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Cloquet Ski Club draws jumpers from all over for home competitions

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Kids in snow pants and race suits were flying off the ski jumps at the Joe Nowak Ski Area all weekend long, as the Cloquet Ski Club hosted back-to-back competitions on Saturday and Sunday at the city's Pine Valley Park.

Skiers, jumpers and their coaches traveled to Cloquet from three different states — Wisconsin, Michigan and Illinois — representing seven different teams in the Central Division for ski jumping and Nordic combined. Of course, there were even more homegrown Cloquet competitors, along with skiers from Coleraine and the Twin Cities.

It was like the good old days, when the giant metal 40-meter and 20-meter jumps were new, and Pine Valley was buzzing with Nordic skiers racing around the trails, alpine skiers zooming down the hills where the tubing is now and ski jumpers sailing off the jumps from morning into the night, said some longtime Cloquet residents who came out to watch.

Paul Johnson remembered skiing from his home on Oak Street to Pine Valley in the late 1960s and early '70s with his older sisters.

"They didn't salt the roads like they do now, so there was always snow on the roads and we'd go through a trail in the woods too,"

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Time to fly



Maxim Glyvka of the Norge Ski Club sails from the 40-meter run, landing a 37.5-meter jump at the Cloquet Invitational at Pine Valley. *Matthew Moses/Pine Knot News*

City cuts staff time to make public access TV budget

City administrative costs are 28 percent of revenues

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In addition to local newspapers, political junkies in Cloquet frequently sought another avenue for the latest candidate comments in advance of last fall's election: CAT-7 TV.

The local community access television channel — which broadcasts on Channel 7 for Mediacom subscribers and YouTube for those who don't use cable TV — had a starring role in election coverage, from broadcasts of Cloquet City Council meetings, to candidate forums, to the local political talk show "Harry's Gang," which

hosted every city council candidate at least once in advance of the election.

Now the city of Cloquet is implementing cuts in staffing at CAT-7 to correct a budget that has been consistently in the red, a move led by city administrator Aaron Reeves. He told the city council Tuesday that the



CAT-7 Cable Coordinator Eric Lipponen monitors the screens during Tuesday's Cloquet City Council meeting. Lipponen's position was cut to half-time starting in 2019 to help balance the budget at the community access television channel.

changes were spurred by a looming budgetary crisis for CAT-7, which is entirely funded by a franchise fee paid by Mediacom to the city of Cloquet; those fees are deposited into the city's cable TV fund.

In November, Reeves said the Mediacom franchise fees, based on Mediacom's local revenues, had fallen to between \$101,000 (2017) and \$108,000 (2016) per year. The city expected 2018 revenues of \$125,000 going into the cable TV fund, while CAT-7 was spending about \$107,000 in personnel costs alone. A large chunk of that money went to pay cable coordinator Eric Lipponen, whose salary was roughly \$58,000 plus benefits, which cost the city another \$28,000.

"It's not sustainable," Reeves told the Pine Knot News in November.

At that time, CAT-7 employed Lipponen full-time along with three part-time employees. Lipponen was the station's only full-time employee, like cable coordinator Jeff Korpi before him.

Effective Jan. 1, Lipponen's job became part-time (20 hours instead of 40) and he no longer gets benefits for himself and his family, a move initiated by Reeves.

The Pine Knot News submitted a public data request Dec. 21 for information about CAT-7, including the budget and expenses for the past five years, records of cable commission meetings and all complaints and/or disciplinary records for Lipponen. Those requests had not been fulfilled before the Pine Knot News went to press this week.

A request for the 15-year franchise agreement with Mediacom signed in October 2015 was provided. That agreement gives the city a franchise fee equal to 5 percent of Mediacom's annual gross revenues locally until 2030. Although city officials expect cable revenues to drop in future years, Mediacom's nationally combined results for the third quarter of 2018 reflected a 4.6 percent increase over the same period the prior year.

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Vote Tuesday for MN senate primary

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It's been a fast-forward special election for Minnesota Senator Tony Lourey's District 11 seat, which he vacated Jan. 3 to become Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Already, Tuesday is the primary election.

Then two weeks after the primary is the general election, on Feb. 5.

Although there is only one contested race in the primary — between Democratic-Farmer-Labor candidates Stu Lourey and Michelle Lee — the primary ballot lists four different parties on two sides. In addition to the two DFL candidates, Jason Rarick is listed for the Republican Party; John "Sparky" Birrenbach is listed for the Legal Marijuana Now party; and there is no listed candidate for the Grassroots-Legalize Cannabis Party.

"People can vote for only one of the four parties," explained Carlton County Auditor Paul Gassert. "If they vote for more than one candidate, they will get credit for voting but the votes won't count."

He added that voters can ask for another ballot if they're at the polls or at the courthouse and realize they made a mistake.

The DFL will hold an endorsement convention at 10 a.m. Saturday at Barnum High School, with a meet and greet starting at 9 a.m. Regardless of whether Lee or Lourey is endorsed, the primary ballot will still include both candidates.

Election update

Gassert took a moment Tuesday to catch his breath in the midst of the election whirlwind, reporting that 1,500 mail ballots went out Monday, with the balance of roughly 1,000 mailed Tuesday. Once they are received, voters should waste no time returning them to ensure they make their way back to the auditor's office by Tuesday, Jan. 22, because Monday is Martin Luther King Jr. Day and there is no mail delivery.

So far, requests for absentee ballots have been minimal, Gassert said, adding that he hopes people who can't vote at the polls Tuesday will come to the courthouse and vote before the primary.

The auditor's office, on the second floor of the Carlton County Courthouse at 301 Walnut Ave. in Carlton (entrance at the side door) will have additional hours for absentee voters from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, and again on Monday — even though the

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