

BRAINERD DISPATCH



Steve Kohls / Brainerd Dispatch

Brainerd High School student Simon Nelson shows the strain of power, cleaning 265 pounds Tuesday, March 5, at the 29th annual Sertoma Lift-A-Thon. The annual weightlifting event, in the high school weight room, is popular with girls and boys. Active weightlifters from the area act as judges for the event.

BAXTER CITY COUNCIL

Members to tackle increased fire service assessments

By Gabriel Lagarde
Staff Writer

BAXTER — The city of Baxter is taking a look at how it will pay off fire service assessments in coming years.

Typically, fire service assessments — or payments to the Brainerd Fire Department to provide emergency coverage to areas including Baxter — is dealt with during the budget session from midsummer until the end of December. That's because there's usually little change in the rates and, thus, little reason to visit the matter in other council sessions.

"But this year there is a large spike," City Administrator Brad Chapulis said during a council workshop Tuesday, March 5. "A little bit over 11 percent. It has to deal with minor increases in operational expenditures, the debt service for a ladder truck being pur-

chased this year and a higher percent increase in contributions from the capital reserve fund."

That translates to a \$134,000 increase across the coverage area, or about \$35,995 for Baxter alone, versus the 2019 assessment, Chapulis said, to fund fire calls and other emergency response services provided by the Brainerd Fire Department. Total assessments for Baxter clock in at \$316,598 in 2019 and \$353,858 in 2020.

Chapulis said the city should look to accommodate natural ebbs and flows in terms of fire calls, as well as assessment fluctuations levied by the Brainerd Fire Department, by structuring the capital fund to anticipate and address future expenditures.

BAXTER: Page A10

JUDGE REDUCES BOND IN INFANT MURDER CASE

By Jennifer Kraus
Staff Writer

The \$1 million unconditional bail set for a 20-year-old Staples man facing second-degree unintentional murder in the death of a 3-month-old child was reduced.

Presley Arron Sleyster appeared Wednesday, March 6, in front of Judge Chuck D. Halverson in Cass County District Court in Walker for a court hearing to discuss his bond/bail.

Sleyster is accused of unintentionally causing the death of an infant he was caring for on Dec. 5, 2018. His bail/bond was set Dec. 31 at \$1 million without conditions, or \$500,000 with conditions.

Sleyster's attorney — Carly Sue Vosacek Arnoldy, a public defender — filed a motion asking the court to reduce Sleyster's bail, citing former U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch's remarks at the White House Dec. 3, 2015, on incarceration and poverty.

Her remarks were: "When bail is set unreasonable high, people are behind bars only

because they are poor. Not because they're a danger or a flight risk — only because they are poor. They don't have money to get out of jail and they certainly don't have money to flee anywhere."

The defense stated in its memorandum the bond is unnecessary and unreasonable and asked for a bail reduction, asking the court to modify the conditions of the defendant's release and impose a reduced bail. The defense's memorandum also states Sleyster has consistently maintained his innocence that he never harmed the child and he was a caring and attentive father to the child. It also stated Sleyster has no prior convictions, has never been in a court proceeding, is not a flight risk to avoid prosecution and he is not a danger to the public.

According to the court records, bail was reduced to \$500,000 with conditions and \$250,000 without conditions. Conditions

BOND: Page A10



Sleyster

Plan boosts benefits for welfare-to-work recipients in Minnesota

By Christopher Magan
St. Paul Pioneer Press

ST. PAUL — After years of trying, advocates for struggling families hope this is the year lawmakers will boost the Minnesota Family Investment Program, or welfare-to-work assistance, which has essentially had benefits frozen for 33 years.

Gov. Tim Walz included adding \$100 a month to what MFIP recipients receive in his budget proposal. DFLers in the House want to go further and increase it by \$200 a month, saying even that generous of an increase would not cover inflationary costs since 1986.

Back then, a postage stamp cost 22 cents, a gallon of gas was less than a dollar and a

dozen eggs cost 87 cents.

About 31,000 Minnesota families or 91,000 people receive MFIP benefits annually, Claire Wilson, a deputy commissioner in the state Department of Human Services, told lawmakers Wednesday, March 6. The average benefit for a family of three: \$532 a month.

"If it wasn't for MFIP, my family wouldn't have anything to stand on," Toshioka Washington of Duluth told lawmakers on a House health and human services committee.

After struggling with homelessness, Washington finally has a stable roof over her family's head, but the challenges they face are far from over, she said. A victim of

PLAN: Page A10



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Sandy Schaefer receives ashes on her forehead from Pastor Erika Nilsen during Ash Wednesday services March 6 at Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Baxter, as Christians begin the Lenten season.

INSIDE TODAY VOL 139-161 DEATHS A5 OPINION A6 CLASSIFIED C1 COMICS A4 SPORTS B1 DEAR ABBY A7 ENTERTAINMENT A8



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