



NATIVE PRIDE DANCERS: Performers promote intercultural respect through education P20

Snow aside, cold temps challenge weekend ski race

BY KIRSTEN FAURIE
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Even though Vasaloppet USA has been able to control how much snow is on the ski course, they still can't control the weather.

The Vasaloppet USA ski races will begin Saturday, Feb. 9 at 10 a.m.; other races including the Fat Tire Bike Race, Skijoring Race and Miniloppet begin at 10 a.m. Sunday, Feb. 10.

Cold temperatures this weekend may cause a delay for the races if race organizers deem it too dangerous.

As of Feb. 6 the National Weather Service predicted a high temperature of 8°F for Saturday; 15°F for Sunday.

Race Coordinator June Forslund said Saturday morning races may be delayed for an hour if temperatures are too low, assuring skiers if races are delayed they will be given notification as soon as possible.

CREATURES OF HABIT

Creation and use of man-made snow on the Vasaloppet trails in the last two years has provided a type of "race guarantee" for skiers.

The Vasaloppet had previously struggled to host a race every year due to varying snow levels.

Forslund attributed that lack of consistency to a drop in race registrations and participation in the several years.

But race registrations are

increasing.

"When we couldn't make snow ... I can't even guess how much we lost. It takes years to get it back with skiers. They are creatures of habit. They get very loyal to a race, and when they lose one they have to go somewhere else. It is hard to get them to come back to yours," Forslund said.

In 2018, approximately 900 skiers participated in the race. This year's registrations are just over 900 with days left

skiers to register. The Vasaloppet has set a goal of 1,200 registrants for 2019.

"It's quite possible we will reach that goal. If not, we will be darn close," said Forslund.

With not only the ability to make snow, but also make it early in the ski season, Forslund said she has seen a trend of skiers coming from far out of town to practice, train or just ski on the Nora trails for

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Leighton Wilkening cracks up with laughter during a Vasa Radio Hour rehearsal on Saturday, Feb. 2. Wilkening has contributed in writing parts of the show, and provides some music and sounds. Wilkening graduated from Mora High School in 1974, but now lives in Minnetonka.

Relishing absurdity

Vasa Radio Hour celebrates small-town quirks in a variety show style

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Empty drink containers, pencils, highlighters and papers were scattered across the table as nine cast members of the Vasa Radio Hour hunched over scripts, preparing for the performance ahead.

They had been at it for about an hour, running through lines while making notes and adjustments about timing, volume and accents. Some kept their winter coats on,

protecting them from the chilly weather outside that persisted in finding its way into the blue-gray board room above the theater.

Despite the drafts, the room was warm with laughter.

SAVING THE WORLD

"I love comedy. I love humor," said Leighton Wilkening, one of the Vasa Radio Hour's contributing writers and keyboardist. "I think it is the one thing that will save the world."

Roughly eight years ago, the Vasaloppet USA board was pondering ideas for an event to host during Vasaloppet weekend that could appeal to members of the community who didn't have a strong interest in skiing.

At the Vasaloppet USA's request, local playwright Roger Nieboer paired with former Mora resident high school drama instructor Gary Hirsch to produce a



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Amy Brosnahan laughs during rehearsal of the final skit.

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Rarick wins senate seat

BY KIRSTEN FAURIE
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Republican Jason Rarick of Pine City claimed victory in the special election for District 11 Senate seat on Feb. 5. Rarick won over democratic candidate Stu Lourey by a difference of 956 votes.



Rarick

According to unofficial results posted on the Minnesota Secretary of State website votes were:

- Jason Rarick 8,127 (52%)
- Stu Lourey 7,171 (45.9%)
- John "Sparky" Birrenbach 298 (1.91%)
- Write-ins 27 (0.2%)

In Kanabec County alone:

- Jason Rarick 1,314 (63%)
- Stu Lourey 735 (35.3%)
- John "Sparky" Birrenbach 36 (1.7%)
- Write-ins 0

Rarick's win is significant for republicans in the senate as it flipped a seat long-held by democrats — particularly in the Lourey family.

Becky Lourey held the seat from 1997-2007; in 2007 she was succeeded by her son, Tony Lourey. Stu is Tony's son. The seat became vacant after Tony was selected as MN Human Services commissioner.

Because Rarick currently holds seat 11B in the Minnesota House of Representatives, another special election will need to take place.

