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Judy Brobston, Hibbing
Dennis Davis, Rio Verde, Arizona
Beverly Gustason, Taconite
Richard Ranso, Grand Rapids
Bruce Shorter, Cohasset
Shirley 'June' Witte, Grand Rapids

| **4D-5D**

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BUSINESS

Chocolates for a good cause

Pengilly company creates sweets for music festival. | **Section D**

Positive signs for Itasca Co.

Ten percent (4,502) Itasca residents have received at least one dose

Following months of high levels of COVID-19, Itasca County now is seeing increasing vaccination, lower infection rates, most schools able to host students in-person, continuing sports seasons and collaboration among agencies and health care providers.

As of Feb. 4, Itasca County saw 35 residents newly diagnosed with COVID-19 over the past seven days and 69 over the past two weeks. The county's 14-day case average per 10,000 residents was 15.7 as of Feb. 1, similar to the levels of infection seen here since early January.

"There's a lot to be hopeful about in our area, possible because of sacrifices by families, individuals and hard-working front-line workers," said Kelly Chandler, division manager, Itasca County Public Health. "Still, we have more than 30 neighbors sick with COVID and in isolation and the virus still circulating. It's up to us to stay strong, keep our forward motion and not to waste the efforts so many have made to keep our neighbors safe.

"Please continue to wear masks, avoid gatherings and keep six feet of distance. We can see the finish line, but we're not there yet."

Ten percent (4,502) of Itasca residents have received at least a first dose of COVID vaccine, according to Minnesota Department of Health.

SEE POSITIVE, PAGE 8



SUBMITTED PHOTOS
Judith Peterson (above) and Ray Johnson (below) receive vaccines at Grand Itasca Clinic & Hospital, Grand Rapids.



Careless riders could close portion of main trail corridor

Snowmobile club urges riders to follow trails over private property

STAFF REPORT HERALD-REVIEW

What became a serious problem last winter, has members of the Itasca Driftskippers Snowmobile Club at their wits end again this year. Irresponsible riders have continued to trespass on private property despite efforts by the club to post signage and ask for added enforcement.

Itasca Driftskippers Club Founder Ken Stangland explained that an important trail connection that runs across property of the former Wendigo Golf Course risks being closed. New owners have assumed the property and granted the Driftskippers a year lease for their trail crossing. The club wants to make sure snowmobilers abide by the restricted arrangements that have allowed riders to cross the private property especially since it connects the main corridor from the Pokegama Lake area to the City of Grand Rapids.

SEE TRAIL, PAGE 8

'This program changes people's lives for the good'

SOAR helps disabled homeless apply for benefits

BY BRITTA ARENDT
HERALD-REVIEW

For those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and have a disability, navigating the application process and paperwork to get the benefits they qualify for and the help they need to gain independence can be extremely daunting. Life can feel like a constant struggle and hopelessness can become overbearing.

However, there is help and advocacy here in Itasca County. The SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) program, offered through KOOTASCA Community Action offers guidance for individuals to confidentially navigate the

Social Security Disability application process. A nationwide program, SOAR is designed to help children and adults who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and have a disability apply for benefits. SOAR seeks to end homelessness through increased access to SSI/SSDI income supports and also encourages employment as a means to increase individual income and self-confidence toward independent living. Without the support of a SOAR provider, it can take as long as 1-3 years to obtain approval for disability benefits. But decisions on SOAR-assisted initial applications are received in an average of only 108 days and are two times more likely to be approved than non-SOAR applications.

Kim Wirtanen is a certified SOAR Caseworker with KOOTASCA Community Action who works mostly with both adult and youth clients who have mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, schizophrenia, and bipolar. She also processes claims for physical health reasons like back issues, cancer, and multiple sclerosis.

"The most important part of this job is getting your client to trust you enough to open up about their daily life," said Wirtanen who explained that the majority of her clients do not have stable housing, are couch hopping, or living on the streets.

SEE SOAR, PAGE 8

Karkela joins Herald-Review Editorial team

STAFF REPORT
HERALD-REVIEW

The Grand Rapids Herald-Review announces Ben Karkela has joined the newspaper's editorial team as staff writer.

Karkela was born in Grand Rapids where he spent his childhood here. He later graduated from West Fargo High School and Minnesota State University Moorhead with a bachelor's degree in mass communications and journalism emphasis. While at MSU, Karkela wrote for the school's newspaper, The Advocate, and was the winner of the

AAF-North Dakota Gold Student ADDY Award for Editorial Spread.

Karkela interned at The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead and worked for Forum Communications as a writer/designer.

SEE KARKELA, PAGE 8



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