



MPR Connects
conversation
2A

Thank you for
your service
4A

Waterfowl
regulations
12A

Walker Youth
Hockey grows
14A

Job Fair
April 13, 2021

The Pilot-Independent

www.walkermn.com



Wednesday, April 7, 2021 ■ Community News Since 1897 ■ Vol. 121 No. 19 ■ Walker, MN ■ 1 Section 16 Pages ■ \$1.25

COVID-19 vaccinations reach more Minnesotans

by Dean Morrill
Editor
dmorrill@pilotindependent.com

On the first day that Minnesotans age 16 and above were eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, Gov. Tim Walz, former Gov. Tim Pawlenty and former Vikings linebacker EJ Henderson each received the single-shot Johnson and Johnson vaccine at the Vikings' Twin Cities Orthopedics Performance Center in Eagan.

"I was excited to receive the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, alongside my friend and former Republican governor

of Minnesota Tim Pawlenty," Gov. Walz said. "It doesn't matter where you live or who you vote for, we can all agree we need to end this pandemic. The vaccines are how we get there. So roll up your sleeves, Minnesota, the end is in sight."

Despite those words by Gov. Walz, many states are seeing a drastic increase in COVID cases.

Health officials are worried about a variant of coronavirus that's spreading as families take spring break.

Monday, Gov. Walz and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) an-

nounced that a federal Community Vaccination Clinic will open at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds. The state will receive 168,000 doses over eight weeks. The site will administer a combination of Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson doses. The doses administered at the Fairgrounds will be in addition to Minnesota's regular statewide vaccine allocations.

Gov. Walz pushed for a federal site to provide additional vaccine doses and serve as another avenue to protect the most vulnerable and underrepresented populations in the state. The Minne-

sota State Fairgrounds were recommended by Minnesota public health officials and selected by FEMA based on equity data analysis, including the CDC's Social Vulnerability Index. The site will also allow Minnesotans who use other forms of transportation to get vaccinated.

In a report sent out by Cass County Public Health, the number of cases over a two-week period rose to 59, with the case rate at 20.33.

Minnesota's death rate sits at 6,885. The total number of positive cases in Cass County rose to 2,247 with 26 deaths.

The number of deaths in

Hubbard County remains at 41, and the number of cases is 1,567. The 14-day case rate per 10,000 rose to 7.34.

Beltrami has 3,197 cases and 55 deaths, Crow Wing County has 5,448 cases and 86 deaths, and Itasca County has 3,412 cases and 51 deaths.

The total number of COVID-19 cases in Minnesota is 527,650 with 504,712 no longer isolated. There were 12 confirmed deaths reported in the state last Wednesday, 12 Thursday, four Friday, 11 Saturday, zero Sunday and 10 Monday.

The total number of peo-

ple hospitalized over the last week is 139 with 16 in ICU.

The Minnesota Department of Health encourages Minnesotans to continue following public health guidance by wearing a mask, practicing social distancing, frequently washing hands, and staying home when sick.

WHA Sup't. Pingrey leaving for Idaho

by Chris Haugene
Staff writer
chaugene@pilotindependent.com

In his fifth year at Walker-Hackensack-Akeley (WHA), Superintendent Eric Pingrey has accepted a new job in Idaho for the 2021-22 school year.

Pingrey, a first-time superintendent, was hired at WHA after applying for the superintendent's position at Virginia School District in northern Minnesota.

Recently Pingrey applied for two positions in Idaho where he was a finalist for both. He first accepted the position at Idaho Falls School District 91, but while still in negotiations for his contract, he decided to turn down the job where he was approved with a 3-2 vote by the school board. Instead he accepted the position with McCall-Donnelly School District 421 in western Idaho, where he was unanimously approved.

The news is an unexpected turn of events for WHA, which had struggled to find a superintendent for close to a decade before Pingrey was hired in 2016. During those years, the WHA School Board rehired a former superintendent for a few years, bought out another superintendent's contract early, and relied on interims.

Around the Corner: a look at businesses in Laporte

Cars, trucks, RVs, buses: Week's Automotive does it all

by Gail DeBoer
Staff writer
gdeboer@pilotindependent.com

When the staff at Weeks Automotive of Laporte say they can work on any type of vehicle, they really mean it.

Owner Cameron Weeks and Shane Scott and Cruise Smith, and his two full-time technicians, provide full service repairs and maintenance for practically anything on wheels: all makes and models of cars and pickups, light trucks, heavy trucks, motor homes, even school buses.

"Cameron had a vision on day one," says his wife Emily, who is also involved in the

business. "He loves his clients and always strives to be better. We've work hard toward our goals!"

Cameron grew up in Golden Valley, graduated from Hopkins High School and moved to Laporte in 1994. He attended Northwest Tech in Bemidji, studied auto mechanics and graduated in 1995 with a two-year degree.

Emily grew up in Wisconsin and also moved to the area in 1994. The couple married in 1998, have five children and a small hobby farm.

Before starting his own business, Cameron worked for 14 years at a local GM dealer. In 2011 he opened Week's



The Weeks' Automotive staff includes (from left) Shane Scott, Cameron Weeks, Emily Weeks, Cruise Smith and Hunter Weeks. Photo by Dean Morrill

Automotive on County 39 near Laporte. Two years ago, the business had outgrown the original shop, so a new, larger one was built on the same site.

Cameron is ASE master certified and is licensed to do U.S. Department of Transportation inspections on commercial vehicles.

He is also certified in school bus repair. Weeks Automotive does contract repair work for local schools, including the Walker-Hackensack-Akeley and Laporte School districts. They also sell tires, do brake jobs, work on air conditioning units, transmissions, do diagnostics and much more.

Weeks Automotive is located at 37878 Co. 39 and is open Monday through Thursday, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m., and Friday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. For more information or to make a service appointment, call (218) 760-7098

More counties added to spring burn restrictions

As fire season deepens and expands, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has added the following counties to the burn restriction list: Cass (south) and Crow Wing.

The state will not issue burning permits for brush or yard waste in these counties until the restrictions are lifted.

Restrictions remain in place for: Anoka, Becker, Beltrami, Benton, Cass, Chisago, Clay, Clearwater, Douglas, Grant, Hennepin, Hubbard, Isanti, Itasca, Kanabec, Kittson, Koochiching, Lake of the Woods, Mahanomen, Marshall Mille Lacs, Morrison, Norman, Otter Tail, Pennington, Polk, Pope, Ramsey, Red Lake, Roseau, Sherburne, Stearns, Stevens, Todd, Tra-

verse, Wadena, Washington, Wilkin and Wright counties.

"Warm and dry conditions are key factors for wildfires, so we have to remain on alert about restricting open burning," said Casey McCoy, DNR fire prevention supervisor. "These restrictions really do work: they've helped reduce wildfires by more than 30 percent over the past decade."

McCoy encourages landowners to compost, chip, or take brush to a collection site rather than burn it. For information on how compost yard waste, visit the DNR's guide to composting yard debris.

People who burn debris will be held financially responsible if their fire escapes and burns other property.

Ice Out report is short, if not sweet!

by Gail DeBoer
Staff writer
gdeboer@pilotindependent.com

Here's the Leech Lake Ice-Out report for this week.

It's too late to enter the contest.

The deadline was midnight April 1.

The lake still has ice on it. There are 26 prizes this year.

We haven't counted entries yet, but it's got to be over a 1,000! Or not.

See you next week.

Laporte School Board discusses online school, Level 4 Special Ed facility at WHA

by Dean Morrill
Editor
dmorrill@pilotindependent.com

Adding a K-12 online school and a new Level 4 Special Education facility opening in Walker were two of several items discussed at the March 8 Laporte School Board meeting.

Superintendent Kim Goodwin said there is a possibility of adding a K-12 online school. This would most likely involve purchasing online curriculum and the program would need to be flexible. "Education is changing," she said. "This would help keep us from losing students. Many districts across Minnesota are completing the application for an online school. Our staff is on board with this and has many good ideas."

Goodwin also met with other schools who are doing this to gather more information.

The board also discussed the Level 4 Special Education facility that is opening this

fall at Walker-Hackensack-Akeley School. The facility is located at the former Ah-Gwah-Ching site.

WHA will accept Level 4 Special Ed students, and once a joint power of agreement is available, Goodwin said it will be brought to the board for approval.

The possibility of purchasing a generator for the district if the community wants to use the school as a disaster relief center was also discussed. Goodwin said this would keep the building up and running in the event of a disaster.

Currently, there is no place for the community to go if there should be a major catastrophic event. The generator would be housed in a separate building, and costs could be as high as \$400,000. Funds would need to come from sources other than the school.

Goodwin said she will gather more information and look into other schools that have generators.

The board also discussed

extra-curricular fees for the 2021-22 school year. Grades 6-8 will pay \$40 per sport and grades 9-12 \$50, with a family max at \$225 per year. Students who qualify for free and reduced lunch will have the fees waived.

Principal AJ Dombeck presented the American Indian program to the board. This program helps pay for the school's social worker, the Indian Ed Liaison, and Indian Ed classroom supplies and books.

Dombeck also told the board about credit requirements. He presented Minnesota's and Laporte's credit requirements, and discussed how changes could help credit recovery. Dombeck suggested lowering math credit requirements.

During the superintendent's report, Goodwin said that she had a meeting earlier in the day with Moody's Investors Service for a rating review and possible upgrade. This action was prompted by the

publication of their new U.S. K-12 Public School Districts rating methodology and the related changes to the metrics they now evaluate for K-12 school districts.

"The review's preliminary finding is that we are in line for a rating upgrade," she said.

Goodwin also discussed the recent information about the second round of COVID-19 funds, and that if the district does get those funds it won't be until July 1.

In other school business, the board:

Approved the second and final reading of the annual mandatory policies 410, 413, 414, 415, 506, 514, 522, 524, 616, and 806.

Approved the February monthly bills totaling \$284,798.

Approved capping classroom size for third- through fifth-grade at 30 students.

The next regular board meeting is April 12 at 6 p.m.

URBAN COWBOY
MICKEY GILLEY & JOHNNY LEE
MAY 21
TICKETS: \$20/\$25/\$32

Loverboy
WITH SPECIAL GUEST HEADERS
JUNE 12
TICKETS: \$24/\$29/\$34
OUTDOOR EVENT

GARY ALLAN
JULY 3
TICKETS: \$39/\$44/\$49
OUTDOOR EVENT

For tickets, call
1-844-554-2646 or
northernlightscasino.com

NORTHERN LIGHTS
CASINO HOTEL AND EVENT CENTER
WALKER, MN