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At least 6 jurors seated in murder trial

BY EMILY CUTTS
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Jury selection continued Tuesday in the trial of Malcolm Woods. Woods, 28, is charged with first-degree premeditated murder and second-degree murder with intent in the September 2018 killing of 38-year-old Brandon Arndt. Woods also faces a charge of possession of ammunition/any firearm with a previous conviction for a crime of violence. A grand jury returned the indictments on March 14, 2019. Woods pleaded not guilty to the charges in May and has been held on \$2 million unconditional bail since Oct. 1, 2018.

On Monday afternoon, one juror was seated. At least five jurors were seated Tuesday. Of those six, two are men and four are women. A total of 14 jurors are needed for the trial. It is likely that jury selection could take most if not all of the week, as each juror is questioned individually to determine their suitability.

Woods, who is representing himself in the trial, questioned at least one of the potential jurors. He has consulted his advisory counsel on a number of occasions. Chief Deputy Olmsted County Attorney Eric Woodford and Senior Assistant Olmsted County Attorney Erin Gustafson have questioned each potential juror. There are two other codefendants in the case.

Darien Klindworth-Woods was scheduled for trial to begin on the same day as Woods, but that trial has been scheduled for a later date.

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Contributed photo
Brandon Arndt and his service dog, Yaggy.

Blooming Prairie bakery a total loss



Photos by Ken Klotzbach / kklotzbach@postbulletin.com
Firefighters from several area towns combat a fire Tuesday morning in a building at 345 E. Main St. in Blooming Prairie.

‘We fought it from the inside for as long as we could’

BY MATTHEW STOLLE
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BLOOMING PRAIRIE
Fire departments from across Southeast Minnesota engaged in an hourslong battle to put out a blaze that engulfed a bakery in downtown Blooming Prairie. Well before the last flame was doused, officials deemed the two-story brick building, now a smoldering wreck, a total loss. Gray smoke could be seen billowing from downtown hours after the first 911 went out. At one point, officials considered using a backhoe to knock the building down as a way to contain the fire, as fire hoses throughout the

morning poured thousands of gallons of water onto the building. “It’s going to be a safety concern here,” said Blooming Prairie Police Chief Greg Skillestad. “They’re going to have to tear this building down.” The Bakery, a two-decade-old business owned by Gregg Fristedt and housed on the building’s first floor, was destroyed by the fire. Fristedt was clearly heartbroken at the loss, said Dewayne Carlsgaard, an Albert Lea resident who talked with him briefly. “We seen him walking by, and he hugged a lady right here,” Carlsgaard said.

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Firefighters hose down The Bakery, which was a total loss in the fire.

Will short-term rental property taxes triple?

BY RANDY PETERSEN
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Property investors seeking to rent out single-family homes for less than 30 days at a time could see their tax bills nearly triple next year. The Olmsted County’s Property Records and Licensing office recently mailed 89 questionnaires that could lead to property tax reclassification for the recipients. Kellie Mueller, Rochester resident and owner of short-term rental properties, said the effort appears to miss the mark.

“I think there is a huge misunderstanding on this,” she said, pointing out that not all short-term rentals are booked for less than 30 days. The 30-day bar is when a rental is classified as a standard residential rental under state guidelines, leaving some properties rented through online platforms in a gray area. Mueller, who holds local rental certificates for her short-term rental properties, said the owners who received the letters frequently rent to patients and others connected to Mayo Clinic for more than 30 days, providing

a homelike atmosphere during periods that can be stressful. “The patients rely on these houses,” she said. Shawn Buryska, a local Realtor who received a letter from the county, agreed. He owns one short-term rental property, which had belonged to his mother. While he holds a rental certificate for the property, he said he’s able to balance the books by renting the house a week — or longer — at a time. “I spent too much on the remodeling,” he said, adding that a traditional rental agreement wouldn’t recoup costs.

Buryska and Mueller said a higher tax classification will likely lead to higher costs for needing a place to stay, but they also question whether it’s the right move. “It’s arbitrary,” Buryska said. Mark Krupski, the county’s director of property records and licensing, said the letters sent by his office this month stem from state direction. In May, Jon Klockziem,



Krupski

director of the Minnesota Department of Revenue, sent county assessors guidelines for classifying residential properties rented on a short-term basis, which he said are on the rise in the state. “A short-term rental property’s use is income generation through short-term lodging (less than 30 consecutive days), which is similar to a hotel property,” Klockziem wrote. “Residential non-homestead and apartment classifications require rentals by tenants for 30 consecutive days or more.”

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