

# LOOKING BACK



FILE PHOTO

**McGrath school ravaged by fire**  
**An early morning fire completely destroyed both the combination grade and high school building in McGrath. Fire departments from Isle, McGrath, McGregor, and Mora were unable to stop the blaze.**  
*Photo taken from the Dec. 4, 1969 issue of the Messenger.*

**20 years ago: 1999**

Mille Lacs County Attorney Janelle Kendall elaborated on her official debut as a singer-songwriter, a career she did on evenings and weekends. An open house celebration was held for the completion of the Isle Community Center. The Mille Lacs Band opened their second healthcare clinic, Aazhoomog, on the reservation.

**30 years ago: 1989**

Gwen Baldry was the new chairperson of the East Central Regional Arts Council. The Isle Area Civic Association sponsored a drive to "Light Up the Lake," as part of the upcoming Crystal Carnival celebration. Onamia band director Bob Statz accepted a donation from the American Legion towards the school marching band.

**40 years ago: 1979**

The Mille Lacs County Jail passed a Minnesota Department of Corrections inspection for the first time since August 1978. Isle School Board withdrew a controversial decision preventing seventh and eighth graders from participating in varsity sports. Isle High School put on a production of the play, "A Handful of Rainbows."

*Taken from the files of the Mille Lacs Messenger on this week's date in history.*

**50 years ago: 1969**

The Mille Lacs Community Choraleers and Pierz Community Chorus put on a joint Christmas concert at Pierz High School. The Isle High School once again hosted a mobile x-ray unit, offering free adult chest x-rays. Leo Scherf, of Isle, celebrated his 72nd birthday along with 50 years of offering banking service in Isle.

**60 years ago: 1959**

Thieves broke into Isle Municipal Liquor and Lakeside Motor Company building, breaking the former's pinball machine. Ma and Bogge Miller moved to California, selling their cafe and building to Jerome Baer. The Minnesota Historical Society acquired Mille Lacs' Rainbow Island from the Atlantic Elevator Company.

**70 years ago: 1949**

Mrs. Leo Gray received a letter from her husband stationed in Guam after a typhoon struck the military base. The Isle Theater featured a 10-minute, educational film on disabled veterans. An announcement from the state Commissioner of Conservation, Chester S. Wilson, detailed new regulations on muskrat and beaver trapping.

## Best of the Mess from Dec. 1, 1999 Another albino buck is killed

by Brett Larson

"It was the hardest shot I've ever had to make," Eddie Lyback, of Isle, said, referring to a shot that put an albino buck out of its misery last week.

Lyback never expected to shoot a white deer and never wanted to. He and his neighbors, who between Isle and Wahkon on the south shore of Mille Lacs, had an agreement to not shoot any of the white deer that roam the woods around Father Hennepin State Park.

Someone who was not part of that agreement thought otherwise. "For someone to come from outside the area and shoot it illegally—that's really low," Lyback said.

According to Lyback, a hunter came to his house on the afternoon of Saturday, Nov. 20, asking permission to search Lyback's property for a deer he shot on Friday night.

Lyback told the hunter that he could not legally hunt in the area he was hunting since all the land adjacent to the road was either posted or state park land. Shooting from the road is illegal in Minnesota.

"If you shot one of those white ones, you're really in trouble," Lyback added.

The hunter told Lyback he shot the deer out of a group and wasn't sure what color it was.

Lyback followed the man and saw where he had been hunting, confirming his suspicion that the deer could not have been shot legally in the area.

The next morning, Lyback himself was out hunting, when he heard crows making a commotion over a spruce swamp on his property. Because they were perched in the trees and not flying around, Lyback suspected an animal

was down.

After searching the area, he found the deer, which was still alive but had a large hole in its shoulder. He said the eyes were glazed over, and it appeared that the shoulder was blown away.

Lyback called conservation officer Bruce Hall, who told him to put it out of its misery. Lyback reluctantly obeyed.

The St. Paul Pioneer Press reported on the incident last week, saying the DNR was investigating whether the hunter was trespassing on private land and/or shooting from a roadway. The paper quoted Hall as saying that the buck will be mounted and displayed at Father Hennepin State Park.

Three albino white-tailed bucks and one doe have been killed in the Mille Lacs area this year.

One albino buck was shot legally on the opening weekend of deer season. A picture of that buck appeared in the *Messenger*.

A third albino buck reportedly was killed by a car between Onamia and Pine Center on the west side of Mille Lacs. That buck was not believed to be of the same group as the other two.

An albino doe was killed by a car between Wahkon and Cove late in the summer.

Albino deer, protected in Wisconsin, are not given special protection by the law in Minnesota. Albinism is caused by a lack of pigment. Because of inbreeding, concentrations of albino deer often are found in the same area.

Father Hennepin State Park manager Bob John told the Pioneer Press that the two bucks that were shot were true albinos with pink eyes and ears, grayish hooves and white coats and that four or five albino deer remain in the area.

"I know for sure we still have two left in the park," Johnson said. "They're quite a draw around this area. They're pretty tame, and kids and locals enjoy having them around."

Eddie Lyback said, "The good news is that there's one buck left, and it's the biggest one." He thinks that buck will continue to produce offspring to delight both residents and visitors of the area.

Mark Lenarz, DNR forest wildlife supervisor, said it's hard to estimate how many albino deer live in Minnesota. "They're certainly rare, but not unheard of," Lenarz said.

Every year, several albino deer are killed in Minnesota.

Lyback said he has heard rumors that large bounties were being paid for albino deer, which may have been an incentive for some to target the white deer this fall.

Lyback contacted Cabela's in Owatonna to see if the rumor was true, and he was told by one of the buyers that the Cabela's owner had told store employees not to purchase any non-typical mounts.

Names of other outdoors stores had been mentioned in the rumors as well, according to Lyback.

A representative from Gander Mountain told the *Messenger* that their displays are on loan from taxidermists, so they don't purchase any mounts.

A manager of one of the Gaylan's stores in the Twin Cities said the stores purchase mounts when the stores are being built, but they stop purchasing them once the stores are full. He said the store does not have a policy on non-typical animals but that none of the Twin Cities stores are currently buying mounts.

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### Nexus Academy

Other details of the incident have been redacted as they are private data or they pertain peace officer records of children that are also classified as private data.

Growing number of violent incidents at Mille Lacs Nexus Academy

There have been 91 calls for service at the Nexus Academy handled by the Onamia police department and nine by the Mille Lacs County Sheriff's Office this year.

There was a sharp rise in incidents in July of this year, mostly for assaults against staff and residents by other residents in the program.

From July 1 to Nov. 11, 56 calls for service at the Nexus Academy were handled by the Onamia police department.

The most notable of incidents included riot and disorderly conduct charges against seven minors in the program for a Sept. 1 incident where residents had barricaded doors and assaulted staff members, requiring five law enforcement agencies to respond.

According to statements given by Nexus staff mem-

bers to law enforcement, they expressed fear that they would be fired over the Sept. 1 incident and that there had been an increasing amount of violence and disorder at the facility.

The staff members told law enforcement that, due to inadequate staffing, the academy is an unsafe environment for themselves and other residents.

Onamia Police Chief Bob Matzke said he had spoken to at least a half dozen staff members over the past six months that also expressed concerns, not only with inadequate staffing numbers but also with staffing the program with employees on light duty due to previous injuries from assaults.

A Nov. 16 incident at the academy was reported by a parent of one of the minors in the program. When 911 dispatch called the academy to inquire about a possible disturbance, dispatch was told that there was a problem but that they were told not to call law enforcement.

When asked about how staff are to handle incidents, Interim Executive Director for Mille Lacs Academy Paula Minske said, "Mille Lacs is staffed to meet DHS requirements. In addition,

we have recently put an emphasis on staff training and mentoring in trauma-informed care, interventions, and de-escalation. This focus will continue throughout the New Year as part of our plan to decrease our use of law enforcement."

Minske said regarding staff protocol, "There is a procedure for staff to follow prior to calling law enforcement. That said, as part of our effort to decrease calls to police, we are reviewing our policies for when police are contacted. We are working closely with the police force to identify steps forward."

However, Minske added, that when activity rises to the need for law enforcement, law enforcement is contacted.

An October Onamia police department report to the Onamia City Council cited concerns with the uptick in calls to service to the academy, specifically the increased amount of time law enforcement spends investigating the assaults and transporting subjects to detention facilities.

"These types of calls can have our officers tied up for hours out of the city, leaving the Sheriff's office to respond to calls or issues in the city

while our officer is gone," the report said.

Minske responded to questions regarding the recent incident stating, "We are aware that calls to law enforcement have increased this year, and we are focused on decreasing this activity. We recognize the strain on resources and greatly appreciate the assistance of law enforcement. We are tackling the issue a variety of ways, and leadership will be reaching out to local entities, such as the police department, to partner with them on plans and solutions going forward."

Minske stated that this past year, the academy has had a shift in services to address the increased need for kids suffering from trauma and mental health issues.

"We serve kids that have been through excessive traumatic experiences, like abuse, neglect, abandonment," said Minske. "They come from difficult situations, and they need our help getting the tools to cope and move forward in a positive way. Trauma is complex, and it can often lead to challenging behavioral issues. The number of clientele experiencing high levels of trauma and mental health can shift from year to year."

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