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ALEXANDRIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

District takes aim at class sizes

Proposal would add extra classrooms at Woodland Elementary

By Rachel Kubik
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Voters approved the Alexandria Public School district operating levy in November, and district administration is intent on following through on one of its promises – reducing class sizes.

The first step is being taken at the elementary level. An elementary school boundary review process will begin in January, the district announced last week, with three goals:

▶ Balancing and reducing class sizes where possible across district elementary schools.

▶ Balancing services available to students in all district elementary schools.

▶ Minimizing the number of families affected by school boundary changes.

Because classroom space is maxed out at all six of the district elementary schools, district staff is considering moving the district office and Community Education offices out of Woodland Elementary School, and converting that space into classrooms.

Woodland Elementary School would be turned into a four-section school, meaning there would be four classrooms and teachers per grade level. Right now, Woodland, Voyager and Lincoln elementary schools are mostly three-section schools.

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Brothers die from silo fumes



Celeste Edenloff / Echo Press

A third helicopter, North Air Care, lands at a farm north of Millerville after three victims were overcome by silo fumes.

A third victim in hospital as of Sunday

By Celeste Edenloff
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A Millerville man died trying to rescue his brother and nephew after they were overcome by silo fumes Saturday, Dec. 21.

According to the Douglas County Sheriff's Office, Steve Boesl, 49, was called when his brother, Curt Boesl, 47, and nephew, Alex, 11, were working in the top of a silo and overcome by silo fumes.

Steve Boesl was pronounced dead at the scene, while his brother, Curt Boesl, died

early the next morning. As of press deadline on Sunday, Alex Boesl was in the hospital fighting for his life.

According to the sheriff's office, another one of Curt Boesl's sons, whose name was not released, was outside the silo and observed what happened. After calling 911 shortly before 11 a.m., he called Steve Boesl who lived nearby.

Steve Boesl arrived on the farm at 11737 Gravel Pit Road NW and entered the top of the silo to try and rescue his brother and his nephew. Steve was then reportedly overcome

by fumes as well.

The Millerville Fire Department was able to extricate all three from inside the top of the silo, the sheriff's office said, and resuscitation efforts began.

Curt Boesl and his son were treated on scene by ambulance personnel and each were transported by LifeLink III helicopters. Curt was flown to St. Cloud Hospital and Alex was flown to Minneapolis Children's Hospital.

Steve Boesl was later transported to the Midwest Examiner's Office for cause

of death determination.

Responding to the scene were the Millerville Fire Department and First Responders, Douglas County Sheriff's Office, North Ambulance, Parkers Prairie Ambulance, LifeLink III helicopter, North Air helicopter, Alexandria Fire Department and the Minnesota State Patrol.

A GoFundMe page was set up for the families on Sunday. Funeral information will be released when it becomes available.

Celebrating a decade of Christmas cheer

Santa for Seniors still going strong

By Celeste Edenloff
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An idea that started with two guys and some canned ham has grown into a community of people, baskets of food and hundreds of senior citizens.

The Santa for Seniors program, created by Craig McMillan and Bruce Wiitanen, celebrated its 10-year anniversary this December by delivering more than 650 baskets to area senior citizens.

In 2009, the two men were chatting while filling up their vehicles at the gas station and talked about how fun it would be to reach out to seniors during the time of giving.

That was all it took. Santa for Seniors was born.

Wiitanen was coaching hockey at the time and came up with the idea that the team could help out as a community service project. Another couple of teams also got involved. They put out a request for names by having people contact United Way, not knowing how many names they would get. It didn't



Lowell Anderson / Echo Press

Volunteers pack bags with food at Lake Community Church on Dec. 10 to be delivered the following day to area seniors.

matter. They were doing the project regardless.

"We delivered 114 baskets that first year," said Wiitanen. Because McMillan and

Wiitanen knew a lot of people in the area, they reached out to see if anyone wanted to help. Wiitanen also cold-called people using the phone book.

"I didn't beg for money," he said. "I explained what we were doing and people opened their checkbooks."

That first year, nobody really

knew what they were doing when they gathered to help fill the baskets and then deliver them. But Wiitanen remembers how everyone pitched in and the baskets got delivered.

One little girl who was a little apprehensive about delivering the baskets came back and asked if she could have more because she had so much fun. Another little girl was sad when she returned and didn't have baskets for everyone, Wiitanen said.

Because the first year was such a success, Santa for Seniors was brought back the next December, and in year two, 250 baskets were delivered. By the third year, that number had climbed to 460 and the whole youth hockey association had gotten involved. The players are the ones who now not only deliver the baskets, but also help to put them together.

Building a connection

When the program began, the baskets were just an added bonus for Wiitanen. The goal was to connect the older generation with the younger generation.

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