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~ NICHOLAS & THE HOPE LODGE ~

MT. LAKE /
COMMUNITY CENTER

Citizens fix up center

◆ Phase one is complete and phase two is on the docket.

by Cheryl Hiebert
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Last fall when a group of citizens approached the Mt. Lake City Council about improving the Mt. Lake Community Center, they were granted permission to make improvements — but without city funds.



John Oeltjenbruns

Phase one of the project has been completed. It included redoing the interior walls and

applying window tint to the south windows at a cost of \$7,141 leaving \$8,520 of the \$15,662 donated by various groups, individuals and businesses.

However, \$10,000 is still needed to purchase and install the new flooring and carpet in the main room and hallway near the bathrooms as part of phase two.

The city council recently approved purchasing commercial flooring and new carpet for an estimated \$9,648 but to wait on the official installation date until more donations are received.

Phase two also includes replacing ceiling fans, adding covers to ceiling lights, redoing coat racks and replacing furniture in the front entry way. Other wish-list items include new ceiling tiles, tables and chairs, kitchen floor and decorations.

Most donations have been directed to Mt. Lake Area Foundation while others have gone directly to the city. Donations made through MIAF fall under its project fund and will be distributed through the Southwest Initiative Foundation. SWIF hosts the MIAF as a way to strengthen the community.

SEE CENTER ♦ 2



SUBMITTED

KYLE FAST PRESENTS a copy of his children's book to Deb Iverson, middle, widow of Lowell Haga-Leas, who was a guest at Hope Lodge and inspired Fast to write the book. Buddy, the llama, stands in for Nicholas at the book signing event.



NICHOLAS THE LLAMA was part of a petting zoo during a celebration at Hope Lodge — and is the main character of a new children's book by Kyle Fast.

SUBMITTED

'Never give up!' Llama character talks about cancer

by Vicki Beckendorf
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If moms, dads, grandpas or grandpas get cancer, trying to explain what's happening to children and grandchildren can be hard — but a talking llama is ready to help.

Kyle Fast, a 2010 graduate of Mt. Lake Public, recently wrote and illustrated a children's book called "Nicholas & the Hope Lodge." Fast, who now

lives in Little Canada, works at Hope Lodge in Minneapolis and Nicholas is a llama featured in the book.

However, Nicholas is named after a real-life llama.

"There was a guest, Lowell Haga-Leas, at Hope Lodge I got to know who brought his llama along for a petting zoo at the Lodge's five-year anniversary," Fast said. "Lowell has since passed away and I wanted to create the book in his honor."

"A lot of our guests have either children or grandchildren and I thought it would be a good way for our guests to explain to the younger ones what Hope Lodge is and why they have to stay there."

The Minneapolis location opened in 2007. There is another in Rochester and more than 32 across the country.

SEE FAST ♦ 2

BUTTERFIELD / COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS

Groups seek to build a better Butterfield

◆ Two Butterfield committees aim to update City Park and sports facilities and honor veterans.

by Cheryl Hiebert
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The Butterfield Community Fund and Butterfield Veteran's Memorial committees have their focus on improving recreation areas and installing a memorial.

The Community Fund, a nonprofit organization, formed in 2010 to raise funds to construct a playground at Voss Park. It has reorganized with new



Connie Braaten



Wynette Haler

members to take on a new project.

The group is working with the Butterfield Veteran's Memorial Committee to raise funds for the memorial, make improvements to the City Park playground

and refurbish other sport facilities in town.

"We will start by updating City Park with new playground equipment for all ages including handicap accessible," Wynette Haler said. "There will be a walking/biking cement path around the park with new LED lighting for safety."

Plans for City Park include being ADA-compliant and having slides, swings, climbers, riding toys and fitness equipment.

"We will also be updating the tennis, basketball and volleyball courts as well as adding soccer nets," Haler said.

The tennis court would be rebuilt to serve as tennis courts and pickle ball courts with LED lighting and electrical outlets installed.

The basketball court would be restructured to include six adjustable hoops, a full-court area to accommodate four half-court games simultaneously. The court would also have lines drawn for four-square, pickle ball and shuffleboard and the fencing would be removed.

The volleyball court would be redone with new nets, sand and LED lighting.



SUBMITTED

ODIN CRAFT MILL show director Nancy Olson, right, presents the gallon jar filled with donations to Mary Schulte. The money will go toward a veteran's memorial in City Park.

The area where soccer is currently played would have soccer goals (nets) and LED lighting added.

The next step of the project includes renovating the baseball and football fields.

SEE BUTTERFIELD ♦ 2



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◆ BRIEFLY ◆

MT. LAKE / WELLNESS



CHERYL HIEBERT 1/9 matthew and michelle adrian 8
MICHELLE ADRIAN, left, holding son Caden, and husband Matthew host a health and wellness program at the Heritage Village meeting room.

Health, wellness tops menu at presentation

Matthew and Michelle Adrian of Mt. Lake recently hosted a presentation about a holistic approach to health and wellness.

"We are so busy being fed but not being nourished," Michelle said. "Stress, exhaustion and depression can affect our health, weight and self-image. But a person's identity can shift when they take action to take back their health."

"The holistic approach offers a way to regain natural energy and mental clarity and increase lean muscle mass," Matthew said.

The online program is made up of a community of like-minded people whose goal is living a healthy lifestyle.

Auditions for comedy announced

The Prairie Arts Continuum announces auditions for the comedy "Take Your Medicine" Monday and Tuesday in the library at the BARC, 1012 Fifth Ave., in Windom. Showtimes are March 29-30 at 7 p.m. and March 31 at 2 p.m. in the BARC auditorium.

There are speaking parts for eight women and four men. On-stage extras are also needed for this production, with no lines.

The story takes place in a small hospital and portrays what happens when a philosophy professor, who is called Dr. Jackson, is mistaken for a medical professional and attempts to treat patients.

If anyone is interested in participating — but has a conflict with the scheduled auditions — they should contact the show's director, Tim Jenniges, at 831-1380 to make other arrangements.

Tickets go on sale in the BARC office on Feb. 25.

Winter reading programs begin

The Mt. Lake Public Library announces its annual winter reading program, sponsored by Plum Creek Library System, is now underway until March 31. Readers 16 years and older may sign up at the library and receive a punch card or reading log to record the number of books read. Participants should read at least 12 books, including audio and e-books, to qualify for prizes.

Libraries in Butterfield, Darfur and St. James are hosting an adult and young adult (ages 12 and older may enter) winter reading program until Feb. 28. Stop by the library to pick up an entry slip, fill it out with the title of the book being read or listened to and enter the drawing.

Greenhouse hemp lease a no-go

An investment group recently expressed interest in leasing Hiebert Greenhouses to grow and process industrial hemp (which is not medical cannabis). The global group has two locations in the United States. The enterprise would employ about 20 people.

A lease agreement of five to 10 years and tax abatements were discussed with the Mt. Lake EDA. The company wanted to start growing plants by March.

However, at a Mt. Lake Municipal Utilities Commission meeting in December, Ron Melson (electric superintendent) said an agreement could not be reached with the property owner at this time.

Darfur library hosts board games

The Darfur library will host an afternoon of board games, friendly competition and snacks. The fun will begin at noon on Saturday. Participants can bring their favorite board game or use one at the library.

'The Horse Whisperer' event set

Join a discussion of "The Horse Whisperer" by Nicholas Evans and watch the movie on Monday at 6 p.m. at the St. James Library. Popcorn will be served.

FAST ♦ Book was inspired by Hope Lodge guest's llama

FROM PAGE 1

The facilities are designed for anyone 18 years and older in active treatment for cancer. They are run by the American Cancer Society.

Patients and their caregivers who live more than an hour (or 40 miles) away from their treatment center can stay at a Hope Lodge for free. The facilities offer a home away from home and provide a serene and supportive environment.

"Hope Lodge is typically full most of the time," Fast said. "We have 42 guest rooms, but a few rooms are reserved for urgent situations. Stay times range from one night, for a treatment or follow-up, to more than a year."

That, in brief, is what a Hope Lodge does, but how does a llama explain that to children?

According to the book, Nicholas the friendly llama lives on a farm with his farm animal friends. One day, his owner became sick and had to travel far away to see doctors. Nicholas packed his suitcase and went along.

They went to Hope Lodge where they stayed during the owner's treatments. Nicholas discovered it was a nice place to be and made lots of new friends.

After a while, the llama started to worry his owner would not get better. When he grew discouraged, staff, volunteers and other guests cheered him up.

Eventually, his owner got news he was getting better and they could return to the farm. But Nicholas decided to stay at Hope Lodge, support his new friends and remind them never to give up in their fight against cancer.

Inspiration

After graduating from Mt. Lake Public, Fast earned a degree in marketing at Minnesota State University-Mankato. He moved to the Twin Cities with friends and was looking for work. He saw a position at Hope Lodge advertised and applied.

Fast, 27, has worked there for two years as administrative support. He coordinates such volunteer activities as hosting meals for guests, bingo night, baking cookies and a trivia game he calls "Spin the Dial with Kyle." His mission is to put a smile on guests' faces.

"I was looking for somewhere I could make a difference and feel like I was helping people," Fast said.

The book, so far, has been a big help. Fast said a guest told him she has read the llama book to her nephew five times so far.

Since the book was published, there is also a plush llama mascot at the front desk to greet guests and appear in Hope Lodge's social media posts.

Fast comes from an artistic family. He is the son of Curt and Kathy Fast of Mt. Lake and has a younger brother, Cory, and older sister, Bridgette. He describes his dad as a craftsman and Cory is an accomplished portrait artist.



NICHOLAS THE LLAMA is excited about his owner recovering from cancer and news they could return to their farm.

SUBMITTED

Fast always enjoyed doodling and used Sharpie pens to illustrate his book.

"After Cory's art exhibit last year, it kind of inspired me to use my artistic skills," Fast said.

There's more to a book than illustrations and Fast relied on high school experiences for that.

"A lot of what I learned about structure for my book came from Mrs. (Kim) Svyerson's class," Fast said. "And I loved doing theater, playing out the emotional ups and downs of the stories."

Spreading hope

A book-signing took place in November at Hope Lodge and all copies from the initial printing sold out.

As gratifying as that was for Fast, a more precious memory from the event was giving a book to Lowell's widow, Deb Iverson.

"My passion is to use the gifts that I feel God has given me to bless people," Fast said. "Right now, that's been through Hope Lodge and the American Cancer Society."

"A book is another opportunity to help guests while they're here, but also help their families that I don't get to see. Even beyond putting a smile on our guests' faces is being able to do that with their families who are going through hard times as well."

Or, in Nicholas the llama's words, "A little hope goes a long way."

BUTTERFIELD

♦ Veteran's memorial part of update plans

FROM PAGE 1

This would include field maintenance, seating and LED lighting.

Portable bathrooms, benches and garbage containers would surround the park and athletic facilities.

The City Park renovation has a projected cost of \$347,000 with top priority given to the playground, path, excavation work and LED lighting. The total cost break down is:

- \$150,000 new playground equipment.
- \$10,000 walking/biking cement path.
- \$20,000 excavation work.
- \$20,000 LED lighting.
- \$78,000 tennis court.
- \$65,000 basketball court.
- \$2,000 volleyball court.
- \$2,000 soccer field.

"We began fundraising last summer selling tumblers, soda can cozies, freezie holders, sweatshirts and T-shirts at the Summer Sizzler," Connie Braaten said. "We also did a 50/50 pot during the tractor pull."

"Over the summer we held a park kick-off night with a freewill meal and carnival activities, held an auction during the Fallen Friends Memorial Run, peeled labels off Butterfield Foods chicken cans and most recently held a pre-holiday celebration which included a freewill meal and craft and bake sale with local entertainment provided.

"We have had many community members help out which has been great."

The committee just finished with a calendar raffle where participants have the chance to win cash during daily drawings held throughout 2019. Winners will be announced daily on the Butterfield Community Fund Facebook page and at the Butterfield True Value hardware store.

"At this time we have raised approximately \$30,000," Haler said. "But are already lining up more fundraising events for this upcoming year including applying for grants and seeking donations from local organizations."

Recently the fund received \$1,000 from the St. James Area Foundation for its Bettering Butterfield projects. The foundation donates to various causes in the area that fall under the guidelines of the foundation.

The Butterfield Community Fund committee consists of: President Wynette Haler, Vice President Mandy Fisch, Secretary Misty Winters and directors Connie Braaten, Jen Harris, Silvia Christensen, Ashley McGill, Sarah Fast and Shannon Sykes.

Veteran's memorial

The Butterfield Veteran's Memorial Committee received \$126 in donations from people who attended the three Odin Craft Mill shows in 2018.

The committee began organizing their efforts to create a veteran's memorial on the southwest corner of City Park in May of 2017.

CENTER ♦ Pool players propose plan to move wall

FROM PAGE 1

- Donations include:
- \$5,000 from the EDA.
 - \$500 from the Lions Club.

\$1,000 toward the purchase of paint from Sherri and Brad Bargen.

- \$1,000 toward window tint from Fulda Area Credit.
- \$5,000 from the Mt. Lake Area Foundation.

Pool room extension

John Oeltjenbruns approached the council about extending the new pool room in the community center so the two pool tables could both align north-south.

Oeltjenbruns asked if the room could be extended from its north side to the window on the west side of the building.

"All costs would be paid for by the pool players and

any donations or donated labor," Oeltjenbruns said. "Contractors have visited the community center to view the area and said the idea is feasible."

Ceiling tiles, electric outlets, contractors, square footage and other logistics were discussed.

The north wall of the pool room within the public area has already been worked on and painted as part of phase one of the community center renovation project. This proposed change would also affect the square footage of carpet and flooring to be ordered as part of phase two.

The council approved extending the pool room wall four feet to the north contingent upon the work (new paint, ceiling tiles, electric work) being completed no later than Jan. 31 and in a timely fashion.

No city funds, city donations or MLAF donations will be used for this project.

Knowledge Bowl teams compete

Mt. Lake's junior high Knowledge Bowl teams placed third, 10th and 18th out of 57 teams. The sub-

regional meet was held Monday evening in Marshall. All teams have a final meet Thursday in Marshall.

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