

editor's notes

Sarah Squires, editor-in-chief, Winona Post

Join me: Protect Winona's front yard

Life is full of coincidences.

More than a decade ago, when I was preparing to interview for the reporter job at the Post, I realized I had more than one connection to River City. I had some friends from college who grew up here, but I also had another window into town with an exacting view. My friend and colleague at the Pope County Tribune had not only gone to college in Winona, but she'd worked at the Winona Post for a short time after school. "What's it like?" I asked her, curious about what made Winona special, and what set the Post apart.

Shannon told me a few things, but what I remember most — her real selling point to me — was the way she gushed about how the city was both bustling and beautiful, and nestled into nature in a way that is so different from other places. "You can be downtown in the middle of the city, and just walk or ride your bike across the bridge and — boom," she said. "You're in the woods, on the river, on an island."

Shannon was telling me about Latsch Island, and the first time I set foot in Winona was the beginning of a bit of a love story with it.

Latsch Island has many faces. She has a public beach pointed toward downtown's riverfront, where scores of people flock for picnics and to cool off in the summer months. People bring their dogs there to frolic and play catch; a lazy tree swing dangles from a towering cottonwood. She's forested on the edges, with boat-houses dotting the edges where people still live the true river life. You can wander the paths along the connected Wolf Spider Island to enjoy a more rustic, wooded area. Or, there's the entire southwest half, on the other side of the interstate bridge, full of wooded wetlands and beauty, secret beaches, and pristine wildlife.

Latsch Island is unique, and most of it was gifted to the city by famed conservationist hero and former Winona Mayor John Latsch. Part of falling in love with Latsch Island, for me, was discovering John Latsch and his vision and legacy. He purchased thousands of acres of river land for the public's use, understanding that without efforts toward conservation, there may one day not be many places along the river where boys could play, where wildlife could remain and thrive unmolested. He wanted all of us to experience the wonder and the beauty of life along the river. Among the many gifts of John Latsch, the island that is accessible by vehicle, just minutes or a stunning hike over the bridge, is perhaps Winona's jewel.

Now, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has proposed using the southwest half of the island as a dump for dredged river sand. It would fill wetlands and ruin habitat for migrating birds and other species that call the island home. It would mar, as one speaker at a recent hearing on the matter, Winona's "front yard."

Some city leaders have said they don't know enough about the

plan to say whether they'll support it. I can't imagine any new detail that would change my mind: A sand dump does not belong on Latsch Island.

Right now, the city is poised to spend millions on trail investments that would connect existing trails to Winona's riverfront and eventually to hundreds of miles of trails in Wisconsin — recognizing the value of outdoor recreation along the river. Indeed, outdoor recreation and investments in it have already brought Winona notoriety and economic impact — helping to attract people to what for decades has been somewhat a secret we've kept to ourselves. The city is also ushering in a wave of new development, including high-end apartments and Fastenal's new riverside office building, along with eyeing more improvements to Levee Park to draw more folks to Winona's downtown river expanse. Winona is on the verge of an incredible boom of development, tourism, and truly embracing its identity as a river oasis and arts and cultural mecca. The idea of adding a sand dump, that would be visible to nearly all these important developments and plopped in the city's jewel of a front yard, is unbelievable.

Having watched the corps' attempts to take a Kellogg farm for a similar plan to house sand in 2017, I know that simply writing an editorial or speaking out at a public hearing will not be enough to stop this. Diverting the corps from putting that family farm out of business took years of resistance and organizing. That's why it's important that we all pay attention now and work to stop Latsch Island from being used by the corps as a graveyard for tons and tons of sand. We need to ask our city leaders to stand up and object to a plan that would scar our most precious stretch of riverfront, and do it loudly, and now. The rest of us must do our part to tell the corps Latsch Island is off limits.

Though some dredged sand has in the past been recycled for use as fill in development, the amount of sand planned for Latsch Island appears to be much more than would be used by any calculation in the coming years. What we're talking about is a sand mountain, visible to us in some of our most important cityscapes, that would likely remain in perpetuity. Just as Latsch meant his land gifts to the public to last forever, this decision will last longer than us. This is the stuff of legacy, which is why it's so important that our city leaders decide now how they'd like the history books of River City to read.

As for the rest of us, our voices matter, too. You can comment on the dredge plan by mailing St. Paul District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, ATTN: Regional Planning and Environment Division North, 180 Fifth Street East, suite 700, St. Paul, Minn., 55101; or email Pool6DMMP@usace.army.mil.

Join me in opposing the corps' plan to gauge our front yard.



Political letters policy

1. Letters must be originals. Duplicate copies and form letters will be rejected.

2. All letters must be signed and include the writer's full address. Names will not be "withheld by request."

3. Anyone who signs a letter is assumed to be the writer, and while this cannot be proven or disproven by the Post, the writer is expected to assume full responsibility for the contents of the letter. In some cases the writer will be contacted to verify this responsibility. The Post will not knowingly publish any letter that has been written by one individual and signed by another, and does not approve of this practice.

4. No letter will be published that constitutes a personal attack on another individual, is demeaning, or potentially libelous.

5. Letters will not be accepted from candidates for any office except when making a direct reply to an issue raised by another writer against the candidate himself, and then it will be restricted to that single issue. Post advertising is suggested as the proper format for candidates to use in their campaigns.

7. Overly long letters, or handwritten letters that are difficult to read, cannot be published.

8. Letters from the same writer are restricted to two per month, as space allows.

9. Letters are printed as space allows, and may be carried over to a future edition.

10. Political letters to the editor that are deemed by Post editorial staff to be simple endorsements will be published as space permits. Letters will be restricted to no more than 200 words. However, letters received later than 10 days before a general election will be restricted to 50 words.

11. Rejected letters cannot be returned, nor will the writer be notified a letter has been rejected. However, all letters will be held on file for one week before being destroyed.

letters

Oppose the Daley Farm expansion

From: David White
Winona

I moved my family to Winona over 55 years ago, being attracted to the area by its natural beauty and opportunity for outdoor recreation. Preserving this environment is important to me and protecting the natural water systems both surface and ground water is part of that. Mega farms such as the one being proposed by the Daleys present an unacceptable risk to our surface and groundwater. The risk is especially acute in Southeast Minnesota because of the karst geology, typified by sinkholes and fissures in the limestone bedrock, which allows rapid transport of surface water to the aquifer that rural towns and residences with private wells rely on for drinking water. Many private wells are already above the 10 mg/L level of nitrate nitrogen that was established in 1962 by the Minnesota Department of Health as a maximum for drinking water. Recent studies have shown that a much lower safe limit should be established, and recognized that nitrogen is only an indicator that is easily tested for. Other dangerous pollutions such as coliform bacteria may also be present.

The Daleys are proposing to expand their dairy herd from 1,700 animals (2193 AUs) to 4,628 animals (5968 AUs), an increase of 2.7 times. Because they were grandfathered in, Daley Farms already exceeds the Winona County maximum of 1500 AUs. So, if this expansion is allowed, they would exceed the Winona County maximum by almost four times!

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is supposed to require an environmental impact statement (EIS) whenever a proposed project presents "a significant environmental risk." This project certainly does, and they have failed to require it, putting the health and welfare of local citizens at risk! We pay their salaries with our taxes. Their job is to protect us. We should be getting more consideration than this from them.

If you are concerned, let them know! Write letters to the editor. Your views are important.

letters

With only two quality child care openings for every 10 Winona County kids, help is needed

From: Jan Kruchoski and Fred Senn

For parents, children, and communities, quality child care is critically important, and in Winona county there currently aren't nearly enough quality child care opportunities available. This represents a crisis that must be addressed by both state and community leaders as soon as possible.

For parents, the availability of quality early care and education programs (ECE) empowers them to work and support their family, or get needed education or training. For the community, it builds the foundation for social stability, and economic prosperity, while saving taxpayer dollars in the long run. For children, it helps them get prepared for success in school, the workforce, and life.

Two crises: Gaps and shortage

Unfortunately, however, Minnesota faces two early care and education-related crises. First, Minnesota has some of the worst education achievement gaps in the nation. Achievement gaps are differences in proficiency measured between groups of children of various racial, ethnic, and income groups. Those gaps can be measured as early as age one, so they need to be addressed early in life before they get larger and more difficult to close.

At the same time, about 35,000 low-income Minnesota children under age five currently can't access quality early education programs. That early learning "opportunity gap" is one of the root causes of our achievement gap problem.

Second, recent analysis by the University of Minnesota finds that in most parts of Minnesota there is a serious shortage of quality programs. In Winona county there are only about two quality slots available

for every 10 children under age five. The same is true in nearby counties.

In other words, about eight out of every 10 area parents face a shortage of quality programs. At best, they don't have an ideal number of choices. At worst, they have a full-blown family crisis where they can't find the quality programs their children need, and some parents consequently can't hold a job to support their family or get needed education and training.

This quality early education shortage is also hurting Minnesota employers, many of whom are struggling to find enough workers during a time of historically high employment rates.

Experts' recommendations pending

Because parents in all communities throughout Minnesota face similar challenges, in fall 2018 a number of statewide groups came together to form an Early Care and Education Crisis Work Group, which we co-chair. Among the statewide groups represented on the work group are the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, the early education-focused nonprofits Think Small and Close Gaps by 5, the Minnesota Business Partnership, and the Minnesota Child Care Association.

Experts from these groups collaborated to learn more about the nature of the problem. They then formed a list of consensus policy recommendations, which they shared with Governor Walz and the Minnesota Legislature.

The recommendations are detailed in a 20-page work group report. They include proposals to 1) invest in flexible early learning scholarships for 35,000 low-income Minnesota children who can't access quality ECE programs; 2) improve the supply of quality child care providers; and

3) reform and better coordinate existing early care and education funding streams to make them work better Minnesota families.

Offering more scholarships is particularly important. To address the achievement gap crisis, and the early learning opportunity gaps at their roots, scholarships expand access to quality Parent Aware-rated programs for low-income children. To address the shortage, the expansion of Scholarships incentivizes the addition of quality slots. That benefits families of all income levels, now and into the future.

It's also important for state leaders to keep the Parent Aware quality rating and improvement system strong. For licensed child care providers who volunteer to participate, Parent Aware helps them adopt evidence-based kindergarten-readiness best practices. That means children benefit from the best practices they need to get prepared for school.

During the 2019 legislative session, the governor and Legislature didn't act on the work group's non-partisan recommendations. The 2020 session needs to be more constructive. The members of our work group stand ready to work with leaders from both political parties to adopt these recommendations during the 2020 legislative session. Minnesota's future depends on it.

Jan Kruchoski is managing principal at CliftonLarsonAllen, and a former president of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. Fred Senn is a founding partner of the Minnesota-based ad agency Fallon Worldwide. Kruchoski and Senn are co-chairs of Minnesota's Early Care and Education Crisis Work Group. The work group report is available at thinksmall.org/crisis and area shortage information is available from the University of Minnesota at ChildCareAccess.org.

winona's twice-weekly newspaper since 1971

winonapost

email: winpost@winonapost.com | winonapost.com

507.452.1262 800.353.2126
fax: 507.454.6409
P.O. Box 27, 64 E. 2nd St.
Winona, MN 55987

Publisher: Patrick Marek
Editor-in-Chief: Sarah Squires
Finance/Operations Director: Dana Cierzan
Advertising Director: Patrick Marek
Sales: Kim Farkas, Bob Shattuck, Les Guderian
Inside Sales/Classified: Amanda Sattler, Carol Fitzgerald

News Editor: Chris Rogers
Reporters: Alexandra Retter, Nathaniel Nelson
Newsroom: Monica Hill
Columnist: Frances Edstrom
Circulation: Mary Veraguth

Creative Director: Ashley Blum
Composition Editor: Monica Veraguth
Creative Designer: Jared Ferk
Proofreader/Editorial Assistant: Molly Miller
Pressmen: Jim Bethke, Jesse J. Brandes
Mailroom: John Payne

Do you need to run
LEGAL ADS?

Assumed Name? Bids? Probate?

Dissolution of Marriage?

Call us for the lowest prices in town!

507-452-1262 or FAX 454-6409

Winona First, Winona Proud, winonapost