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Official newspaper of the city of Winona

WAPS examines why families said goodbye

by NATHANIEL NELSON

At its last meeting, the Winona Area Public Schools (WAPS) Board examined the initial results of a survey aimed at finding out why families have been leaving the district after WAPS came up 152 students short from its budgeted

enrollment projections for this school year. Initial results show that more than half of respondents left due to the recent closure of Madison and Rollingstone schools and many families were dissatisfied with the district's teachers and administrators, though only 35 of the 232 surveys sent out were returned.

The survey asked six questions: a confirmation that the family had chosen to leave WAPS, what school the students attended, what grade level the students were enrolled in, the reason for leaving WAPS, what school system they went to, and what WAPS could have done differently to keep them in

the district.

According to the report, 232 surveys were emailed out, with 95 emails opened and 35 surveys completed. That equates to a little over a 15-percent response rate overall.

Of the respondents, 17 said they left due to the recent closure of Madison

and Rollingstone schools. Sixteen said they were dissatisfied with the school learning environment, 15 said they were dissatisfied with the control of behavior issues in the classroom, and 12 said they were dissatisfied with the

see **EXAMINES** page 4a

Youth tackle treasure of trails



by CHRIS ROGERS

Maddie Benke demonstrated for the instructor how to start a snowmobile and what to check before she does. She was a little nervous, though, and the news camera probably didn't help. "What do you need to see and be

seen?" the instructor asked. Benke paused, then flipped the lights. Then she revved up the big sled and took it around the course.

Benke was one of several local youths who received their snowmobile safety certificate

Photo by Chris Rogers

■ Young Maddie Benke got her snowmobile safety certificate after completing a driving test earlier this month. Local snowmobiling clubs host the safety classes and maintain a network of trails.

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2 arrested in shooting

by NATHANIEL NELSON

Two were arrested in relation to a home invasion and shooting on December 15, which left a 28-year-old woman tending a gunshot wound as alleged "payback" for an altercation that happened at a local bar earlier that night.

Joseph Addison Simmons, 38, and Courtney Sherell Anitrea Slack, 27, both of Winona, were each charged with four felony counts, including aggravated robbery, burglary and assault, while Simmons also faces an additional felony charge of illegal possession of a firearm.

According to the criminal complaint, at about 1:30 a.m. on Saturday, December 15, police responded to a call from an address on the 850 block of West Fifth Street. A 28-year-old woman living there reported that she had been assaulted by Slack outside Steiny's Bar.

Two hours later, the woman called again, but this time she was tending a gunshot wound to her thigh. The caller reported that "a light-skinned African-American man wearing dark clothing," later identified in the criminal complaint as Simmons, had knocked on the door and shot her in the leg with what police suspect to be a small-caliber handgun. The woman said she had initially thought the knock was coming from police.

The woman claimed Simmons pushed through her door and said, "you messing with my cousin," before stomping on and punching her several times. He

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From speed stacking to motivational speaking

by NATHANIEL NELSON

On his kitchen table, 21-year-old Jesse Horn sets up a camera, a timer, and 12 cups. Five seconds later, the speed stacker has moved the cups into three different formations before returning them back to where they started.

"When people watch my videos, they think, 'What? This has to be set up.' In person, they think otherwise. It's really that speed," Horn said.

Horn is a competitive cup stacker, or a speed stacker. The sport involves taking a set of cups and rearranging them as quickly as possible. Today, Horn is one of the best in the world at the sport, but it all started with a commercial.

"When I was nine years old, I saw a TV commercial that changed everything for me. It was for Speedstack, the official cup of sports stacking. It

was the coolest thing I'd ever seen, and I wanted to try so bad," Horn said. "The rest went from there."

By the time he was 13, Horn was already starting to compete in regional tournaments. In his first sport stacking competition in Eagan, Minn., he ended up placing first and that set the ball rolling. For the next decade, Horn has continued to practice an hour a day, every day.

"I kept practicing and practicing, and got faster and faster every year," Horn said.

Now, Horn holds multiple Wisconsin state records in every speed stacking category. For the 3-3-3, or the most basic stack of the group, his competitive record is 1.578 seconds, with a personal record at home of 1.377 seconds. For the 3-6-3, he holds the top spot with 2.008 seconds

see **SPEAKING** page 5a

Officials showcase Ed. Village

by NATHANIEL NELSON



Photo by Nathaniel Nelson

■ Tarrell Portman, dean of the College of Education at Winona State University, leads a tour of the new Education Village campus.

The new Education Village at Winona State University (WSU) is coming along swimmingly as representatives from each of the departments involved helped guide a mid-construction tour of the facility last Friday. The \$32-million project is set to open in the fall, giving education students of all kinds a wealth of new opportunities and experiences.

The 100,000-square-foot campus will renovate Cathedral Elementary School, Wabasha Recreation Center and Wabasha Hall into a state-of-the-art educational facility, with 18 dedicated learning spaces to support students and faculty. The counselor education department, education studies department, and WSU Children's Center will all find a home at the village and, according to Tarrell Portman, dean of the College of Education at WSU, it will help Winona

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Shooting

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then demanded she give him money, and she reportedly gave him a billfold containing an ID, credit cards and an unknown amount of cash. Simmons also took the woman's cell phone before fleeing the scene.

The woman called police and then a friend, and was found in her kitchen with her thigh bandaged. She was subsequently transported to Winona Health for the treatment of the gunshot wound.

On December 19, the woman told authorities that she had identified Simmons on Facebook as the man who shot her, the report states.

The next day, police met with Slack, who reportedly acknowledged that she had been in an altercation with the woman at Steiny's on December 15. She reportedly told officers that she told Simmons about what happened and wanted to scare the woman as payback for what happened at the bar.

According to the criminal complaint, Simmons drove Slack to the woman's residence to scare the victim, and Slack said she did not know Simmons had a gun. During the burglary, Slack stood off to the side while Simmons was in the residence, the report states.

Simmons and Slack were both charged in Winona County District Court on Friday, and their next hearing is on January 4.

Trails

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after completing a driving test out at Gary Sobeck's Gilmore Ridge farm earlier this month. At age 12, Minnesota children can get a youth snowmobiling certificate that allows them to ride on trails and frozen rivers — but not county or state roads or city streets — by themselves, and Ridgeway and Winona-Lewiston snowmobile clubs teamed up to offer safety classes for local kids this winter.

"It's going to be nice because I can go out on my own and I'm legal," Tanner Benson said of getting his youth snowmobile safety certificate.

Both trainings like this for local youth and the network of local snowmobiling trails themselves are made possible by local, volunteer snowmobiling clubs. "Unfortunately, every fall signs don't just pop out of the ground and wait for snow," Blake Stinson Jr., president of Ridgeway's Country Climbers club, said. "It's all very dependent on volunteers."

Every year, club volunteers talk to landowners and get permission to install signs. They cut trees and remove rocks that summer storms wash out, and they clear away brush from the trail. "No one wants to ride over that stuff. It's especially dangerous," Stinson said. "Be aware," Sobeck warned. "If you had a little wind and a tree blows down and the club doesn't see the tree right away, you've got to be aware. The trail is there, but obstacles can pop up anytime."

In the spring, volunteers drive around, picking up all the signs. The clubs get funding from state registration fees for maintaining trails, but private donations enabled the Winona and Lewiston SnowSports Club to afford a nice, new groomer to smooth out the snow on its trails.

Stinson grew up around snowmobiles. "Instead of going to movies with friends like some kids, we'd go snowmobiling," he said. "We'd stop at a facility, play pool, and have a pop, and then we'd go off riding." The club, Stinson explained, is about giving back.

Ridgeway native and college student Courtney Shams grew up around snowmobiles, as well. She and a friend were helping out with the youth safety class. "We hang out with a lot of people Dad's age more than our age," she said. "But it's a family thing. We make a lot of connections."

"I just like getting out on the fields," Sobeck said when asked what he likes about snowmobiling. "And the trails are so connected. The trails are across our farm here, and you could go all the way up to Canada without ever getting off the trail."

The trails are gorgeous, Shams said. "The trail when you come down by Homer and you look out at the river — there's some beautiful scenery," Stinson stated. Snowmobilers catch a lot of wildlife sightings, too, Stinson and Sobeck explained. "Around here, you're going up and down the valleys and there's wildlife. You see turkeys and every darn thing," Sobeck stated. "Where you might normally see them in winter, they're out there," Stinson stated.

"I have a lot of memories with the guys I rode with back in the '70s," Sobeck said. "I still ride with them now."

More information about Winona County snowmobiling trails and snowmobiling clubs is available at www.winonacountysnowmobiletrails.com. The SnowSports Snowmobile Club is holding a raffle fundraiser on January 12 at 7 p.m. at the Lewiston Community Center in Lewiston. For more information, visit Lewiston and Winona SnowSports Snowmobile Club on Facebook.

Chris@winonapost.com

Speaking

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and a personal record of 1.773 seconds. As for the cycle stack, which involves three different figurations, Horn's Wisconsin record is 6.088, shaving off over a second with his personal record of 4.979 seconds.

Over the past eight years, Horn has competed in six Junior Olympics for the United States, traveled around the globe competing in worldwide tournaments on five different continents, and cemented his place atop the Wisconsin state leaderboard.

He has now been stacking for 12 years, and he has no intention of stopping.

"I will compete in as many speed stacking tournaments as I can and continue to make more new friends," Horn said.

But for Horn, it hasn't always been easy. When he was three years old, he was diagnosed with autism. According to his aunt, Lola Longyhore, he has always been forced to deal with those issues, and from a social perspective, it was difficult for him.

"Nobody really notices the one at the lunch table with autism," Longyhore said. "He doesn't — nobody has ever called him to go to McDonalds, or go to a movie. They still feel a little uncomfortable."

But through speed stacking, everything changed. When he attended that first tournament in Eagan, he was invited over to a pizza party after the competition.

"It was the first time he was ever invited to somebody else's house," Longyhore said. "This was the door that opened up his friendships, whether they be further away or closer."

Horn said through his time in the sport, he has been able to work through many of the issues he had with autism. The



Contributed photo

■ Jesse Horn prepares to complete a timed 3-6-3 relay at a competition earlier this year. Horn is the number-one ranked speed stacker in Wisconsin.

necessity for hand-eye coordination has helped develop the right side of his brain, raising his reflexes, and it has also helped him become more confident — both on the table and off. Longyhore added that over the years, she has seen her nephew change in more ways than one.

"He couldn't make the first move like other people. This sport let him move past that, and now he can sit and visit with the kids and talk with them about things, and answer them. It's really changed his personal life as well, in addition to his physical side," Longyhore said.

For speed stackers, the sport of cup stacking can be quite aggressive. Ultimately, speed is their goal, and the faster they are, the more trophies and ribbons they can bring home, Longyhore said. But while Horn said he enjoys breaking records and going to tournaments, that's not why he loves the sport as much as he does.

"The best thing is the many friendships I make all around the world. From Taiwan, to Thailand, to Spain to Australia," Horn explained.

For Horn, speed stacking is only the start. His next goal is to spread his story as far as possible.

"Along with speed stacking, I am now following my dreams to becoming a motivational speaker to tell people my story — to give everyone hope who has a child on the autism spectrum," Horn said.

Horn's first motivational speech was at the Wisconsin Community of Practice on Autism Spectrum Disorder and other Disabilities Conference at the University of Wisconsin in La Crosse, Wis., on October 25, 2017. From there, he spoke at a cooperative educational service agency (CESA) located in West Salem, Wis., on five different occasions and at school districts in Sparta, Holmen, La Crosse, and several other CESAs in

Wisconsin.

Next year, he will speak in South Dakota and Iowa, as well. "I want to make a difference offering autism awareness and how a passion and the tool of sport stacking changed my life. I want to inspire people to follow their passion in life no matter their different abilities," Horn said. "Find your passion and just follow that passion. If donuts are something you want to do, then make the donuts," Horn said.

Earlier in December, Horn made an appearance on the television show "The Doctors," and in July, Horn will head to Washington, D.C., to attend the 51st annual Autism Society Conference to tell his story and bring it to a wider audience than ever before.

"If I could help one child on the autism spectrum open up their world with my story, I can always go to sleep knowing that I made a difference," Horn said.

Village

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State stand out with its teaching programs.

"It will open the sky for innovation in teaching education. We're already seeing students coming to WSU who want to graduate as teachers taught in the Education Village," Portman said.

Portman led most of the tour, talking at length about the changes to the buildings, the new facilities and programs to be offered, and what it all means for the 2,000 students who will spend most of their days in the area.

The biggest focus for the university has been on the space, and providing different formats in which teachers will learn and practice. There are glass rooms

which open up into conference halls, smaller rooms for one-on-one work, and a tech space for counselor education students to film themselves at work and then watch how they operate. There are closed classrooms, collaborative classrooms, lecture halls and state-of-the-art flexible learning environments.

"Special attention was placed to the utilization of space within the Education Village, even with the different kinds of walls used," Portman explained. In the former Cathedral School, there will be rooms based off classrooms from the 1800s all the way through to the modern day. Portman said these rooms will help teachers-to-be learn how to teach anywhere, whether it's a one-room schoolhouse or a hyper-technological future school.

"I believe we teach teachers

to teach with both technology and a pencil, because you never know what environment you'll be in," Portman said.

According to WSU President Scott Olson, the idea for the facility began seven years ago after the university received a grant to revamp how teachers are prepared for modern classrooms. At first, the process was focused on curriculum, adding more technology and practical experience into the classroom, but Olson added that the changes led administrators to think that transforming where they were teaching was just as important.

"It was clear that different types of spaces would make the changes easier," he said.

At the time, the university already owned several of the buildings on the new campus, but they were used sparingly for classes and groups that couldn't find space on the main campus. Then, WSU purchased the former Cathedral School and plans for the Education Village were set in motion.

"We were intrigued by the idea of turning these old buildings and renovating them for a modern purpose. It felt like a way of honoring those buildings and their legacy," Olson said.

Wabasha Hall and Wabasha Recreation Center were both once part of the Cotter School system, before it moved over to the former Saint Teresa's campus, while the Cathedral School was one of the area's most

prominent Catholic elementary schools. It wasn't only about honoring the former buildings, either, Olson explained. WSU was once the Winona Normal School, the first of its kind in the country, and it focused on educating teachers in how to build students for the world of tomorrow.

"The impact [the Normal School] had still has international reverberations in how teachers were prepared," Olson said.

Bringing that focus back to WSU was the biggest impetus for Education Village, Olson said. The college has always been well known for its education wing, but bringing the new facility out will help the university honor teachers and students more directly. He also said the idea of calling it a village is important to show how the facility will work.

"I love the idea of a village because it suggests that we're all working on this together," Olson said.

The dean's office will move from its current home in Gildemeister Hall to the Cathedral School in June 2019 to begin operating in that space and help with the transition to the new campus, Portman said. By fall, all three buildings will be open for business and students will flood through the doors to a new, state-of-the-art space aimed at helping young teachers thrive — in any environment.

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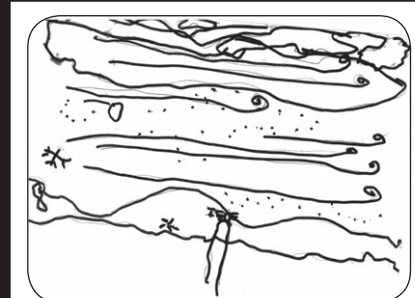
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