



HUSKIES HEADED TO SECTION FINALS

The Jackson County Central football team will play in the section finals for the eighth straight season after shutting out Luverne in the semifinals Saturday afternoon.

Story, B1



JACKSON COUNTY PILOT

129TH YEAR/ISSUE 44

DAYLIGHT-SAVING TIME ENDS
Set your clocks back one hour
Sunday, Nov. 3, at 2 a.m.



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2019

The vote: Yes or no?

Polls open from
7 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Tuesday, Nov. 5

by **JUSTIN R. LESSMAN**
Publisher

A “yes” from voters in next week’s school bond referendum will allow officials with the Jackson County Central School District to move forward with a plan they say addresses facility needs, improves student learning opportunities and ensures the long-term financial sustainability of the district.



Barry Schmidt

A “no” will send them back to the drawing board. Voters across the school district will head to the polls Tuesday to either vote yes to allow the district to issue \$35.4 million

worth of school building bonds with which to finance the plan, or no to stop it dead in its tracks.

Perfect timing?

Recently retired debt, changes in the way property taxes are calculated and an apparent mandate from local voters has district officials thinking now is the perfect time to move forward with a plan they say addresses facility needs, improves student learning opportunities and ensures the long-term financial sustainability of the district.

School officials say the timing of the vote itself is not an accident. In fact, its roots date back five years.

That’s how long the district has been forced to utilize reserves to balance its budget in light of state funding decreases and operational cost increases. Members of the school board back then identified the district’s four school buildings as a primary

See **VOTE** on **A3**

APPROVAL OF SCHOOL BUILDING BONDS

Shall the School Board of Independent School District No. 2895 (Jackson County Central), Minnesota, be authorized to issue general obligation school building bonds in an amount not to exceed \$35,415,000 for acquisition and betterment of school facilities?

- Yes
- No

BY VOTING “YES” ON THIS BALLOT QUESTION, YOU ARE VOTING FOR A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE

Inside...

A3 Find out where to vote in Tuesday’s special Jackson County Central School District bond referendum.



PHOTOS BY JUSTIN LESSMAN

A tombstone sculpture at Lakeside Cemetery casts a melancholy gaze north toward the all-but forgotten inhabitants of the county burial site.

THE FORGOTTEN ONES



The county burial site at Lakeside Cemetery lies just north of this aging shoreline monument.

Few know about those interred in county burial site

by **JUSTIN R. LESSMAN**
Publisher

There is a small plot of land along an overgrown lakeshore in northwestern Jackson County where the forgotten ones go.

Those with no family, those with no money, those with no place to rest — they go here.

Forever.

And they are forgotten.

Very few know their names. Fewer still know when they passed. No one’s sure exactly where they lie.

They are the inhabitants of the county burial site — the old pauper’s grave.

They are the forgotten ones.

The county of Jackson owns two lots on the far north end of original part of the Lakeside Cemetery near the city of Heron

Lake. With 16 plots to a lot, that’s space for 32 bodies.

At least three are occupied.

“There were three burials as of 2006 I know,” said John Hay, a member of the Lakeside Cemetery Association Board.

Cemetery records indicate the body of one John A. Peterson was buried there in 1905, a Stephen S. Jones was laid to rest there a year later and one Charles Strong was interred there in 1928. Preceding Strong’s name in the cemetery record is a one-word descriptor — “Baby.”

Cemetery records specify all three are buried in Lot 57, though in which plots is unknown, Hay said. All 16 plots in Lot 58 were vacant as of 2006.

Hay said he believes one additional plot may have been filled within the last 13 years, but the records are inconclusive and he said he’s just not sure.

See **FORGOTTEN** on **A3**



PHOTO BY DAN CONDON

SWEET SELECTION

Legend Gottsche digs into a bucket of candy while taking part in the trunk-or-treat event sponsored by the Jackson Women of Today last Thursday in downtown Jackson.

State department heads hear of local challenges firsthand

by **JUSTIN R. LESSMAN**
Publisher

One-third of Gov. Tim Walz’s cabinet was in Jackson last week to talk agriculture, industry and workforce with a cross section of local leaders.

Commissioners of eight state departments — including agriculture, commerce, employment and economic development, labor and industry, natural resources, pollution control, revenue and transportation — stopped by AGCO Jackson Operations last Thursday morning to meet with company officials and local government leaders. The stop was one of 11 on a two-day tour across south-central Minnesota.

Margaret Anderson Kelliher, commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Transportation, said the agencies represented on the tour were all involved in Minnesota Business First Stop, a partnership of state agencies working together to streamline the development process so complex business projects can move forward as quickly and efficiently as possible. The purpose of the tour, Kelliher said, was to increase awareness

See **CHALLENGES** on **A12**



PHOTO BY JUSTIN LESSMAN

Eric Fisher (right), director of operations at AGCO Jackson, discusses some of the challenges facing manufacturers in southwestern Minnesota with Steve Grove, head of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, during a Minnesota Business First Stop tour last week. Thom Peterson, state agriculture commissioner, listens in back.

Ambassador pays weekend visit to Jackson

The man sitting next to Brad and Meg Freking at Friday evening’s Jackson County Central High School band and choir concert and the Huskies football game the next afternoon was not just anybody.

He was H.E. Francisco Daniel Gutierrez, Belize’s ambassador to the United States.

Gutierrez, who became Belize’s 10th ambassador to the United States when he presented his letters of credence to President Donald Trump last summer at the White House, was in Jackson for the weekend to visit with the Frekings, owners of new Fashion Pork. The Jackson-based company has operations in Belize, Meg Freking said Monday.

“He and his wife spent the weekend with us,” Freking said. “They came with us to the band and choir concert Friday, the football game on Saturday and church with us on Sunday before heading back home. They are great people.”



BUSINESS BRIEFS

Chamber-member business reps set to gather for annual meeting

Representatives of Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce-member businesses will gather for the chamber's 2019 annual meeting next month in Jackson.

The meeting will take place from 5:30 to 8 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 12, at the Jackson American Legion hall. Those who attend will hear a chamber overview, meet the new chamber director, enjoy food and a silent auction and take in a community panel discussion on the future of Jackson.

Advance tickets are available now from the chamber office.

Businesses, organizations, families being sought to decorate planters

The Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce is on the lookout for businesses, organizations, social and civic groups, church groups and families interested in decorating a Main Street planter in advance of the community's Holiday Fest celebration.

It's the chamber's seventh annual "Deck the Downtown" planter adoption and beautification program and those interested are asked to contact chamber board member Kim Church as soon as possible to reserve their planter. Church may be reached by phone at 847-4740 or email at kimchurch@depre50.com. Planters are to be decorated no later than Nov. 27.

Businesses encouraged to be a part of this year's Holiday Fest

Businesses interested in being part of Jackson's Holiday Fest celebration on Dec. 7 have several ways to get involved — among them participating in the lighted parade or sponsoring various events and activities.

The lighted parade begins at 5:30 p.m. in downtown Jackson with a theme of "Home for the Holidays." Sponsorship opportunities are available for the parade, fireworks, Santa visits and free movie matinees.

Businesses interested in being a part of Holiday Fest are encouraged to register with the organizing Jackson Area Chamber of Commerce by calling 847-3867 or emailing chamber@jacksonmn.com.

Downtown business is local outlet for tickets to Opry Christmas show

A downtown Jackson business is the local outlet for tickets to the 11th annual Opry Christmas Jackson Style live musical extravaganza.

Tickets for reserved seating to the two Dec. 7 shows are available now at the Colleen Anderson Insurance Agency on Jackson's Main Street.

Proceeds raised from the sale of tickets benefit community-building Jackson Kiwanis Club-sponsored activities.

Local Scouts selling wreaths

Members of Jackson Boy Scout Troop 80 are offering Christmas wreaths, swags and other holiday items for sale as a fundraiser.

They guarantee delivery before Thanksgiving. Those interested may contact Kelly Soucek at 841-0367 before Nov. 5.

FORGOTTEN: Graves

Continued from A1

Nobody really is. Jackson County Attorney Sherry Haley said she believes "at least one" of the plots may have been used since 2006.

The low number of those laid to rest in the county burial lots and the obscurity of details surrounding who may or may not be interred there speak to the rarity of a county burial, said Jackson County Coordinator Steve Duncan.

"The county plots are available for those with no family and no means," he said.

The costs are borne by the county, Haley said; final arrangements are made by the local human services department.

Craig Myers, executive

director of Des Moines Valley Health and Human Services, said state statute and agency policy dictate exactly who qualifies to be buried there and specifies other details — a good thing, as such situations don't often arise.

But when they do, when one passes from this life leaving behind nothing — no family, no money, nowhere to lie — they go, like John A. Peterson, like Stephen S. Jones and like little Charles Strong before them, to the overgrown shore of a little lake in northwestern Jackson County.

And there they lie. Forever. Forgotten.

VOTE: Polls open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Continued from A1

driver of those increasing operational costs.

The board ordered a comprehensive facilities assessment in 2017, which identified more than \$17 million worth of necessary improvements to the district's four school buildings — the bulk of which were tied directly to the middle school building in Lakefield.

A community task force identified two possible solutions to the problem, with a subsequent districtwide survey indicating strong support for adding middle school space to the existing Pleasantview Elementary School in Lakefield, addressing needs at the JCC High School and Riverside Elementary School in Jackson and closing and demolishing the middle school. Total estimated cost of the work is \$35.4 million — the amount the district is seeking authority to bond for from voters.

If the timing of the vote was forced by the fact the district is running out of reserves with which to cover its ongoing budget deficit, said Tony Sjolander, director of project planning and development with Kraus-Anderson Construction Co., a consulting firm hired by the district last fall, it's made nearly ideal by several other circumstances.

The first is the district is shedding a large amount of old debt, which effectively reduces the local property tax burden. A large chunk of debt related to the 2002 addition at the JCC High School fell off the books in 2017; the balance of the \$19.6 million will be completely paid off in 2022.

The second is the recent adoption by the Minnesota Legislature of the Ag-2School Tax Credit. Barry Schmidt, superintendent of schools at JCC, said this means the amount of property taxes paid on a new school bond would be less in 2020 than on an old bond back in 2017 and even less in subsequent years.

"With the new bond, taxes will go up in 2020, but will still be lower than they were in 2017," Schmidt said.

By 2023, taxes per acre on the new bond would be less than they were in the 2018 and 2019.

Couple the effect of the new ag tax credit with the retirement of old debt, Schmidt said, and "it effectively neutralizes the new bond issue."

Sjolander said homeowners and renters may also qualify for property tax refunds based on household income and the effect of the referendum on property taxes. The district, through financial advising firm Ehlers, has established an online tax calculator that can provide property owners estimates of the effect the referendum will have on their individual taxes. It is available on the JCC district website.

And, while historically low interest rates also make this a good time to borrow money, Sjolander said, perhaps the most compelling reason to move forward at this time is because district voters have indicated an interest in doing so.

An overwhelming majority of those who completed the district-sponsored survey earlier this summer — 64 percent — indicated they would support closing the middle school building in Lakefield, and 56 percent indicated support for upgrading the remaining three school buildings at a cost of around \$35.4 million. Not only was the direction clear, Sjolander said, but the data are solid.

"This is rock-solid statistical information," he said. "The results of the survey are effectively our marching orders."

Getting the referendum on the November ballot was also important, Sjolander said, as doing so will allow the debt to get on the tax rolls in 2020 as opposed to 2021, saving the district around \$1 million in costs related to carrying the initial interest payments.

"You can look at as either saving a million dollars in costs, or not having to cut a million dollars in

building," he said. "Either way, it's significant."

The end result

While district officials are pleased with how the timing of the vote has fallen into place, they say what really matters is the hoped-for end result — namely, more efficient, functional and fiscally sustainable school buildings that improve student learning opportunities.

"We're in the business of providing the best possible education we can for our students," Schmidt said. "That's why we're doing what we're doing."

District officials estimate the elimination of one school building — the middle school in Lakefield — will save around a quarter-million dollars per year in operational costs and will improve other operational efficiencies.

"The middle school building has absolutely lived its useful life," Sjolander said. "The community really got its money out of that building."

But its elimination now will free up money with which the district plans to address high-priority repairs and maintenance needs in the other three buildings.

"It will allow us to invest back in our communities — both Lakefield and Jackson," Schmidt said.

Building new middle school space onto the existing Pleasantview building will also result in facilities more in tune with the educational landscape of today and tomorrow.

"Education is different today than when the middle school was built in the 1920s," Sjolander said. "It's moved from lecture-based education to more project-based learning. The new middle school addition will contain flexible, project-based learning spaces designed to

Where to vote on Tuesday, Nov. 5

Polling places for Tuesday's special Jackson County Central School District bond referendum are as follows:

- Absentee: Jackson County Courthouse, Jackson
- City of Alpha: Jackson County Courthouse, Jackson
- Belmont Township: Jackson County Courthouse, Jackson
- Christiania Township: Bethany Lutheran Church
- Delafield Township: Delafield Town Hall
- Des Moines Township: Fair Board Office/Beef Barn, Jackson
- Enterprise Township: Jackson County Courthouse, Jackson
- Ewington Township: Jackson County Courthouse, Jackson
- Heron Lake Township: Jackson County Courthouse, Jackson
- Hunter Township: Lakefield Multi-purpose Center, Lakefield
- City of Jackson: Good Shepherd Hall, Jackson
- Jay Township: Martin County West High School, Sherburn
- Kimball Township, Kimball Town Hall
- City of Lakefield: Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Lakefield
- Middletown Township: Middletown Town Hall
- Minneota Township: Minneota Town Hall
- Petersburg Township: Petersburg Town Hall
- Rost Township: Jackson County Courthouse, Jackson
- Round Lake Township: Round Lake Town Hall
- Sioux Valley Township: Trinity Lutheran Church
- West Heron Lake Township: Jackson County Courthouse, Jackson
- Wisconsin Township: Jackson County Courthouse, Jackson

accommodate current and future educational programs intended to prepare students for careers and postsecondary opportunities now and into the future. We are committed to creating space within these walls flexible enough to be adapted to anything that may come."

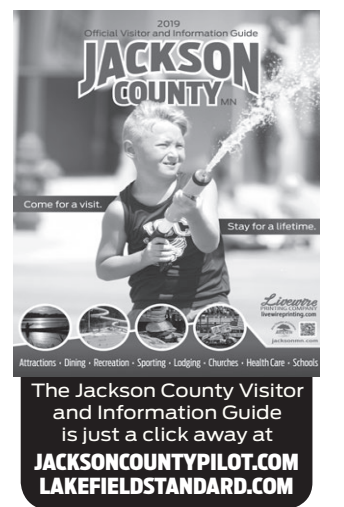
Aligning stars?

In Schmidt's mind, in Sjolander's mind and in the minds of members of the JCC Board of Education, the question that will appear on Tuesday's referendum ballot — whether or not the board is authorized to issue up to \$35.4 million worth of bonds for the betterment of school facilities — is the right plan at the right time.

"The plan is solid, the timing is good and this

really gets the district a long-term solution," Sjolander said. "The stars have all kind of lined up on this one."

Whether voters across the district agree will be known shortly.



VOTE

NOVEMBER

5TH

For the Future
of Our Students

Jackson County Central Bond/Referendum

Paid for by the members of the
Jackson County Central Board of Education

Rhonda Moore • Brad Anderson • Melonie Vancura
Jeff Johnson • Amy Voss • Eric Kruger • Jody Withers

Coming to the
Fairmont Opera House...

CHE APALACHE

SUNDAY, NOV. 10TH
AT 2:00PM

Che Apalache is a four-man
string band based in Buenos
Aires with members from
Argentina, Mexico, and the
United States. Combining
instrumental prowess with tight
vocal harmonies, they have
created an authentic blend of
genres to reflect the nature of
their lives.

Adults: \$20 Seniors (55+): \$15
Students: \$10 Under 10: \$5
Price subject to \$5 increase Day of Show

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