

Storyteller



Mitch Kezar has been lugging his photography gear accross grasslands and city streets all over the world for 50-plus years. His images and videos have been used by some of the leaders in the publication and corporate industries.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MITCH KEZAR

After traveling 8 million miles in a 50-year photography career, Delano’s Mitch Kezar isn’t slowing down

MATT KANE
Sports Editor

As drastically as the hair on his head and upper lip has transformed from a sharp brown to a wise gray, the world of photography has evolved immensely over the 50 years Mitch Kezar has looked through the viewfinder.

Kezar’s darkroom is now digital, but his passion in getting the shot and giving viewers their 1,000 words worth for each picture has never eased, even as his focus has shifted from still images and photojournalism to video production and promotional campaigns.

“I was an early adopter of every last piece of gear the manufacturers could conjure up. I think that’s what kept me in the business. I have an innate need to tinker with that stuff and learn it,” he said recently from his Delano home, where the shelves are filled with vintage camera bodies and dozens of lenses of various focal lengths. “Video is vastly more complex than stills, because you have to master sound and movement and think many steps ahead. But I think being a good still photographer is really an added benefit to being a good video producer, because you see the pictures first. I line it up just like I used to do with stills, and just let the action happen.”

Kezar recently completed a video for Federal Premium promoting the



Mitch Kezar spent decades chasing stories as a newspaper and magazine photographer. Kezar captured this image of Jimmy Carter talking to journalist Sam Donaldson during a presidential campaign.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MITCH KEZAR

Kids and Clays Foundation. In less than a week, that video was viewed more than 2,000 times on Facebook.

“It’s nice to know your work is getting out there, and that people are seeing it and appreciating it,” said Kezar.

Hunting, fishing and wildlife conservation projects have taken Kezar’s focus for much of the past three decades, but, during the earlier years of his half-century photography career, Kezar’s cameras were capturing hard news and feature subjects: everything

see STORYTELLER, 14A



4th of July preview inside

When does the 4th of July carnival open? How many candidates will vie to be Delano Ambassadors Wednesday night? What is the parade route and who is the grand marshal? When can spectators start saving their spots? Who is performing during the celebration? When are the fireworks? What’s new in 2019?

All these questions and more are answered in the 4th of July preview inside this edition.

Delano School Board approves budget

GABE LICHT
Editor

After months of discussion, the Delano School Board approved the 2019-20 budget on a 5-1 vote, with Board Member Al Briesemeister opposed and Vice Chair Lisa Seguin absent.

Briesemeister did not explain the reason for his no vote during the regular meeting or the work session. During a May 23 special meeting, he expressed frustration with the process used to make about \$300,000 in budget cuts, but he did not indicate that he opposed the budget overall.

The budget calls for deficit spending by \$900,000 in the unassigned fund balance, bringing the general budget fund balance to \$6,058,488, which is more than 12 percent of projected expenses.

In the capital budget, the district will spend \$1,467,644 for long-term facility maintenance and \$986,328 for operating capital, leading to \$642,204 in deficit spending in that fund.

Business Manager Mary Reeder said that new language arts curriculum for grades kindergarten through fourth grade is the largest portion of the operating capital expenses.

LTFM expenses include \$400,000 for parking lot repairs, \$120,000 for a fire road, and \$100,000 for sidewalks at the Delano Community Education building. Reeder noted the sidewalk project might be delayed if the city opts to reconstruct Second Street.

It also includes \$38,000 to refinish the Tiger Activity Center gym floors and \$10,000 for bleacher repairs.

“We’ve just invested \$48,000 into preventable things,” Board Member Amy Johnson said during the work session, referencing damages to facilities due to spring sports teams practicing indoors.

The board approved the 2019-20 LTFM budget, as well as the 10-year

LTFM budget, separately.

The 10-year LTFM budget calls for nearly \$10 million in spending through fiscal year 2029.

In other budget-related business, the board approved the new language arts curriculum for grades kindergarten through fourth grade.

“The biggest thing missing was we should have had teachers present,” Board Member Rachel Depa said of the May 20 meeting at which the curriculum was first discussed.

She added that she and fellow Board Member Jennie Rosenow had since met with teachers regarding the curriculum.

“The insight they gave us into the curriculum was much more than we got from (Director of Teaching and Learning) Joe (Vieau),” Depa said. “It meets the standards I was looking for. After talking with them, I’m more comfortable with it.”

Q Comp

Quality Compensation advisors Meghan Gibas and Maria Menz presented to the board about that program.

They noted that about 80 percent of all teachers surveyed had a favorable view of the program.

Menz said changes were made after no Q Comp goals were met during the 2017-18 school year.

At Delano Elementary School, Q Comp goals will be based off of Formative Assessment System for Teachers tests that are taken in the fall and the spring instead of Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments that are only taken once a year.

At the high school, tests will be proctored by teachers in the content area being tested, which was already the case for students in seventh and eighth grade. Students are required to stay in the classroom for the entire time allotted for the tests.

see BOARD, 6A

HAPPENINGS

See page 2A for more

Hunt for the granite chip begins

The hunt for the granite chip begins at 9 a.m. Friday, June 28. For more information, see the 4th of July section in this edition.

Early deadlines, office closed July 4-5

Deadlines for the Delano Herald Journal will be 24 hours earlier than normal – noon Tuesday, July 2, due to the 4th of July holiday. Offices will be closed July 4 and 5.

Food shelf closed July 4

The Delano Helping Hands Food Shelf will be closed Thursday, July 4, in observance of Independence Day.

Parade spot savers prohibited until July 4

Placing items on sidewalks, trails, and public property is a safety hazard. Because of this, all blankets, tarps, chairs, tape, ropes or other items placed on public property will be removed by the City of Delano. For those who wish to save a spot for the parade, these items can be placed on public property no earlier than sunrise July 4.

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Plenty more stories to tell for Kezar

from STORYTELLER, 1A

Like most photographers, though, major figures and celebrities like Carter and John Travolta were not the subjects of Kezar's photographs at the start.

Those aforementioned sheep and some geese on the family farm were favorite subjects of Kezar's in his infant stages of photography, as a kid growing up in Thief River Falls.

"Mom would run up to the drug store and get the film back and there would be a bunch of pictures of a flock of geese and our sheep. That was my favorite subject matter," he said. "I used to steal her camera and burn off a few frames."

Kezar's 50-plus year photography career all started with his mother's Brownie Hawk-eye camera that now sits on the shelf in Kezar's kitchen in Delano.

Also on that shelf is the Graflex Speed Graphic camera Kezar used at his first paying job.

"Three days before I got out of high school, I was hired as a staff reporter and photographer and floor sweeper at the Thief River Falls Times. That was June 8, 1969."

Fifty years to the day after walking through the doors of the Thief River Falls Times, June 8, 2019, at his cozy home in Delano, Kezar and a large gathering of friends, celebrated his career with a hog roast and enough memory-spurring libations to make all photographers appreciative of autofocus.

Those memories for Kezar, include many steps through the photography world.

"I started out at a small-town newspaper and that led to a little bit of college journalism, and that led to not a great draft number, and that led to enlistment in the Air Force."

Kezar wanted to put his photography talent to work for the Air Force, but it almost didn't happen.

"The Air Force wanted to make a jet engine mechanic out of me. I said, 'Look here, Sergeant, a wrench doesn't fit in my hand; I'm a photographer,'" Kezar remembered. "He said, 'I hear that every day.' I said, 'Well, I have a press pass.'"

The Sergeant did not believe Kezar until he flashed that press pass.

"I still carry a media pass," Kezar noted.

Kezar became a combat media specialist in the Air Force. He was never shipped out for combat, himself, but several friends served in Vietnam.

While still in the Air Force, Kezar began working as a staff photographer at the Montgomery Advertiser, and went on to serve as president of the Alabama Press Photographers Association.

Kezar moved on to the Tampa Tribune, where he oversaw 37 photographers as the director of photography for seven years.

"We covered everything from the Yucatan to Cuba," he said of his tenure in Florida. "It was a pretty heavy time."

Kezar returned home to Minnesota in 1981, when he accepted an offer to oversee the photo staff at the Minneapolis Star. When the Star and Tribune combined in 1982, he became the assistant director of photography for the largest newspaper in the region.

"I love that paper," he said of the Star Tribune.

With a portfolio to back up his skills and experiences, Kezar left the newspaper business and ventured out on his own as a freelance photographer for national magazines. His work has been featured in TIME, Newsweek, National Geographic, Fortune, Business Week, Family Circle, and Woman's Day.

As the digital technology



Mitch Kezar shooting images for Garmin in San Francisco.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MITCH KEZAR



Keeping up with the ever-changing technology in the photography world has allowed Mitch Kezar to continue his successful career. Here, Kezar shows off the first camera he ever used as a professional journalist 50 years ago, the Graflex Speed Graphic he looked through at the Thief River Falls Times June 8, 1969.

PHOTO BY MATT KANE

began taking over the photography world, Kezar panned his camera away from the world of general circulation magazines, and aimed it at the world of hunting and fishing.

Field & Stream and Outdoor Life

are two of the largest outdoors magazines to feature Kezar's images. His portfolio grew to include corporate work and advertising campaigns, and his medium switched from still photography to video.

Not an easy move, Kezar admits.

"It was nasty. It was an awesome, awful, technical, head-banging learning curve to get into it," he said. "Once you

got it, you got it, though, so its a matter of keeping your head down and learning."

The list of companies that feature Kezar's still images and videos is a who's who of cor-

porate giants in the outdoors world — Federal, Remington, Winchester, Leupold, Bushnell, Realtree, Mathews, BowTech, Filson, Abu Garcia, Fenwick, Old Town, Pure Fishing, Outdoor Channel, and Savage Arms.

In the corporate world, Kezar's clients have included FedEx, HB Fuller, General Mills, and 3M.

A farm kid who served in the FFA and in 4-H, Kezar never forgot where he came from. He has produced more than 200 covers for Successful Farming Magazine, and is working on a multi-year project for the South Dakota Grasslands Coalition.

He takes special pride in the grasslands project.

"It's a lovely career job, because it's a story I know and it's a story I believe in," he said. "It's a blast shooting it. We get to hang out with ranchers in their environments, and tell their stories of successes and failures in introducing grasslands to areas that were indigenous grasslands back when the buffalo roamed."

His work with the grasslands project and the promotion of returning the land back to the hoofed animals that once

tographing a hunt for Leupold, a leading optics company. He was in a hot air balloon soaring over the Mara River.

"People ask what's the coolest thing I have seen in my career; that has to be it," he said. "We were up at 10,000 feet, which is bloody high for a hot air balloon. You would look off to your left and see herds of plains animals — topi, zebra, wildebeest, impala; all the hoofed animals — as far as the eye could see. You look to the right and see them shoulder-to-shoulder to the end of the earth in that direction."

"I'm not sure that is possible now. From what I heard in 1989, that was sort of the end of the grand migration."

Kezar is also the founder of Windigo Images, a stock photo business that houses "the most comprehensive image collection of hunting, fishing, camping and great outdoors," and, with girlfriend Ellen Becker, created Kindred Small Films, a company that produces family documentaries that preserve one's history for the sake of future generations.

What Kezar has seen through the viewfinder in half a century could fill a book or two. Actually, his work has filled many pages — in newspapers, books, magazines, and calendars, as well as websites and social media platforms.

He has photographed in Europe, Asia, Africa, South America and China.

"I was trying to figure out the other day whether or not I have ever taken a goof-off vacation. Maybe two in all these years," he said. "I figure I have logged over 8 million miles so far. My cases look like it."

Those cases were back in South Dakota this past week, safely housing the gear and equipment that will capture the images in Kezar's eye.

"I have been really fortunate to do what I like to do; something I think I'm halfway decent at doing," he said. "No sign of slowing down. I have stuff to do and stories to tell."

To see more of Mitch Kezar's work, follow the link at www.delanoheraldjournal.com.



roamed it, relates to an assignment two decades ago that Kezar will never forget.

It was 1989 in Africa, where Kezar was pho-

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Saturday, July 27
8:30 - Noon
Limited space. Preregistration required.

Ridgeview Delano Clinic
916 St. Peter Avenue, Delano

Also offered at Ridgeview Belle Plaine Clinic, Saturday, Aug. 3, 8:30 a.m. - Noon