

Cass County
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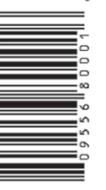
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Cass EDC report hints of progress at Ah-Gwah-Ching site

by Gail DeBoer
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Two brief sentences in the Cass County Economic Development Corporation's (CEEDC) March 5 report will pique the interest of anyone who wonders if the former Ah-Gwah-Ching site near Walker will ever be redeveloped.

"[We] continue to work with an interested party on being the 'an-

chor' on the Ah-Gwah-Ching development. Additionally, an effort is being made to earmark complementary businesses," EDC Director Mike Paulus told commissioners.

Ah-Gwah-Ching opened in 1907 as a state tuberculosis hospital. In the 1960s, as TB cases waned, it became a state nursing home/regional treatment center. Over the decades, as the resident population dropped, efforts were made to find other uses

for the facility. Eventually AGC was closed in 2008, buildings were demolished a couple of years later, and Cass County acquired 60 acres for redevelopment from the state of Minnesota. The site has sat, undeveloped for nearly a decade, despite efforts by the EDC and others.

When contacted March 6, Paulus said he could not share any details until a developer agreement is in place and the developer is ready to

announce plans.

The report went on to note that the EDC had received a \$99,999 revolving loan fund grant from USDA. Those funds have been loaned out to three businesses: one, a start-up; one, an existing business for retention; and one for business expansion. The EDC also has other funds available to lend.

Attempts to complete an opportunity zone project with a wind energy

producer did not pan out because studies did not come back positively.

The EDC currently provides technical assistance to 28 Cass County businesses and residents. For the fiscal year-to-date, the EDC has raised \$1,365,000 in capital for the county.

Due to increased interest in EDC services, employee Marina Lovell will be moving from office assistant to a consulting position. A part-time office assistant will be hired.

WHA School receives grant to purchase milk cooler



Walker-Hackensack-Akeley School has been given an Agricultural Growth Research and Innovation (AGRI) grant from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to increase the use of Minnesota dairy in its nutrition program.

The AGRI Milk Cooler grant assists schools and early care and education organizations in purchasing milk coolers and related dairy equipment. Each school or organization may apply for up to \$1,500 per milk cooler. Eligible expenses include the cost of the milk cooler and associated installation expenses.

WHA School received one of 39 grants awarded across the state.

WHA head cook Nancy Semmler and Indian Ed Director Dr. Michael Anderson with the new milk cooler purchased using the grant money. Photo submitted

"We can now replace the elementary milk cooler, as the old one was on its last leg. Now our students will have access to more milk, more often," said Michael Anderson, director of Indian Education at WHA School.

"This grant allows for investments in schools and early care education organizations, provides nutritious dairy products to children and expands markets for the state's dairy farmers," said MDA's Assistant Commissioner Whitney Place.

The MDA is currently accepting applications for the second round of milk cooler grants. For more information, visits the MDA's Milk Cooler Grant website at <https://www.mda.state.mn.us/business-dev-loans-grants/agri-milk-cooler-grant>

Cass County agrees to \$2 million settlement for man who died in jail

by Gail DeBoer
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Cass County and the Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust have agreed to pay \$2 million to the estate of Darren Benais of Cass Lake, who died March 15, 2018, in a holding cell at the county jail, a day after drinking toxic windshield wiper fluid.

Last Thursday, Jason M. Hively of the law firm Iversen Reuvers Condon released the following statement:

"Cass County and the Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust agreed to pay \$2

million to Darren Benais's estate in exchange for a dismissal of any claims stemming from the events surrounding his death.

"There was no admission of wrongdoing and no non-monetary terms were included. However, the involved staff were disciplined and received unpaid suspensions. Additionally, in an effort to prevent a tragedy like this from occurring again, all staff completed comprehensive poison prevention training and safety measures were implemented

County settlement
Continued on page 8A

Walker Council delays street improvement project

by Dean Morrill
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Walker's North Side Street Improvement Project that was suppose to start this spring and finish in 2020 has been put on hold.

At the March 4 Walker Council meeting, the council discussed moving the project's start date back to 2020. The council had concerns that the way the construction was scheduled would cause serious parking problems and affect too many residents and businesses.

The \$4.5 million project includes underground utility, street and drainage improvements, and encompasses portions of Cleveland Boulevard, Railroad Avenue, Front Street, Second, Third, Fourth and Sixth streets, the alley west of Fourth Street, and Prospect Place and Ross Place. The project is expected to address sanitary sewer lines that are more than

50 years old with cracked and failing pipes, root intrusion and mineral build-up. The water main has multiple deficiencies while streets have potholes and cracks.

The council also did not consider a resolution authorizing the application to seek a Minnesota Public Facilities Authority grant to help pay for the project.

Another important topic the council discussed in detail was the Library Board and whether to reduce the number of members from seven to five, so it is easier to have a quorum to hold meetings.

It was decided that city staff will draft a resolution for consideration to change to a five-member board with at least three of the five members from Walker.

Walker Council
Continued on page 8A

Hackensack plans to inspect, clean water tower

by Gail DeBoer
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KLM Engineering, a Woodbury, Minn., firm specializing in water tower inspections, will be drafting a proposal to inspect, fix, repaint and bring Hackensack's water tower up to code.

KLM consultant Shawn Mulhern explained the multi-phase process at the March 4 city council meeting.

The process begins with

KLM conducting an inspection and reporting what needs to be done; the tower was last inspected in 2007. Then come plans and specs for the bidding process. Before work begins (repairs, interior/exterior sandblasting, painting/coating, etc.), the tower would be drained and temporary water connections provided for residents and businesses.

All work must be done by a certified firm in order to meet state requirements. The project could be done in 2020 and would take 4-6 weeks.

Mulhern will submit KLM's proposal, the council will review it and then make a decision. Cost estimates can't be made until KLM identifies

the extent of the work.

As part of its summer schedule, the **Cass County Board of Commissioners** will hold its Sept. 17 meeting at Hackensack City Hall at 6:30 p.m. The public is encouraged to attend. Councilor Jim Schneider said the board will want to see the completed sea wall project at city park, made possible by an \$80,000 grant from the county's Fund 73.

In other matters the city **Approved payment** to Maintenance Supervisor Dave

Hackensack Council
Continued on page 8A

by Gail DeBoer
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Rhetorical question:
How do you hold an ice out contest if the ice NEVER goes out?

Sorry, I'm just a bit depressed after getting snowed in last weekend for the umpteenth time!

Things will get better. "The sun will come out tomorrow; tomorrow; bet your bottom dollar — ice will melt!"

OK, enough of that. This is going to be short and redundant. I can't dwell on this.

(Copy/paste info from last week.)

Submit your best guess(es) for when all of Leech Lake will be ice free. Deadline is 5 p.m., April 1. Send 'em by one of these methods:

Email to gdeboer@pilotindependent.com or dmorrill@pilotindependent.com (not both).

For regular mail, send to Pilot-Independent, PO Box 190, Walker, MN 56484

Fax entries to (218) 547-3000.

Hand-deliver to The P-I, 408 Minnesota Ave., Walker. Entries must include:

Name; mailing address; email address; and phone numbers (land line and/or cell) (Copy/paste info from last week with slight change.)

Weeks/months/years from now, when all the ice has melted, we'll declare the date, grab the correct entries, throw them into a large black garbage bag, shake vigorously and start drawing for prizes.

If there are more correct

guessers than prizes, Frizzell Furniture Gallery, one of our generous sponsors, will kick in enough extra gift certificates to cover the overage (see prize list).

Conversely, if there are more prizes than correct guessers, we award prizes first to the correct date guessers, then take entries for the day before and day after, throw

them in the bag, shake and draw, until all prizes are used up.

All prizes must be claimed at the sponsoring business by Labor Day weekend, and all prizes are final!

Things should start to look up by next week, because March 20 is officially the First Day of Spring! See you then.

Ice-out prize list ...

Here is the list of the 42 prizes donated by the 2019 Leech Lake Ice-Out Contest sponsors.

Grand Prize: kayak and paddle, donated by Walker Bay Dock

- SuperOne Foods — Three \$25 gift cards.
- Thrivent Financial — Grill tool set
- Walker Area Realty — \$100 VISA gift card
- Pilot-Independent — One year gift subscription
- State Farm Insurance — Two boxes golf balls, tees, towel
- Bank Forward — Picnic cooler
- Walker American Legion Post — Legion sweatshirt
- Bear Pause Theater, Hackensack — VIP Room Pass/4 Lakeside Fireplace — Fireside basket
- Mark's Market, Hackensack — \$20 gift card
- American National Bank — Proof coin set
- Forestedge Winery, Laporte — \$20 gift certificate
- Third Base Bar & Grill, Laporte — \$25 gift certificate
- Cafe Zona Rosa — \$25 gift certificate
- Norm's Auto Body — Two free oil changes
- Thrifty White Drug — Two \$20 gift certificates
- Frizzell Furniture Gallery — Four \$50 gift certificates
- Gas Service Co. — Three propane fills (20 lb. size)
- First National Bank North — \$50 VISA gift card
- Walker Hotel — \$50 gift certificate
- Orton's BP — Four premium car washes
- Laporte Grocery — \$25 gift certificate
- Chase on the Lake/502 — \$25 gift certificate
- Benson's — \$25 gift certificate
- Bayside Bar and Grill — \$25 gift certificate
- Walker Ford — Two free oil changes
- Dairy Queen — Ice cream cake
- Jenny's Beehive — Stress Fix Body Care Basket

Sponsors are located in Walker, unless otherwise noted.

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