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HAPPY EASTER: Pastor's column PAGE 5

Doesn't every bunny love a photo op?



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

Easter is this Sunday, April 5. In honor of the upcoming holiday, the Easter Bunny stopped by the Water's Edge Community Center in Hugo for a visit. Keep an eye out for some bunnies in this week's issue. Find more information on page 2.



CONTRIBUTED

This map shows the location of the proposed Hardwood Creek Trail connection. It is approximately one-mile long.

IF YOU GO:

What: Hardwood Creek Regional Trail open house
When: 4 to 6 p.m. Wednesday, April 8
Where: Oneka Room at Hugo City Hall
Details: Learn about the project's design process and the project schedule, and meet the project team. Attendees can provide feedback and share ideas for the project.
Contact: Erin Blaylock, project manager: erin.blaylock@washingtontownshipmn.gov or 651-430-4384.

Hugo accounts for nearly 12% of new construction in Washington County

BY SHANNON GRANHOLM
MANAGING EDITOR

HUGO — New construction in Hugo continues to be a popular option for homebuyers. In fact, the city of Hugo accounted for 11.9% of new construction in Washington County for 2025.

"We are fourth in Hugo, right behind Woodbury, Cottage Grove and Lake Elmo," said Tyson Terry, a residential property appraiser with Washington County. "We are seeing a lot of the new construction homes being sold pretty quickly and for asking price ... New construction has climbed, but it is not through the roof."

It's a yearly tradition for the county assessor to visit the City Council to recap some of the key findings for the assessment year (AY). Terry shared findings for AY 2026, based upon actual real estate market trends of Washington County properties from Oct. 1, 2024, through Sept. 30, 2025.

Although each property in the county is reassessed every year based on market conditions, individual properties are viewed by the assessor every five years. The reviews begin in March and must be completed by Oct. 30. As a part of AY 2026, 1,476 reviews were completed in Hugo alone, and 1,812 properties in the city will be up for

SEE ASSESSOR'S UPDATE, PAGE 11

Regional trail: Public invited to open house

BY SHANNON GRANHOLM
MANAGING EDITOR

A major regional trail project continues to move forward. Once a one-mile extension is complete, there will be continuity from Ramsey

County up to Chisago County.

The Hardwood Creek Regional Trail is a 10-mile multiuse trail that runs through Forest Lake and Hugo, generally following the Burlington North-

SEE REGIONAL TRAIL, PAGE 11

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COUNTY BRIEFS

County Board approves contract, agreements for pavement crack sealing

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved an \$801,446 contract with Asphalt Surface Technologies Corp. to provide crack sealing services on roads and highways in the county. Crack sealing is a key pavement-preservation strategy that protects the county's transportation infrastructure and extends the life of existing pavement. This preventive maintenance approach maximizes the life of the county's investment, delays the need for costly overlays or reconstruction and supports a safe, reliable transportation network. Crack sealing is performed annually to maintain system-wide pavement health.

The 2026 program will seal roadway cracks across the county system, including county roads, county state

aid highways, county park roads and parking lots and city and township road segments completed at the request and cost of those jurisdictions.

In addition to the contract, the County Board approved cost-share agreements with Birchwood, Stillwater Township and Grey Cloud Island Township to cover the costs of crack sealing on specified city and township roads. Crack sealing is planned to begin in May.

Sheriff's Office receives donation from OUR Rescue for forensic access tool

The Washington County Sheriff's Office received a \$6,005 donation from OUR Rescue to help offset the costs of a license for a forensic tool to access encrypted data on mobile devices. The software, called GrayKey Essentials, is designed to provide same-

day, lawful access to mobile devices and extraction of encrypted data.

OUR Rescue is a nonprofit organization that exists to protect children from sex trafficking and sexual exploitation, a mission best accomplished through collaboration with law enforcement agencies both in the U.S. and abroad. The donation from OUR Rescue is part of its commitment to empowering domestic law enforcement agencies by providing tools, training and technology to enhance their abilities to combat child exploitation.

Sheriff's Office receives \$5K grant for Shop with a Cop

The Washington County Sheriff's Office received \$5,000 from Walmart's Spark Good local grant program in support of the Sheriff's Office Shop with a Cop event. The Washington County Sheriff's Of-

fice has partnered with the Oak Park Heights Walmart for the last several years to host a holiday Shop with a Cop community engagement event.

Military families identified by the Yellow Ribbon Network and students nominated by local elementary schools that could use additional help to make the holidays a little brighter are selected to participate in this event. The selected children are paired with deputies from the Sheriff's Office and officers from the Oak Park Heights Police Department to shop for gifts for their families. The participants are also provided a Secret Santa gift selected by the deputy or officer that they are paired with. This event has been a great opportunity for the Sheriff's Office employees and volunteers to connect with the community in a positive way.



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Scan for this week's specials!

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Bunny Search

In this issue of The Citizen

- Find all the bunnies that look like the one on the left hidden in this newspaper. Some of them may be black and white.
- Enter the number of bunnies you find on our contest form online for a chance to win St. Paul Saints tickets.
- The example bunny here does not count toward the total.
- All correct answers will be put into a drawing and one winner will be selected.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING



ONGOING EVENTS

HUGO SENIOR CITIZENS PLAY '500'
When: 12:45 p.m. Thursday, April 2 and 16 and the 1st, 3rd and 5th Thursday of every month
Where: Rice Lake Centre, 6900 137th Street N.
Details: Games begin at 12:45 p.m. Refreshments and coffee served. All senior citizens from the area invited.
Contact: Barb at 651-592-0369 or barbcconnolly1958@yahoo.com

CRIBBAGE
When: 1 p.m. Monday, April 6 and April 27 and the 1st and 4th Monday of every month
Where: Rice Lake Centre, 6900 137th St. N., Hugo
Details: Senior citizens from Hugo and surrounding area are invited to an afternoon of cribbage. Coffee and refreshments served.
Contact: Alice at 651-429-4413

CURRENT EVENTS

SENIOR HOUSING DAY
When: 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Friday, April 3
Where: White Bear Area Senior Center, 2399 Cedar Ave.
Details: Explore local housing options, learn the essentials of aging in place, find resources to help with the transition.
Contact: 651-653-3124 or ids624.org

BINGO FOR BOOMSTICKS

CONTRIBUTED

EASTER EGG HUNT
When: 9:30 a.m. Saturday, April 4
Where: St. Joseph of the Lakes Catholic Church
Details: Annual egg hunt. Register online at mystjoes.me.
Contact: www.mystjoes.me

GUIDED FILLEBROWN HOUSE TOUR
When: 11 a.m.-noon Saturday, April 4
Where: Fillebrown House, 4735 Lake Ave., White Bear Lake
Details: Visit the quaint 1879 lakeside cottage and learn about life in the resort era. Ticket information online.
Contact: whitebearhistory.org

TRIBUTE TO JOHNNY CASH: MITCHELL HALL AND THE TENNESSEE TRIO
When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday, April 4
Where: Hanifl Performing Arts Center, 4941 Long Ave., White Bear Lake
Details: Tribute to the legace of Johnny Cash. Ticket information online.
Contact: 651-478-7427 or lakeshoreplayers.org

ONCE UPON A STORY TIME
When: 9-10 a.m. Tuesday, April 7
Where: Wargo Nature Center, 7701 Main

BINGO FOR BROOMSTICKS
When: Friday, April 17; Doors open at 5 p.m. and Bingo starts at 7 p.m.
Where: Hugo American Legion
Details: The Hugo Fire Relief Association is partnering with Ducks Unlimited for a Bingo Night. In addition to Bingo, there will be raffle prizes. Reserve your spot ahead of time by visiting <https://www.hugofirerelief.org>.
Contact: RHoernemann@ci.hugo.mn.us

St., Lino Lakes
Details: Step into a world where imagination knows no bounds as a storyteller takes you on nature adventures through stories, songs, and crafts. Registration is encouraged through Anoka County Parks to ensure there are enough craft supplies for all attending.
Contact: anokacountyparks.com

FUTURES IN BLOOM
When: 7:15-8:45 a.m. Thursday, April 9
Where: Century College, East Campus Lincoln Mall
Details: Breakfast fundraiser to support Century College students seeking to become part of Minnesota's healthcare workforce. RSVP.
Contact: 651-444-2314 or century.edu/giving/foundation-events

NEURODIVERSE AUTHOR READING AND BOOK RELEASE
When: 10 a.m. Wednesday, April 8
Where: White Bear Center for the Arts, 4971 Long Ave.
Details: Celebrate the release of stories written by PAI participants by hearing them told live by the authors.
Contact: whitebeararts.org

ZEPHYR GALA
When: 509 p.m. Saturday, April 10
Where: JX Event Venue, 123 2nd St., Stillwater
Details: Signature fundraising event for Mahtomedi Area Education Foundation supporting Mahtomedi students and teachers. Ticket information online.
Contact: onecau.se/zephyrgala26

SAVE THE DATE

KIDZ N BIZ
When: 9 a.m.-noon Saturday, April 18
Where: Oneka Elementary
Details: Free community event hosted by the Hugo Business Association connects local business and families through vendor booths and activities such as games, inflatables, face painting, prize drawings, demos, food and more.
Contact: hugobusinesses.com

CHAIN OF GIVING
When: 5:30-9 p.m. Saturday, April 18
Where: Peder Pederson Pavilion
Details: "Beach Bingo"-theme includes 10 rounds of Bingo, dinner and cash bar serving vacation-mode drinks. Fundraiser for Chain of Lakes Rotary supports STRIVE seniors college scholarships and support for community outreach programs.
Contact: chainoflakesrotary.com



CENTERVILLE TIDBITS

- Spring Lake Park, Blaine, Mounds View (SBM) Fire Department Assistant Fire Chief Matt Montain gave an update on the day-to-day calls for service answered by the SBM Fire Department. So far this year, there have been 684 calls for service throughout the department's multicity jurisdiction. Twenty of those calls came from Centerville and included three structure fires. The department responded quickly to a short-lived grass fire caused by an out-of-control bonfire. "Even though it's wet right now, it doesn't take a lot to dry out an area. Careful burning can't be emphasized enough," he said. The department is gearing up for grass season as signs point to a dry spring. Montain noted that the department responds to approximately 150 calls for service from Centerville each year. With 24 calls already, expect the activity to pick up to around 40 calls per month in the summer, Montain said. January and February are the slowest months, but activity peaks in the summer when people are out and about, he said.
- As part of the city's capital improvement plan for water infrastructure, city staff requested permission to submit a grant application to the Minnesota Department of Health's project priority list for water infrastructure projects that will need to be completed soon. These projects may become eligible for funding support from the state's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, but the application had to be submitted by March 13.

The city must apply to establish eligibility for the priority list before city projects can be considered. After rehabilitation work in Well No. 1 revealed that sand in the well would always be a problem, Public Works Director Charlie Lehn identified three grant opportunities for which the city would want to be considered. The estimated cost of all three projects comes to about \$1.6 million. The city may prioritize these three projects as funding becomes available:

- Well No. 3, to be located in town as a backup to the city's other two wells;
- Cleaning, paint evaluation and 10-year maintenance on the city's water tower; and
- Meter technology software equipment to streamline

the reading of meters.

Council approved the submission of the grant application seeking future eligibility to obtain funding for the three projects outlined above.

- The Centerville Elementary PTA Spring Festival will take place from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. May 3, after council approved a special event permit. Both the Centennial Lakes Police Department and SBM Fire Department have no concerns and have marked their calendars to participate. There will be bouncy houses, fire trucks, crafts, raffles, pizza and ice cream, along with other activities and games. The Centerville Elementary PTA Spring Festival has been an annual event for many years.
- Start taking grounders and practicing your swing. The Centennial Little League has already been approved by the Parks & Recreation Committee to play summer baseball, pending submission of the league schedule. Council also approved a special event permit allowing the league to use the baseball and softball fields and facilities at Laurie LaMotte Memorial Park from April 1 through Sept. 30.
- As the city vowed to support legislation for electric bicycle safety measures, the CLPD is promoting bike safety, said City Administrator Athanasia Lewis in her report. To learn more about bike safety education, click on the link: www.clpdmn.com.
- Lewis also noted that 2026 spring weight restrictions are now in effect. Visit the city website at www.centervillemn.com for a list of roadways with restrictions.
- The Public Works Department stresses that plowing season is not over. Please do not remove the markers

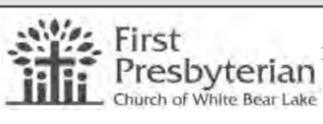
that are in place along the roadways and yards.

- The Planning and Zoning Commission has highlighted a few proposed projects to be under review during the next couple of months:
 - Wood of Old Mill – the third and final phase of the Old Mill Estates Development
 - Sutton Transportation expansion
 - Engineering Office at 1737 Main St.
- In the meantime, the Equinox Development proposal for townhouses on 21st Street has been withdrawn.
- In mid-March, Anoka County mails out statements for property taxes payable in 2026 and valuation notices (2026 value on which 2027 taxes will be based). If you believe the valuation or classification of your property is incorrect, call Centerville City Assessor Mary Wells at 763-412-1966 Ext. 1 to discuss. There is also a formal appeal option, which is the opportunity to appear before the Centerville Local Board of Appeal & Equalization meeting. The meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, April 23, at Centerville City Hall in council chambers.
- Council Member David Kubat has submitted his resignation due to residency issues, and council has accepted it. Half of Kubat's term remains, and council will determine how many people to interview for his vacant seat, as well as the process for rounding up candidates. That person will serve until the next election cycle. With Kubat's departure, a seat on the Parks & Recreation Committee is now open.
- Council has rescheduled the April 9 meeting to April 16 to meet quorum requirements.

Loretta Harding



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Thank you, readers

Are you ready for spring as our local garden centers begin to open? This community is an amazing place to live, from our local schools, sports, arts, events and entertainment, to the wonderful local options to dine out. This



Publisher's View
Carter Johnson

community is next-level. Here at the The Citizen, we are grateful for you. Over the past few weeks as a result of our first-ever saturation drops more than 1,000 households throughout Hugo have received complimentary copies of the local newspaper. Many of you have made the decision that you would like to receive it regularly through a mailed subscription. From this sampling experiment, we have also received great feedback. A few of our readers have asked for more detailed crime reports, and others have asked for less negative news and more feel-good stories. We

take your input to heart as we strive to be your best source for community information featuring hyper-local news.

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We are beginning our spring subscriber campaign. We rely on subscriptions to help offset the rapidly rising cost of providing the local news, including labor, health care and postage. We have seen more than a 50% increase in postage from the USPS in the past few years. Many years ago, most local papers were delivered by youth carriers, and we are now starting to bring back that method. This can be a fun opportunity for local kids to have their first job. Essentially, youth carriers own a business, spurring entrepreneurial spirit. Kids learn discipline from delivering in a timely fashion, they learn time management and how to navigate their schedule to fit in delivering the paper with school, music lessons and sports. Many famous people got their start in business with a paper route, including Warren Buffett, Walt Disney, Wayne Gretzky and Martin Luther King JR.

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If you think about trying to attend the community meetings that impact your life – planning commissions, school boards, city councils, parks and watershed districts to name a few – you realize how much time it would take and how inconvenient it would be. Our reporters are there so you don't have to be. In the pages of The Citizen we are providing summaries of these meetings in so you don't have to miss the information. We work hard to save you time and keep you informed. Please take a few minutes to sign up to support the local news.

Carter Johnson is Publisher of Press Publications.



Creating the Conditions to Build the Future

Remarks recently shared by Dr. Kazmierczak at the conclusion of a comprehensive Building Our Future & Facilities Update presentation to the School Board



Movers and Shakers
Wayne Kazmierczak

As our list of finished Building Our Future construction projects is coming to fruition – with Early Childhood and Transition Education spaces being finalized at Sunrise in preparation for housing the programs in the fall – it's a meaningful time to pause and reflect.

This transformation has been a massive undertaking, beginning with the vision of former School Board members and some of our current members. Over the course of this journey – from developing the plan to supporting the informational campaign and guiding the initial implementation – leaders including Janet Newberg, George Kimball, Kim Chapman, Ellen Fahy, Chris Hiniker, Lori Swanson, Cathy Storey, Marge Newmaster, Scott Wilson, Don Mullin and Rolf Parsons as well as current members Scott Arcand, Deb Beloved, Kathleen Daniels, Angela Thompson, Jessica Ellison, and Chris Streiff Oji have played an essential role.

I remember sitting in my office shortly after joining the district when two of our coaching and

teaching legends, Don Glover and Jim Galvin, stopped by to ask when we were going to begin facilities work that was so clearly needed. They were familiar with my work in a previous district and were energized by what might be possible here. As I recall, Mr. Galvin was ready to start knocking on doors that very day.

The shared vision – and the tireless efforts of nearly 100 community and staff members who served on our facilities planning committee – has been truly inspiring. To everyone who participated in those early meetings, reviewed blueprints, and shared their hopes for our schools: thank you. You helped lay the foundation for everything we see today.

The centerpiece of this entire vision is, of course, our unified White Bear Lake Area High School. For the first time in decades, our students in grades 9 through 12 are learning together under one roof. This is about more than a 375,000-square-foot addition or a stunning new student union commons area inspired by our community's sailing heritage – it's about the student experience. By bringing our students together, we've eliminated transitions that once fractured the high school journey, allowing for deeper relationships, expanded opportunities, and a stronger sense of "Bear pride" that begins on day one of freshman year.

Beyond the high school, this work has revitalized fifteen campuses across the district. We have done so strategically – utilizing multiple revenue sources and

maximizing every dollar of the 2019 bond – to ensure that the benefits reach every corner of our district, from our earliest learners to our senior citizens.

We know that this work requires a deep level of public trust. That is why we were especially heartened by the results of our 2024 community survey. With 86% of our residents and 91% of our parents rating the quality of our district favorably, these results are a testament to the partnership we share. The survey also affirmed a high level of confidence in our efforts to steward tax dollars responsibly. We take that fiscal responsibility seriously, and we believe these modernized, sustainable facilities are clear evidence of that commitment.

This project has been truly transformational. We haven't just renovated buildings; we have reimagined what learning looks like in White Bear. We have created spaces that foster student agency, support career pathways, and ensure that every child who walks through our doors feels safe, welcomed, and inspired.

To our families, our staff, and the entire White Bear Lake Area community: thank you for your support, your patience during construction, and your unwavering belief in our students. Together, we have built a future that will serve this community for generations to come.

*Dr. Wayne Kazmierczak
Superintendent, White Bear Lake Area Schools*

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- Repeat letters by the same writer about the same subject matter will not be published.
- Submissions containing libelous or derogatory statements will not be published.
- All letters are subject to editing.
- Deadline is 5 p. m., Wednesday of the week prior to publication.
- To submit a letter, e-mail it to citizennews@presspubs.com, fax it to 651-429-1242 or mail or deliver it to Press Publications, 4779 Bloom Ave., White Bear Lake, MN 55110.
- Press Publications publishes 99% of the letters to the editor that meet the guidelines.



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Unproud servants

All of us want things to go better in our relationships. None of us wants things to go poorly with others. So how can we help things to go smoother between us? While there are many ways to answer this question, let's talk about just one way: swallowing our pride. This reminds us of an interesting interaction Jesus once had with some of His closest friends. James and John once made a bold request of Jesus. They thought they knew what was best, and they wanted to help Him be in charge of heaven (Mark 10:37).

When Jesus' other close friends heard this, they were understandably upset (Mark 10:41).

What about us? Our Midwest sense of modesty usually tells us that we are humble people. But how often do we sit on the sidelines and think we know what is best? The classic example is the "armchair quarterback" who sits safely at home and thinks he has all the answers on how his team could win. But we do this with way more than just watching sports. How often do we think we have the answers as we complain about things at school or work? When we look at our world, how often do we sit back and think we have the answers and we know how to solve all these problems? This even affects our relationships. Have you ever given unsolicited advice? Have you ever offered your "two cents" when nobody asked for it? We learn the hard way how this kind of

attitude affects our relationships and makes it harder to get along.

So, what is the answer? Jesus answered this situation with, "Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be a servant of all." (Mark 10:43-44) When we "swallow our pride" and are willing to serve others, it helps our relationships. When we are willing to serve, then we are willing to do two things: listen to others and admit we do not have all the answers. The best example of this is Jesus! The very next thing He said was, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45) Jesus loves us enough to serve and save us. Even though He has all the answers, He still loves us enough to listen to us and humble Himself. Easter is a great time to remember how much God loves us and how we have the joy of serving others. Not only do we benefit from this, but our relationships will benefit as well!

If you are looking for a church home to celebrate with this Easter, we invite you to join our church family! A free Easter breakfast is at 8 a.m. and worship is at 9 a.m. on Easter Sunday (April 5). Worship will also be live-streamed on our YouTube channel. For more information, check out www.newlifehugo.org.

Tim Heinecke is the pastor at New Life Church Lutheran in Hugo.



COMMUNITY BRIEFS

Xcel Energy holds public hearings for new gas rates

At the beginning of 2026, Xcel Energy asked the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission to approve an increase in natural gas rates. The requested increase is approximately 8.2%, or approximately \$63.4 million. On average, the proposed final rate change would increase the monthly bill for a typical residential electric customer by \$7.11, or 8.7%.

Administrative Law Judge Kimberly Middendorf will hold six in-person public hearings and two virtual public hearings between April 27 and May 6, 2026, so customers have an opportunity to comment on the request.

For information and the public hearing schedule can be found online at tinyurl.com/4yw6ct9z. If you have questions about the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission review process or need assistance submitting comments,

contact the Commission's Consumer Affairs Office at 651-296-0406 or consumer.puc@state.mn.us.

Watershed district offers shoreline restoration grants

The Rice Creek Watershed District (RCWD) offers a variety of shoreline restoration grants for raingardens, erosion control and more. The RCWD water quality grant program provides an opportunity for individuals and organizations to actively participate in improving the water quality within the district. This program funds projects that implement best management practices to address water quality challenges within the watershed. Successful applicants can receive up to \$10,000 for an eligible project. For more information, visit www.ricecreek.org/grants/water-quality-grants.

SCHOOL BRIEF

Students plant terrariums at Oneka

Fifth graders at Oneka Elementary recently made terrariums. In science lessons, students are learning about ecosystems and how different environments thrive. They worked together to plant grass and alfalfa seeds and added a mealworm and leaves. Students are also using the scientific method to observe and record what happens to their terrariums over the next few weeks.



CONTRIBUTED

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POLICE REPORTS

The Washington County Sheriff's Office reported the following calls for service:

- Washington County Sheriff's Office deputies arrested an individual of undisclosed identity on a warrant at 5:05 p.m. Feb. 19 in the 15000 block of Greene Avenue N.
- Deputies on stationary patrol for drivers indulging in illegal passing on Highway 61 and 125th Street N. at 5:19 p.m. Feb. 19 cited a violator of that state law in the 5000 block of 130th Street N. A second motorist was issued a written warning for the same violation at 8:43 p.m. on Everton Avenue N. and 121st Street N.
- Following an alert for a domestic abuse no-contact order violation involving a parent and minor child, deputies arrived in the 5000 block of 165th Street N. at 10:08 p.m. Feb. 20 and determined there was sufficient evidence to prove that a violation of a court order had occurred and arrested the suspect.
- A speeding motorist was issued a written warning for the offense at midnight Feb. 21 on Oneka Lake Blvd. N. and Geneva Avenue N.
- Proving that free-range deer can suddenly appear out of the headlights and jump on squad cars as well as civilian cars, deputies on routine patrol in the 13000 block of Goodview Avenue fell victim to a gotcha deer at 6:18 p.m. Feb. 2, even though the squad was fully marked. In the Case of the Undiscriminating Deer, deputies' squad sustained moderate front-end damage and had to be towed back to the law enforcement center.

• Deputies found an abandoned bicycle at 10:11 p.m. Feb. 21 on the sidewalk near the community center in the 15000 block of Farnham Avenue N. The bike was not listed as stolen or missing, so deputies placed it near the community center security camera.

- A motorist behind in the paper-

- work of owning and driving a vehicle was pulled over in deuces wild fashion at 2:00 a.m. Feb. 22 on Frenchman Road and Victor Hugo Blvd. N. for expired registration. During the stop, the driver was unable to produce any proof of insurance and was likely cited.
- A PlayStation 5 and controllers were reported stolen from the 6000 block of 145th Circle N. at 5:33 p.m. Feb. 22.
- A resident in the 15000 block of Glenbrook Avenue N. at 10:41 a.m. Feb. 23 reported his credit card skimmed recently and fraudulent charges put on the card immediately.
- A motorist on Main Street and Otter Lake Road was pulled over and received a citation at 7:20 p.m. Feb. 23 for expired registration.
- A resident in the 4000 block of 149th Street N. reported a neighbor for making loud banging noises at 9:27 p.m. Feb. 23. However, when deputies spoke with the neighbor, that neighbor said they'd also heard the same noise. It is unknown who or what was making the noise, and both parties stated they had filed complaints with the homeowner's association.
- A southbound motorist was cited for speeding at 9:30 p.m. Feb. 24 in the 15000 block of Forest Blvd. N. by deputies on patrol on Highway 61, who pulled the vehicle over due to its high speed. During the traffic stop, deputies identified the driver and issued the speeding ticket due to his "history of having a lead foot."

• After a gas can was reported in the middle of the roadway on Frenchman Road and Forest Blvd. N. at 12:18 p.m. Feb. 25, deputies quickly responded and removed it.

- Washington County Sheriff's Office deputies received a report from motorists stuck waiting at a red light at 12:25 p.m. Feb. 25 that the traffic lights on Frenchman Road and Victor Hugo Blvd. N. were not changing. Deputies arrived on scene to confirm they were not changing and summoned

the Hugo Public Works Department.

- A motorist speeding along Forest Blvd. N. and 140th Street N. was issued a traffic ticket for that offense at 4:51 p.m. Feb. 25.
- While on routine patrol on Frenchman Road and Victor Hugo Blvd. N. at 5:37 p.m. Feb. 25 deputies observed a vehicle with its license plate tucked away in the back window, almost entirely obstructed from view. After they stopped the vehicle, deputies also noticed the vehicle had no working brake lights. In contacting the driver, deputies also noticed that no proof of insurance was forthcoming. The driver was then cited for the lack of insurance and faulty brake lights.

• In the Case of the Filibustering Fido, the owner of a barking dog was cited for violating city ordinances at 9:45 p.m. Feb. 26, following a complaint from the 4000 block of Rosemary Way N.

- A speeding driver was arrested for multiple violations at 9:56 p.m. Feb. 26 in the 14000 block of Forest Blvd. N. after deputies on patrol observed him speeding 16 mph over the speed limit in downtown Hugo. During the traffic stop, the driver tried to argue with deputies, saying the speed limit was 40 mph, which meant he was allowed to drive at 50 mph. Deputies quickly assured him that the speed limit was 35 mph and that he was speeding at 51 mph. The disagreement led deputies to make sure the driver's other motoring obligations were up to date. They discovered the driver had no insurance for his vehicle, nor did he enjoy valid driving status. Deputies had had enough and took him into custody.
- Residents in the 6000 block of 145th Circle N. reported a group of juveniles for throwing eggs at their house at 8:15 p.m. Feb. 28.

• In the Case of the Charging Chihuahua, dog owners in the 6000 block of 158th Street N.

were issued a written warning at 9:03 p.m. Feb. 28 for allowing their dog to charge their neighbor.

- A suspicious SUV parked outside a residence in the 5000 block of 120th Street N. at 12:10 a.m. March 1 with its lights on turned out to be a man out for the evening with his girlfriend. Deputies advised the couple to leave.
- Deputies conducted a traffic stop for hands free violation and for tabs that expired in May 2025 at 5:00 p.m. March 1 on Frenchman Road. Another motorist was stopped and cited at midnight March 3 on Forest Blvd. N. at 159th Street N. for expired registration. A third motorist was cited at midnight March 4 in the 6000 block of Egg Lake Road N. for tabs that expired in September 2024.
- Deputies responded to a driver who was in a bit of a pickle at 9:26 p.m. March 3 in the 12000 block of Goodview Avenue N. The driver somehow left his vehicle while it was in reverse and managed to lock the keys in the car while it was in gear and he was on the wrong side of the locked doors. After deputies were unable to open the vehicle, the driver suggested that the best way to get inside the vehicle would be to try to break the windshield for access. Deputies quickly advised against that plan, saying that special glass is used for windshields to keep them intact in the event of a crash to protect and keep the individuals inside.
- Deputies continued their streak in not being able to unlock vehicles after they couldn't open a vehicle at 4:18 a.m. March 4 in the 13000 block of Fenway Blvd. N. As they didn't have the proper tools, they advised the driver to call a tow service.



Loretta Harding

PUBLIC SAFETY BRIEFS

Minnesota State Rep. Elliott Engen arrested on suspicion of DUI

Minnesota State Rep. Elliott Engen (District 36A), who is running for state auditor, has been charged with fourth-degree DWI following a traffic stop in White Bear Lake.



CONTRIBUTED
Elliott Engen

The evening before the arrest, Engen was scheduled to attend a "Eyes on Fraud" fundraiser at The Minnesota in downtown White Bear Lake.

According to the White Bear Lake Police Department, at approximately 1:51 a.m. Friday, March 27, the agency conducted a traffic stop near the intersection of Fourth Street and Otter Lake Road in White Bear Lake for observed traffic violations, including speeding, expired registration and an inoperable headlight. The driver, a 27-year-old male from Lino Lakes identified as Engen, was arrested for suspicion of driving while impaired.

Engen was transported to the White Bear Lake Police Department, where a breath test reportedly indicated a blood alcohol concentration of 0.13. He was subsequently booked into the Ramsey County Adult Detention Center on a charge of fourth-

degree DWI and later released from custody.

As of press time, the case had been forwarded to White Bear Lake's prosecuting attorney for processing.

Fire department confirms identities, ages of victims in house fire

The White Bear Lake Fire Department has released the names and ages of the four victims in the house fire that occurred in the 2100 block of Richard Avenue March 21.

Jessi (Pierce) Hinrichs, 38, and her three children, Hudson Hinrichs, 8, Cayden Hinrichs, 6, and Avery Hinrichs, 4, were killed in the fire. Preliminary findings have not led to any evidence that the fire was set intentionally. The official cause of the fire remains under investigation by the White Bear Lake Fire Department and State Fire Marshal's Office.

"(They) will forever be loved and remembered by their husband and father, Mike Hinrichs, and the White Bear Lake and Mahtomedi communities," said White Bear Lake Fire Chief Greg Peterson. "We have been in close contact with Mike to support him, his family and his friends. He has asked

us to share his request for privacy while he grieves and the rest of his family and friends navigate this unimaginable time."

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HUGO BITS AND PIECES

• Executive Director Tim Cryer, from Lakes Center for Youth & Families, recently visited the council to present the annual report and provide updates on the organization, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2026. "In the nonprofit world, that is nothing to shake a stick at, to be around that long. We really feel blessed," Cryer said.

Some highlights from the report include:

- According to data from the Minnesota Student Survey, there are 18,468 youth grades K-12 in Washington, Anoka and Chisago counties. Of those, 26% struggle with depression; 30% struggle with anxiety; 8% struggle with substance use; 20% missed 10% or more of school; 15% seriously are considering suicide; and 5% have attempted suicide.

- 135 youth per year are served by the Strong Start program; 125 clients per year are served by the Juvenile Justice program; and 176 youth per year are mentored through the Education Engagement program.

- The center hosted over 3,000 counseling sessions and served 230 clients in 2025.

The public is invited to attend the Taste of Lakes from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Thursday, April 23, at Invisible Wounds Project, 840 Lake Street S, Unit B, Forest Lake. The keynote speaker will be Sam Eaton, author and founder of "Recklessly Alive." Proceeds from the event support mentoring, counseling, truancy intervention and restorative supports for youth and families across the communities.

For 2026, the city of Hugo will contribute \$17,670 in financial support to Lakes Center for Youth & Families for providing support programs to Hugo families relating to counseling, intervention and enrichment.

• The Hugo Fire Department now has a reciprocal emergency services agreement in place with Spring Lake Park-Blaine-Mounds View (SBM) Fire Department. Since SBM recently merged with the Centennial Fire District, SBM has requested the city of Hugo continue its auto aid response to the city of

Centerville as it has previously, despite the merger. In return, SBM has also agreed to provide resources for structure fires in the city of Hugo.

• The Chain of Lakes Rotary will host its Chain of Giving event from 5:30 to 9 p.m. Saturday, April 18, at the Peder Pederson Pavilion. This year's theme is Beach Bingo and will include 10 rounds of bingo, dinner and a cash bar serving "vacation mode" drinks for a mini getaway. Proceeds benefit STRIVE seniors, helping provide college scholarships to send students to camps and support other community outreach programs. For more information, visit <https://chainoflakesrotary.com>. The council approved a lawful gambling permit and temporary liquor license for the event.

• The council will host the Local Board of Appeals and Equalization meeting at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, April 2, in the Oneka Room at City Hall.

• A reminder to families that the annual Kidz n Biz event is scheduled from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, April 18, at Oneka Elementary School.

• The Planning Commission and City Council have scheduled a joint workshop for 5:30 p.m. Thursday, April 23, in the Oneka Room at City Hall. City Administrator Bryan Bear explained that the purpose of the workshop is an update and discussion about the city's zoning ordinances, including residential zoning districts, lot widths, setbacks, apartment development, etc.

• This summer, several concerts are planned at Lions Volunteer Park on Wednesday nights. Dates include May 27, July 8, Aug. 5 and Sept. 2. See the city website for more information.

The next City Council meeting will be at 7 p.m. Monday, April 6, at City Hall.

Shannon Granholm

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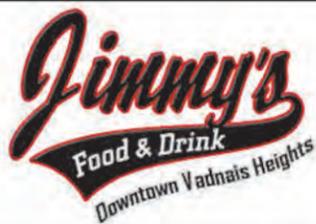
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6:00PM BINGO @ BEARTOWN

TUESDAY

6:00PM BINGO @ JIMMY'S

WEDNESDAY

9:00AM BINGO @ JIMMY'S
5:00PM MEAT RAFFLE @ DOC'S & BEARTOWN | 6:00PM BINGO @ BEARTOWN

THURSDAY

6:00PM BINGO @ JIMMY'S | 7:00PM BINGO @ WB BAR

FRIDAY

5:00PM MEAT RAFFLES @ WB BAR & DOC'S
6:00PM TRI-WHEEL @ WB BAR

SATURDAY

12:30PM BINGO @ SAK'S | 6:00PM TRI-WHEEL @ WB BAR
5:00PM MEAT RAFFLE @ JIMMY'S

RATE INCREASE NOTICE

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS FOR XCEL ENERGY MINNESOTA CUSTOMERS

Xcel Energy asked the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) to approve an increase in natural gas rates beginning Jan. 1, 2026. The requested increase is approximately 8.2% or \$63.4 million. On average, the proposed final rate change would increase the monthly bill for a typical residential natural gas customer by 8.7% or \$7.11.

The MPUC may either approve, deny, or modify the requested changes, including approving a lesser or greater increase than was requested for any customer class or classes of service.

The MPUC will likely make its decision on our rate request in the fourth quarter of 2026. If final rates are lower than interim (temporary) rates, we will refund customers the difference with interest. If final rates are higher than interim rates, we will not charge customers the difference.

If you move before a refund is issued and we cannot find you, your refund may be treated as abandoned property and sent to the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Unclaimed Property Unit. You can check for unclaimed property at www.missingmoney.com. To make sure we can send you any refund owed, please provide a forwarding address when you stop service.

Public Hearings

Administrative Law Judge Kimberly Middendorf will hold six in-person public hearings and two virtual public hearings so that customers have an opportunity to comment on our request. Any Xcel Energy customer or other person may attend or provide comments at the hearings. You are invited to comment on the adequacy and quality of Xcel Energy's service, the level of rates, or other related matters. You do not need to be represented by an attorney. The hearings will begin at their scheduled time and adjourn after everyone present has had an opportunity to comment or ask questions.

PUBLIC HEARING SCHEDULE		
Date	Time	Location
Monday, April 27, 2026	1:30 p.m.	Washington County Heritage Center 1862 Greeley St. S. Stillwater, MN 55082
Tuesday, April 28, 2026	1:30 p.m.	Virtual WebEx (see access details below)
Tuesday, April 28, 2026	6:30 p.m.	Wyoming Area Library 26855 Forest Blvd. Wyoming, MN 55092
Wednesday, April 29, 2026	1:30 p.m.	Great River Regional Library Bremer Room 104 404 W St. Germain St. St. Cloud, MN 56301
Monday, May 4, 2026	6:30 p.m.	Winona State University Kryzsko Commons Purple Rooms 247 - 249 500 Huff St. Winona, MN 55987
Tuesday, May 5, 2026	1:30 p.m.	Ramsey County Library Community Program Room 2180 Hamline Ave. N. Roseville, MN 55113
Tuesday, May 5, 2026	6:30 p.m.	Virtual WebEx (see access details below)
Wednesday, May 6, 2026	6:00 p.m.	Robert Trail Library Robert Trail Large Meeting Room 14395 S. Robert Trail Rosemount, MN 55068

Bad weather? Find out if a hearing is canceled—call (toll free) **855-731-6208** or **651-201-2213** or visit mn.gov/puc.

Virtual Public Hearings

Public hearings have been scheduled as follows to be held via video conference.

April 28, 2026, at 1:30 p.m. and **May 5, 2026, at 6:30 p.m.**

Attend by Internet Connection (Audio and Video)

To join the virtual hearing using a computer, tablet, or smart phone, where you will have audio and video capability, go to: <https://minnesota.webex.com>. In the gray box where it says, "Enter Meeting Information" type the Event Number below for the public hearing date you are attending:

April 28, 2026 1:30 p.m.	May 5, 2026 6:30 p.m.
Event Number: 2490 656 2535 Event Password, if needed: XCEL28	Event Number: 2489 688 6927 Event Password, if needed: XCEL55

Directions for Appearing via WebEx.

- Log on 5 to 15 minutes before the hearing begins. You will be asked to join the hearing through a WebEx application or through a plug-in for your web browser.
- Enter the Event Number shown in the box above.
- Next, you will be asked to enter your name, your email address, and an event password (if required). After entering this information, click "Join Now" and you will be granted access to the virtual hearing.
- When you enter the hearing, your microphone will be muted. If you would like to ask a question or make a comment during the meeting, use the chat function to send a message to the meeting moderator, who will place you in the queue to comment. When it is your turn to comment, your name will be called and your line will be unmuted. You will then be able to ask questions or make a comment.

To Attend by Telephone (Audio Only)

If you do not have access to a computer, tablet, or smart phone, or if you would prefer to attend the hearing via audio only, you may join using any type of telephone. You do not need internet access to call into the hearing; however, you will only be able to hear (not see) the speakers. You will still be able to comment and ask questions.

Use the information in the box below to dial into the hearing. You will be asked to enter the access code for the hearing, as set forth below:

April 28, 2026 1:30 p.m.	May 5, 2026 6:30 p.m.
Phone: 1-855-282-6330 Access Code: 2490 656 2535 Event password: 923528 from phones	Phone: 1-855-282-6330 Access Code: 2489 688 6927 Event password: 923555 from phones

If you would like to ask a question or make a comment during the hearing, **press *3** on your telephone. You will then be placed into the queue to comment. When it is your turn to speak, the last few digits of your telephone number will be announced by the moderator and your line will be unmuted, allowing you to be heard.

Public Hearing and Process Information

Administrative Law Judge Kimberly Middendorf will preside over the public hearings and will provide the Commission with findings of fact, conclusions of law, and recommendations after the conclusion of the evidentiary hearing. The purpose of the public hearings is to receive public input on the proposed rate increase. At the public hearings, interested persons have the opportunity to: (1) ask questions of the utility and agency staff; and (2) offer verbal and written comments on the merits of the proposed rate increase. Members of the public may participate without needing to intervene as a party. Representation by legal counsel is permitted but not required.

Please note that the public hearings will end when all attendees have had the opportunity to comment and all other business has been concluded. You are encouraged to join the meeting at the scheduled start time to be placed in the queue to comment. Commenters will be called in the order they enter the queue. Please arrive at the beginning of the hearing to ensure you will have time to comment.

Written comments may be submitted during the comment period before and after the public hearings. Follow the instructions below to provide written comment.

Please contact **Christine Pham** at **651-201-2249** or christine.pham@state.mn.us if you have questions on how to participate or have trouble accessing the public hearing using telephone or internet.

WRITTEN COMMENTS TO THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

You can still submit comments even if you do not attend a public hearing.

Comment Period

Comments will be accepted through **May 19, 2026**.

- Comments must be received by 4:30 p.m. on the close date.
- Comments received after the comment period closes may not be considered for the record.

How to Submit a Written Comment

Written comments can be submitted via: (1) the Commission's website; (2) electronic mail; (3) U.S. Mail; or (4) fax. To learn how to submit a comment in any of these ways, please visit mn.gov/puc, select "Get Involved" from the dropdown menu on the top of the page, then select "Public Comments and How to Participate." This will take you to the Public Comment page where you will find a list of ways to comment. Be sure to reference MPUC Docket No. 25-356 in the subject line of your comment.



If you do not have access to the internet, you may send or deliver your comment to:

Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
121 7th Place East, Ste. 350
St. Paul, MN 55101

Important: Comments can be reviewed by the public on the MPUC's website, except in limited circumstances consistent with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. The MPUC does not edit or delete personally identifying information from comments received.

EVIDENTIARY HEARINGS

Formal evidentiary hearings on Xcel Energy's proposal will be held on **May 11 - 12, 2026**, starting at **9:30 a.m.** each day. The evidentiary hearings will be held at the Public Utilities Commission, 350 Metro Square Building, 121 Seventh Place East, St. Paul, Minnesota. Individuals who cannot attend in person may attend via WebEx, a video conferencing platform. Members of the public who wish to attend the hearing through **WebEx** may request an electronic invitation by contacting MPUC staff **Christine Pham** at **651-201-2249** or christine.pham@state.mn.us.

The purpose of the evidentiary hearing is to allow Xcel Energy, the Minnesota Department of Commerce — Division of Energy Resources, the Minnesota Office of Attorney General — Residential Utilities Division, and parties who have formally joined the contested case, to present testimony and to cross-examine each other's witnesses on the proposed rate increase.

TO LEARN MORE

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

Xcel Energy
414 Nicollet Mall
Minneapolis MN 55401
Phone 612-330-5500
Web: xcelenergy.com/company/rates_and_regulations/filings

Minnesota Department of Commerce
85 7th Place East, Suite 500
St. Paul, MN 55101
Phone: 651-539-1534
Web: <https://efiling.web.commerce.state.mn.us>. Under "eDockets" select "Search Documents" insert "25-356" in the Docket #s field, select Search, and the list of documents will appear on the next page.

If you have questions about the MPUC's review process or need assistance in submitting comments, contact the Commission's Consumer Affairs Office at:

Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
121 7th Place East, Suite 350
St. Paul, MN 55101
Phone: 651-296-0406 or 800-657-3782
Email: consumer.puc@state.mn.us

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

Please contact the MPUC staff **Christine Pham** at **651-201-2249** or christine.pham@state.mn.us as soon as possible if you need an interpreter or accommodation to attend a public hearing.

PROPOSED RATES				
Customer Class	Average Monthly Usage in Ccf (or therms)	Average Monthly Bill - Current Rates	Average Monthly Bill - Interim Rates	Average Monthly Bill - Proposed Rates
Residential	71	\$82	\$88	\$89
Small Commercial	189	\$199	\$211	\$221
Large Commercial	1,303	\$1,235	\$1,300	\$1,315
Small Demand	7,924	\$6,918	\$7,293	\$7,405
Large Demand	17,776	\$15,015	\$15,809	\$16,108
Small Interruptible	6,745	\$4,633	\$4,898	\$5,001
Med. Interruptible	46,220	\$27,353	\$28,555	\$30,196
Large Interruptible	617,483	\$350,615	\$364,315	\$379,449
Large Firm Transport**	75,708	\$19,432	\$22,455	\$24,088
Small Interruptible Transport**	6,745	\$1,729	\$1,998	\$2,097
Med. Interruptible Transport**	118,174	\$19,722	\$22,724	\$26,990
Large Interruptible Transport**	2,119,680	\$88,455	\$99,345	\$88,455

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

Centurion team member wins FIRST Leadership Award

Isaac Cavegn, a student at Centennial High School and member of the Centurions robotics team, has won the FIRST Leadership Award. Due to his achievement, Cavegn has been named a finalist for the award at the world championships in Houston.

"He demonstrates strong leadership skills, but what stands out most to me is his humility; he leads by example and without ego. Isaac consistently gives to his classmates and is never focused on taking, making his accomplishments all the more admirable," Centurions Head Coach Ken Mechtel said.

Cavegn was nominated for the award by his coaches in recognition of his continued commitment and leadership on the robotics team. In addition to his dedication to the robotics design team, Cavegn has taken on a full PSEO course load.

This is the second year in a row a Centennial student has won the award. Last year's winner was Andrew Abraham. Mechtel said it's been an honor for the team to win the award two years in a row.

"It is a testament to the dedication of our mentors and coaches. We work hard to stay in the background and allow our students to lead the way. That isn't always easy, but it makes this recognition all the more meaningful," Mechtel added.



Centennial High School student and Centurions robotics team member Isaac Cavegn has won the FIRST Leadership Award. Here he is pictured with his award.

Madeline Dolby

Bears name Athena Award recipient

Josie Guidinger is the Athena Award recipient for White Bear Lake's Class of 2026. She will attend a recognition event at St. Paul RiverCentre on April 15.



Josie Guidinger

Athena is an award for multi-sport female athletes with strong academic record in the metro area. Guidinger lettered six years in Alpine skiing and three years in tennis, was captain for both teams, collected three all-conference awards and two honorable mentions, and qualified for state twice. She is a senior class officer, Student Council and National Honor Society member, and serves on Link Crew and Mentorship Club. Guidinger plans to study aviation in college and compete in Alpine.

SPORTS BRIEFS

GYMNASTICS

Four Centennial gymnasts earned All-Northwest Suburban Conference honors — senior Amelya Gannon; juniors Belle Brunn and Elsa Hjelmlnd; and seventh-grader Addison Baker. Brunn was a state qualifier, placing fourth on vault in the section meet. Getting honorable mentions were juniors Lily Kissick and Grace Zimmerman and freshman Alexandra Sindt. The Cougars were 5-4 in conference for fifth place among 12 teams.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Centennial had three all-conference selections after a 15-13 season including 11-4 in the Northwest Suburban. They are Amelia Delmedico, Sydney Schmitz and Kate Lee. Getting honorable mentions were Kaylin Green, Ava Taylor and Addy Sears. Schmitz got the team's offensive player award and Delmedico got the defensive award. Anjali Patel got the Cougar Spirit Award. Schmitz was the scoring leader with 12.7 points per game, followed by Delmedico 9.1, Sears 9.0, Lee 8.6 and Green 6.7.

Bruce Strand



Liberty nabs 5th place in state tourney

Liberty Classical Academy made a good showing in the school's first-ever state tournament appearance in any sport.

The Lions took an 85-63 drubbing from Red Lake County in the quarterfinal Thursday at Target Center, but bounced back to capture fifth place in Class 1A with consolation bracket wins over Cherry 79-63 on Friday and Southland 56-53 on Saturday at Concordia-St. Paul. The White Bear Lake parochial school finished 29-3.

Liberty senior Sam Rupnow was named to



The Liberty Classical Academy boys varsity basketball team makes the school's first-ever state tournament appearance.

the All-Tournament team. Rupnow tallied 80 points in the three games (the third highest total among 32 teams in the four classes) along with 22 rebounds. He had 28 against RLC, 30 against Cherry and 22 against Southland.

Ethan Richter notched 51 points in the three games. Cruz Triana had 33 points and 21 rebounds.

The state champions were Hills-Beaver Creek in 1A, Minnehaha Academy in 2A, Totino-Grace in 3A and Chaska in 4A.

Bruce Strand

SPRING 2026



SPORTS PREVIEWS

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ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Amelia Delmedico

Centennial Girls Basketball

April 2, 2026

Amelia Delmedico, Centennial senior guard, was named to the all-Northwest Suburban Conference team after helping the Cougars post an 11-4 conference record. Delmedico was a consistent scorer averaging 9.1 points per game. She was also got the team award for best defensive player. A two-year starter, she averaged 5.7 points as a junior.



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REGIONAL TRAIL: Provides connection to Lino Lakes, Centerville

FROM PAGE 1

ern Railroad corridor alongside Highway 61. It extends from the Chisago County border in the north to 140th Street in Hugo, where the developed segment currently ends.

The trail also connects to a broader regional network, including links to Anoka County via the Central Anoka County Regional Trail. The trail provides a continuous route between Lino Lakes and Centerville, primarily serving the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve area.

A one-mile gap remains in the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail where the rail line is still active.

“By extending the trail south from 130th Street N to 120th Street N, the gap will be addressed, and the trail will have continuity from Ramsey County up to Chisago County,” explained Erin Blaylock, Washington County design engineer/business liaison.

A master plan was approved for the trail nearly a decade ago (2013), and the city of Hugo undertook a preliminary feasibility study for the corridor in 2019. The county also performed a feasibility study for the project in 2022. At the time, the council approved a letter of support for the final extension of the trail and has since supported grant applications for funding.

Washington County has secured a \$1,244,000 grant through the state’s Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. The grant funding has kick-started the de-

sign phase of the project, but Blaylock noted the funding award for the project is subject to the approval of the 2026 state Legislature.

“We are excited to hit the ground running with the design phase,” Blaylock said.

Community engagement, preliminary design, data collection and analysis and environmental documentation are all planned for 2026. Final design and project bidding would follow in 2027, and construction would also start that year.

“There are many moving parts anticipated during the design phase ... the timing (construction start) may change. We will continue to work with city staff as details are figured out,” Blaylock said.

Hugo Mayor Tom Weidt said, “I’m looking forward to this getting done. The sooner the better, and it looks like we are finally on the glide path to get it done. Hopefully, nothing derails it and we can keep going and get to that construction (start). That would be great to see.”

An open house is planned for April 8 (see pullout on front page for more information). Those who cannot attend the open house can review open house materials and provide feedback online via the project website from April 8-30. Visit www.washingtoncountymn.gov/HardwoodCreekExtension for more information.

Managing Editor Shannon Granholm can be reached at 651-407-1227 or citizennews@presspubs.com.

School Board adopts consent agenda policy with 6-1 vote

BY SHANNON GRANHOLM
MANAGING EDITOR

Some new rules are now in place for removing items from the consent agenda, following the board’s 6-1 vote (School Board Member Dan Skaar dissented) to revise the consent agenda policy (203.6).

The policy discussion arose as part of the district’s routine review of policies and was discussed in detail at the board’s meeting last month. (See “White Bear Lake Area School Board debates changes to consent agenda policy,” White Bear Press, Feb. 18, 2026.)

The consent agenda allows the board to approve a group of routine items, such as meeting minutes and financial reports, in a single vote. In the past, board members could request that an item be removed from the consent agenda for separate discussion. Under the revised policy, a board member seeking to remove an item from the consent agenda would be required to make a motion, receive a second and obtain majority approval from the board.

Skaar said the change to the policy deviates from Robert’s Rules of Order.

“I think that the revision to bypass Robert’s Rules with our own rules is just another way for the board and the superintendent to limit free speech on those who seek accountability by asking questions about spending,” Skaar said. “I think board governance without accountability is really not governance; it is pretty useless. I think it is small-minded, and it prevents public accountability.”

School Board Member Christina Streiff Oji pointed out that school board members receive the board packets ahead of time and are encouraged to reach out with questions ahead of time. She added that she was supportive of the revisions to the policy.

“We operate as one board. One should not consistently pull random items off of the consent agenda. From my perspective, the agenda items being asked to be pulled from the consent agenda are not important enough or relevant enough to be pulled from the consent agenda and do not need to be discussed separately,” Oji said. “Instead, it appears that items being pulled from the consent agenda are meant to put people on the spot, catch people off guard and are being used in an attempt to discredit our organization and those in it.”

School Board Member Kathleen Daniels said she agreed with Oji and clarified that items could still be pulled from the consent agenda. “There is an opportunity to remove items from the consent agenda with a second, so that would mean that other board members, or at least one other board member, would feel that it would be a good point of discussion. So it doesn’t remove the opportunity (for) removing it, it just has to have a second,” she said.

Skaar responded, “Let’s be realistic. I’ve had how many motions seconded here? Maybe two out of 25 or 30.”

Daniels responded, “I think he seeks to obstruct the will of the board by continuing the same comments over and over again at every board meeting.”

The board ultimately approved the revisions to the consent agenda policy. For a copy of the policy, visit www.isd624.org/about/school-board/meeting-materials.

Managing Editor Shannon Granholm can be reached at 651-407-1227 or citizennews@presspubs.com.



ASSESSOR’S UPDATE: New construction selling quickly

FROM PAGE 1

review in AY 2027.

The city of Hugo had 274 arms-length/ qualified residential sales, an increase of 54 sales over the prior year. Those sales ranged from \$170,000 to \$2.15 million. The average sales price in Hugo was \$414,500 in AY 2026 compared to \$411,200 in AY 2025.

Similarly to last year’s update, Terry shared that there is still a lot of new construction in Hugo, although it is down slightly. According to NorthstarMLS data, newly constructed homes comprised 36.8% of the home sales in Hugo, an increase of about 2% from 2024. New construction made up 16.5% of home sales in Washington County.

The city had a total of 133 new starts (single-family) in AY 2026, a decrease of 37 new starts from AY 2025. (There were 119 new starts in AY 2024 and 110 new starts in 2023.) The median sale price for a newly constructed single-family home in AY 2026 was \$532,853 in the city of Hugo compared to \$559,950 in Washington County and \$551,963 in the Twin Cities, according to NorthstarMLS data.

Terry noted that if you remove new construction and include multifamily, the median sale price for AY 2026 was \$436,500 in the city of Hugo compared to \$437,500 in Washington County and \$393,000 in the Twin Cities.

“We are right on pace in Hugo



PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

Tyson Terry, a residential property appraiser with Washington County, shared the above summary of the residential class in a recent update to the Hugo City Council.

with the rest of the county and slightly above the Twin Cities average,” he said.

New construction can skew the numbers a bit; for that reason, Terry shared statistics that included new starts as well as statistics without those new starts. For example, when it comes to days on the market for AY 2026, the median number of days on the market for a multifamily or single-family unit in the city of Hugo, including new construction, was 22 days;

with new construction removed, that number increases to 35 days.

“We are quite a bit above median days on market if we take the new construction out,” Terry said.

When it comes to asking price, property owners in the city of Hugo (not including new construction) received approximately 98.8% of the asking price in 2025. That percentage went up to 100% for new construction.

Lender-mediated sales are “creeping back in,” Terry explained, noting that they are still nowhere near the levels of what the city and county saw back in 2008-2009. The city of Hugo saw four lender-mediated sales in AY 2026, but it didn’t see any in AY 2025 or AY 2024. There was a total of 38 lender-mediated sales in Washington County in AY 2026 compared to 29 the year prior. “I don’t see that being an issue in Hugo or in the county,” Terry said.

To view the full 2026 assessment report, visit <https://washington.minnesotaassessors.com/forms.php>.

Managing Editor Shannon Granholm can be reached at 651-407-1227 or citizennews@presspubs.com.

Historic Average Sale Prices: Single Family & Townhome/Condo

	ay2022	ay2023	ay2024	ay2025	ay2026
Afton	\$ 722,300	\$ 724,500	\$ 809,500	\$ 1,025,900	\$ 1,091,200
Bayport	\$ 361,000	\$ 436,400	\$ 424,400	\$ 576,100	\$ 444,400
Baytown	\$ 754,000	\$ 894,000	\$ 1,031,300	\$ 1,026,900	\$ 999,600
Birchwood	\$ 494,800	\$ 438,800	\$ 476,300	\$ 528,300	\$ 381,900
Cottage Grove	\$ 344,300	\$ 371,500	\$ 388,300	\$ 397,800	\$ 408,700
Dellwood	\$ 1,100,000	\$ 1,226,900	\$ 849,700	\$ 1,018,400	\$ 1,096,100
Denmark	\$ 697,300	\$ 751,800	\$ 727,800	\$ 624,300	\$ 962,100
Forest Lake	\$ 375,900	\$ 383,600	\$ 431,200	\$ 398,200	\$ 441,100
Grant	\$ 672,700	\$ 754,200	\$ 773,500	\$ 881,400	\$ 843,400
Grey Cloud	\$ 564,700	\$ 272,500	\$ 527,500	\$ 399,900	\$ 490,000
Hastings	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Hugo	\$ 449,900	\$ 392,000	\$ 403,800	\$ 411,200	\$ 414,500
Lake Elmo	\$ 619,000	\$ 657,300	\$ 659,600	\$ 697,600	\$ 694,800

The above chart compares the average sales price for single-family homes and townhomes in cities across Washington County for AY 2022 through AY 2025.

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BUSINESS BRIEF

Humble Roots expands to downtown White Bear Lake

Humble Roots Boutique is expanding. The boutique will open a second location in downtown White Bear Lake and share a space with Oak & Iron. Currently, the store has another location in Centerville located at 7095 Center-ville Road.

The business will begin moving items into its new space this week. The owners hope to be up and running by the end of April.

CONSTRUCTION BRIEF

Construction continues at County Road J, I-35E interchange

Construction on the County Road J and I-35E interchange is well underway. Additional work is scheduled to begin the first week in April. This work includes the construction of a new bridge deck. Also, contractors will begin to remove soil on the existing on and off ramps.

The interchange, led by Ramsey County, is in partnership with MnDOT, Anoka County, White Bear Township, North Oaks and Lino Lakes. According to Ramsey County, planned improvements will complete missing freeway connections by adding access to and from southbound I-35E, enhance pedestrian and bicycle facilities along County Road J (Ash Street), replace the bridge over I-35E and improve stormwater management with new stormwater ponds.

More information about the project can be found online at tinyurl.com/kmnh8b9p.

CENTENNIAL SCHOOL BOARD NOTES

- Superintendent Jeff Holmberg gave a presentation regarding recent updates to the long-range plan to the board. The plan, referred to as Centennial Forward, will ensure schools within the district remain vibrant, safe and ready to meet the needs of current and future students. It also focuses on balancing educational priorities, fiscal responsibility and long-term stewardship of district resources.

- Executive Director of Teaching and Learning Mark Grossklaus and Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Casey Rutherford provided the board with an update regarding the district's English Learning Arts (ELA) 9-12 curriculum. In October, staff from the teaching and learning department got together with teachers to revisit priority standards, standards shift and the curriculum review tool. A few months later, the group met again to review curriculum options. In February, the three main curriculum options were reviewed. The three options were narrowed down by cross referencing what other Minnesota schools are using. These options include HMH Into Literature, Savvas My Perspectives and Imagine Learning Study Sync. Next month, the recommendation will be brought to the Centennial School Board for review and budget approval. In July, the curriculum will be purchased from the vendor. The new curriculum will be implemented in the 2026-2027 school year.

- Arctic Wolf will be responsible for security operation solutions for the next three years following board approval. The agreement provides a 3% annual increase each year over the three years. It will begin July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2029. The district has worked with Arctic Wolf for the past two years. According to Executive Director of Business Services Patrick Chaffey, this purchase will come from the Sourcewell cooperative purchasing program in accordance with Minnesota Statute 471.345.

- The board accepted several contributions made to Centerville Elementary, Centennial Middle School and Centennial High School.

The next work session will be at 5:30 p.m. Monday, April 6, in the district office. The next regular school board meeting will be at 6:30 p.m. Monday, April 20.

Madeline Dolby

Disaster: 'It's not a matter of if, but when'

BY LORETTA HARDING
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

A major snow event was forecast for the weekend of March 14-15. As the city of Centerville learned of the approaching blizzard, dedicated public servants around town heard the forecast, jumped into action and prepared for a potential apocalyptic snowfall.

The first order of business to prepare for such an event began months ago when emergency services throughout the county prepared the Anoka County 2025 Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Centennial Lakes Police Department Chief James Mork and Spring Lake Park, Blaine, Mounds View (SBM) Fire Department Assistant Fire Chief Matt Montain presented the plan at a recent Centerville City Council meeting.

The city needs to be covered by the plan to qualify for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grants, Mork said. FEMA currently has two mitigation grant programs that the state of Minnesota administers: the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) and the Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) program. The HMGP and FMA programs are administered through the Minnesota

Department of Public Safety.

A new hazard mitigation plan is developed every five years due to the changing needs of a changing community. "It's not a matter of IF some type of disaster occurs, it's WHEN," Mork said.

"The hazard mitigation plan is a way to make sure we have everything together," Mork said, "and that includes all the stakeholders in the community, not just police and fire." The best time to hand out business cards and shake hands is not when you're standing waist deep in water, he added.

Having a plan will reduce or eliminate any natural or technological disaster, said Montain, who worked closely with Mork to identify what the cities in the county might need.

The plan also includes hazard education, such as how tornado and fire siren systems operate. Public safety personnel work with schools on fire drills to be sure of their compliance, should something happen while they are in session. Sirens are a complex issue, and communication may fail between sirens. The goal is to have that fixed immediately or have backups, Montain said.

An important part of being proactive means having strong structures to be-

gin with. When the Ides of March blizzard arrived, city emergency services had already set up a mitigation action chart. To reduce the risk of storm damage to new development, the city's plan is to continue to enact regulations and adhere to the Minnesota State Building Code to mitigate storm damage before it happens and to continue to enforce the code through its building department.

When disaster happens, the first thing to be lost is power, which is vital. Mitigation preparedness and response support ensures that the city has emergency generator backup power for city services and buildings. For the future, the city is planning to upgrade the generator at City Hall/ fire station to ensure there is backup power to support government operations and fire response in the event of a summer or winter storm. The city's public works department and emergency services will collaborate on this goal.

Centerville has several senior residences. Emergency planning includes working with the assisted living homes throughout the city so that they can be prepared with emergency plans for extended power outages. Emergency plans might include evacuation and any staffing and transportation needs. Ex-

penses for this response will come from the city's general operating budget.

For the long term, the city will reduce the risk of downed trees and branches from severe summer or winter storms and work with utility companies to convert overhead powerlines to underground where possible. Centerville's Public Works Department will manage the trimming or removal of trees on city property to reduce potential damage from severe summer or winter storms.

As it happened, the most severe part of the Ides of March storm passed southeast of Centerville. But the city and its emergency management services were prepared — on paper and in reality, as they will be in the event of a flood, tornado, extreme cold or heat, lightning, hail, windstorms, wildfires and more.

"Our goal is to get out there and educate the public as much as we can," Montain said after council unanimously passed a resolution to adopt the 2025 Anoka County Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Loretta Harding is a contributing writer for Press Publications. She can be reached by emailing news@presspubs.com.

WHITE BEAR LAKE AREA SCHOOL BOARD NOTES

- Approximately 20 students attended the Minnesota Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) State Leadership Conference in St. Cloud March 9-11. The conference serves as a key platform for HOSA members to grow their leadership skills, connect with peers and explore the ever-evolving world of health care. Throughout the conference, participants take part in interactive workshops, hands-on sessions and guest lectures led by professionals and educators in the field. From emerging medical technologies to career prep and personal development, the topics are designed to inspire and inform. Students demonstrate their knowledge, skills and creativity in a wide range of health care-related competitive events.
- Forty-four students involved in the WBLAHS

Black Student Union are expected to attend the Historically Black Colleges and Universities tour from April 11-18. The experience is designed to connect students with colleges, peers, staff and faculty. Students will take part in dynamic guest presentations and immersive opportunities. Throughout the tour, students will engage in guided reflection and journaling to make meaning of their experiences, deepen self-awareness and capture personal growth.

- Approximately 70 students in the high school jazz bands will travel to the University Wisconsin – Eau Claire Jazz Fest April 17-18. The event will offer workshops and clinics along with live performances.
- Ayan Ibrahim, assistant director of educational equity and achievement; John Leininger, Matoska International principal; and Ang Nelson, Otter Lake Elementary principal, provided an update on the Elementary Spanish Dual Immersion Program.
- The district proposes to issue up to \$17,680,000 of facilities maintenance bonds to fund projects included in the district's long-term facilities maintenance (LTFM) plan. The proposed issue will also finance the current refunding of the 2027 through 2032 maturities of the general obligation facilities maintenance bonds, Series 2018A, in the amount of \$14,070,000 for a total issuance of

\$31,750,000. This issuance serves the dual purpose of funding critical LTFM projects and reducing existing debt service costs through the strategic refinancing of existing debt.

Every other year, the district issues LTFM bonds to fund deferred maintenance projects across its multiple sites. The last district LTFM issue was in 2024.

The district is required to approve its LTFM plan annually in July and submit the plan to the Minnesota Department of Education for approval by July 31. The board also approved its 2026-2029 Achievement and Integration Plan.

• A second reading of School Board Policy 211 (Criminal or Civil Action Against School District, School Board Member, Employee, or Student) is scheduled for the April 13 meeting.

The proposed changes are in the title, and sections I, III and IV. The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance about the school district's position, rights and responsibilities when a civil or criminal action is pending against the school district, a school board member, a school district employee or a student.

• A second reading is also scheduled for School Board Policy 212 (School Board Member Development) and School Board Policy 809 (Naming School Buildings or Facilities) for April 13. No changes are planned for Policy 212, but there are some changes proposed to Policy 809 in sections III, IV, V, and VI.

The next regular school board meeting is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. Monday, April 13.

Shannon Granholm

PUBLIC NOTICE

CITY OF HUGO
WASHINGTON COUNTY, MINNESOTA
ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS
2026 BALD EAGLE INDUSTRIAL PARK AREA
STREET IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
SAP 224-101-003, SAP 224-108-003 AND SAP 224-110-003
GENERAL NOTICE

The City of Hugo (Owner) is requesting Bids for the construction of the 2026 Bald Eagle Industrial Park Area Street Improvement Project. Bids for the construction of the Project will be received online through QuestCDN vBid™ until Monday, April 13, 2026 at 2:00 pm local time. Immediately following expiration of the time for receiving bids, representatives of the City of Hugo will publicly view Bids at an online Bid opening meeting. Those interested in viewing the online Bid opening are welcome to join the meeting by logging on to <https://zoom.us/join> or calling 1.312.626.6799 and entering Meeting ID 993 2894 1423 and Passcode 803924. The as-read online Bid results will be available at www.questcdn.com following the Bid opening.

The Project includes the furnishing of all labor and materials for the construction complete in-place, of the following approximate quantities:

44,000	S Y	Remove Bituminous Pavement
5,350	L F	Remove and Replace Concrete Curb and Gutter
3,000	C Y	Excavation – Common (P)
5,300	TON	Type SP 9.5 Wearing Course Mix (3,C)
5,000	TON	Type SP 12.5 Wearing Course Mix (3,C)
4,700	TON	Type SP 12.5 Non-Wear Course Mix (3,C)

The provisions of MINN. STAT. 16C.285 Responsible Contractor are imposed as a requirement of this contract. All bidders and persons or companies providing a response/submission to the Advertisement for Bids of the City of Hugo shall comply with the provisions of the statute.

Information and Bidding Documents for the Project can be found at www.questcdn.com. Bidding Documents may be downloaded from the website for a nonrefundable fee of \$55 by inputting Quest project #10106626 on the website's Project Search page.

The website will be updated periodically with addenda, lists of registered plan holders, reports, and other information relevant to submitting a Bid for the Project. All official notifications, addenda, and other Bidding Documents will be offered only through the website www.questcdn.com. Neither Owner nor Engineer will be responsible for Bidding Documents, including addenda, if any, obtained from other sources.

Bids will only be accepted via the electronic bidding service through QuestCDN.

The City Council reserves the right to reject any and all Bids and to waive any Bids received without explanation. No Bid may be withdrawn for a period of 60 days.

For all further requirements regarding Bid submittal, qualifications, procedures, and contract award, refer to the Instructions to Bidders that are included in the Bidding Documents.

DATED: March 19, 2026 BY THE ORDER OF THE CITY COUNCIL
s/s Michele Lindau
City Clerk
City of Hugo
Published two times in The Citizen on March 19 and April 2, 2026.

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Local barbecue brand grows from family recipe to statewide sales

BY SHANNON GRANHOLM
MANAGING EDITOR

What started as a couple tinkering with a rib rub recipe at a family cabin has turned into a local barbecue brand.

Hugo residents Sarah and Josh Smith have been barbecuing together for about a decade, but they officially launched their seasoning brand Ope We're Smokin' BBQ last May.

"It's always been a passion for us and cooking and learning different things together through our meals," Sarah explained. "In 2023, I started developing some health concerns that caused us to look into what we were eating. One of the main things we were eating was barbecue, and we realized that all of the seasonings that are on the market have a lot of MSG, fillers, preservatives and extra added stuff that really is not necessary."

Sarah grew up in White Bear Lake and graduated from White Bear Lake Area High School in 2011; Josh, originally from St. Francis, is an Army veteran who served six years of active duty and six years with the Minnesota National Guard.

Even though the two have



CONTRIBUTED

Hugo residents Josh and Sarah Smith will celebrate their one-year anniversary this May. Ope We're Smokin' BBQ will host a wing sampling at 11 a.m. Saturday, May 2 at Argyle Moose in Hugo.

full-time jobs — Sarah as a marketing director for a hair care company and Josh as a safety director for a trucking company — the two wanted to share their creation with the world, both in real life and on TikTok.

"We have always cooked for friends and family. That feeling of just sitting around the table and hanging out with friends and family has always been so special to us ... to be able to share that with other families and other people just seemed like our path, and it seemed like a passion that we could bring forward to other

people," Sarah said.

Josh added, "If we are able to make it for ourselves, why not make it for other people too? We thought it would feel good to be able to share it with other people and not just keep it for ourselves."

The Smiths regularly attend flea markets and pop-up events throughout the state to spread the word about their brand and gather feedback. Josh says 75% of the people they have run into while attending events are interested in finding "clean ingredients" when purchasing rubs or seasonings. "One of those things that was eye-open-

ing when we get to talk to consumers is how important that is for people," Josh said. "That definitely made an impression on me."

Sarah said once the couple made the switch to clean ingredients, it didn't take long for her gut health to improve significantly.

"We make our own recipes. We've sat in our kitchen formulating recipes, sat in our backyard going back and forth," she said. "We are not just slapping a label on something somebody else created. This is truly something that we have worked on and put so much time and energy into to create the best product possible."

The couple first launched a rib rub, because Josh loves making ribs. The rib rub works for all types of pork, including pulled pork, pork chops and even bacon. Josh mentioned some people even choose to put it on chicken, although it was not designed for that.

Next came an all-purpose seasoning, which Josh says you can put on "absolutely anything." Most all-purpose seasonings are a combination of salt, pepper and garlic, but Josh and Sarah added crushed thyme to the recipe. "It accents

the food very nicely. It pulls a lot of good, earthy flavor out of red meat and makes it a little more savory," Josh explained.

The newest addition to the seasoning lineup, which the couple says is quickly becoming a favorite, is the honey chipotle rub. "When you first taste the seasoning, up front it is very sweet, but then the sweetness tapers off and a little bit of heat follows. It's a nice sweet up front and a kick afterwards," Josh said. Sarah added, "People in Minnesota want a kick, but they want a Minnesota kick so I think the honey chipotle kind of nails it."

Ope We're Smokin' BBQ seasonings can be found online at opeweresmokin.com or Amazon. The seasonings are also available at the Argyle Moose in Hugo, 11 area Kowalski's Markets, Northern Fire Grilling & BBQ Supply in Minnetonka, and Destination Bar-B-Q in Rochester. The business also partners with the Minnesota Frost and Flame food truck based out of Forest Lake.

Managing Editor Shannon Granholm can be reached at 651-407-1227 or citizennews@presspubs.com.



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