies: Flower gardening and outdoors— camping, fishing and hiking

The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

ACROSS

1 Blows away

5 Kind of therapy

10 Stomach woe

14 Barn topper

15 Long-necked wader

16 Urgent request

17 Priceless

19 Pilot products

20 Doer of do's

21 Exit, as a 747

23 Old anesthetic

25 Kidney-related

26 Kitchen fixture

29 Warren denizens

32 Indiana hoopsters

34 Hammer part

35 Car nut

38 Public praise

40 Pass away

42 "___ rang?"

43 Pre-weekend shout

45 Addams Family uncle

46 Pirate treasure

49 Kind of whale

50 Word with way or well

52 Tightly packed

54 Colorful marble

57 Work boot features

61 Life preserver?

62 Easy to reach

64 Ice ___

65 2% alternative

66 Natural soother

67 ___ for oneself

DOWN

68 Humble

69 Off-color

1 Hertz rival

2 Long for

3 Coveter's emotion

4 Death Valley is below it

5 "Pipe down!"

6 Warming device

7 Planet, poetically

8 Hard-hearted

9 On bended ___

10 Small Java program

11 Fresh start

12 Reddish dye

13 Studio stand

18 English major's field

22 Disney's Ariel and Aurora

24 Jay-Z's genre

26 Fix, at the vet's

27 Tex-Mex snack

28 Line of work

30 Four-poster, e.g.

31 Carne, in some chili

33 Aries or Libra

36 Sure anagram

37 Start of an idea

39 Start for way or wife

41 Out of the ordinary

44 Spoon-___

47 On the market, as a house

48 Pass on, say

50 Knock, with "at"

51 China setting

53 Like a busybody

55 Ketch's cousin

56 Reverberate

58 Up to the task

59 Farm machine

60 Bird feeder filler

63 Pasture grazer

Solution to Crossword:

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

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PUBLIC SAFETY

◀ **BLOTTER** from A6
NW at 7:20 p.m.
Suspicion: Officers responded to suspicious activity in the 1100 block of Frontage Rd. W. at 10:36 p.m. They took a subject into custody.

STEELE COUNTY SHERIFF

Feb. 12
Burglary: Deputies began a burglary investigation in the 16100 block of Highway 218 in Blooming Prairie Township at 2:51 p.m.

Feb. 14
Arrest: Deputies arrested a motorist during a traffic stop at Highway 218 and 133rd St. SE in Blooming Prairie Township at 4:44 a.m.

Assault: Deputies responded to an assault on Interstate 35 in Owatonna Township at 11:45 a.m. They took a subject into custody.

Child Protection: Deputies received a child protection report from the 500 block of 8th Ave. W. in Ellendale at 12:13 p.m.

Mental Health: Deputies responded to a mental health incident in the 200 block of 7th Ave. W. in Ellendale at 6:24 p.m.

Feb. 15
Fraud: Deputy took a fraud report in the 5200 block of 82nd Ave. SW in Lemond Township at 7:36 a.m.

Child Protection: Deputies received a child protection report from the 4100 block of 66th St. NW in Medford Township at 9:15 a.m.

Feb. 16
Child Protection: Deputies received a child protection report from the 3400 block of 98th St. SE in Aurora Township at 8:57 a.m.

ARRESTS Steele County

OWATONNA POLICE

Heather Marie Walters, 47, arrested at 11:36 a.m. Feb. 12, DWI, possession of paraphernalia and cancelled license, held for court.

Matthew John Camozze, 43, arrested at 1:15 a.m. Feb. 13, assault/domestic assault and strangulation, held for court.

William Joseph Yanchulis Jr., 41, arrested at 4:50 a.m. Feb. 14, DANCO violation, held for court.

Katie Lynn Johnson, 35, arrested at 11:45 p.m. Feb. 16, warrant arrest, held for court.

STEELE COUNTY SHERIFF

Nicholas Greg Bergan, 28, arrested at 10:50 a.m. Feb. 14, warrants arrest, body only.

Gregory Gene Anderson, 40, arrested at 11:48 a.m. Feb. 16, probation violation warrant arrest, held for court.

OWATONNA FIRE

Feb. 10
Gas Leak: At 6:51 p.m., a gas leak occurred in the 600 block of Willowbrook Dr. NE.

Feb. 11
Fire: Firefighters responded to a dumpster fire in the 2200 block of Condor Place NE at 7:50 p.m.

Feb. 12
Gas Leak: Firefighters responded to a gas leak in the 300 block of Rose St. E. at 12:18 a.m.

Leak: At 2:02 p.m., a refrigeration leak occurred in the 700 block of Bridge St. W.

Feb. 13
Fire: Fire personnel responded to a trash fire at Highland Ave. NW and Fairview St. NW at 7:22 p.m.

BEV'S FRIENDS & FAMILY TOURS PRESENTS: GALLERIA SPRING FLOWER SHOW & BACHMAN'S



FRIDAY, APRIL 7, 2023
WELCOME SPRING!

Welcome in spring with a trip to the Galleria and Bachman's! We'll have plenty of time to view the beautiful floral displays at the Galleria and do some shopping. Then we'll enjoy a delicious lunch (location to be determined) and finally, we'll be able to tour Bachman's Inspiration House and its retail store.

\$125 includes motor coach transportation, a delicious lunch and entrance to Bachman's "Inspiration House." Don't wait to reserve your spot - this tour is always very popular.

Departure times:

Albert Lea Walmart	8:30 am
(North side of parking lot)	
Owatonna Perkins	9:00 am
State Bank of Faribault	9:30 am (mall location)

Reserve your seat early as this one will fill quickly!
Contact Bev's Friends & Family Tours at:
507-451-8695 / jblysne@charter.net.
Mail check to 318 SW 13th St., Owatonna, MN 55060. Or contact Kim at the State Bank of Faribault.



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Appreciation Day
Feb. 22

Bus Driver Appreciation Week

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**Blooming Prairie
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Fair looks at barricades for extra security

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

There's never a shortage of new attractions at the Steele County Free Fair (SCFF), and Rick Ellingson hopes this year is no exception.

A member of the SCFF Board of Directors – and the director of safety – is staying true to his roots.

Ellingson is working with Emergency Management Director Kristen Sailer to secure barricades for six entrances to the fairgrounds.

"We've been looking for a while, trying to find the right fit for us," Ellingson said. "We had to have very specific ones, because they couldn't be permanent, like a cement barricade. If there's an emergency, we couldn't move them quick enough" to

allow rescue vehicles through.

Sailer is applying for a grant from Homeland Security to pay for the barricades and a trailer to store and haul them, at a total cost of close to \$150,000.

"These are very lightweight, compact," Ellingson said, "but they'll definitely stop up to a small cargo truck, up to 50 mph."

Should a vehicle strike the barricade, the bumper will push it backward. That in turn secures the barricade into the ground, "and spikes come up and hit the bottom of your vehicle," Ellingson said. "It does some serious damage."

He and Sailer have talked with officials in the region to gauge interest and need in sharing the system.

"I think they could



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Barricades like these could be in use this year at the Steele County Free Fair – and beyond. The barricades will withstand an impact of up to 50 mph; if they are struck, the upright piece will go backward and spikes come up, striking the bottom of the vehicle. The SCFF is partnering with Steele County Emergency Management and hopes to fund the purchase with a grant from Homeland Security.

be used very often," Ellingson said, at events like the Fourth of July celebration in Blooming Prairie and Owatonna's homecoming or holiday lighted parades.

There are plenty of horror stories about vehicles ramming into

parade floats and bystanders, he said.

Fair Manager Scott Kozelka agrees.

"I believe if we have barricades, it deters them from even trying to come in" where they're not allowed, he said.

There have been

issues before, including one that left Ellingson with a broken nose.

During the 2021 SCFF, a man who was driving an SUV on the fairgrounds became angry when Ellingson – who is also a Blooming Prairie Police officer, a Mayo paramedic, and a Medford firefighter – told him he couldn't enter a road that was closed to the public.

The driver got out of the vehicle and head-butted Ellingson, then fled. He was arrested and charged with assault and is serving a six-year prison term for racketeering in another case.

It's not about him, though, Ellingson said.

"It's not 'if' (something) will happen, it's 'when,'" he said. "And if it does, we're prepared. If we're not prepared, I'd sure hate to say,

"well, we thought about this, but..."

The barricades may arrive in time for the 2023 SCFF, which runs from Aug. 15-20.

"If the money's available, they could very well be here," Ellingson said.

In addition to the barricades, the fair board is looking ahead to another safety feature: A storm shelter.

During inclement weather at the fairgrounds, visitors now use the community building, the Four Seasons Centre, or the cemented area under the grandstands.

A storm shelter, Ellingson said, "is funded by FEMA, because of the importance of them."

It becomes even more important for people who spend the week, including overnight, on the fairgrounds.



Owatonna crowns Snow Week royalty

STAFF PHOTOS BY JONI HUBRED

Owatonna High students kicked off Snow Week activities Monday by crowning seniors Drew Henson and Emily Jacobs (shown at the right) as their king and queen. The morning pep fest in the school gym included a performance by Huskies cheerleaders, and a lip sync battle among the Snow Week royalty finalists—Lauren Bangs, Riddhi Bhakta, Ella Hayes, Emily Jacobs, and Emily Schmidt; and Benjamin Bangs, Blake Burmeister, Drew Henson, Coda Richardson, and Cael Robb. Team captains also previewed the week's winter sports match-ups.



It's more than the Winter Blues



Steele Talkin'
BOBBI MATHERN

Have you ever noticed that people's moods tend to be worse in the winter, especially when the sun isn't shining?

It is common for people living in Minnesota to experience the "winter blues", when we have less exposure to sunlight, fresh air, exercise, and opportunities to socialize.

Exposure to sunlight helps us to regulate serotonin, an important chemical in our brains that helps us feel good. Sunlight also helps produce vitamin D, and vitamin D boosts our serotonin levels. Most people living in Minnesota have lower vitamin D levels during the fall and winter months.

This may lead you to ask if this means that most people in Minnesota are clinically depressed during the winter months? It does not. While many people may notice a change in their moods and activity levels, only about 5% experience significant enough symptoms to be diagnosed with Seasonal

Affective Disorder.

Seasonal Affective Disorder is technically Major Depressive Disorder that occurs in a seasonal pattern. Usually, a person will notice the onset of symptoms in the late fall or early winter, and not during the spring or summer. Less commonly, some people notice the depressive symptoms during the spring and summer seasons only.

Symptoms of Major Depression and Seasonal Affective Disorder may include feeling depressed most of the day, nearly every day, losing interest in activities you once enjoyed, experiencing changes in appetite or weight, having problems with sleep, feeling sluggish or agitated, having low energy, feeling hopeless or worthless, having difficulty concentrating, and having frequent thoughts of death or suicide.

If you think you may have Depression or Seasonal Affective Disorder, please do not hesitate to reach out for help. You should not try to diagnose yourself. Instead, see your health care provider or a mental health professional such as a therapist or psychiatrist for a thorough evaluation. Medical interventions may include antidepressant medications and cognitive behavioral therapy.

See BLUES on A18 ►



STAFF PHOTO BY KAY FATE

Kari Woltman, an investigator with the Steele County Sheriff's Office, smiles as her boss, Sheriff Lon Thiele, talks about her accomplishments since she was hired in 2011. Woltman was named the Exchange Club of Steele County Peace Officer of the Year.

Woltman named Peace Officer of the Year

BY KAY FATE
STAFF WRITER

Kari Woltman, an investigator for the Steele County Sheriff's Office, is about as stoic as you'd expect an investigator to be ... until she talks about her family.

"I want to thank my mom and dad for never deterring me from law enforcement," she said Friday morning as she accepted the Peace Officer of the Year award from the Exchange Club of Steele County for her outstanding service to the citizens of the communities and townships within the county.

Woltman became

emotional as she spoke about the support she receives from family members – many of them also members of law enforcement, "so they know all too well the sacrifices it takes to make it in this field."

That includes her husband, "who as a peace officer knows firsthand how hard this job can be," she said. "Being able to have shared experiences makes it a lot easier."

Lance Woltman is a police officer for the city of Rochester.

Kari Woltman is at least the third generation of her family to See WOLTMAN on A17 ►



STAFF PHOTO BY KAY FATE

Steele County Sheriff Investigator Kari Woltman, center, accepts the Exchange Club of Steele County's award for Peace Officer of the Year. On the left is Randy Sobrack, president-elect of the club. Sheriff Lon Thiele, who hired Woltman in 2011, is on the right.

This Bud's for you



At 96, Peka keeps mind sharp with poems

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RICK BUSSLER

This Bud's for you No, not the Budweiser type, Rather speaking it's Bud Peka. He may be in his nineties. But he sure knows how to devise these poems. Poetry writing is his love. A polite thing where he brings joy to most.

Bud Peka has dabbled with poetry writing throughout much of his life, but he didn't really get serious about until 2017.

"It unleashed on me," Peka said in describing his propensity for poem writing. "It came full force six years ago."

And, now at the age of 96, he admits he can't stop. Thoughts keep coming to him at all times of the day and night when he scribbles them onto note paper and later composes them into poems on his computer.

"I can't shut it off," Peka said from his apartment in Owatonna. "I'm in the shower, and I have a poem going through my mind. I'll be sitting at breakfast and thoughts come to my head."

But that's not all. "I've written poems in my sleep," he said. "I have dreamed them, gotten up (in the middle of the night) and put them on paper."

His wife of 40 years, Susan Hagen, can vouch for his obsession with poetry. "I'm always picking up scraps of paper, and I put them on his (computer) keyboard," Hagen said. "There are always little pieces of handwritten paper all over the place," she added.

Peka recalls exactly when he began writing poems. "I was 7 years old and wrote one at the kitchen table for my mother on Mother's Day," he said. While he couldn't recall the exact poem, it went something like this: "Rose was her name. I was her Bud. Roses have thorns, and I was a thorn in her side."

Peka has no idea why he started poetry writing.

"It's just something that happened," he said.

He continued writing poems intermittently throughout the years, including the time while he served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. But it wasn't until 2017 when the poetry quickly took over his life.

He now writes them for family, friends, and others. Instead of buying sympathy cards, Peka writes poems for families whose loved ones have passed on. He writes them in birthday cards for great-grandchildren and others.

Peka also submits them regularly to this newspaper. And he's even put a collection together in a pair of books for family members.

"There's no money in it," he said laughing. But that's not to say he hasn't developed a following.

"I've got a fan club," he said proudly. He added he is often recognized in public when people come up to him and comment about his poems.

For Peka, watching others react to his poems brings him the greatest joy.

"I enjoy people reading them and getting enjoyment out of them," he said. "I'm expressing my inner thoughts for the enjoyment of others."

He's even given up his concertina that he



played old-time music on for years at nursing homes, the VFW Fish Fry, and other venues.

"It was just getting too heavy for me," Peka said.

There are no worries about weight, however, when it comes to writing poems. All he needs to be able to do is hit the keys on his computer keyboard.

Peka estimates he's written more than 500 poems featuring a wide variety of topics over the past six years. Writing poems, he said, comes "real easy" for him as he is always focused on rhyming words together, a staple of most poetry. He's done all types of poems, including serious, humorous, and even emotional.

"Whatever comes to mind. I'm telling the story the way I want it in poetry."

Through his poetry, Peka tries to express his opinions and entertain people.

His favorite poem is "We All Sail Our Own Boat," which is highlighted on this page.

A friend has told Peka he wants it read at his funeral.

Besides the love of expressing himself, Peka knows there are other hidden benefits. "I would stagnate mentally if I didn't write poems," he said. "It keeps my mind sharp."

Perhaps a bit uncharacteristically, Peka has a good memory and can recite many of his poems while sitting in the living room chair.

There is also a love story buried deep under all Peka's poetry. "I really credit her for my longevity," Peka said pointing to his wife. "She is my reason for living. We've had a good life. God is good, and he has been good to me."

God has also been on his side. Peka has survived two heart attacks. After one of them, he admits, it makes no sense that he is still around.

The first one came in September 1983, when Peka and a group of friends took a fishing trip to Canada. They were on water and 25 miles away from land when Peka went into cardiac arrest. He still can't believe he survived.

In January 1990,

Peka underwent a quintuple bypass heart surgery in the Twin Cities. He has had no heart issues since then.

He also shared how his brother had a heart attack while in the hospital and died.

"We were both 57. He died, and I lived," said Peka. "I believe in miracles."

Added his wife Susan: "Both heart attacks everybody was thinking he wouldn't make it."

Peka has six children, 13 grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren.

Born in North Dakota, Peka came to Owatonna in 1980 to work for Federated Insurance after living in the St. Cloud area for years. He was on the road with State Farm Insurance for about 22 years before joining Federated.

After retiring in 1990, Peka and his wife have done extensive traveling, including 21 cruises at various places around the world. They are members at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Owatonna.

"When Bud passes away, we're going to put together a book of poems," Hagen said.

We All Sail Our Own Boat

Bud Peka's all-time favorite poem

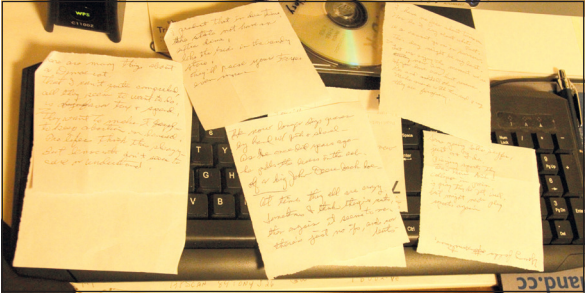
I am sailing in a tiny boat, that's afloat,
On that unpredictable ocean of life,
The winds of fate fill the sails of my boat,
I rejoice when everything seems just right.

At times only a tranquil calm remains,
Following the sea's wild, tempestuous roar,
But I long ago had discovered my lighthouse,
Jesus steers me clear of perilous, rocky shores.

He always knows what is best for me,
Providing personal calmness, no I have to fear,
I constantly try to follow his moral compass,
He has charted a course for me to steer.

I try to live my life for Him, each and every day,
With firm hand I hold my boat on steady course,
But, at times I have drifted from my chosen way,
After which I've suffered deep remorse.

From my launching, rough seas, now my salvation,
I have tried to follow in his footsteps, while yet alive,
But now, my cruise is over, I'm at my destination,
I pray He'll welcome me into His house,
when I arrive.



"It unleashed on me... I can't shut it off."

Bud Peka
Area Poetic

Top: Bud Peka reads from one of his poem books.
Middle: Bud works at his computer on another poem with his wife, Susan Hagen, looking over his shoulder.
Bottom: Little notes often are found scattered around Bud's home spurring ideas for poems.

Time to Go

I hear the Lord calling,
He's calling me home,
That's why I'm writing
This poet's last poem.

I love you my dear Lord,
When you call, I'll be there,
It is you I've adored,
You've answered my prayer.

When you do call me,
I'll write no more,
I pray I'll be taken
Through Heaven's door.

BLOOMING PRAIRIE

FEB. 28
10 a.m. — Storytime, BP Library

OWATONNA/MEDFORD

FEB. 25
5:30 p.m. — Haunted Movie Night, History Center
7:30 p.m. — Arms and the Man Comedy, Little Theatre of Owatonna

FEB. 26
2 p.m. — Arms and the Man Comedy, Little Theatre of Owatonna
2 p.m. — Music at the Art Center
3:30 p.m. — 4-H Pasta Dinner & Silent Auction, Owatonna Middle School

FEB. 27
4 p.m. — Owatonna HRA Meeting, City Hall
5:30 p.m. — Exchange Club Meeting, VFW
7 p.m. — Medford City Council Meeting, City Hall

FEB. 28
7 a.m. — Grab n Go Breakfast, Traditions

of Owatonna
9:30 a.m. & 10 a.m. — Storytime, Owatonna Library
10 a.m. — Memory Café, History Center
4 p.m. — Exchange Center for Family Unity Housewarming, 1820 Hartle Ave.
5 p.m. — Steele County Board Meeting, County Admin Building

MARCH 1
6 p.m. — Trivia Night, Mineral Springs
6:30 p.m. — Trivia Mafia, Foremost

MARCH 2
5 p.m. — Airport Commission Meeting, Airport Lounge
6:30 p.m. — Childcare Provider Spring Social, Country Club

MARCH 3
7 p.m. — Hometown Sampler Concert, Little Theatre of Owatonna

4-Hers to host Pasta Dinner on Sunday

The 18th annual Steele County 4-H Pasta Dinner and Silent Auction fundraiser will take place Sunday, February 26 from 3:30–7 p.m. at the Owatonna Middle School, 500 15th St. NE, Owatonna.
The silent auction tables close at 5:30, 6 and 6:30 p.m. There will be lots of silent auction baskets to bid on.
This fundraiser benefits the entire

Steele County 4-H program. That means every one of the 1,000 4-Hers in the program and all 150 adult volunteers will feel the impact of this event. Tickets are very reasonably priced at \$8 and are available from Steele County 4-H members or at the Extension Office, 635 Florence Ave., Owatonna or at the door. Call 507-444-7685 for details more details.

Coffee and Conversation set with superintendent

The community is invited to join Superintendent Jeff Elstad for “coffee and conversation” at the Owatonna Public Schools District Office, 515 W. Bridge

St., Door 1, on Friday, Feb. 24, 8-9 a.m.
Hear an update on what’s happening in the school district, and bring any questions you have for the superintendent.

Hometown Sampler brings bands back to Owatonna

BY JONI HUBRED
NEWS EDITOR

It started in 1992 as “a group of community members who loved music and wanted to do something for charity.” That’s how Jodie

DeKam Valentine remembers the first Hometown Sampler, a weekend concert series that benefits Community Pathways. This year’s event takes place March 3-5 at Little Theatre of Owatonna.

Bands once again include Bad Tangerines, The Gogs, Turn the Page, and Mile 5, and admission is simply a donation of food or cash.

The first event, Valentine said, was held at the Owatonna Arts Center with people mixing and mingling. While the format has evolved, the purpose has remained the same: feeding Steele



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Local a cappella group Bad Tangerines return for this year's Hometown Sampler. They also performed during the first-ever benefit for the local food shelf.

County residents experiencing food insecurity.

The very first beneficiary was the Steele County Food Shelf, which merged in 2020 with the Steele County Clothesline to form Community Pathways. The new nonprofit provides food, clothing, and other services, and expanded its Oakdale Street facility to serve a client base that more

than doubled last year.

The charity means a lot to Valentine on a personal level.

“As an elementary teacher, I have had students benefit from the food shelf,” she said.

Fortunately, the Hometown Sampler has grown every year and now brings in several thousand people over three days to listen to local bands. Audiences will hear a range of sounds, Valentine said.

She has a connection with two of the groups, as a member of Bad Tangerines and as the mother of Mile 5 guitarist Noah DeKam. Mile 5 started performing in 2010, and “it has been fun for the community to

watch the boys grow up on stage,” Valentine said.

“All of them have grown up and gone on to lives of their own, and they come back every year,” she added. “That speaks volumes.”

Each of the four bands will perform about five songs, so the 2-hour concerts move quickly. Mile 5 will perform Americana and rock, The Gogs are an alternative band, Bad Tangerines sing a cappella music, and Turn the Page does “a little bit of everything,” Valentine said.

“Every year, we make an effort to make it new and exciting and make people want to return,” she said.

IF YOU GO...

Who: Community Pathways
What: Hometown Sampler
Where: Little Theatre- 560 Dunnell Dr., Owatonna
When: March 3- 7 p.m., March 4- 3 & 7 p.m., March 5- 2 p.m.
Why: Benefit for Community Pathways
Other: More details at Hometown Sampler Facebook page

Library hosts movie about female warriors

The Owatonna Public Library will on Feb. 23 show a remarkable film inspired by true events.

Movies at the Library starts at 2 p.m. Film licensing guidelines prevent the library from giving the title, but here’s a summary:

This film tells the story of an all-female unit of warriors who protected their African kingdom in the 1800s with skills and a fierceness unlike anything the world has ever seen. Inspired by true events, it follows the emotionally epic journey of a general as she trains the next generation of recruits and readies them for battle against an enemy determined to destroy their way of life.

The movie, which runs 2 hours and 15 minutes, is rated PG-13 for partial nudity, brief language, sequences of strong violence, some disturbing material, and thematic content. There’s no charge for this or any library program.

To learn more, visit owatonna.info or the library’s Facebook page. All films become part of the permanent DVD collection after the final showing.

The 3rd floor Gainey Room has a widescreen Blu-ray projector, large screen, surround sound system, and upholstered seating, along with hearing assisted looping technology, which enhances the audio for patrons who use hearing devices with telecoil or T-coil.

Poor Nobodys play at Owatonna Arts Center

The Owatonna Arts Center will present the Poor Nobodys at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 26.

The musical group has received a 2022 Creative Support grant from the Minnesota State Arts board to support their performance of a live score accompanying the screening of the historically important Swedish film “A Man There Was.”

Admission of \$10 will support the musicians.

The six members of “The Poor Nobodys” (Jenna Wyse, Christa Schneider, Chris Hepola, Eric Struve, Chris Duba, and Albert Perez) have been playing together since 2008. They’ve written and performed many original scores for both classic and new films, including “Night of the Living Dead,” Douglas Fairbanks’ “The Black Pirate,” and Alfred Hitchcock’s “The Lodger.”

AdaptHealth to be featured at Parkinson's meeting

The Parkinson’s Support Group will be meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 28 from 2-3:30 p.m. in the Gainey Room at the Owatonna Public Library.

This month, Michelle and Alexa from AdaptHealth in Owatonna will be bringing

equipment to show us that may make dealing with Parkinson symptoms a little easier.

The Parkinson’s Support Group meets the fourth Tuesday of each month, and it is open to all who have Parkinson’s and their caregivers.

Sudoku Corner

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

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9	3	1	9	8	2	6	8	7
8	6	8	7	3	9	1	2	9
7	2	9	8	9	3	8	1	6
6	8	3	8	1	9	9	7	2
1	9	8	6	2	7	8	9	3
8	1	2	7	8	9	6	9	
9	8	9	2	6	1	7	3	8
3	7	6	9	9	8	2	8	1

Prairie Sportsman

Thurs. Evenings, 7:30



KSMQ PUBLIC TV

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DIRECTV - 15
HBC Luminet - 15
MetroNet - 13, 105, 106, 107
Mediacom - 2, 7, 11, 118, 119, 120, 802, 813
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July 3: Party on the Lot...DJ Music: Karaoke
July 4: Open: 9 am - ??
July 22: B.O.B. Ride "Toys for Tots"

ON SITE MANAGER TEAM NEEDED

Local Apartment Community in Owatonna is actively seeking a management team to help oversee the day-to-day property operations.

Duties include: light maintenance, administrative, cleaning and resident relations. Ideal candidate must have attention to detail and excellent people skills.
Compensation includes: a two bedroom townhome plus hourly pay for maintenance and cleaning.

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JOB ANNOUNCEMENT

Finance Director

The City of Kenyon & Kenyon Municipal Utilities, MN, is seeking a Finance Director. Kenyon is located 40 miles south of the Twin Cities and 40 miles north of Rochester, MN. Conducts financial and accounting functions. Pay rate up to \$37.41+ per hour (non-exempt) but negotiable depending on experience plus excellent benefits.

Qualifications: A.A Degree in accounting, finance, business, or related field and at least three years of experience in a position with similar responsibilities. Desired: B.S. degree in accounting, finance, public administration, business or related field.

Application materials are available at Kenyon City Hall, and at <http://www.cityofkenyon.com> or by calling 507-789-6415. Review of applications will begin on March 3, 2023, Application materials will be accepted until the position is filled. Submit application materials to info@cityofkenyon.com, by mail, or at City Hall 709 2nd St. Kenyon, MN 55946.

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BLOSSOMS OF THE WEEK



Cade Haase – KB – Mrs. Brun’s Class – Parents: Joshua & Elizabeth Haase –
Cade always comes to school with a humongous smile and a great attitude! He has been working extremely hard in school and is making wonderful progress. Most importantly, Cade is a very kind friend. He is a leader when it comes to sharing with his classmates and helping others! Keep up the great work, Cade! Cade makes our school and classroom a better place!



Walter Olsen – 1A – Mrs. Spande’s Class – Parents: Rachel Cowan and Ron Olsen – Walter shows Prairie Pride each day at school. He is an awesome friend to others. Walter loves to help with any task, and he is the first to help out a friend. Walter always tries his best on his school work, is very determined, and his learning has grown so much over the year. Walter is a joy to have in 1A! Keep up the great work, Walter!



Frank Cacich – 3A – Mr. LaRock’s Class - Parents: Frank & Katie Cacich – Frank is an excellent example of being an “Awesome” Blossom. Frank comes to school each day with a smile on his face and is always happy! He brings a lot of positive energy to our class and loves to play and share about sports! In class, Frank is willing to try anything and tries his best no matter what he is doing. He participates in class, waits his turn, and loves to share stories with his class. Way to go, Frank. We are so proud of you!

The Blossoms of the Week are Sponsored by these Community Boosters



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STATE CHEER DYNASTY

◀ **DYNASTY** from A2 Payton Bunn, Brenna Sommer, Isabel Stadheim, and Sierra Misgen. And one more thing: The NRHEG team also received the Regional Academic Honor award for having the region’s highest GPA; at 3.83, it was also the highest GPA in the state. The win at state sent the team to the National High School Cheerleading Championship in Orlando, Fla., where it placed 11th. “Our performances at Nationals went well,” Churchill said. “In the first round, we battled a lot of nerves and some exhaustion,” after arriving from Minnesota the day before, with an early-morning competition time. Still, “we were lucky enough to make it into the second round and performed a better-executed routine with a lot more energy,” she said. “Our goal was just to make it out of that first round, and we did.” The team was just 0.8 points from making it into the top 10, which would have advanced them to the finals. “It was heartbreaking,” Churchill said, “but it was also really gratifying to know we could be so successful. I think it also left them pretty hungry for more.” She and Jennie Bunn have been coaching the team for five years; Brooke Berg and Linda Stadheim have been coaches for four years.

The coaching isn’t the only constant. Most of the athletes have been competing together since they were in second or third grade, Churchill said, “so at this point, they know each other extremely well, and I think that’s a big advantage that we’ve had over other teams.” The team also hasn’t lost large numbers to graduation. “Two years ago, we had one (graduate); this year, we’ll have two, so that’s helped with consistency and success as well,” she said. The 15 members range from eighth graders to seniors. They start practice in July “because that’s when there’s the most gym availability,” Churchill said. Throughout the season, there are just one or two weekly practices lasting 2? hours. Other teams typically practice more often, she said, “so we really have to be mindful and take advantage of the time we have.” Much of the time is spent working on skills, building difficulty, and improving technique. Judges’ feedback from competitions throughout the season also dictate the work done. The performances are choreographed by All Star Cheerleading gym out of Bloomington, but “we really try to give our athletes the reins as much as possible,” Churchill said. “We want them to feel

a sense of ownership in their routine.” They also needed to raise money for the trip to the national competition; it cost more than \$27,000 to send the 15 athletes and four coaches. While the kids worked really hard, their coach said, “we were so amazed by the generosity of the ... community. It was humbling to see how much they believed in our kids and wanted to invest in them and their success.” A lot of the girls had never been on an airplane or out of the Midwest. “This experience is something these kids will remember for the rest of their lives, and it’s all thanks to the community,” Churchill said. Their accomplishments are even more noteworthy when you take a look at the students’ schedules. About half of the team also plays volleyball; several are also in sideline cheer for other sports teams at NRHEG. They have jobs, families, volunteer work, and of course, school – keeping up that strong GPA. “They’re some of the hardest workers I know,” Churchill said, “and they’re also really, really good humans. Doing this with them has been one of the best things I’ve ever done. “I’ve heard coaches talk about getting their ‘once in a lifetime’ team,” she said. “I know these guys are mine.”

BP after-prom plans ‘Finer Things Bingo’

◀ **BINGO** from A1 of the jackpot – is growing in popularity, but it didn’t seem like a good fit for Christianson’s goal. “So we said, what if we do something that’s not all purses? We can get guys and other people involved,” she said, “and we just started rattling off a bunch of ideas.” The plan is to provide prizes that might appeal to a wider audience, including high-end coolers, designer sunglasses, power tools, hotel stays, and a Kate Spade backpack-wallet combo. “The (BP) Cancer Group does purse bingo every year, and they do a great job and raise a bunch of money,” Christianson said. “I didn’t want to step on their toes; my goal is to have less on the purse end of things and more on the finer end of things.” The event will be held on March 18 at the Pizza Cellar; doors open at 10:30 a.m., bingo starts at 11 a.m. A packet of 10 cards – three games on each card – is \$40. Christianson’s goal is to hit \$5,000 to defray the cost of hosting a substance-free, supervised all-night after-prom party for the seniors and juniors at BPHS. This year’s attendees will have a dance and meal at Oak View Weddings and Events, south of Owatonna, then return to the high school to distribute prizes and end the evening. “Things have gotten a little expensive this year – actually, really expensive,” Christianson said. With five weeks to go before the bingo event, she still needed

about five more big donations. She’ll accept anything, including cash. “Unless they want it to go specifically to the bingo event, anything will go toward prizes on the evening of prom,” Christianson said. “When we have a tie (for a prize), I have to offer something of value,” so more items are needed. She’s become something of an expert at assessing quantity and quality; this is her seventh year as chair of the after-prom committee. Her youngest child is a senior this year, but Christianson isn’t so sure she’ll stop volunteering. “It’s the million-dollar question I’m asked all the time,” she laughed. Instead, she’s focused on the fundraising now that her gambling lesson has been learned. “March is kind of a hum-drum month,” she said. “We want spring, and sports are done, so I hope it’s a great turnout.”

IF YOU GO

What: Finer Things Bingo
When: 11 a.m. March 18; doors open at 10:30 a.m.
Where: Pizza Cellar- Bloomington Prairie
Why: Fundraiser for BPHS After-Prom

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Friday, February 24
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Evelyn Trom, 88, Blooming Prairie



Evelyn Trom

Evelyn G. Trom, age 88, of Blooming Prairie, passed away Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2023, at Prairie Manor Care Center, Blooming Prairie. Evelyn was born Nov. 10, 1934, in Algonia, Iowa to John and Alice (Harmon) Gross. The family relocated to Hayfield, where Evelyn graduated from high school in 1953.

On Oct. 22, 1953, she married Lowell Trom at First Lutheran Church in Blooming Prairie where they remained long-time members. Together, the couple raised six children on the family farm.

Evelyn was the embodiment of Grace, her middle name. An avid gardener, Evelyn planted hundreds of pink petunias that graced and brought life to the farm. Her passions extended to fashion, interior design, and hosting elaborate gatherings for events and holidays, all of which showcased Evelyn's flair for refined style and impeccable taste for simple elegance. The debilitating effects of Advanced Parkinson's Disease ravaged Evelyn's body for over 25 years, eventually compelling her to move from the beloved home and gardens she so thoughtfully nurtured to Prairie Manor Care Center in July 2013. Even in her suffering, Evelyn demonstrated grace and inspired others with her charm, kindness, and patience, never complaining about her extreme limitations.

Evelyn will be remembered for her efforts to restore Westfield Lutheran Church. But for the efforts of Evelyn and relative Dale Underwood, the church would have crumbled into its foundation years ago. Westfield Lutheran Church remains a steadfast reminder of the faith and spirit of perseverance that unites generations

of neighboring farm families.

Survivors include children, Randy (Karen) Trom, Shelley (David) Williamson, Bradley Trom, Sonja (Douglas) Eayrs, Peggy Trom, James (Deanne) Trom; eight grandchildren, Amanda Trom, Rachel (Ryan) O'Leary, Michael (Shubhang Dave) Williamson, Andrew (Roberto Molina Ledesma) Williamson, Rebekah (Paul) Cavanagh, Kathleen Eayrs, Justin Trom, and Maggie Trom; great grandchildren, Evelyn and Noelle; sisters, Ermadell (Theodore) Knutson and Joanne (James) Whitcomb; and brother, Ronald Gross.

She was preceded in death by her husband, parents, brothers Linden and Alvin Gross, and sisters Celia Marini and LaVonne Gross.

The funeral service was held at First Lutheran Church, 434 1st Street SW, Blooming Prairie, MN on Monday, Feb. 20, 2023, at 2 p.m. with Pastor Heidi Heimgartner officiating. Visitation was held Sunday, Feb. 19 from 2-5 p.m. at Worlein Funeral Home, 418 Hwy. Ave. South, Blooming Prairie, and one hour prior to the service Monday. Interment was in First Lutheran Cemetery, rural Blooming Prairie.

Special thanks to the staff at Prairie Manor Care Center and son Brad for their years of loving care of Evelyn.

Memorials are preferred to First Lutheran Church, Westfield Lutheran Church or Prairie Manor Care Center.

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



Maxine Perendy, 91, Mankato



Maxine Perendy

Maxine Louise Perendy age 91, of Mankato, died Feb. 8, 2023 at New Perspective Senior Living. A Memorial Service was held at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 18, 2023 at Mankato Mortuary.

Visitation was held one hour prior to the service and continued following the service. A graveside service will be held in the spring at Blooming Prairie Cemetery. Memorials may given to an organization of the donor's choice.

Maxine Louise was born Nov. 11, 1931 in Blooming Prairie to Oscar and Hilda (Luthe) Lysne. She attended Blooming Prairie school and was later married to Donald Prokopec. They had two children, Ann and Debra. Donald died on Sept. 8, 1973.

On Oct. 12, 1974, Maxine was united in marriage to Dr. William Perendy. Maxine was a homemaker for her family and was a former member of Red Oak Grove Church in Blooming

Prairie and was a current member of Christ the King Lutheran Church in Mankato. Maxine belonged to the local Sons of Norway and loved playing the Dulcimer. She actually belonged to a Dulcimer Club in Arizona.

Maxine is lovingly survived by her daughters, Ann Arnett of Eagle Lake and Debra Luebke of Mankato; the Perendy family, Dr. Tom Perendy, John (Beth Ann) Perendy, Mandy Neisham, Frank Perendy, and Peter Perendy; five grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren, and 12 great-great-grandchildren. She is also survived by four siblings, Donna Symes of Austin, Gene (Barbara) Lysne of Albert Lea, Jimmy (Bev) Lysne of Owatonna, Sharon Johnson of Geneva; nieces, nephews, cousins, and a sister-in-law. Selma Lysne of Austin.

Maxine was preceded in death by her parents; first husband, Donald Prokopec; second husband, Dr. William Perendy; two sons-in-law, Chuck Arnett and Melvin Luebke; a great-great-granddaughter, Belle; five siblings, Esther, Harvey, Agnes, Edna, and Barb.

maker for her family were top priority. Marian loved canning, cooking, baking, gardening, sewing, recycling cards and puzzling. She was very creative and could literally make something out of nothing on demand. She and Pat loved traveling Minnesota to see fall colors and always had a special place in their hearts for Grand Marais, Split Rock Lighthouse, Gooseberry Falls, art and music.

Mass of Christian Burial was held at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2023, at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Owatonna, with interment following at Sacred Heart Cemetery. Friends greeted the family one hour prior to the funeral at church starting at 10 a.m.

In lieu of flowers, donations are preferred to St. Croix Hospice, Albert Lea or to Sacred Heart Catholic Church/St. Mary's School Owatonna.

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

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Woltman named Peace Officer of the Year

◀ **WOLTMAN** from A13 enter the field: Her grandfather was a deputy for the Rice County Sheriff's Office, and her father was in corrections. An uncle retired as a sergeant for the New Ulm Police Department.

So it may come as no surprise that Woltman knew fairly early in life what career she would choose.

"I think I was 14 or 15 when I thought I might be interested," she said. "I had an understanding of what it took and what it would entail."

She joined the Police Explorer Program in Faribault, where she grew up, then earned a bachelor's degree from Minnesota State University-Mankato.

Woltman said that early decision was helpful in a couple of ways:

"One, it was much easier to stay out of trouble as a kid," she laughed, "and two, I was able to try out different avenues of law enforcement to really understand what I wanted to do."

She had a college internship with the water patrol in Rice County, served as a community service officer in Lakeville and was a police officer in Waseca before being hired as a road deputy in Steele County in 2011.

Steele County Sheriff Lon Thiele was proud to be the one to hire Woltman, he told the guests at Friday's

PEACE OFFICER OF THE YEAR

Kari Woltman- Investigator- Steele County Sheriff's Office

Other roles:

- Local coordinator of Toward Zero deaths, the state's traffic safety program, since 2015
- Grant-writer for SCSO; secured funding to pay for the school resource officer at Medford Public Schools
- Child passenger safety technician, educating parents about proper fit and installation of car seats in vehicles
- Local coordinator of Project Lifesaver, a program designed to protect – and quickly find, if necessary – people with cognitive disorders who tend to wander
- Certified in forensic extraction of cell phone data
- Certified in Cornerhouse forensic interviews with child victims
- Background investigator for jail setting
- Local coordinator for Take it to the Box, medication disposal program
- Assists in publication of Steele Star newsletter
- Conducts alcohol and tobacco compliance checks of local businesses
- Keeps technology current

award breakfast.

"We're looking at a whole new world in law enforcement," he said, "so when we find somebody that's good, and wants to stick around and wants to do their job ... this is why I nominated Kari for the award."

There are currently about 150 law enforcement job openings in the state, Thiele said, a far cry from "30-plus years ago, when we were lucky if there were 20 or 30 jobs open – and then it was a matter of 400 or 500 people going for one or two positions."

"I'm proud to say Kari found her niche, her fit in Steele County," he said. "We're glad to have her here."

Woltman has been an investigator since

2019, and prides herself on maintaining her integrity and honesty, "regardless of the outcome."

Law enforcement, she said, "is a noble profession, where people can find a lot of pride in their work when they find their niche, like I did."

Now in her mid-30s, Woltman figures she has "probably more than 20 years before I can retire... I want to grow my knowledge base, so someday that might look like a supervisor role, helping our agency to progress and mentoring young people coming into the profession."

"I appreciate this honor," she said, "and hope to continue to work to make Steele County proud."

Family: Ariana died doing what she loved

◀ **ARIANA** from A1

It's still a mystery as to why Ariana crashed around 7:45 p.m. on Feb. 3 on a trail that the family has been on many times over the years. Besides living in Owatonna, the family has a second home in Marenisco, Mich., located about seven miles from the crash site.

"Something broke on the snowmobile, or she was startled by something, maybe an owl," said Randy, who was ahead of her and circled back to make the discovery. He noted no deer tracks were found in the area. "There was a slight curve, but I don't feel she failed to navigate the curve. It was something out of her control. She did not make any mistakes."

After hitting a tree, Ariana went airborne for about 60 feet before landing in another tree, Randy said, noting he walked about 100 feet in the dark trying to find her.

Other snowmobilers stopped to help rescue Ariana and bring her back to the trail where Randy and others performed CPR.

"I blew into her mouth for one hour," he said, adding a stranger did chest compressions. She died before emergency workers arrived on scene.

She was at least the 10th snowmobile fatality in Michigan this winter, according to the DNR. Last year, there were 13 snowmobiling fatalities in Michigan.

Randy said an autopsy was performed indicating she died of blunt force trauma.

Ariana's death has left her family devastated. The family took some comfort in how the small town of 500 people in Michigan showed up to support them after the tragedy. Randy related how many people were crying when they showed



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Ptacek had a family photo taken at Christmas with Ariana shown in the front left next to her sister, Sara, and family dog. Back row: DeeDee and Randy Ptacek and Levi Pitney.

up to offer their support.

"I looked up and said, 'Ari, you broke a town,'" Randy said.

About 20 friends traveled from Michigan to Owatonna for Ariana's funeral. There was also a large contingency of co-workers from Kwik Trip at the funeral. Ariana was an assistant store leader in St. Peter.

Randy said Ariana, who graduated with an accounting degree from Minnesota State University-Mankato, aspired to be a store leader for Kwik Trip. She started working at Kwik Trip in 2013, and Randy recalled how she helped open several stores. She graduated from Owatonna High School in 2014.

"It tears me up a bit to think about how she did so much in such a short time," Randy said. "She developed so

many friendships and was moving up in the company."

Sara Ptacek remembers her sister as being "my travel buddy." One of their bucket list things to do was travel to Ireland. They spent two weeks together in Dublin in 2019.

"It was the best trip ever," said Sara.

The sisters also shared matching tattoos.

"She was a joker," added her mother, DeeDee Ptacek.

For now, the Ptaceks are trying to figure out how to live without Ariana.

"Day by day, minute by minute, we're trying to find some kind of new normal, but I don't know what that's going to look like," said Randy.

Asked how they plan to go on, DeeDee, said: "I don't think we've figured that out yet."

Remembering our mortality with ashes as Lent begins



Rev. Leandra Anderson

RED OAK GROVE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
AUSTIN

I always felt a little odd walking around with ashes on my head. Often forgetting that they were there, scratching my forehead and then spreading them around my face.

A solemn service to sit through, a moment where you are reminded of mortality, communion, and the beginning to a season of reflection and embodiment of Christ. We eat together and reflect together because, at the core, Lent is about the powerful movement we see from the Spirit in our communities as we have these moments that only come during this season of the year. In our gospel reading for Ash Wednesday from Matthew 6, we

are reminded that in our faith we are asked to not make it a show of piety or attention, but rather make our faith a practice of the heart. Verse 21 reads that "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." When we look to the heart for us this time of year, we do not see what it is that we have decided to remove or add to our daily lives, but we look to see how our acts center around Christ and our closeness to him. We dare move

closer to Christ during lent, not because it is a great show of how pious we are, but because we have heard Jesus remind us that where we place the transpires of our lives, there our hearts will be also. Where we place our treasures, where we place our hearts is so important, if we place our hearts on the things we must do and the things we reluctantly decided to give up, our heart may carry negativity and sadness through the season.

If we place our hearts where Christ is, in our lives, in our communities, and in our hearts, we will draw closer to the places where the Spirit teaches us how to be more like Christ. Nowadays, I place ashes on people's foreheads and remind them that they will one day return to dust. I invite them into the space where we are asked to repent and to know that someday we will die a death that will connect us to one another as dust. A place where we

will all be connected to Christ. Even in that solemn reminder of the beginning of Lent, I look out at a group of people with crosses on their heads and it reminds me of our togetherness as siblings in the Body of Christ. I am reminded of the hope that lies in our communities as we repent, reflect, and draw closer to Christ together throughout all of Lent. May you be blessed with the reflection and embodiment of Christ this Lent.

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Sunday School: 9:30 a.m.
Sunday Worship: 10:30 a.m.

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500 Dunnell Dr., Owatonna
507-215-2249
Sunday Bible Study: 9 a.m.
Sunday Worship: 10 a.m.
Friday RU Recover pfm: 7 p.m.

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220 S. Cedar Ave., Owatonna
507-451-5319
Sunday Worship: 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study: 11 a.m.
Wednesday Evening: 7 p.m.
www.stpaulsowatonna.org

BAPTIST

FIRST BAPTIST
104 First Ave., Blooming Prairie
507-583-2673
Sunday Worship: 10 a.m.
Sunday School: 9 a.m.
Sunday Bible Study: 11:30 a.m.
Wednesday Service: 6:30 p.m.
www.fbcbloomingprairie.org

GRACE BAPTIST-OWATONNA
65 26th St., Owatonna
507-451-3494
Sunday Worship: 10 a.m.
Sunday School: 8:45 a.m.
Sunday Evening: 5 p.m.
Wednesday Adult Service 7 p.m.
Wednesday Youth Service 7 p.m.
gracebaptistministry.org
info@gracebaptistministry.org

BETHEL BAPTIST
1611 Hemlock Ave., Owatonna
507-451-8548
Sunday Worship: 9 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.

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CHRIST THE KING
205 Second Ave. NW, Medford
507-451-4845
Mass: 5:30 p.m. Sat Mass: 9 a.m. Mon & Fri parishoffice@stjosephowatonna.org

CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS
307 SW First St., New Richland
507-234-6244
Saturday Mass: 5 p.m.
www.stannjan.com

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507-583-2784
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Sunday Mass 10:15 a.m.
www.litomysl.webs.com

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columbanusbp@gmail.com

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Sunday School: 10:30 a.m.
www.cornerstoneowtonna.com

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Sunday Connections: 10:15 a.m.
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Sunday Worship 9 a.m.
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Sunday Service: 10 a.m.
www.victorymn.org

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507-451-2819
Sunday Worship: 9 a.m.
Pastor Clark Baldwin
Sunday School: 10:15 a.m.
office@auroralutheranchurch.org

COMMUNITY LUTHERAN - ELCA
106 Third St. SE, Geneva
507-256-4288
Sunday Worship 9:30 a.m.
Every 3rd Saturday at 5 p.m.
communitylutherangenevamn@gmail.com

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503 Radel Ct., Ellendale
507-684-2451
Sunday: Worship-9 a.m., Sunday School & Adult Bible Study-10:20-11:15 a.m.
Monday: Call to Prayer-7 p.m.
Wednesday: Bible Study-9:30 a.m., Confirmation- 6-7 p.m., Youth Group- 7-9 p.m.
Saturday: Men's Bible Study- 8 a.m.
Sunday School- 10:15-11 a.m.
firstlutheranchurchellendale@gmail.com
Website: https://www.firstlutheranellendale.org/

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434 First St. SW, Blooming Prairie
507-583-6621
Sunday Worship 9 a.m.
Sunday School 10 a.m.
firstluthoffice@yahoo.com

FIRST LUTHERAN - LCMC

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507-451-3854
Sunday Worship 9 a.m.
Sunday School and Adult Ed 10:15 a.m.
flchopemn@gmail.com

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2500 7th Ave NE, Owatonna
507-451-4125
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Sunday Praise Service, Sunday School & Bible Class 10 a.m.
info@gsowatonna.com

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507-213-0281
Sunday Worship 10:15 a.m.
Sunday School 9 a.m.
pontoppidanlemond@outlook.com

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Sunday Worship 9 a.m.
Sunday Education Hour 10:15 a.m.
redeemerowatonna@outlook.com

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507-320-8287
Sunday Worship 9 a.m.
www.roglutheran.org

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507-528-2404
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Sunday School 9:15 a.m.
Wednesday: Advent 7 p.m. (with Holy Communion)
sjlcoffice@frontiernet.net

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320-674-0351
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Sunday School 9 a.m.
www.saintjohnssergeantjimdo.com

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info@stjohnowatonna.com

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ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN - LCMS

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Sunday Worship 8:30 a.m.
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
www.motorcitychurch.org

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2781 SW 92nd Ave., Meriden
507-451-2165
Sunday Worship 10 a.m.
deaconbilliejo@gmail.com

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609 Lincoln Ave., Owatonna
507-451-4520
Sunday Worship -Sanctuary 8:15 a.m. & 9:30 a.m., Fellowship Hall 10:45 a.m., Live Stream 9:30 a.m. at facebook.com/tlcowatonna and tlcowatonna.org/worshiplive
Video on Spectrum (CH181) Metronet TV (Ch 900) and owatonnalive.com
Tuesday at 4:30 p.m. Wednesday at 6 p.m. and Sunday at 11 a.m.
www.tlcowatonna.org/

TRINITY LUTHERAN - ELCA

104 First St. SE, Hayfield
507-477-2248
Sunday Worship 8 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.
Sunday School 9:15 a.m.
www.trinityhayfield.org

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108 Third Ave. SW, Medford
507-451-0447
Sunday Worship 9 a.m.
Wednesday 6:30 p.m.
tlcmedfordoffice@gmail.com

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57043 300th St., Waltham
507-567-2272
Sunday Worship: 10:30 a.m.
Sunday School 9:15 a.m.

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Sunday Worship 10 a.m.
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Wednesday Worship: 6:30-7:30 p.m. 1st & 3rd every month
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Sunday School: 10:30 a.m.
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Spanish Evangelism & Prayer: Friday 7 p.m.
www.elevationnorth.blogspot.com

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507-413-7850

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www.redemptionowatonna.org

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Tuesday Worship: 5:30 p.m.
Wednesday Worship: 5:30 p.m.

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Sunday Worship: 9 a.m.
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Wednesday Service: 7 p.m.

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www.associatedchurch.org
office@associatedchurch.org

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109 E Main St., Hayfield
507-477-2631
Sunday Worship: 10 a.m.
www.firstpresbyterianhayfield.com

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P.O. Box 66
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507-528-2320
Sunday Worship: 10 a.m.
www.faithstreet.com

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

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County to purchase public health van

◀ **COUNTY** from A3 health departments that operate mobile units. They toured one in Pine County and “asked what they liked and what they would do differently.”

The tours and discussions over how the mobile unit would be used led to the group scrapping an optional piece of equipment: a handicapped lift. Other departments didn’t have one; Pine County has had their mobile unit since 2020 and hasn’t seen a need for one.

Also, Aaseth said, the Steele County van will not be used for transport.

“We tossed that one back and forth,” she said. “We were concerned about the space it takes up in the unit.”

County Administrator Scott Golberg said the purchase would be covered through a Local Assistance and Tribal Consistency Fund grant. He pointed out commissioners were “generally supportive” of the mobile unit purchase when the idea was first presented last April; at that time, the estimated cost was closer to \$70,000.

Aaseth said anyone can drive the van, which will be equipped with a rear-view camera, a back window, and storage options suggested by Pine County staff.

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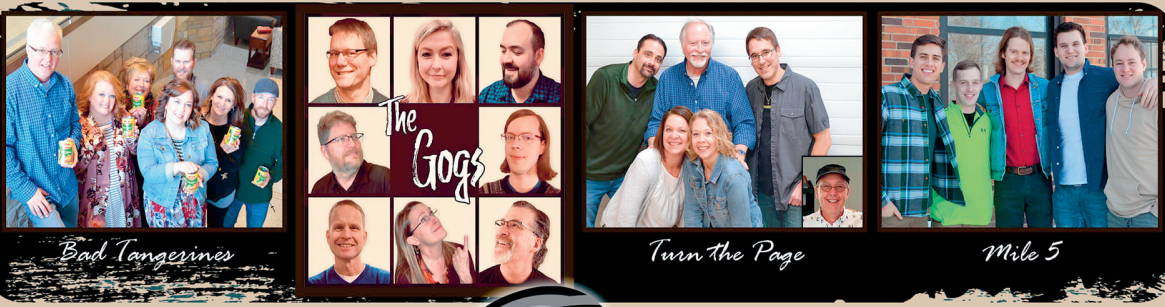
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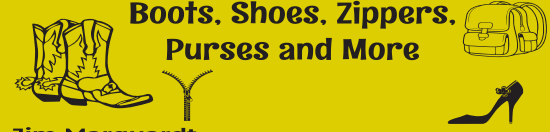

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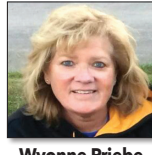


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Medford's Mason Degrood, black singlet, celebrates with teammate Luis Lopez after winning his heavyweight match to send the Tigers to the Class A state tournament. Degrood's win broke a 30-30 tie with Lake Crystal-Wellcome Memorial and won the Tigers the Section 2A title.

STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Medford's Evan Schweisthal, black singlet, lifts his opponent up for a vicious mat return during his 138-pound match. Schweisthal found himself in a dogfight of a bout, but came out on top with a key 7-6 decision.

Section title comes down to heavyweight

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

The Medford Tigers broke through the final section test last

Saturday in St. Clair, taking down the Lake Crystal-Wellcome Memorial (LCWM) Knights 33-30 in an absolute barn-burner of a

championship dual. Medford faced early adversity falling behind 12-3 through 126 pounds, but the Tigers See **MEDFORD** on B5 ►



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

Medford's Dylan Heiderschiedt, black singlet, finishes a single-leg takedown against his opponent at 195 pounds. Heiderschiedt scored a 10-7 decision that kept Medford ahead by six points going into aa pivotal 220-pound matchup.

Huskies win Section 1AA title

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

Owatonna High School's gymnastics team will appear at the state tournament for the third consecutive year this winter after the team won the Section 1AA title at home last week against an eight-team field.

The Huskies took first place with a final score of 145.325 — winning in the vault, beam and floor to edge out second place Lakeville South by 2.5 points.

“Our Owatonna fans definitely showed out. Judges always come up to us and say how much they love the meet because of how competitive and packed it is every year. There are always going to be multiple teams throwing 140s, and to win in front of our home crowd was amazing,” said Owatonna head coach Evan Moe.

Moe was also handed Section Coach of the Year honors after the meet, commemorating him for his team's season and repeated success at the top of the section.

Owatonna's title run began on the uneven bars where the Huskies recorded a team score of 33.875.

The Huskies were forced to compete without an integral part of their lineup in Chloe Myer who missed the meet due to suffering a hyper-extended knee in training.

However, the Huskies found a spark when Emma Johnson replaced Myer on the bars and led the team with an 8.625-point routine.

The Huskies' score on the bars would go on to be their lowest of the night, but set up a hot stretch of high-scoring



STAFF PHOTO BY JOEY BUNTON

Owatonna's Emma Johnson concentrates on her rotation as she prepares to land during her floor routine. Johnson led the Huskies in scoring on both the uneven bars and the floor.

routines across the beam, floor and vault.

According to Moe, a pivotal point in the meet was when the Huskies coaching staff watched multiple Lakeville South athletes fall on the beam, setting up the team to potentially win the event if they could manage to hit their routines.

Moe's confidence in his team was validated shortly afterward when Owatonna moved to the beam and went five-

for-five on its routines without any gymnasts falling to score 36.675 points and win the event.

Owatonna's Delia Neumann earned the top score amongst the team with a 9.350-point routine.

On the floor, Owatonna scored 37.275 points behind Emma Johnson's 9.475.

Once again, the Huskies earned the top score and set themselves up for a potential See **HUSKIES** on B6 ►

MOST DON'T

BLOOMING PRAIRIE STUDENTS
DRINK ALCOHOL IN A TYPICAL MONTH

2022 MN Student Survey, n= 149 BPHS Students. Funded by MN DHS BHD

Moe wins section Coach of the Year

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

Owatonna High School gymnastics head coach Evan Moe was awarded Section 1AA Coach of the Year honors last week after his Huskies team won the section title at home to advance to state.

Moe — who began coaching for Owatonna in the winter of 2019 — has already produced a stellar resume with three state appearances including third- and sixth-place finishes.

“It’s a big part of my life. I coached all throughout high school ever since I had my driver’s license. After high school, I stayed home in Owatonna and drove to Mankato for

school, then drove back home to coach at night. It’s always been something I’ve loved,” said Moe.

After graduating from Mankato with a minor in coaching, Moe stuck around Owatonna and actually assisted the team on former coach Tom Smith’s staff as a paid intern.

However, there was one ironic twist along the way.

“My brother, Derek, and I essentially conditioned the kids because he was a trainer at the time. One day when we were at the gym, a couple of people asked if he would take on a coaching job and he said he couldn’t because he was moving to Pennsylvania. But, he said, ‘My brother will take a job.’ I was prob-



Owatonna gymnastics head coach Evan Moe shares a smile with athlete Brynn Routh after her beam routine. Moe was recently awarded Section Coach of the Year honors for his team’s win at sections and continued success over the past four years.

ably just messing around with one of my buddies at the gym, but they approached me, offered and I said, ‘Sure,’” Moe said with a laugh.

When Smith retired in 2019, Moe’s tenure as the team’s head coach began.

Moe had a background in gymnastics in his youth, however, his main focuses growing up were wrestling and hockey.

“I remember nights when I was young when I would have hockey, gymnastics and wrestling practice. Wrestling was my main sport, and I think that the mindset helped with gymnastics. Wrestlers are tough, gritty and strong mentally, which is the same for gymnasts.”

According to Moe, one of the greatest blessings of being Owatonna’s head coach has been working alongside talented athletes and coaches, as well as

a top-notch development program.

“Every year that we continue to win and bring great gymnasts and teams out it really builds my confidence. I know that we have great kids and a great staff and it shines through every season. Taking over after Tom and watching his gymnasts, so to speak, was almost like being handed the keys to a Ferrari. But now even years later we’ve seen so many girls come up through the system and succeed that we know we’re going to put out teams that throw great scores every year.”

Owatonna gymnastics fans will have to strap in for another ride at the Roy Wilkins Auditorium in St. Paul this week when the state tournament begins on Friday, Feb. 24.

The Huskies will compete at the Class AA meet scheduled for 11 a.m.



Evan Moe

Owatonna loses section thriller to Mayo



Owatonna Live
SPORTS WRAP
ROY KOENIG

Owatonna’s section semifinal wrestling dual came down to heavyweight at Mayo High School last week for a spot in the Section 1AAA final.

Top-ten ranked 220-pounder Ethan Peper bumped up to face the Huskies’ Grant Lower, who had won by pin against a different Spartan during the regular season match

to secure an OHS win. Peper earned the pin to lift Mayo to a 36-27 win.

It came down to that thanks to an inspiring rally by Blake Fitcher at 220. Coach Derek Johnson said, “For Blake to overcome a little adversity in the match, getting reversed with 20 seconds left and then getting what probably was a reversal or at least loss of control with four seconds left was huge to push it into overtime.” Fitcher won to set up the dramatic conclusion.

“It was a tough loss,” said Johnson, “But, there’s a lot of silver lining there. From being such a young team, we had a considerable turnaround, even from the Mayo dual we had just a couple of weeks ago. We had guys like Donny Sorenson at 113. Lane Karsten is getting much

more mature with his wrestling.”

The Huskies fell behind 14-0 before three straight major decision victories from Karsten, Trey Hiatt, and Michael Reinardy pulled Owatonna close at 14-12. After a Mayo pin, the Huskies ran off three in a row. Jack Sorenson won 4-0, RJ Reinardy prevailed 1-0, and Cael Robb stuck his man in the first period to put OHS up 24-20. Mayo retook the lead 30-24 with a pin and a major.

Future looks bright

“We had a lot of gutsy performances from a lot of young guys. That was the message right after,” Johnson added, “A lot of the teams in the section are bringing back almost full squads next year, but we feel as a coaching staff and a community that our

ceiling is much higher.”

Owatonna beat Century 56-21 in the quarterfinals. Mason Blum suffered a dislocated elbow and couldn’t wrestle against Mayo. Lower reinjured his shoulder. Robb and Blum are the only seniors on the roster.

Johnson believes the team can rally in the individual tournament. “We had a disappointing loss to Northfield in the semifinals last year and then turned around and ended up being the second-best team in individual sections, if you were to tally that up like college nationals.” The individual tournament is Feb. 24-25.

Townley, fischer to state

Isabelle Townley and Aliah Fischer recently punched their ticket to the state girls’ wrestling tournament.

See **SPORTS WRAP** on B4 ►



Owatonna robotics team members Jack Ruiter, Lileigh Nguyen, Eric Xie, and Aiden Engel pose for a photo. All four are currently assisting in the planning and execution of building a robot for the team’s upcoming competition season.

The heavy hero



Steele Sports
JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

With the Section 2A dual between Medford and Lake Crystal-Wellcome Memorial (LCWM) tied 30-30 heading into the final match at 285 pounds, Medford’s Mason Degrood had nowhere to hide.

The winner goes to state and continues a run that could potentially end with a state title, while the loser gets a second-place medal and their dreams dashed.

“Before the match, everyone was coming up to me like, ‘You got this. We believe in you.’ I thought, ‘Oh my god, they’re cursing me,’” said Degrood jokingly.

As he stepped onto the mat with Medford’s fate on his shoulders, the match quickly became real for the second-year wrestler.

After going back and forth through the first two periods and trading leads, Degrood had a brush with an early exit when LCWM’s Dietrich Rosin nearly caught him in a cradle.

“He cradled me and instantly when he got it, I was like, ‘Oh no.’ But I got out of it, flipped him, went a point ahead and got it done for my team.”

Degrood’s escape-takedown sequence would end up putting him one point up on LCWM’s Rosin, and with smart decision-making and a tough ride until the final whistle, Degrood sent the Tigers to state with a 7-6 decision win.

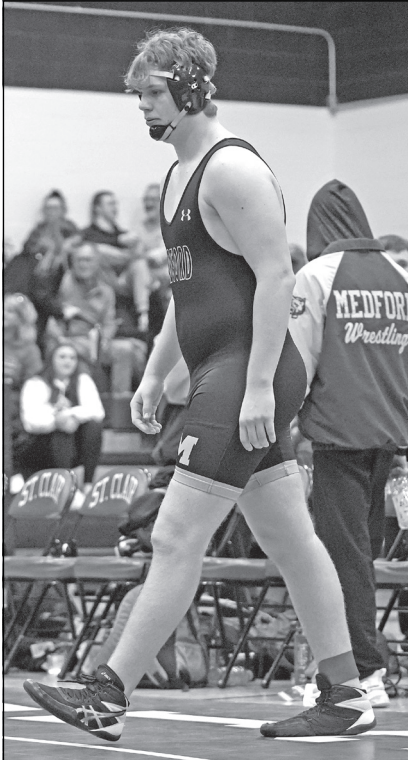
“It’s really not my dream. I like to be up by about 20 when the heavyweights go out there,” said Medford head coach Dennis Whitman laughingly. “But Mason came through in the clutch. There’s a lot of pressure going into that third period. I know I wouldn’t want the dual to fall on my shoulders, but for him to come through with that win is pretty special.”

According to Whitman, the result was not only a special performance, but the result of a season’s work.

“We’ve talked before every dual. Everyone knows how important every match is and how hard we’ve worked all year. When it came down to it, we knew that this was our moment. So when Mason hit the mat we just said, ‘Hey, go on out there and let’s get this,’” said Whitman.

With the win, Medford will advance to the Class A state tournament, scheduled to be held at the Xcel Energy Center on Thursday, March 2.

Class A matches will begin immediately following the Class AAA quarterfinal round scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. on March 2.



Medford’s Mason Degrood steps onto the mat for his heavyweight match against LCWM’s Dietrich Rosin. With the match tied at 30-30, the pressure fell on Degrood’s shoulders to send Medford to state — which he did with a 7-6 decision win.



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Schultz's 'Last Crew'

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

Legendary NRHEG coach John Schultz is set to finish his final season on the bench for his beloved girls basketball team this winter and earned recognition from his home fans last week for his dedication to the program.

Between the junior varsity and varsity games against Blue Earth Area, Schultz made his usual run to get some popcorn before the next game began — when he returned to his team, coaches and fans all donned “Big Dog’s Last Crew” shirts to celebrate his upcoming retirement from coaching.

“It was totally unexpected. They know I always go to get popcorn between games. When I came back and saw all the girls in red shirts, I thought, ‘Oh there must have been something going on I didn’t hear about.’ Then I looked a little harder and saw there was a bald guy on the shirt. I laughed and that’s when I finally realized. It was an awesome feeling,” said Schultz.

Born and raised in Ceylon, Schultz coached his former high school team for five seasons before he made his way to NRHEG in 1991 to become an educator.

Upon arrival, he made his intentions clear: He wanted to coach.

“It was late in the summer and they had an opening for a physical education position, so I applied. I mentioned in the interview that I want to coach everything that I can and move up to the top as fast as possible.”

During his first year as a Panther, he was an assistant football, basketball and softball coach.

However, in just his second season, Schultz found himself at the helm of NRHEG’s girls basketball program after the spot opened up.

“The year before the varsity team had won four games. It was a challenge. Ultimately, it was the culture that needed to be fixed.”

Schultz began his culture shift from the 1992 season to 2000, but found himself almost entirely out of coaching at the high school level

after the birth of his second child, Jade.

While he stuck around the program and remained an integral part of the team even during his absence from the head coaching role, Schultz was able to reclaim his role as the bench boss in the 2010-11 season.

According to Schultz, it was the start of Jade’s varsity career and an opening at the head coach role that sparked his return.

What happened next remains NRHEG history.

From 2010 to 2014, Schultz’s Panthers teams made three consecutive trips to state and brought home titles in back-to-back years in 2013 and 2014.

Schultz ended up relinquishing his role as the head coach once again after the 2014 season, but by that point his legacy in the program spoke for itself.

With two state titles and a record of 225-58, he had become NRHEG coaching royalty and was forever inscribed alongside his stellar teams in the Panthers’ history books.

See **SCHULTZ’S** on B5 ►



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Left to right: Onika Peterson, Trinity Smith-Vulcan, Erin Jacobson, Sidney Schultz and John Schultz all pose for a photo donning “Big Dog’s Last Crew” shirts in honor of John Schultz’s upcoming retirement from coaching. Schultz’s resume with the Panthers includes a 225-58 record as well as two state titles.

Vikings top Panthers 63-55 for Gopher title

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

The NRHEG Panthers girls basketball team was upended 63-55 by the Hayfield Vikings in the Gopher Conference championship game last weekend.

Both sides were competitive until the final whistle with neither team being able to establish a secure lead all the way up until the final minutes.

“It was a great game. I’m extremely proud of how well our girls bounced back after a tough loss against WEM the night before. Our girls never backed down tonight, and we rebounded well. I’m excited to see what this team can accomplish in the next couple of weeks,” said NRHEG head coach Onika Peterson.

Right from the opening tipoff, both teams got to work trying to dictate the flow of the game.

Each side traded baskets through the first half and ultimately it was Hayfield that took a 31-29 lead into halftime.

Undoubtedly the biggest storyline of the game was Hayfield’s ability to get



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

NRHEG’s Faith Nielsen (2) goes up for a jump shot against Hayfield in the Gopher Conference championship game. Nielsen was forced to take over the Panthers’ offense at point guard after teammate Sidney Schultz got into foul trouble early on.

to the line and cause the Panthers to deal with foul trouble.

NRHEG senior guard

Sidney Schultz — whom Peterson described as the quarterback of the team’s offense — recorded three

fouls in the first nine minutes of the game.

“Obviously it affected our game plan a ton because she’s run our offense for so many years.”

After her third foul, Peterson had to take Schultz out of the game for extended periods, forcing Faith Nielsen and Hallie Schultz to step up and run the point.

According to Peterson, Hallie Schultz had not played guard in multiple years, giving the Panthers a completely new look.

Regardless, NRHEG remained competitive and trailed by just two points until the team caught fire briefly in the second half.

After the game became tied at 39-39, NRHEG found a massive 6-0 run to jump ahead of the Vikings as time continued to dwindle down.

Unfortunately for the Panthers, the increase in their lead led to the increase of Vikings’ star guard Kristen Watson.

The junior took over down the stretch, and while NRHEG rotated multiple players out with four fouls apiece, the Vikings were able to recover offensively.

See **VIKINGS** on B5 ►



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

NRHEG’s Sidney Schultz tries to fight through a double team, but is stripped of the ball on her way to the basket. Schultz made a difference for the Panthers when she was on the court, but her minutes were heavily limited due to recording three fouls in the opening 10 minutes.

BP wins on senior night

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

The Blooming Prairie Awesome Blossoms pulled out a 37-36 win over Bethlehem Academy last week to close the team’s regular season.

Blooming Prairie seniors Haven Carlson, Chloe McCarthy, Anna Pauly, Abby Smith and Madelaine Stoen were all recognized before the game and helped en route to an emotional win for all Awesome Blossoms players, coaches and fans alike.

“We’ve had a lot of really good close games recently, and we really needed a win. It’s an emotional one obviously, and even though you could sense that we didn’t have the same pop tonight, the girls rallied together and really everyone played well,” said Blooming Prairie head coach John Bruns.

Blooming Prairie’s defense was at its best against Bethlehem Academy and kept the team in the game despite scoring its fifth-lowest point total of the season.

The Cardinals were able to take a lead early and kept it until halftime at 16-13, but were unable to keep the Awesome Blossoms out of striking distance.

Bethlehem Academy held its lead until there was just 1:30 remaining in the game when Pauly made the break-through play Blooming Prairie was looking for.

With the score at 33-30, Pauly drove to the basket and cashed in a contested layup and forced a foul during the shot.

The senior buried the game-tying free throw to tie the game and sent the Awesome Blossoms fans into pandemonium.

Blooming Prairie was able to get a stop on the ensuing possession before Macy Lembke gave the Awesome Blossoms a 35-33 lead after sinking a jump shot from the left win.

Bethlehem Academy once again had no answer on offense and was forced to foul McCarthy to attempt to regain possession.

McCarthy was money when she had to be and sank both free throws to extend her team’s lead to four points.

This time, the Cardinals answered back by nailing a deep three-point shot with three seconds remaining to trail 37-36.

Bethlehem Academy fouled and although Blooming Prairie missed the free throw, the scramble for the loose ball took the last remaining seconds off the clock to secure the win for the Awesome Blossoms.

Pauly led all Awesome Blossoms with 12 points in the comeback win to cap her senior night.

See **BP** on B7 ►



NRHEG’s Zander Flatness, black singlet, is lifted off his feet and held horizontally by LCWM’s Nick Slater in their 182-pound match. Slater went on to win by fall.

Panthers ousted in semis

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

The No. 6-seeded NRHEG Panthers put up a valiant effort in the Section 2A tournament, but fell short of the championship dual after losing 64-18 to the No. 2-ranked Lake Crystal-Wellcome Memorial Knights (LCWM). NRHEG struggled to stay competitive early and found itself in a large deficit the team was unable to erase. “We went into this match Saturday with a bit of hope that we would be competitive. We have been wrestling very well, but

today Lake Crystal was still a bit too much for us to handle. Our athletes have a choice now: either work as a group to get better in the off-season or stay where we are and hope we can make it back to the semifinals next year,” said NRHEG head coach Shawn Larson. The Panthers’ troubles with the Knights began early and often with LCWM claiming the first five matches by fall to take a 36-0 lead. NRHEG fought back with a win at 145 pounds when Brady Schlaak earned a first-period pin to move the score to 36-6, but

the momentum was short-lived. LCWM earned a pin at 152 before NRHEG’s Harbor Cromwell took home the Panthers’ second pin of the day at 160 pounds. With the score at 42-12, NRHEG needed to win out every remaining match by fall to tie and send the dual to criteria scoring. NRHEG’s last hopes were dashed when LCWM earned another pin at 170 pounds to mathematically eliminate the Panthers. LCWM went on to win at 182, 195 and 220 before Makota Misgen sent NRHEG out with a bang by winning via a sec-

ond-round fall. Misgen was battered by illegal contact during the first period of his dual and fought through a black eye and major swelling to get the win. Earlier in the week, NRHEG pulled off the upset over No. 3 Maple River/USC to advance to the section semifinals. The dual remained close at 14-12 through 138 pounds before three consecutive falls by NRHEG’s Ryan Schlaak, Reese Routh and Cromwell gave the Panthers a 32-12 lead. The Longhorns managed to cut the deficit to 32-30, See **PANTHERS** on B7 ►

WEM walks off against Westfield

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

The Westfield Razorbacks had their state team tournament dreams shut down in the opening round of the Section 2A tournament when the team traveled to Waterville to face the WEM/JWP Grizzlies. Both teams stayed neck-and-neck all the way until the heavyweight bout where WEM/JWP got the job done at home to win 40-38. “They’ve had our number twice this year. We were able to flip the script in a couple of matches early on, which was fun to see at the end of the year. But we came up short and needed to not give up those bonus points,” said Westfield head coach David Lassahn. Westfield and WEM/JWP battled to a 10-10 stalemate through four matches before the Razorbacks turned on the afterburners. At 132 and 138 pounds, Cannon Wacek and Bo Zwiener got the job done for Westfield with back-to-back pins to take a 22-10 lead. WEM/JWP responded with a fall, but a decision win by Cade Christianson and a pin by Grant Magnuson quickly recouped the lead for Westfield at 31-16. Unfortunately for Westfield, a pin victory and a win by forfeit for the Grizzlies kept them in range of passing the Razorbacks at 31-28. Ty Bronson stopped the bleeding with a massive pin at 195 and was awarded an extra point on a post-match team penalty by WEM/JWP to go up 38-28, but Brody Johnson and Vincent Hernandez would go on to get pinned, giving the Grizzlies the win at 40-38. The loss in team section play resulted in the end of the Razorbacks’ team season; however, Westfield athletes will still have the chance to compete at the section individual tournament. The Section 2A individual tournament will take place at Maple River High School on Saturday, Feb. 25. No official start times or tournament brackets were made available at the time of press.

Owatonna loses section thriller to Mayo

◀ **SPORTS WRAP** from B2 “Both absolutely cruised their way to the finals. Isabelle had a really tough, close match with Maggie Olson of Albert Lea,” said Johnson. She had to turn right around and wrestle for true second. “To pick herself back up, and basically wrestle like an absolute demon in her true second match and destroy her opponent was amazing.” “Aliah took second. She got caught in a headlock right away in her finals match. That’s a girl she beat just a week before. It’s not like she’s far away.” The state tournament is March 2-4.

May the force be with them

The OHS robotics team is ramping up to their competition season. Senior Aiden Engel is one of the Rebel Alliance admirals. “I watch over all the different teams and make sure everyone’s on task and that we have plans, so that we know what we’re doing.” He told the Owatonna Live Coaches Show, “I started out as a programmer and last year was the programming lead.” He didn’t want to get too far ahead of things, but wanted to set the bar high. “It’s a little hard to talk about goals before we have a robot built, but I think making it to state is a really solid goal.” Engel plans to pursue computer science in college. Lileigh Nguyen leads the build team, which “does the infrastructure of the robot, pulls it together with all the motors and stuff before handing it off to programming and electrical.” The senior says there are adjustments made

throughout the season. “We’re doing a lot of machining. We’ve got a good wood and metal shop down here. We got a cobalt saw and a drill press in there we use frequently.” Nguyen says being in robotics has helped shape her future. “Having all of this hands-on intensive experience has definitely pushed me toward mechanical engineering.” She is also involved in speech, knowledge bowl, and mock trial.

No previous experience necessary

Jack Ruiter joined as a freshman without much knowledge of robotics but has grown to become a team admiral. “The seniors, they really take you under their wing. You learn a ton about programming. Pneumatics, it’s a whole new world, building the robot... This year we get that opportunity to pass that down to our freshmen.” Ruiter says competition day “brings lots of energy.” “It’s really neat being able to work with those other teams to win.” He enjoys the challenges. “We’re figuring out problems. I love problem-solving. It’s kind of a fun thing for me.” He’s currently working with recent OHS grad Nolan Baker at his business and plans to continue in information technology. Freshman Eric Xie is in his first year. “We program the controls of the robot so it can move and do other tasks that it needs to do... I think it’s pretty cool working with other people from different areas in Minnesota and see what they have and see if we have any strategies that we can implement together.” The team has numerous business partners



Steele County Blades players Connor Homan, Joey Bunton, Anders Thorager, and Brady Rossbach are don their Blades jerseys for a photo. All four athletes will age out after this season and have become fan-favorite players making up the team’s veteran core.

and community mentors. Shaun Robbins is the advisor. “The amazing part of this is the kids do all the work,” said Robbins. Competition and cooperation come together in robotics. “When we’re in the pits and a team breaks something, they throw an announcement up over the PA and four, five, or even six teams go running with whatever part that they need.” Owatonna has about 40 students in robotics this season. **Playoffs or bust** One of these games Anders Thorager will put on his Steele County Blades sweater for the last time after playing his entire junior hockey career in Owatonna. Connor Homan has suited up for a handful of teams over his career and is also aging out. Joey Bunton has become a fan favorite over his three seasons in Owatonna. He has

taken pictures for the Steele County Times and plans to pursue digital media at the University of Kentucky while playing club hockey. Brady Rossbach was the last to leave the ice after the final home game at Four Seasons Centre, reflecting on his time in town following a game in which he scored four goals. All four hope that the final game doesn’t come too quickly as the team pursues playoff success in March. Thorager (Stillwater, MN) was the captain. “It gave me a lot more responsibility, but also felt good to know a lot of people look up to me. A lot of people follow me. Just to know I can be the leader the team needs and give some of the new guys small pointers throughout the year. Helping them through practice, helping them in the locker room, making sure they’re fitting in well.”

His father David is an Owatonna High School graduate. Anders enjoyed skating in the same rink. Bunton (Danville, IL) says it’s hard to believe this segment of his hockey career is ending. “This team has such a family environment that I’m going to miss for the rest of my life. And that I’ll know that I played on one of the coolest teams I could’ve.” A different sort of excitement awaits him in Kentucky. “I’ve heard that their environment is electric. They play at midnight. I think that will be fun... It’s a cool little barn.” Rossbach (New Berlin, WI) spent two winters in Owatonna. “I liked what they had to offer here. I like the town. I like the community we have here. All those aspects played into the reason why I ended up staying here... It’s hard to believe that this

is my fifth year playing juniors. It seems like a long time when you say five years, but in all reality, it seems so quick.” Homan (Anchorage, AK) has grown during his tour around the country playing junior hockey. “I think the maturity that comes from it is a major thing. A lot of people go to college right out of high school, and they might not be ready to be away from home. It was hard the first year when I was seventeen. I was still a senior in high school, but it’s matured me a lot and helped me become a little more independent.” Rossbach and Homan plan to play college hockey. **Owatonna live schedule** *Thursday, Feb. 23:* OHS boys’ hockey in the section tournament, 7 p.m. OHS girls’ basketball vs. Mankato East, 7:30 p.m.

Schultz's "Last Crew"

◀ **SCHULTZ'S** from B3
Yet, just because he passed on head coaching duties to current team leader Onika Peterson does not mean he has removed himself entirely.
Shultz has sat alongside Peterson on the bench the whole time, still talking x's and o's and helping coach his youngest daughter, Sidney, who is a senior this year.
On top of that, Schultz remains the Panthers team bus driver — a position he will take up full-time as he steps aside from coaching in the upcoming months.
"I can't say enough great things about John Schultz. He's phenomenal. When he came back to help coach Sid's crew when they hit eighth grade, people asked if that would be intimidating. I answered, 'Why would that be intimidating? He's a great person to have on the bench,'" said Peterson.



John Schultz, standing left, and Onika Peterson, standing right, watch on as their team faces off against Hayfield in the Gophehr Conference championship last weekend. Schultz was the head coach at NRHEG when Peterson first joined the staff, with Peterson becoming head coach after Schultz stepped down at the end of the 2014 season.



NRHEG's Quinn VanMaldeghem drives to the basket along the baseline against Hayfield. VanMaldeghem was the Panthers' leading offensive player with a 15-point, 10-rebound double-double.

Vikings top Panthers 63-55 for Gopher title

◀ **VIKINGS** from B3
Hayfield went on to take the lead and hold it until the final buzzer as Watson nailed six late free throws to end her point tally at 35.
NRHEG's loss to the Vikings is now their third consecutive one.
Leading the Panthers on offense was Quinn VanMaldeghem, who recorded a double-double with 15 points and 10 rebounds.
Next up for the Panthers will be a trip

to the Section 2AA tournament slated to start on Tuesday, Feb. 28.
No seedings, tournament matchups or game start times have been released at the time of press.

Player Stats vs. Hayfield				
	P	R	A	
O. VanMaldeghem	15	10	0	
F. Nielsen	12	3	0	
S. Schultz	9	1	0	
C. VanMaldeghem	8	7	0	
P. Nielsen	6	0	0	
Jacobson	3	2	0	
H. Schultz	2	10	2	
Stadheim	0	2	0	

SCOREBOARD			
TEAM	1st	2nd	Final
NRHEG	29	26	55
Hayfield	31	32	63

Medford moves on to state

◀ **MEDFORD** from B1
stood tall and braved the early storm to eventually come out on top with the dual coming down to the final heavyweight match.
"It's just a huge relief. Like a weight has been lifted from our shoulders. We've been working toward this for the past five or six months. Last year when we lost in the finals, our kids all knew this year's goal was to get back to this match and win. When you put in that work with a clear goal and accomplish it, it's a huge relief," said Med-

ford head coach Dennis Whitman.
Through the first four matches, Medford's lone win came from Luis Lopez at 113 pounds via a 6-0 decision.
Meanwhile, LCWM had accumulated 12 points via a fall at 106 and two decisions at 120 and 126.
With the early momentum swaying toward the Knights, Medford's Tommy Elwood, Evan Schweisthal and Charley Elwood quickly changed the dynamic of the entire dual.
Tommy Elwood and Schweisthal secured

7-1 and 7-6 decisions respectively to gain six points total and cut the deficit to 12-9 through 138 pounds.
With the Tigers now in striking distance to take the lead, Medford rolled out Class A juggernaut and multiple-time state champ Charley Elwood.
The senior did not disappoint with a fall victory in just 1:13 of the first period to give Medford its first lead at 15-12.
LCWM's Talan Osborne regained the lead for the Knights at 152 pounds with a fall win over Kael Neu-

mann, but back-to-back first-period pins from Medford's Garron Hoffman and Tate Hermes settled the score at 27-18 for the Tigers.
LCWM earned another fall at 182 with Nick Slater pinning Aiden Ahrens, but once again Medford had an answer.
Dylan Heiderscheidt gained points back for Medford with a 10-7 decision to improve the score to 30-24 for the Tigers.
As if the drama couldn't intensify any more, LCWM blew the roof off of the St. Clair gymnasium with a pin

at 220 pounds to tie the dual at 30-30.
Conor Wilson put up a fight against LCWM's Ryder McMichael and nearly escaped without allowing bonus points for the Knights, but a late pin by McMichael at the 5:29 mark evened the score.
With the meet tied going into the heavy-weight matchup, Medford's season weighed heavy on the shoulders of Mason Degrood.
The second-year wrestler had already defeated LCWM's Dietrich Rosin earlier in the season; however, this time he was in for

an even tougher bout.
After Rosin collected an early lead, Degrood worked some escapes and secured a solid reversal to set the score even.
The match looked prime to go the distance until Rosin found a nifty cradle that sent Knights fans to their feet and spelled danger for Degrood and the Tigers.
While Degrood admitted that Rosin's cradle caught him off guard, he did not allow him to secure the finish.
Instead, Degrood kept Rosin's near fall points to just two to keep Rosin's lead at 6-4. He quickly regained the lead with a lightning-quick escape-takedown sequence to go up 7-6.
Once Degrood found his way to the top he never gave Rosin a chance to recover.
When the final whistle blew, Degrood made his way to the center of the mat to have his hand raised while Medford fans packing the gymnasium went berserk with excitement.
Having won the Section 2A title, Medford will move on to compete at the Class A state team tournament scheduled to begin on Thursday, March 2 at the Xcel Energy Center.
The Tigers will take the mats immediately following the Class AAA quarterfinals beginning at 9 a.m.
The Tigers' first opponent for the state meet was not made available at the time of press.



Medford's Mason Degrood, black singlet, sits at the center of the mat and looks at his celebrating team after winning his heavyweight match to send Medford to state. Degrood used a huge escape-takedown sequence to win the match 7-6.

COLLEGE SPORTS

Williams picks up starting role at Bemidji

BY BARBARA BOXLEITNER
SPORTS CORRESPONDENT

Summer preparation helped Brayden Williams earn a starting role as a freshman for the Bemidji State University men's basketball team.

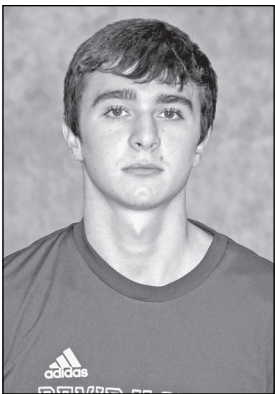
The Owatonna High School graduate started the first 24 games (16-8). He was the only freshman starter and was one of two Beavers to start every game. His 29 minutes per game ranked fourth on the team.

"I'm definitely a little surprised," the 6-foot-2 guard said about his playing time. "I put in a lot of work during the summer. I definitely feel like it's earned."

"The biggest difference is the physicality," he said. "I've gotten a lot stronger, not getting pushed around."

The Beavers play man defense about 80% of the time, he said, and he typically defends another guard.

"I've improved a lot," he said. "I'm moving my feet outside the arc better, being able to guard multiple positions, not just the point guard."



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Brayden Williams

His 2.9 rebounds per game ranked fifth on the squad, with his game-high being eight.

Though primarily a shooting guard, he has played point guard sometimes and ranked third on the squad with 2.7 assists per game. In three games, he had six assists.

He averaged 7.2 points per game, sixth on the team, and reached double figures in scoring six times. His high of 19 points came against Augustana, when he converted five of eight three-point attempts — both career bests.

"That game I was kind of feeling good," said Williams, who had 15 points in the next

game for his only consecutive double-digit efforts entering the Feb. 13 week.

More men's basketball

Tyrel Creger of Bay College had a career-high 24 points against Grand Rapids Community College.

The freshman out of Owatonna High also matched his career best of 11 rebounds in recording his second double-double.

Baseball

Caleb Vereide is a freshman pitcher and outfielder for the University of North-

western. He played for Owatonna.

Women's ice hockey

Out of Owatonna High, Grace Wolfe played in the first 33 games for St. Cloud State University and tied for the team lead with 14 assists. The sophomore had one goal.

Women's swimming

Owatonna resident Verity Wray-Raabolle won the 100-yard backstroke for Macalester College at a meet against St. Olaf.

Send updates about area athletes to Barbara Boxleitner at jdanddoc@gmail.com.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Former Owatonna basketball starter Brayden Williams has earned a lead role as a freshman for Bemidji State University this winter.

Huskies win Section 1AA title

◀ HUSKIES from B1 victory heading into the vault.

The Huskies iced the meet with a 37,500-point performance on the vault that scored Moe's squad not only a section title, but a season-best team score in the event.

Jozie Johnson's 9,500-point routine earned her the top score amongst all competitors.

The Huskies' win punched their tickets to the Minnesota State High School League state tournament, scheduled to begin on Friday, Feb. 24.

The state meet will be held at the Roy Wilkins Auditorium in St. Paul on Friday, Feb. 24.

Owatonna is scheduled to start its day at the state meet at 11 a.m.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOEY BUNTON

Owatonna's Jozie Johnson rotates mid-flip in her vault routine at the Section 1AA meet. Johnson led all athletes in the vault with a 9,500-point routine.

SPORTS BRIEFS

COMPILED BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
BP torches Medford, Bethlehem Academy

The Blooming Prairie boys basketball team finished last week 2-0 with wins over Medford and Bethlehem Academy to improve to 2-7 in-conference and 9-14 overall.

Blooming Prairie ended its week with a massive 83-65 win over the Cardinals. After taking a 31-26 lead into halftime, head coach Cam Rutledge's squad put the finishing touches on the win with a break-out 52-point second half.

Bethlehem Academy scored 39 points of its own but came nowhere close to the production of the Awesome Blossoms down the stretch.

A major key for Blooming Prairie in the game was free throw shooting.

The Awesome Blossoms finished with 23 successful free throws on 32 attempts, compared to Bethlehem's mark of seven for 15 from the charity stripe. Brady Kittelson led all Awesome Blossoms with 23 points, while brothers Gabe and Zack Hein both scored 18 points apiece. Earlier in the week, Blooming Prairie put another beating on a Gopher Conference opponent by downing the Medford Tigers 93-62.

Blooming Prairie's offense was nearly unstoppable again and exploded for 54 first-half points to outscore the Tigers by over a two-to-one margin.

An additional 39 points after the half for Blooming Prairie kept the Tigers at bay as the opposition scored 37 points of their own.

Leading Blooming Prairie in scoring were Gabe Hein and Kittelson. Hein found his stroke early and often, finishing with 30 points, while Kittelson was also lights out with 25.

Medford's Austin Erickson caught fire and put up 28 points in the Tigers' loss.

Blooming Prairie will play its final regular-season game at home on Friday, Feb. 24 when the Triton Cobras come to town for a game at 7:15 p.m.

As for Medford, the Tigers will have their last regular-season game on the road against JWP on Friday, Feb. 24 at 7:15 p.m.

NRHEG loses nail-biter to Bucs 54-52

The NRHEG Panthers boys basketball team came up just short of a home win against WEM last week after falling 54-52 to the Buccaneers.

NRHEG had the opportunity to take home the win, but a swingy offensive game full of large runs ended up in WEM's favor when the Panthers' offense went silent late.

WEM opened the game on an 8-0 run and ran the score up to 22-8 before NRHEG found a much-needed run. The Panthers hit the locker rooms at halftime with a 35-28 lead after finishing the first half on a blistering 27-6 run.

According to NRHEG head coach Dan Schmidt, the Panthers extended their lead to 10 points before the offense lost its rhythm and allowed the Buccaneers to take the lead with two minutes remaining. The Panthers could not find the bounces they needed on offense to close out the game and fell by a two-point margin.

While they had an opportunity to tie the game at the buzzer, according to Schmidt, the team "couldn't get a clean look." Daxter Lee led all Panthers with 19 points in the loss.

The Panthers will play their final regular-season game on the road against USC on Friday, Feb. 24 at 7:15 p.m.

Huskies hold off Falcons 48-39

The Owatonna Huskies girls basketball team traveled last week to Faribault and returned with a 48-39 win to their name in Big Nine Conference play.

Owatonna and Faribault both had their defenses on full display, resulting in a low-scoring 23-21 first-half score line that favored Owatonna.

The Huskies were the more efficient team in the second half as well and ended up winning by nine points thanks to outscoring the Falcons 25-18 down the stretch.

While the Huskies shot 34.6% from the field on offense, the defense held the Falcons in check at just 23.9% shooting. Ava Olson-Brooks led the Huskies with 18 points.

Earlier in the week, Owatonna fell 55-50 on the road against Rochester Mayo.

After trailing 26-23 at halftime, Owatonna continued to stick close to the Spartans but could not pull ahead by the final buzzer.

Olson-Brooks led the Huskies with 12 points, closely followed by 10 points from Carsyn Brady.

Owatonna will play its final regular-season game at home against Mankato West on Thursday, Feb. 23 at 7:30 p.m.

Huskies tie for Big Nine lead

The Owatonna Huskies boys basketball team last week tied for the Big Nine Conference lead once more after winning conference games against Rochester Mayo and Faribault.

Owatonna earned its final win of the week in a 79-41 drubbing against a one-win Faribault team, but the most high-stakes game of the week was by far its clash against Rochester Mayo.

The Spartans entered the game 15-5 overall and 11-5 in conference — just one game back from the Huskies in the standings.

Owatonna left no doubt as to who was more deserving of their rank in the Big Nine Conference as the Huskies stormed out to a 32-19 lead at the half. Rochester Mayo battled back with 31 points in the second half, but Owatonna outscored them again with 32 to send the Spartans home with a loss.

Collin Vick's 18-point, 10-rebound double-double led all Huskies athletes on offense.

Helping Owatonna reclaim its spot atop the conference standings was a huge win over Mankato West (12-10). The Scarlets defended their home court against then-division leaders Mankato East with a 70-69 win.

Owatonna will have a chance to beat the Scarlets next in a road matchup scheduled for Thursday, Feb. 23 at 7:30 p.m.

However, looming on the horizon is also a meeting with co-leaders Mankato East on Tuesday, Feb. 28 at 7:30 p.m.

Owatonna upends Austin 6-0

Owatonna's boys hockey team finished last week on a high note after beating Austin 6-0 at home.

The win over the Packers gave the Huskies their first winning streak since Dec. 13 when the team opened the season with three straight wins.

Owatonna went up 1-0 in the first period behind a goal from forward Andrew Mitchell and extended its lead in the second period with three goals from Garret Stelter, Zach Knott, and Thomas Herzog.

Austin had no answers for the Huskies' offense and allowed two more goals to Mark Spurgeon and Joseph Webster in the third period to finalize the scoring at 6-0.

Seth Johnson, Mitchell, Spurgeon, and Webster all led the team with three points.

Earlier in the week, Owatonna ground out a 3-2 win on the road against Rochester John Marshall.

The Huskies potted one goal in each period and held off the Rockets' late push to earn the narrow win. Spurgeon scored two goals and Broderick Goodnature recorded one to cap Owatonna's scoring.

The No. 6 Huskies' next matchup will come in the Section 1AA quarterfinals when the team travels to No. 3 Lakeville North on Thursday, Feb. 23.

The puck drop is scheduled for 7 p.m.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

NRHEG senior Aden Berg is emotional as he turns to his bench after losing his match at 220 pounds to LCWM's Ryder McMichael. Berg and the Panthers were beaten 64-18 by the Knights.

Panthers ousted in semis

◀ **PANTHERS** from B4 and actually gained the lead at 33-32 after winning a 6-0 decision at 220 pounds, but could not field a wrestler at

heavyweight giving the Panthers a win via forfeit. The forfeit gave NRHEG the 38-33 edge it needed to advance in

the section tournament. With the loss to LCWM, NRHEG's team season officially comes to a close, however, the Panthers will partici-

pate in the Section 2A individual tournament scheduled to begin on Saturday, Feb. 25 at Maple River High School. No official start times or matchups were made available at the time of press.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS

NRHEG's Makota Misgen, center, is helped by St. Clair medical staff as he talks with head coach Shawn Larson, right. Despite gaining a black eye and major swelling due to illegal contact, Misgen went on to win his match against LCWM by fall.

BP wins on senior night

◀ **BP** from B3 Earlier in the week, Blooming Prairie took on St. Charles, Medford and Grand Meadow. The Awesome Blossoms lost two close games to St. Charles and

Grand Meadow, falling 50-48 to the former and 47-45 to the latter. However, Blooming Prairie did secure a big Gopher Conference win by beating Medford 53-22. Pauly led the team

with 12 points against the Tigers, while Andrea Bock led her side with seven points. No. 12 Blooming Prairie's next game will be in the Section 1AA tournament on the road against No. 5 Plainview-Elgin-Millville on Thursday, Feb. 23 at 7:00 p.m.

"Due to technical difficulties, Blooming Prairie section wrestling and senior night girls basketball photos were not able to be published. We apologize for the inconvenience."

SCOREBOOK
GOPHER CONFERENCE
STANDINGS
GIRLS BASKETBALL

GOPHER EAST		
	Conf.	Overall
Hayfield	10-0-0	24-3-0
Blooming Prairie	6-4-0	11-12-0
Triton	5-5-0	10-16-0
Randolph	4-6-0	17-9-0
Kenyon-Wanamingo	3-7-0	11-12-0
Bethlehem Academy	2-8-0	9-13-0

GOPHER WEST		
	Conf.	Overall
NRHEG	8-1-0	19-5-0
WEM	7-2-0	16-8-0
Maple River	4-4-0	13-10-0
JWP	2-6-0	12-14-0
Medford	1-7-0	2-22-0
United South Central	0-2-0	3-12-0

BOYS BASKETBALL		
GOPHER EAST		
	Conf.	Overall
Hayfield	8-1-0	20-5-0
Kenyon-Wanamingo	7-2-0	18-7-0
Randolph	5-4-0	14-10-0
Bethlehem Academy	4-5-0	13-9-0
Blooming Prairie	2-7-0	9-14-0
Triton	1-8-0	7-17-0

GOPHER WEST		
	Conf.	Overall
Maple River	9-0-0	23-2-0
United South Central	7-2-0	17-7-0
JWP	5-4-0	10-12-0
WEM	3-6-0	4-17-0
NRHEG	2-7-0	3-21-0
Medford	1-8-0	2-22-0

BIG NINE CONFERENCE
STANDINGS
GIRLS BASKETBALL

BIG NINE CONFERENCE		
	Conf.	Overall
Rochester Mayo	17-3-0	20-4-0
Mankato East	16-4-0	17-6-0
Austin	16-4-0	17-7-0
Red Wing	15-5-0	17-6-0
Rochester Century	13-7-0	15-9-0
Mankato West	10-9-0	10-13-0
Winona	9-11-0	11-13-0
Owatonna	9-11-0	9-13-0
Rochester John Marshall	4-15-0	4-19-0
Northfield	4-16-0	4-20-0
Faribault	3-17-0	4-20-0
Albert Lea	3-17-0	3-19-0

BOYS BASKETBALL		
BIG NINE CONFERENCE		
	Conf.	Overall
Mankato East	14-4-0	17-5-0
Owatonna	14-4-0	17-5-0
Rochester Century	13-5-0	14-8-0
Austin	12-6-0	14-8-0
Northfield	12-6-0	14-8-0
Rochester Mayo	11-6-0	15-6-0
Mankato West	9-9-0	12-10-0
Winona	8-10-0	9-12-0
Rochester John Marshall	8-10-0	9-13-0
Albert Lea	6-13-0	7-16-0
Faribault	1-17-0	1-21-0
Red Wing	1-18-0	3-20-0

GIRLS HOCKEY		
	Conf.	Overall
Owatonna	12-1-0	18-6-0
Northfield	9-2-0	18-8-0
Mankato East	8-3-0	16-5-0
Albert Lea	10-3-0	16-6-1
Winona	8-7-0	9-13-0
Rochester Century/JM	6-7-0	6-16-1
Red Wing	7-8-0	7-17-0
Rochester Mayo	5-11-0	6-16-0
Mankato West	1-12-0	2-19-2
Austin	1-13-0	2-19-0

BOYS HOCKEY		
	Conf.	Overall
Northfield	14-3-0	20-5-0
Rochester Century	12-4-0	15-10-0
Rochester Mayo	10-3-1	17-5-2
Owatonna	8-5-2	11-12-2
Albert Lea	11-4-1	18-6-1
Mankato East	7-8-0	10-15-0
Rochester John Marshall	8-6-1	14-10-1
Mankato West	5-9-3	7-15-3
Faribault	7-9-0	11-13-0
Winona	4-9-2	9-13-2
Austin	1-15-1	4-19-1
Red Wing	0-12-3	1-20-4

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These businesses and organizations are proud supporters of the Steele County Times' expanded county wide sports coverage. We wish all local teams the best success throughout the season.

Go Blossoms, Go Tigers, Go Huskies and Go Panthers!

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Congratulations

Owatonna Gymnastics on capturing the section championship and earning a trip to the state tourney



Back row, from left: Coach Jason Smith, Coach Evan Moe, Alivia Sturges, Jayna Martin, Brynn Routh and Kiana Starks; middle: Jozie Johnson, Emma Johnson, Johanna Spielman, Dylann Norrid and Kaelyn Smith; Front row, from left: Delia Neumann, McKenna Edel, Kendra Miller, Averie Roush, Kaitlyn Cobban and Chloe Myer.



Way to twist your way to the top...
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LOOK WHO WE'VE CAUGHT READING!

Excitement abounds throughout February as students at Blooming Prairie Elementary School are celebrating “I Love to Read Month.”

Wednesdays are dress-up days at Blooming Prairie Elementary School, centered around a farm theme. Students may dress up as farm animals or wear animal-print clothing. When the rooster crows over the intercom on Wednesdays, everyone is supposed to drop what they are doing and read. As students meet their reading goals each week, they earn a token. The tokens are then placed in the bucket of the animal they would love to see Principal Jacob Schwarz kiss: cow, pig, goat or sheep. The animal with the most tokens will get a smooch from Mr. Schwarz on March 1 during a school assembly.



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First Grade



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February 22, 2023

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Owatonna Looks Ahead to New Community-wide Brand

North Star Branding Team Visits Owatonna

North Star Place Branding & Marketing visited Owatonna in January to kick off the research phase of the community-wide branding initiative. They spent the week conducting visits with 100-plus people through focus groups and interviews. This research is critical to the next steps of developing the community-wide survey that will be open for all community members to participate in. Other highlights of North Star's week in Owatonna included attending a high school basketball game and two Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce events and touring the city. Watch the video as they share their experiences of the week.



Sign up for ongoing updates and to be notified when the community survey is available at BrandingOwatonna.com. This branding project is being funded through a public/private collaboration. The goal of this research-driven, community-wide identity and branding initiative is to increase interest and investment in the community from residents, entrepreneurs, companies and visitors.

2023 Street Improvements Neighborhood Meeting & March 7 Public Hearing

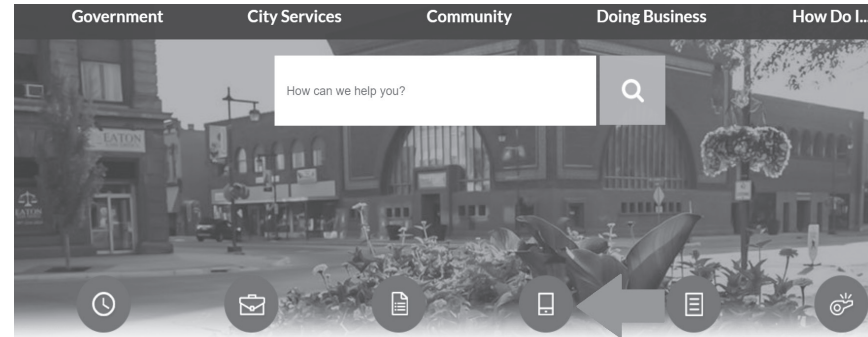
Spring is quickly approaching and the Engineering Department is looking forward to another busy year of road construction. The City Council has designated the street reconstruction and bituminous rehabilitation projects that will be completed during the 2023 Construction Season. Included in the 2023 Street & Utility Project will be: Butternut Avenue SW from McKinley Street to Riverview Place Riverview Place SW from Butternut to the cul-de-sac School Street East from Main Street to Partridge Avenue. In addition, the 2023 Havana Road State Aid Project includes Havana Road from Truman to Smith Avenue. The streets proposed for bituminous reconstruction in the 2023 Improvement Projects are deteriorating and in need of both pavement rehabilitation as well as utility (water, sanitary sewer, and storm sewer) upgrades. A neighborhood meeting for these two projects will be held on March 1 at 5:30 pm in the City Council Chambers located at 540 West Hills Circle. Staff will present information on the project and answer questions. Public Hearings for the two projects will be held during the March 7 City Council meeting beginning at 7 pm in the City Council Chambers.



Current Job Openings with the City of Owatonna

The City of Owatonna currently has several positions that area available. Benefits, competitive wages and an opportunity to perform meaningful work that positively impacts the community are just a few reasons to apply. Apply for any of the following positions at governmentjobs.com. Or by visit owatonna.gov "Employment Opportunities" to apply or to subscribe to receive alerts about future opportunities.

- Full-time Positions:**
- Paid-On-Call Firefighter – Fire Department
 - Resident Firefighter – Fire Department
 - Laborer – Parks and Recreation Department
- Seasonal/Temporary Positions:**
- Coordinator – Brooktree Clubhouse
 - Guest Services
 - Guest Services Lead
 - Lifeguard
 - Head Lifeguard
 - Water Safety Instructor
 - Youth Program Official - Soccer
 - Maintenance



Snow Removal Reminders



Trash & Recycling Container Placement

The City of Owatonna would like to remind residents to please keep trash and recycling containers well behind the curb or in their driveways and to remove the containers as soon as possible after pick-up service. The containers are very difficult for snowplow drivers to navigate around with snowplows and may result in the street not being plowed all the way to the curb. Keeping the containers out of the street will allow for more effective snow removal and will reduce instances of the plows knocking them over.



Don't Crowd The Plow!

Motorists always need to exercise additional caution and to stay back at least 200 feet when approaching a snowplow. Snowplow operations require frequent stopping and reverse movements. Maintaining proper distance will help keep both drivers safe. Patience and cooperation from drivers is appreciated as snow removal operations are completed.

- 

1. Shovel
Clear walkways before snow turns to ice. Apply salt only if needed.
- 

2. Scatter
Use salt only where critical. Aim for 3 inches of space between salt granules.
- 

3. Switch
Salt doesn't melt ice below 15 degrees. Use sand for traction when it's too cold, or a different de-icer.
- 

4. Sweep
Clean up leftover salt, sand, and de-icer to save and reuse as needed.

Pledge To Be Salt Smart

Salt used for deicing accounts for approximately 75 percent of chloride found in local waterways. During precipitation events and snowmelt, stormwater gathers excess salt and washes it into nearby streams and lakes. Chloride in water has significant negative impacts on wildlife, the environment and humans. Employ these simple practices during winter weather to prevent pollution to our valuable local water resources. <Insert Graphic Referenced Above> Learn more about Owatonna's Stormwater Management Program by visiting <https://www.owatonna.gov/Stormwater>.

Keep Catch Basins Clear of Snow, Ice and Debris

As spring approaches, snow and heavy rains can cause localized ponding and flooding if storm drains are blocked. To prevent this, please check any storm drains located near your driveway and clear them of snow, ice and debris. Sweeping up any sediment, deicing salt or trash that has accumulated prevents it from reaching a nearby waterbody or clogging the stormwater system. In addition to street catch basins, there may also be storm inlets or drains in yards that need to be kept clear as well. Learn more about the City of Owatonna's Stormwater Program and Catch Basin Adoption Program at www.owatonna.gov/stormwater or send an email to stormwater@ci.owatonna.mn.us.



Boards & Commission Meetings

We'll save you a seat!

The City of Owatonna encourages community members to attend public meetings and serve on any of its 12 boards and commissions. Notice of all public city meetings and agendas are available at [Owatonna.gov](https://www.owatonna.gov) including meeting times for the following

City boards and commissions:

- AIRPORT COMMISSION
- CHARTER COMMISSION
- CITY COUNCIL
- FIRE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION
- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
- HOUSING & REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
- HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
- PARK & RECREATION BOARD
- PLANNING COMMISSION
- PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD
- PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
- WEST HILLS COMMISSION

Shrek coming to stage at OHS

BY JOHNNIE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR

The Owatonna High School theatre program will be performing "Shrek the Musical" for its winter musical beginning Friday, Feb. 24 at 7 p.m. The musical will be held at the on-campus auditorium and will be the last time the school holds a performance at the current campus. "This is going to be the last musical that Owatonna High School does on this stage. It's kind of bittersweet, but we're looking forward to putting on a great final show here. I've been working in this space for 23 years now, with probably just as many musicals along the way. I'll definitely

miss it," said director Erik Eitrhein. According to Eitrhein, the decision to go with "Shrek" was a simple one: it connects with all kinds of audiences. "I think what we liked about it is that it's recognizable and that it is enjoyed by both young kids and adults. We were looking for a show that would drum up interest in our theater program. It's no secret that the past few years have been difficult on theater programs, and our goal is to try and bring people back into it." Eitrhein's plan has seemed to work so far as he mentioned that this show brought a visible uptick in the number of auditions and amount of buzz around the school.

Taking center stage in the musical as Shrek, Fiona and Donkey will be Alec Harris, Ava Eitrhein and Kate Sande. Such roles will require a strong ability to get into character, a trait that Eitrhein noted each student has come to master over the course of the rehearsal period. A key difference between the movie and the musical that Eitrhein is excited to watch is Sande's role as Donkey – a part portrayed by Eddie Murphy in the original movie. "I think that she has an incredible take on the part that audiences will really enjoy. She is taking on what is usually a male part and has made it her own. It's going to be fun to watch."

Also set to make an appearance on stage is a 15-foot mechanical dragon that will be played by Cali Hedlund. According to Eitrhein the dragon will both sing and be equipped with a fog machine that will imitate breathing fire and smoke. "I think that this performance will have a bit of something for everyone who attends. Our kids have been dying to go out and perform after working so hard this winter season and we can't wait for opening night to show off all the work." The performances will take place from Feb. 24-26 and March 2-3 with each show time being scheduled for 7 p.m. with exception of the one on Sunday, Feb. 26, which will be at 1:30 p.m.

Are you ready for some gardening yet?



Mastering Gardening
LORRIE RUGG

I sure am! This winter seems snowier, colder and longer than normal to me. So, I find myself reading more about plants, looking up information on things I want to grow and I have signed up for a few gardening webinars — more than a few, but I am ready for the spring of 2023 to arrive. I am anxiously awaiting the first visit to a greenhouse to breathe in the smell of dirt! Gardeners will know exactly what I mean, we are then in our happy place. In one of my browsing sessions on the computer, I ran across an article that I found very interesting and thought I would share it with you. I was on the Proven Winner website and I didn't realize that we have plants in a lot of categories that have been named the National Plant of the Year. I had heard about the perennial of the year, since I am a big perennial gardener, but did not know that other plants were given that title. I always like to see what is new on the market and how I can fit that into my landscape. The Annual Plant of the Year is Truffula Pink Gomphrena. This plant is easy for everyone. It is perfect for baskets and containers as well as planted right in your backyard. Beautiful pink color and is easily recognized at a glance. The Caladium of the Year is Heart to

Heart Scarlet Flame Caladium. This can grow in sun or shade. It has vivid red leaves splashed with hot pink speckles and a bright green contrasting edge. This plant is not one of my favorites, but the picture and colors of this plant puts it on my wish list. You can plant this in containers or directly in your landscape. The Perennial of the Year is Dolce Wildberry Heuchera. It has royal purple broad glossy leaves with ruffled edges that add contrast and texture. This is a definite yes on my plant list this spring. Heucheras are my favorite perennial and that is evident in my yard. I have lots of shade and made good use of this plant. The color variation on the foliage draws me in everytime. The Hosta of the Year is probably one that some of us are familiar with: Shadowland Empress Wu. It is the largest hosta — a mound of huge, leathery textured leaves. The blooms are a bonus on this hosta attracting hummingbirds and pollinating bees. The Landscape shrub of the year is worth mentioning — Purple Pillar Hibiscus. A new favorite of mine, I bought my first perennial hibiscus last summer, so will see if it makes it through the winter. But this variety has a narrow columnar growth habit, perfect for squeezing into tight spots. It forms a perfect hedge packed with Lavender purple blooms. It attracts pollinators, but not deer! There are more Plants of the Year listed on the Proven Winner website to check out — these were my favorites. So please visit the site to view the pictures of these plants and read about the other varieties that carry the title. It helps cure the winter doldrums!

BP School officials praise Rinckenberger

BY HOWARD LESTRUD
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Vocational agriculture is a popular subject at Blooming Prairie High School. Just ask department head Bill (Rink) Rinckenberger. He is also the Future Farmers of America (FFA) advisor. Rinckenberger was recently nominated as one of five top vo-ag educators in Minnesota. A committee will then select the top educator, and it will be announced in mid-April. Principal John Worke and Superintendent

Chris Staloch both had high words of praised for Rinckenberger. Worke said, "Mr. Rinckenberger has great relationships with our students. He demands respect and he holds his students to the highest of standards. Teaching 'hands on' classes is not always the easiest, but Mr. Rinckenberger does it with passion and the students enjoy being in his classes. Congratulations Mr. Rinckenberger!" Staloch said, "Mr. Rinckenberger is affectionately known as 'Rink' by the students

that he serves through FFA and the Ag/Industrial Tech classes that he teaches. "Up until this year he has been a one-person department for many years and has done a wonderful job of juggling all the responsibilities that our school district has asked him to lead. "His students receive hands on learning opportunities and skills that transfer into the workforce and any post-secondary options that they pursue. Mr. Rinckenberger works



Bill Rinckenberger hard to hold his students accountable while creating a collaborative learning environment for all. We are so fortunate to have him educating the students of Blooming Prairie Public Schools."

Septic systems getting replaced in Mower County Lansing Township tops the list with 12

Nearly 340 septic systems have been replaced in three years across Mower County as part of an initiative aimed at protecting groundwater and local waterways. After the 2022 construction season, Mower County Environmental Services now has overseen the installation of 338 subsurface sewage treatment systems (SSTS) that replaced non-compliant systems since 2020 when the Mower County Board launched a push to accelerate SSTS compliance. In 2022, Mower County property owners installed 98 replacement septs, with the leading townships being Lansing (12), Austin (nine) and Windom (eight). Nearly 67% of the new septs installed in 2022 occurred in the Cedar River watershed; with most of the other 33% being in the Root River watershed of eastern Mower County. This progress follows 112 septic systems installed in 2021 and 128 systems in 2020, which was a record high, topping a previous mark of 125 systems a decade earlier.

lished escrow accounts resulting from property transfer or zoning-permit reasons. Last year, Mower County had 94 compliance inspections done by private contractors, leading to 33 non-compliant systems being found of which four have been abandoned permanently by the owners. In 2021, the county had 30 non-compliant systems found after an SSTS ordinance was adopted that year by the Mower County Board to increase reviews of septs. To date, Mower County has more than 4,000 properties with a septic system. The county estimates that 75% of those systems are in compliance with another 22% considered to be failing to protect groundwater and 3% designated as an "imminent threat to public health and safety." Prior to the new SSTS ordinance, the county typically found about five non-compliant systems each year, Lipelt said. "This change has

helped greatly in expediting septic compliance," she added. Under its SSTS program, Mower County offers some assistance to property owners that includes: • Septic loans of up to 90% of the replacement system's cost to be paid over 10 years as a tax assessment. • Compliance-inspection vouchers (while available) if required to inspect for a land-use permit. • Low-income grants; an qualifying example is a family of four with an annual income under \$66,650. In early 2020, the Mower County Board launched an SSTS initiative to complete the final phase of the county's long-running efforts to achieve septic compliance countywide. Some changes in recent years have included the county adding compliance-inspection prompts; commercial and industrial septic systems needing to maintain con-

stant compliance through inspections or operating permits; and septic systems (if not compliant) needing to be upgraded before transferring property or an escrow will need to be established for its transfer. Septic owners are urged to make sure they are properly maintaining their system, Lipelt said. A properly maintained septic system that is pumped and inspected every three to five years will last 30 years or more, she said. University of Minnesota's On-Site Sewage Treatment Program offers extensive tips for best maintenance of septic systems, ranging from annual maintenance to daily care, on its website: septic.umn.edu Mower County Environmental Services, 1105 Eighth Ave. N.E. in Austin, can assist with low-interest loans for septic replacements and other septic questions at 507-437-7718 and online at: www.co.mower.mn.us/486/Septic-Systems.

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BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

Feb. 22 Jayden Peterson Julie Lembke David Goodnature Kelly Krell Marvin Nelson Allan Trotman Doreen Busho	Feb. 24 Nathan Lindeman Leigh Slowinski Feb. 25 Tess Koster Muriel Thompson Sr. Mary Wendl	Sophia Schiller Linda L. Christianson Marlys Loew
Feb. 23 Sandra Basness Ardella Swenson Meghan Amberg Lori Arndt Caysa Salinas Jenny Winn Camden Klemmensen	Feb. 26 Kari Bottin Betty Behnken Per Kvalsten Feb. 27 Julia Worke Doris Rasmussen Brad Hines	Feb. 28 Amber Lonergan Douglas Novak Tim Trotman Mike Ingvalson Mary Wacek

Feb. 22
Marion & Joan Mast
Feb. 25
Steve & Cork Drexler

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AWESOME JOB BLOSSOM SCHOLARS



Congratulations to these students who earned a spot on the Second Quarter Honor Roll at Blooming Prairie High School:



Blossoms A Honor Roll - Grades 9-12 Front row, from left: Tyler Miller, Micah Donnelly, Jesse Cardenas, Sam Michaud, Ella Smith and Mia Johnson; second row: Cooper Cooke, Elizabeth Miner, Ava Smith, Annaka Forsberg, Rachel Winzenberg, Maxmar Ogren, Keily Averhoff, Charli Tripp and Clare Rennie; third row: Jaime Reinke, Aidan Slowinski, Derek Kubicek, Kolby Vigeland, Luke Heimgartner, Ty Forystek, Mason Simon and Brady Kittelson; back row: Madison Thurnau, Jenna Johnson, Anna Pauly, Madelaine Stoen, Anna Reese, Chloe McCarthy, Haven Carlson, Madison Lea and Ethan Brandt.

Blossoms A Honor Roll Grades 7 & 8 - Front row, from left: Ellie Stoen, Natalie Winzenburg, Natalie Schumacher, Bella Romeo and Jaylynn Sletten; second row: Jayden Wencl, Allison Bruggeman, Regan Donnelly, Neila Nelson, Ella Schleicher; third row: Sophia Esplan, Addison Mongeau, Isabella Schiller, Gloria Hernandez and Jasper Doocy; back row: Drew Reinke, Evan Westphal, Bentley Miller, Derek Miner, Jasper Sayles and Charles Korsmoe. Missing: Haley Schlichter and Chloe Weber.

A Honor Roll Grade 7 Charles Korsmoe Bentley Miller Derek Miner Bella Romeo Haley Schlichter Natalie Schumacher Jaylynn Sletten Ellie Stoen Natalie Winzenburg	Mason Simon Aidan Slowinski Ava Smith Charli Tripp Kolby Vigeland Rachel Winzenburg	Eliot Gimbel Lacey Haberman Shaun Hanson Zachary Holtberg Aubrey Klocke Madysan Slowinski Gabe Staloch Jaxon Studer Maxwell Thoen Emmaleigh White	Kylee Loth Logan Marzolf Molly Robins Hailey Schumacher Shawntee Snyder Sophie Thomas Lilly Wacek	Bradley Boyd Aden Doocy Addison Haugland Carsten Ingvalson Sadie Jensen Lance Lembke Kaydance VerHey-Schumacher Kloe Wacek	Grade 8 Cole Lindeman Alivia Martinez Riley Marzolf Kelvin McCarthy
Grade 8 Jasper Doocy Sophia Esplan Gloria Hernandez Addison Mongeau Neila Nelson Jasper Sayles Isabella Schiller Ella Schleicher Jayden Wencl Evan Westphal	Grade 12 Ethan Brandt Jesse Cardenas Haven Carlson Micah Donnelly Jenna Johnson Madison Lea Chloe McCarthy Samuel Michaud Tyler Miller Anna Pauly Anna Reese Clare Rennie Madelaine Stoen Madison Thurnau	Grade 9 Tyler Anderson Allison Blume Layla Coleman Natalee DeVries Ella Farr Noah Graves Madelyn Harvey Samantha Hefling Jonathan Heimgartner Brady Johnson Avery Larson Ambriella Miller Ella Salinas Claire Schwarz Cannon Wacek	Grade 12 Hosea Baker Morgan Camery Levi DenHerder Ethan Marzolf Dakota Mueller Katie Quandt Alexander Riley Joie Ruhter Lucas Schammel Alexis Steckelberg Abigail Thoreson Leah Thorson	Grade 10 Braden Farr ScottJohnson KohanMiller ElijahSkillestad GradySteckelberg Maveda Warner	Grade 9 Aubryana Alwes Cody Braaten Leah Hockers Hannah Hunter Colby Johnson Ayden Jones
Grade 9 Allison Bruggeman Regan Donnelly Drew Reinke Chloe Weber	A- Honor Roll Grade 7 Kyllo Callister Hollis Carlson Payson DeVries Isaac Fort Evan Jacobsen Eli Johnson Jayden Levine Haley McIntosh Raylee Miner Jasper Oldenkamp David Penkava Annika Schwarck Tessa Smith Max Sorensen Jakson Vermilyea Michael Wilberding	Grade 10 Catelyn Bartlett Lauren Brown Isabel Dickel Abby Jordison Madilynn Madsen Jacob Pauly Sophia Schiller Bo Zwiener	B+ Honor Roll Grade 7 Talon Arndt Parker Blome Sarah Brown Evie Emanuel Brayton Ingvalson Owen Jones Jaxon Meier Ryder Smith Ian White	Grade 11 Dylan Anderson Justin Bingham Cale Braaten Aubri DenHerder Jossie Munoz Khara Peters Justin Stork Karson Strand	Grade 10 Brianna Deplitch Alex Lea Elissa Martinez Alyssa Ronning Caitlyn Stangl Cole Wangen Alexis White
Grade 10 Cooper Cooke Mia Johnson Brady Kittelson Ella Smith	Grade 8 Gracelyn Anderson Connor Cooke Cooper Foster	Grade 11 Cameron Blume Breckin Cochlin Elizabeth Dohrmann Hannah Freese Shanna Halverson Layla Lembke Macy Lembke	Grade 8 Zachary Green Daisy Heimer Jaxon Hill Avry Hoffman Riley Johnson Hayden Miller Conor Rennie Gavin Slowinski	Grade 12 Natalie Brandt Bailey Brown Faith LaFontaine Johnson Cyprus Schleicher Anna Suchanek Elliott Swenson	Grade 11 Massey Enger Sienna Fyksen Lily Graves Carly McIntosh Rogue Rubedor Madison Sorensen
Grade 11 Keily Averhoff Annaka Forsberg Tyler Forystek Luke Heimgartner Derek Kubicek Elizabeth Miner Maxmar Ogren Jamie Reinke			B Honor Roll Grade 7 Kaden Anderson Ezekiel Ellingson Carson Gaines Madison Green Kylynn Johnson Jayden Kvalsten Mason Mueller Lanie Osmon		Grade 12 Trista Mott Samuel Smith Paul Sunde



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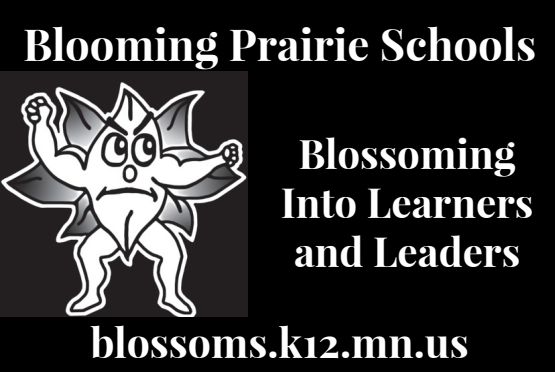
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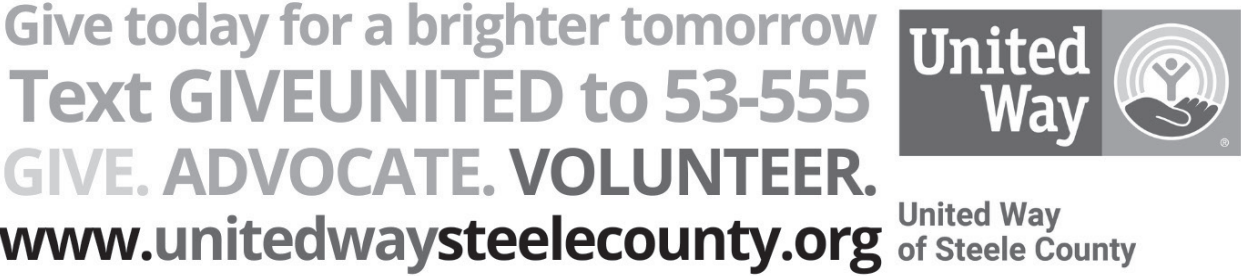
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PANTHER of The Week



NRHEG Elementary School- Ellendale
This week's Panther of the Week is Johannah Bennett. She is the daughter of Marc and Amy Bennett and they reside in New Richland. Johannah is in Ms. Garlow's fourth grade class. Johannah is a very respectful and caring friend. She likes to make sure others feel included and help out. She is a hard worker and very curious--she loves learning. Johannah shows her Panther Pride by helping out and making others feel welcomed. She also has worked to create projects sharing things she has learned about and made a book tree for our classroom to share book recommendations with each other. Keep up the great work Johannah!



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There's been an increase in alarming language surrounding the solvency of Social Security, but in reality, its prospects are not nearly as gloomy as you might have heard.

Here's the story: Under current law, Social Security is estimated to exhaust its trust funds by 2035, after which benefits could be cut by 20%, according to the 2022 Social Security Trustees report. However, the large cost of living adjustment (COLA) (8.7%) for 2023 could cause the trust funds to use up their resources sooner.

But this outlook may represent a worst-case scenario. For one thing, the cost of the 2023 COLA will be somewhat offset by higher taxes on workers contributing to Social Security. The maximum amount of earnings subject to the 6.2% Social Security tax jumped from \$147,000 in 2022 to \$160,200 in 2023. And in looking down the road, further increases in this earnings cap may also help reduce the gap in the trust funds. Increasing the payroll tax is another possibility for boosting funding to Social Security.

And here's a political reality: Social Security is a popular program and it's unlikely that any future Congress wants to be blamed for reducing benefits. Of course, there are no guarantees, but it seems fair to say that you can reasonably expect some benefits from Social Security when you retire.

But perhaps the bigger issue is just how much you should depend on Social Security for your retirement income. On average, Social Security benefits will provide about 30% of a beneficiary's preretirement earnings, according to the Social Security Administration. But the higher your earnings before you retire, the lower the percentage that will be replaced by Social Security.

Still, you'll want to maximize the benefits that are available to you — and that means deciding when to start taking Social Security. You can begin as early as 62, but your monthly payments could be as much as 30% lower than your normal (or "full") retirement age, which will likely be between 66 and 67.

Even if you were to wait until your full retirement age before collecting Social Security, you'll also need to draw on other sources of funding. So, while you are still working, it's a good idea to keep contributing to your IRA and 401(k) or other employer-sponsored retirement plan.

The amount you contribute should depend on your overall financial strategy and your financial needs, so, for example, you probably shouldn't put in so much into your retirement accounts that you feel significant stress in your monthly cash flow. But when you do get a chance to invest more in these accounts, such as when your salary goes up, you may want to take advantage of the opportunity.

Ultimately, you should be able to count on Social Security as part of your retirement income. You may want to consult with a financial professional to determine when taking Social Security makes the most sense for you and how you can also get the most from your other retirement accounts. You'll want a retirement income strategy that's built for the long run.

To learn more, call today.



Jeffrey M. Hall
Financial Advisor

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FORECLOSURE

NOTICE OF MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE SALE

THE RIGHT TO VERIFICATION OF THE DEBT AND IDENTITY OF THE ORIGINAL CREDITOR WITHIN THE TIME PROVIDED BY LAW IS NOT AFFECTED BY THIS ACTION.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN: That default has occurred in the conditions of the following described mortgage:
DATE OF MORTGAGE: January 26, 2012
ORIGINAL PRINCIPAL AMOUNT OF MORTGAGE: \$106,000.00
MORTGAGOR(S): Jay A. Kalvig, a single person
MORTGAGEE: Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc., as nominee for Loandepot.com, LLC
DATE AND PLACE OF FILING: Recorded on November 2, 2012 and memorialized upon Certificate of Title No. 16703 as Document Number T000069438 in the Office of the County Registrar of Titles of Steele County, Minnesota.
ASSIGNMENTS OF MORTGAGE: Assigned to: Nationstar Mortgage LLC by assignment recorded on January 3, 2023 as Document Number T000082323 in the Office of the County Registrar of Titles of Steele County, Minnesota.
LEGAL DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY: Lot Five in Block Three in Heinz Addition to the City of Owatonna, Minnesota.
REGISTERED PROPERTY STREET ADDRESS OF PROPERTY: 1132 BUTTERNUT AVENUE, OWATONNA, MN 55060
COUNTY IN WHICH PROPERTY IS LOCATED: Steele County, Minnesota.
THE AMOUNT CLAIMED TO BE DUE ON THE MORTGAGE ON THE DATE OF THE NOTICE: \$87,970.21
TRANSACTION AGENT: Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc.
NAME OF MORTGAGE ORIGINATOR: Loandepot.com, LLC
RESIDENTIAL SERVICER: Nationstar Mortgage LLC
TAX PARCEL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER: 17-149-0305
TRANSACTION AGENT'S MORTGAGE IDENTIFICATION NUMBER: 100853701000818376
THAT no action or proceeding has been instituted at law to recover the debt then remaining secured by such mortgage, or any part thereof, or, if the action or proceeding has been instituted,

that the same has been discontinued, or that an execution upon the judgment rendered therein has been returned unsatisfied, in whole or in part.
PURSUANT, to the power of sale contained in said mortgage, the above described property will be sold by the Sheriff of said county as follows:
DATE AND TIME OF SALE: March 21, 2023 at 10:00 AM.
PLACE OF SALE: Steele County Sheriff's Office, Law Enforcement Center, 204 Pearl Street East, Owatonna, MN 55060.

to pay the debt then secured by said mortgage and taxes, if any actually paid by the mortgagee, on the premises and the costs and disbursements allowed by law. The time allowed by law for redemption by said mortgagor(s), their personal representatives or assigns is six (6) months from the date of sale.

TIME AND DATE TO VACATE PROPERTY: Unless said mortgage is reinstated or the property redeemed, or unless the

time for redemption is reduced by judicial order, you must vacate the premises by 11:59 p.m. on September 21, 2023.

THE TIME ALLOWED BY LAW FOR REDEMPTION BY THE MORTGAGOR, THE MORTGAGOR'S PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVES OR ASSIGNS, MAY BE REDUCED TO FIVE WEEKS IF A JUDICIAL ORDER IS ENTERED UNDER MINNESOTA STATUTES, SECTION 582.032, DETERMINING, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THAT THE MORTGAGED PREMISES ARE IMPROVED WITH A RESIDENTIAL DWELLING OF LESS THAN FIVE UNITS, ARE NOT PROPERTY USED IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, AND ARE ABANDONED. MORTGAGOR(S) RELEASED FROM FINANCIAL OBLIGATION ON MORTGAGE: None

Dated: January 13, 2023

NATIONSTAR MORTGAGE LLC Mortgagee

TROTT LAW, P.C.

By: /s/
N. Kibongni Fondungallah, Esq.
Samuel R. Coleman, Esq.
Sung Woo Hong, Esq.
Attorneys for Mortgagee
25 Dale Street North
St. Paul, MN 55102
(651) 209-9760
(22-1397-FC01)
THIS IS A COMMUNICATION FROM A DEBT COLLECTOR.

NOTICE

STATE OF MINNESOTA COUNTY OF STEELE

DISTRICT COURT
Judicial District:
Third District
Court File No.
74-JV-22-2070
Case Type:
CHIPS - Permanency

In the Matter of the Welfare of the Child(ren) of: Christina Marie Melhouse (Mother) and Anthony James Moore (Father).

Summons and Notice Termination of Parental Rights Matter (CHP-115)

NOTICE TO: Christina Marie Melhouse (Mother) and Anthony James Moore (Father), Above-named parent(s) or legal custodian(s).

1. A Termination of Parental Rights Petition has been filed in the Juvenile Court alleging that parental rights of the above-named parent(s) or legal custodian(s) to the child(ren) named in the petition should be permanently severed.

2. **This is your notice** that this Termination of Parental Rights case is scheduled for a remote hearing before the Juvenile Court located at 111 East Main Street Owatonna MN 55060, on March 22, 2023 at 8:30 AM or as soon after as the case can be heard. Please contact court administration to get the remote hearing information.

3. **YOU ARE ORDERED** to appear before the Juvenile Court at the scheduled time and date.

4. You have a right to be represented by counsel.

5. If you fail to appear at the hearing, the Court may still conduct the hearing and grant appropriate relief, including permanently severing the parental rights of the above-named parent(s) or legal custodian(s) or taking permanent custody of the child(ren) named in the Petition.

Dated:

February 1, 2023

BY:
Steele County Court Administration
111 East Main Street
Owatonna MN 55060
507-686-7012

NOTICE

STATE OF MINNESOTA COUNTY OF STEELE

DISTRICT COURT
Judicial District:
Third District
Court File No.
74-JV-23-124
Case Type:
CHIPS - Permanency

In the Matter of the Welfare of the Child(ren) of: Christina Marie Melhouse (Mother) and Sakariya Ali Aden, (Father)

Summons and Notice Termination of Parental Rights Matter (CHP-115)

NOTICE TO: Christina Marie Melhouse, Above-named parent(s) or legal custodian(s).

1. A Termination of Parental Rights Petition has been filed in the Juvenile Court alleging that parental rights of the above-named parent(s) or legal custodian(s) to the child(ren) named in the petition should be permanently severed.

2. **This is your notice** that this Termination of Parental Rights case is scheduled for a hearing before the Juvenile Court located at 111 East Main Street Owatonna MN 55060, on March 22, 2023 at 8:30 AM or as soon after as the case can be heard. Please contact court administration to get the hearing information.

3. **YOU ARE ORDERED** to appear before the Juvenile Court at the scheduled time and date.

4. You have a right to be represented by counsel.

5. If you fail to appear at the hearing, the Court may still conduct the hearing and grant appropriate relief, including permanently severing the parental rights of the abovenamed parent(s) or legal custodian(s) or taking permanent custody of the child(ren) named in the Petition.

Dated:
February 8, 2023

BY:

/s/ Trista Nelson
Steele County Court Administration
111 East Main Street
Owatonna MN 55060
507-686-7012

NOTICE TO HAVANA TOWNSHIP RESIDENTS

Our Annual Meeting and Township Elections will take place on Tuesday, March 14, 2023 at Havana Town Hall, 4398 Havana Road, Owatonna. The Annual Meeting will begin at 3:30 PM and voting will begin immediately after the meeting is adjourned and will close at 8:00 PM.

Dave Joachim, Chair
Laurie Wolhart, Clerk

Notice to Merton Township Residents

The Merton Township Annual Meeting and Election will be held Tuesday March 7th 2023 at 5:00 pm at the township hall. Inclement weather date will be the third Tuesday of March. Polls will be open immediately following the annual meeting for the purpose of electing: One Supervisor for a 3-year term and one Treasurer for a 2-year term. The Board of Canvass will meet immediately following of the polls at 8:00 pm for counting of the ballots.

Eugene Peterson, Chairman
Brandon Balzer, Clerk

PROBATE

STATE OF MINNESOTA COUNTY OF STEELE

DISTRICT COURT
THIRD DISTRICT
Court File No. 74-PR-23-142
Case Type: Informal Probate

In re the Estate of Linda Mae Selig, a/k/a Linda M. Selig, a/k/a Linda Selig, Decedent

NOTICE OF INFORMAL PROBATE OF WILL AND APPOINTMENT OF PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE AND NOTICE TO CREDITORS

TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS AND CREDITORS:
Notice is hereby given that an amended Application for Informal Probate of the above named Decedent's Last Will and Testament, dated August 7, 2013, has been filed with the Probate Registrar, and the amended Application has been granted.
Notice is also given that the Probate Registrar has informally appointed the following: Debra Kukacka, whose address is 519 1st Street SW Faribault, MN 55021 as personal representative of the Estate of the Decedent. Any heir, devisee or other interested person may be entitled to appointment as personal representative, or may object to the appointment of the personal representative. Unless objections are filed pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 524.3-607, and the court otherwise orders, the personal representative has full power to administer the Estate, including, after 30 days from the date of issuance of letters, the power to sell, encumber, lease or distribute real estate. Any objections to the probate of the Will, or to the appointment of the personal representative, must be filed with this court, and will be heard by the court after the filing of an appropriate petition and proper notice of hearing.
Notice is also given that, subject to Minn. Stat. § 524.3-801, all creditors having claims against the Estate are required to present the claims to the personal representative or to the Court Administrator within four (4) months after the date of this Notice, or the claims will be barred.

Dated : January 13, 2023

Darla J. Busian
Registrar

Robin Hoesley
Court Administrator

Attorney for Applicant: Gregory S. Thibodeau Attorney at Law, P.A.

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Public Notice

The board of audit for Aurora Township will be held at 6:30 PM Monday March 6th, 2023 at Aurora Town Hall. The Monthly board meeting will follow.

Alicyn Prestegard – Clerk
Dennis Paulson – Chairman

Parcel 18.030.1602 located in Dodge County

The City of Blooming Prairie is currently accepting sealed bids for the lease of 26.92 acres of tillable farmland for the 2023 farming season. We will accept sealed bids in the City Administrator's Office located at 138 Highway Avenue South in Blooming Prairie until February 28, 2023 at 4:00 P.M. Bids will be opened and the highest bidder will be immediately notified and a lease agreement will be prepared.

Attend Township Day Meeting Tuesday, March 14, 2023

Owatonna Township in Steele County will convene for our annual meeting on Tuesday, March 14 at 3:00 PM in the Town Hall, 1334 S.E. 28th Street, Owatonna, Minnesota. All township residents are welcome and encouraged to attend. Township election voting is open 4:00-8:00 PM.

Please be advised that a portion of the discussion of the Annual meeting will pertain to the current condition of the township building.

We are grateful for your participation in the Owatonna Township Annual Meeting to share your opinion on important issues facing our township.

Jerry Katzung, Chairman
Joe Elbert, Clerk
Owatonna Township

Public Notice

Notice of Annual Meeting and Election of Officers is hereby given to the qualified voters of Aurora Township, County of Steele, State of Minnesota. The annual meeting and annual election of township officers will be held on Tuesday, March 14th, 2023. Annual Meeting is at 4 PM. The election poll hours will be from 5 PM to 8 PM at which time the voters will elect:

- 1 Supervisor – 3 Year Term
o Dennis Paulson – incumbent
- 1 Treasurer – 2 Year Term
o Barb Gallea – incumbent

The annual meeting and election will be held at:
Aurora Town Hall
7304 Austin Road
Owatonna, MN 55060
The Board of Canvass will meet at 8:15 PM March 14th, 2023. In case of inclement weather, the meeting and election will be held on Tuesday March 21st, 2023.

Alicyn Prestegard – Clerk
Dennis Paulson – Chairman

Ordinance Amendment CHAPTER 52: SEWERS

(D) Any person desiring to transfer ownership of a property within the city by deed, contract for deed or in any other manner shall, within 60 days prior to the transfer of ownership, have an inspection conducted of the property to determine if the property is in violation of this chapter by having a connection of roof downspouts, foundation drains, areaway drains, sump pumps or other sources of surface runoff or ground water to a building sewer or building drain which in turn is connected directly or indirectly to a public sanitary sewer.

If the structure on the property being transferred is slab-on-grade a visual inspection is required by city personnel. If the inspection identifies drains, a sump pump, or other sources of surface runoff collection and disposal, or questions arise in determining the endpoint of where drainage from roof downspouts occurs, an inspection conducted by use of dye, smoke or camera, or other method acceptable to the city to establish that the property is not in violation of this chapter is required.

All structures that have any sort of construction below grade are required to have an inspection conducted by use of dye, smoke or camera, or other method acceptable to the city to establish that the property is not in violation of this chapter. This includes but is not limited to, split level units, basements, crawl spaces, cellars, storm shelters and more.

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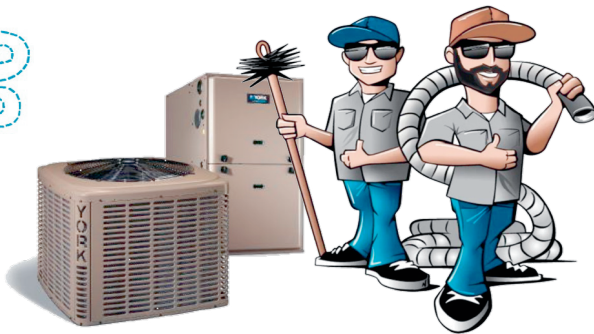


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OWATONNA SCHOOLS WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2023 | B16

Top 3 sledding places in Owatonna

BY ANGEL BARAJAS
OHS MAGNET WRITER

During winter, many people like to go outdoors and do all types of fun activities when the snow is perfect. One activity that is most popular among OHS students is sledding. Sometimes it is hard to know where to go sledding due to the copious amounts of hills in Owatonna; and their verging attributes.

When picking out where to go sledding in Owatonna, one must think about safety, the steepness of the hill, the height of the hill and overall enjoyableness. One should also take into consideration which is the most fun hill to go down that also has an easy way up. In most cases the steep hills are fun, but not when it comes to walking back up in snow boots whilst

dragging a sled too the result might leave a sledder exhausted.

Lincoln Elementary

At number three is the Lincoln Elementary sledding hills. These hills range from all different sizes due to students making their own hills off the snow in the ground. What makes these hills attractive is their location in town, which many deem them easy to access. Physical Education teacher, Mr. Dustin Thorson said, "I love hearing and seeing the pure joy of students sledding together. Students get very creative in how they try to sled during our classes." The Lincoln Elementary hills are very wonderful for young kids, but also a very good way for them to go sledding and hangout with other kids during the winter.



Lincoln Elementary students climb up hill during physical education class.

West Hills

Coming in second is West Hills. These hills are the second most popular hills in Owatonna to go sledding, because they are in a more conservative area and not in the wide open. While the hill has limited space to go sledding overall there is still plenty of room to

get the job done. Sophomore Parker Casas said, "I always go sledding at the West Hills and it is a very good sledding spot and I really enjoy sledding there." This hill could be enjoyed by everyone, but most younger kids just beginning to sled have the most fun at this hill.

Owatonna Country Club

Coming in at the number one spot, the hill near the Owatonna country club. This is one of the most popular hills in Owatonna due to the hill being steep and fun to go down since there is also a frozen river at the end.

This means in case one does not stop in time they will end up hitting the top of the river. Sophomore Chuck Hawkinson said, "I have been sledding at the hill near the country club for about two years now and it is a very fun place to spend time in during the winter." Another reason that it is number one is because it is not that hard to come back up making the overall experience less tiring which leads to one staying there for hours on end. This hill is very appropriate for adults and older kids because it is steep and very fast to go down.

Now when picking where to go sledding, think about these three hills in Owatonna and give them a try to see which one fits better to the sledding experience that is being pursued.



OHS MAGNET PHOTO BY ETHAN ARMSTRONG

OHS Concert Choir performs at the Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis.

OHS Concert Choir tours Minnesota

BY ETHAN
ARMSTRONG
OHS MAGNET WRITER

OHS Concert Choir went on tour for the first time since COVID-19 started. They left the high school at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 28th, and arrived back at the high school at 10:45 pm on Monday, Jan. 30th. This is how they spent their days during the trip.

Ms. Paula Asmus said, "The choir sang so well throughout the weekend and they were consistent with every performance. Over the weekend we sang at the Four Seasons Center for the OHS Girls Hockey Game vs Hastings, The Basilica of Saint Mary, Prior Lake High School, Farmington High School, Bethel University, and Target Center."

On Saturday, January 28, their first stop was the Owatonna Varsity Girls Hockey game at the Four Seasons Center. They sang the National Anthem before the game and cheered on their team as they faced Hastings for an out of conference match up.

Richardson said, "This day was really laid back and I

enjoyed that, laser tag at Grand Slam was really fun too."

On Sunday, January 29, Concert Choir stopped at the Basilica of Saint Mary to sing in their beautiful church. They sang as a complete choir, the Chamber Choir sang one of their songs and a few soloists sang as well.

Senior Ezra Oien said, "I thought it was super cool. It was crazy that the church had a seven second reverb, which was my favorite thing!"

Senior Mikah Elstad said, "My favorite thing we did on Saturday was definitely singing at the Basilica. I've never been in a church that big before."

The choir sang for about 30 minutes and then got a tour of the space and got to look at all the details of the church. After the tour, they headed to the Chanhassen Dinner Theater to watch the musical "Footloose".

On Monday January 30, the final day of the tour started off early at 8 a.m. when the choir loaded the bus and headed to Prior Lake High School to sing with their top choir. Elstad said, "I was really impressed with Prior

Lake. They looked like they were having lots of fun and the vibe was really good throughout the whole exchange." They sang their songs for each other and even sang one together.

After the exchange, they went to eat lunch and make their second stop at Farmington High School. They left Farmington and arrived at Bethel University to work with their choir director; they also watched an opera that Bethel performed.

After performing at Bethel, the choir departed to the highlight of their trip. The Timberwolves game where they would sing the national anthem.

Alec Harris said, "It was very exciting yet intimidating. Having this once in a lifetime opportunity was pretty cool." This would end their trip and they headed back to Owatonna.

This tour was a great way for the choir to get out and spread their gift of music. Ms. Asmus said, "It was great just getting to have fun and see the students get to spend time with their friends."

View all articles by the Owatonna High School Magnet staff at ohsmagnet.com.

OWATONNA HIGH SCHOOL PRESENTS

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Music by Jeanine Tesori

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Original Production Directed by Jason Moore and John Ashford

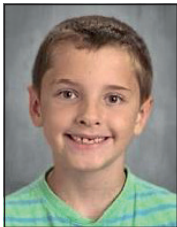
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2023

Students of the Week

Elementary School



Nathan Lindsay
Second Grade
Parents: Anthony and Kari Lindsay

Nate is a wonderful student to have in the classroom. He is a hard worker, good listener, and a great role model for the rest of his classmates. He shows excellent leadership skills, and we can always count on him to do the right thing. Keep up the great work, Nate!



Divani Lopez
Fifth Grade
Parents: Daniela Gallegos and Eleazar Lopez

Divani is a conscientious student who diligently works to complete assignments. Divani is gentle, kind, and quiet but when she has something to say everyone listens. Divani has a dream of becoming a doctor one day and with her dedication to academics, there is no doubt she will become Dr. Lopez one day.

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