

The Bemidji Pioneer

Sunday, May 12, 2019

Today's forecast
High 60° Low 44°
Weather, Page A2

JEFF'S SPOT

DeMars brothers always return to Lake Bemidji for annual fishing opener

By Micah Friez
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Joe and Mark DeMars stand waist-deep in the waters where the Mississippi first meets Lake Bemidji.

The soft waves reach up to meet the shoreline. The occasional car whisks by on the downtown bridge above. And, when lucky, a fish splashes as it's hooked out into the midnight air.

The DeMars brothers are standing in Jeff's spot. It's tradition.

"Life just gets busy, but you make time for this. It's what you remember," Joe said. "There are a lot of traditions, some that have gone by the wayside, but this is one that we've always (kept)."

Joe, 42, and Mark, 54, both live in the Twin Cities area, but they return to Bemidji for each fishing opener. Their brother, Jeff, lived in town and hosted family fishing outings in his coveted downtown cove.

SPOT: Page A7



Above: Anglers fish from their boats at dawn on Lake Bemidji during Minnesota's fishing opener on Saturday morning. Left: Joe DeMars of Hugo, Minn., fishes in the water where the Mississippi River hits Lake Bemidji at about 1 a.m. Saturday, May 11, during Minnesota's fishing opener.

Photos by Jillian Gandsey / Bemidji Pioneer

Northern Dental Access Center expands teeth treatment west

Halstad facility will provide another option for patients

By Matthew Liedke
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BEMIDJI — With demand coming from thousands across western Minnesota and neighboring North Dakota, the Northern Dental Access Center in Bemidji is marking its 10th anniversary with an expansion.

Operating as a nonprofit community clinic, NDAC primarily provides care to those with low incomes and/or are on medical assistance. To accommodate the volume of patients who come to Bemidji from afar, NDAC is in the process of opening a new clinic in Halstad, Minn.

The new location includes six treatment rooms, and since its soft opening earlier this year, the Halstad clinic has already seen about 600 patients.

According to NDAC Executive Director Jeanne Larson, the new location isn't fully operational



Larson

yet, but is expecting about 5,000 patients in its first year. In comparison, the Bemidji location served more than 26,000 patients in 2018.

And because many of those patients live in counties on Minnesota's western border, Larson said NDAC leadership started to look west for a new clinic.

"We thought our next best approach was to move closer to people who were coming here (to Bemidji)," Larson said.

Larson said a private dental practice in Halstad had recently closed and the owner offered the property at a cost of about \$700,000. Larson said along with the purchasing cost, the NDAC also invested more than \$200,000 in start-up costs.

"Our biggest concern is having the organizational culture we have here, which we've worked very hard to keep, over there," Larson said. "We want a welcoming, non-judgemental environment. Where people can feel this will be their home for dental care."

During the transition, Larson said the Bemidji location is sharing staff with Halstad, with some of Bemidji employees working there at least a day or two per week.

"There will be some back and forth in our first year there," Larson said.

Humble beginnings to a larger clinic

The NDAC's decade in operation is only part of its history, Larson said, as discussion for

DENTAL: Page A6

No criminal charges yet in human remains case

Main suspect is behind bars

By Jordan Shearer
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BEMIDJI — Although more than three months have passed since authorities found human remains in a residential fire pit just outside Bemidji, they have yet to file any criminal charges in the case.

Meanwhile, the man at the center of the investigation is behind bars.

Darren Stebe, 44, was arrested in early February in the wake of a missing-person investigation.

The Beltrami County Sheriff's Office issued a statement shortly thereafter saying Stebe likely would face charges related to the deaths of two people.

Since then, however, the Beltrami County Attorney's Office has not charged Stebe, nor anyone else. County Attorney David Hanson said



Stebe

the reason is because they're not pressed for time since their primary suspect is already incarcerated.

Authorities arrested Stebe during their investigation for violating the terms of his early release from a 2010 drug sentence. Stebe is incarcerated at the Minnesota Department of Corrections in Stillwater with an anticipated release date of May 2021.

"Our suspect is incarcerated," Hanson said. "There isn't the expediency that surrounds most cases... we have the luxury of time; we're using that to make sure we have all of our investigatory pieces put together before (we) bring charges."

Outside of that, Hanson declined to comment on any details from the case.

CHARGES: Page A7



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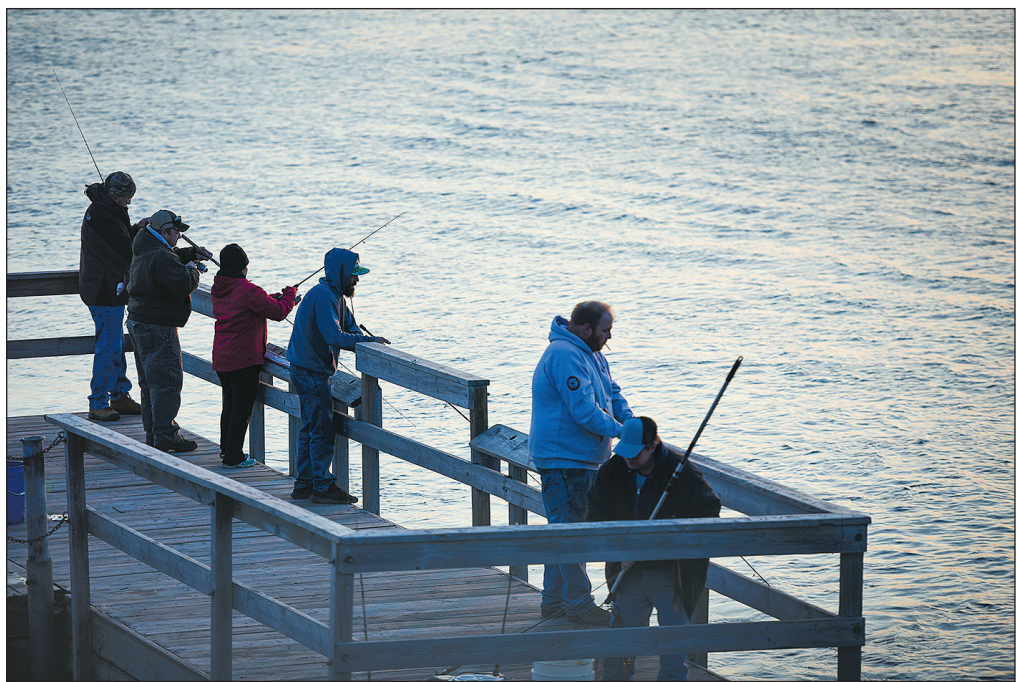
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Photos by Jillian Gandsey / Bemidji Pioneer

Anglers fish from the Lake Bemidji Fishing Pier at dawn during Minnesota's fishing opener on Saturday, May 11.

SPOT

From Page A1

So, on Saturday, once midnight passed and the Minnesota fishing season officially opened, Joe and Mark were right where they belonged.

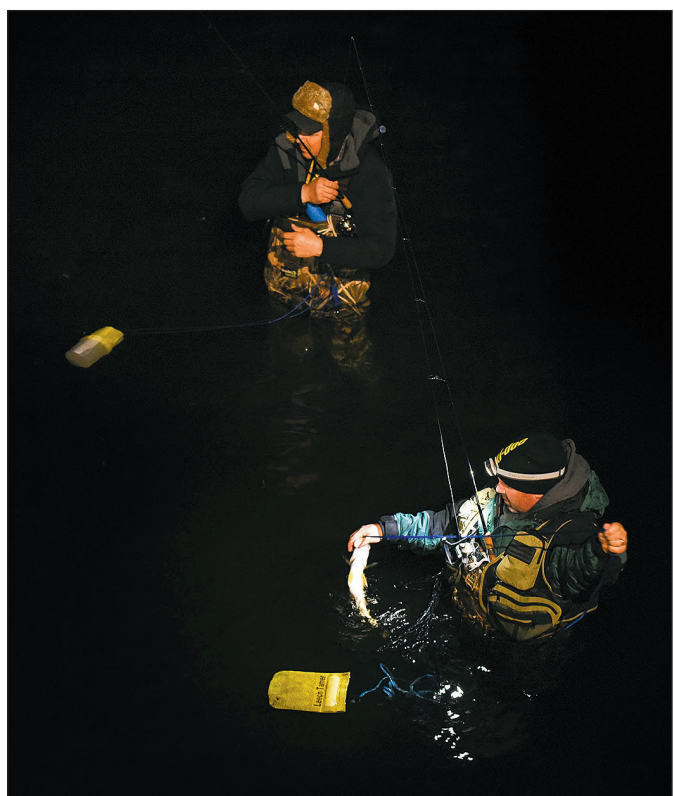
"When my brother moved up here, we started coming up," Mark said. "... That's kind of tradition. We always put on the chest waders and try to hit the water as soon as it's Saturday."

Jeff was diagnosed with lung cancer and also had multiple brain tumors before passing away on Feb. 27, 2017. He was 55. Jeff is survived by his wife, Lisa, and kept alive through the trek to his spot that Joe and Mark make an annual priority.

"There's some sibling rivalries and there's strifing, but we always come together for the weekend to go fishing," Joe said. "That's what we've done forever, since I was as little as I can remember. ... Whatever's going on, we're going to drop it. If we can do this, we have to find a way."

The brothers always pray before casting the first line, and they then spent about three hours in the water early Saturday. They caught 16 fish in their go-to location and kept nine between the two of them.

"It's extremely peaceful, quiet," Mark said. "You're in God's creation, and it's just a



Joe DeMars nets a walleye while his brother, Mark DeMars, fishes where the Mississippi River hits Lake Bemidji at about 1 a.m. Saturday during Minnesota's fishing opener.

joy to be a part of what he has put together. As a believer, you have that connection. And we always do pretty good."

The DeMars grew up outdoorsmen, largely in part to their father, Gene. All four siblings even learned to fish left-handed because that's how dad taught them. The connection among them still stands today, as Joe and Mark called their brother, Greg (who lives in Louisiana), on the drive up to Bemidji to reminisce about fishing tales in Jeff's spot.

The downtown waters were filled with dozens of anglers on opening night, populating the area from boats, piers and shores. The DeMars had a late start to the opener — not touching the waters until after the midnight opening — but Jeff's spot remained unoccupied until they arrived.

Almost as if it was reserved. "Fishing here) is my way to remember him," Joe said. "Families have ups and downs and ins and outs, but we always knew each other best here."



Pioneer file photo

The remains of two people were found in early February in a fire pit at this property located off of state Highway 89 northwest of Bemidji.

CHARGES

From Page A1

The investigation began in early February when the sheriff's office received a missing-person report regarding an individual who was traveling from the Twin Cities to Bemidji. The report indicated the person may have been traveling with a second person from the Duluth area.

Investigators found the person's vehicle at the Palace Casino in Cass County on Feb. 4. Shortly thereafter, they arrested a person of interest — Stebe — for violating his early release.

Investigators also encountered a second person of interest, although Stebe was the only one named by authorities.

That led investigators to a home in the 6500 block of State Highway 89 in

Eckles Township, west of Bemidji.

"Both of the individuals were interviewed and further information was gathered throughout the evening that led investigators to believe a crime of violence had taken place at a residence where the two people of interest had resided together," a release from the sheriff's office said.

The release also said they found "what is believed to be the human remains of two people." Officials later said they found the remains in a fire pit, and identified them as 39-year-old Adam Thorpe of Maple Grove, Minn., and 41-year-old Jason McDonough of the Superior, Wis. area.

Officials have not released any information regarding what may have started the altercation or how the parties came in contact with each other. However, Stebe allegedly

knew one of the victims — McDonough — from a time when they both were incarcerated, according to a person who knew both men.

Once arrested in February, Stebe was briefly held in the Beltrami County Jail before he was transported to the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Stillwater.

Thorpe's family could not be reached for comment. However, he was reportedly a former Twin Cities-based DJ.

McDonough's family issued a brief statement, expressing their loss.

"Jason always had a good heart and a gentle soul. He would help anyone, anytime. He loved his family and wasn't afraid to express his love by always saying 'I love you' and giving you a hug. He will be missed by many," Jamie Heytens-Nielsen said on behalf of McDonough's family.

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