



INSIDE
CARDINALS SET A
RECORD PACE AT 5A MEET
SPORTS, B1

Alexandria

ECHO PRESS

www.echopress.com | \$1.50 | Wednesday, February 26, 2020



Firefighters from six departments are battling a fire above Raapers Eatery and Ale and RM Tattoo on Tuesday morning.

FIREFIGHTERS BATTLE EARLY-MORNING FIRE

At least four downtown
buildings involved

**By Celeste Edenloff
and Al Edenloff**
Firefighters from several departments were battling a major structure fire on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Broadway in downtown Alexandria on Tuesday morning. The blaze, which was reported at 4:34 a.m., is believed to have originated

ed in or near the Raapers Eatery and Ale building. At press time three other buildings were affected by the blaze: RM Tattoo, Charlie's Bazaar and Little Darlings. Crews from six departments — Alexandria, Osakis, Garfield, Forada, Carlos and

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Firefighters check the back entrances of the buildings on fire while another crew douses the rooftop.

ALEXANDRIA SCHOOL BOARD

Boundary lines OK'd

By Ross Evavold
revavold@echopress.com

The Alexandria School District was expecting to review its boundary maps for its six elementary schools this year, and the creation of an extra classroom per grade at Woodland Elementary School made redrawing the maps even more of a priority. On Feb. 18, the Alexandria School Board unanimously approved boundary adjustments for the 2020-21 school year, calling for changes in three areas of the school district:

- An area near Lake Geneva, where students are moving from Voyager to Woodland.
- An area in the center of Alexandria, from 3rd to 10th avenues and from McKay Avenue to Broadway, affecting students at Woodland, Lincoln and Voyager.
- A large area south of I-94 and west of Highway 29, where students are moving from Lincoln to Woodland.

In all, the moves will affect about 145 students.

Updating boundary lines has been done every few years in an attempt to rebalance class sizes, and to meet the district's goal of keeping classes in kindergarten, first and second grades within the 20-23 student range, and classes in grades 3-5 at 26 and under. Adding the classrooms in Woodland for next year meant drawing some students from Lincoln and Voyager elementaries. Scott Heckert, the district's human resources director, told the board that in making the boundary changes, they tried to keep communities together. It is the fourth boundary change he has been involved in, and first since 2013. The largest of those came when Woodland opened in 2009 and more than 400 students changed schools. This time the district held four informational sessions, which were attended by about three dozen parents, and mailed 133 letters to affected families. Heckert also called 13 families that were affected when the board added a section to the southern area, from County Road 21 west to Lake Mary.

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ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL

Douglas Machine seeks tax break for big expansion

By Al Edenloff
aedenloff@echopress.com
Douglas Machine's plans for a \$4.3 million expansion rolled ahead at Monday night's Alexandria City Council meeting. The council learned the company's application to be designated as a "Job Creation Fund" was approved by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. The fund awards eligible companies up to \$2 million in rebates for creating or retaining high-paying jobs, constructing or renovating facilities, or making other property improvements. The council supported the application in January. Also at Monday's meeting, the council scheduled a public hearing to consider whether to provide tax increment financing for the expansion. It will take place at the council meeting on March 23. The "Phase 5" addition will expand Douglas

las Machine's facility at 3404 Iowa Street by about 45,900 square feet and include warehouse, manufacturing and office space. The expansion is expected to add at least 15 full-time employees within two years at hourly wages ranging from \$14.05 to \$37.55. With TIF, the property taxes remain at the current level for a certain period of time, in this case, nine years, and the property tax difference is used to pay for certain parts of the project. Douglas Machine plans to use the TIF to cover \$315,000 of the site development costs. When the project is complete, it will add about \$1.2 million to the city's tax base, according to the TIF application. The estimated market value of the company's existing building and land is just over \$2 million.

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Giving his heart to God

John Smith shares story of near drowning

By Celeste Edenloff
cedenloff@echopress.com
When John Smith fell through the ice five years ago on a frozen lake, his mind was telling him to fight. Smith said every human has a fight or flight instinct because that is what God gives them. On that fateful day in 2015, when it wasn't looking good, Smith and two friends wanted nothing more than to fight. However, as much as his mind was telling him to fight, his body wasn't allowing it. "That was the hardest situation," said Smith. "The hypothermia was setting in and I couldn't fight anymore. I was a big brown noodle in the water." Smith recalled what happened the day he nearly drowned and was declared dead. He shared his story twice last week to large crowds at the Broadway Ballroom, at a youth event Feb. 20 and the next day to a packed room at the Unity Foundation luncheon. Smith, along with his mom, Joyce Smith, and his pastor, Jason Noble, were the guest speakers at the luncheon. The story of Smith's miraculous recovery was made into a box office hit movie, *Breakthrough*, which was released in April 2019. The movie is based on the Christian book, *The Impossible*, written by Joyce Smith



Celeste Edenloff / Echo Press
John Smith and his mom, Joyce, were guest speakers at the Unity Foundation luncheon. He shared his story of nearly drowning five years ago, and coming back to life after his mom prayed over him in the hospital. with Ginger Kolbaba. Since that time, Smith, his mom and his pastor have made many public appearances sharing the miracle and Smith's newfound connection with God. The now 19-year-old, a student at a Twin Cities Christian college, said he remembers the water and how dirty it was. He remembers his head going above and below the water. "I remember the screams. I remember the ice piercing my skin and how cold it was," said Smith. "I remember how it went from cold

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