

Sports

St. Peter Herald



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St. Peter VFW baseball player Brogan Hanson works on the T, while others take their swings in the first practice at the batting cage at Veterans Field. (Pat Beck/St. Peter Herald)

DNR hopes reducing sunfish limits will increase size, asks for feedback

By PAT BECK
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Male bluegills can be compared to defensive football players.

Those players train to be bigger, faster and stronger to defend their team's prized possession, the end zone. Male bluegills, meanwhile, do the same to defend their nests.

But the numbers of big bluegills, also known as sunfish, have been reducing in many lakes in Minnesota because of increased harvest by anglers.

So the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is proposing the Quality Bluegill Initiative (QBI) to reduce the limits of sunfish from 20 to five or 10 in 123 lakes in 2021 and more in 2022. Fifty-seven lakes, all in the west and northwest part of the state, already have reduced limits for sunfish.

Sunfish limits statewide were last reduced from 30 to 20 in 2003, but that did not improve size quality. To determine if it would be a good idea to reduced the limit in more lakes, the DNR is taking a public survey this year.

Signs will be posted at public accesses of proposed lakes where special regulations are being considered. The public is invited to comment, and public input meetings are planned for the fall in the same county as the lakes. If the proposal wins public support and is approved internally, changes should go into effect on March 1, 2021.

Brandon Eder, Waterville Area Fisheries assistant supervisor who was instrumental in the study of the QBI, thinks it's a good idea to protect the big bluegills, because they drive the size in the lake.

"The big male bluegills in the spring like right now are in shallow, building spawning beds, making nets, making these colonies," Eder said. "These look like little saucers in the sand. Male bluegills get the best spots. They're in the middle. They're protected and get more females coming by there, looking for the best spots to lay their eggs, so that they can be as successful as possible."

See SUNFISH on 3B



Nancy Ross of Coon Rapids catches a pumpkin-seed sunfish last season at Shields Lake. (Pat Beck/St. Peter Herald)

SAINTS PLAY BALL AGAIN

St. Peter youth baseball teams finally get on the field

By PAT BECK
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At at meeting Sunday night, St. Peter Baseball Association decided to cancel all travel seasons for 2020.

"We will still be practicing and working on skills, and hopefully scheduling some scrimmages with other local communities," SPBA President and VFW Co-Coach Ron Guappone said. "However, we will not be participating in any organized season."

"The MBL will not be playing any ball in June, but will be offering a shortened season beginning July 6 and ending Aug. 14. As an Association, we opted to not join that, as it extends too far into August for most families."

The VFW team of 16-year-old juniors-to-be hit the field for the first time this season Monday at Veterans Field when the city parks opened to the public. They had only one school-ball practice before they were sent home

Guappone, who serves as co-coach with Kurt Moelter, welcomes the chance to finally play the game he loves.

"It kind of feels like a holiday these boys getting back together to play ball again," Guappone said as the 11 players warmed up by playing catch. "Baseball signifies summer, and they just go together. These boys have been stuck at home not being able to interact with their friends for the most part. It's a start of a sense of normalcy for them again. These kids grow up watching it. Most kids play from the time they're 4- to 5-years-old. It's just competing. We all know these kids are competitors. There's some talent out there."

Guappone thinks baseball "is the greatest sport ever invented. It's so equal. Everyone gets their chance. That's why it's the dream of so many little kids. Every kids starts T-ball thinking he's going to be in the Major Leagues. You're not up against the clock. You still get 27 outs. It's part of the American fabric. Baseball, apple



Third baseman Rowan Dahlseid gets set to pick up a grounder. (Pat Beck/St. Peter Herald)

pie and summertime."

At the practice, they warmed up by playing catch, including long tosses. Then they split up into two groups, one doing infield practice at

Vets 2 and the other in the batting cage working on their swings. They they switched off.

See SAINTS on 2B

Beatlemania runs rampant at Montgomery National Golf Club

By PAT BECK
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A yellow submarine, a 17-foot tall guitar, a 35-yard guitar-shaped fairway sand trap and street signs showing distances to "Beateley" places.

These are among the many props at the Beatles-themed Montgomery National Golf Club. As you drive in, you can't miss the vibrant yellow submarine, and as you approach the clubhouse, you'll find the giant guitar statue standing proudly. You'll encounter the massive guitar sand trap six holes in. The clubhouse walls, meanwhile, are covered with Beatles and family memorabilia, including photos and maps. Golf caps come with a Beatles logo. Flags are embroidered with musical notes. Even the scorecard is themed after The Beatles' "White Album" with each hole named after a different song.

The man behind the menagerie is owner Greg McKush. A Beatles fan since he was a grade-schooler, McKush, 56, designed the course with his favorite rock and roll band in mind.

"Since I was 9 years old, I started buying Beatles albums," McKush said. "I had every one. I'm a huge [Paul] McCartney fan. I'm a singer-songwriter, so I've been playing Beatles' music since I was young."

The golf course gives McKush a chance to show off his creativity and his passion.

"That's what I love about this big 160-acre canvass," he said. "And I can't wait to keep adding to it. We're definitely one



Greg McKush, owner of Montgomery National Golf Club, brings a Beatles theme to the course, including a yellow submarine and his yellow submarine face guitar. (Pat Beck/St. Peter Herald)

of a kind."

Also an actor and model in television shows and commercials, McKush played at farmers markets and private parties for years.

"My kids and I had a little band called Sunny-side Up," McKush said. "I play a little bit here when we have tourna-

ments. I pipe out Beatles' music to the golf course with a big speaker."

The yellow submarine came last spring from Hot Sam's Antiques Store, Foto Park, Junkyard Theme Park along Interstate 35 near Lakeville.

"When I went by it was green, and right there I thought, I need to get that

and paint it yellow," McKush said. "And also he had this great big guitar, which I refaced and made it into an Olson guitar, which is the kind of guitars I play. That was the first step of all this craziness."

The submarine was a fiberglass prop in the 1970 movie, "Tora, Tora, Tora," on the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. They

WHITE ALBUM SCORECARD

Disc 1

1. "A Little Help From My Friends"
2. "Don't Let Me Down"
3. "Hello Goodbye"
4. "Octopus's Garden"
5. "Yellow Submarine"
6. "While My Guitar Gently Weeps"
7. "Blackbird"
8. "Get Black"
9. "Number 9"

Disc 2

10. "Martha My Dear"
11. "Dear Prudence"
12. "Day Tripper"
13. "Norwegian Wood"
14. "Don't Pass Me By"
15. "Strawberry Fields"
16. "Golden Slumber"
17. "Fool on the Hill"
18. "The End"

made two of them, but they didn't need a second take when they blew it up. Guitar maker Jim Olson in Circle Pines, Minnesota created the 17-foot Lucian guitar.

"We refaced it, and at the top on my actual one that looks just like it is 'The Giving Tree' that I read for my kids for years," McKush explained, "We emulated that as best we could."

See GOLF on 3B



St. Peter third baseman Kent Bass tracks down a ground ball in the hole last season. (Pat Beck/St. Peter Herald)

St. Peter over-35 baseball starts practicing

By PAT BECK
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The St. Peter Saints over-35 baseball team started practicing Monday at Community Spirit North Park in preparation for the potential River Valley League schedule. The city of St. Peter opened parks Monday.

“The governor has progressed to Phase 2 of the Stay Safe Plan,” River Valley League President Ken Schmidt said Sunday. “Baseball games don’t happen, I believe, until Phase 3 kicks in. Then with opened fields and any special rules handed down by the state, individual teams will have to decide whether to participate or not. Practices are subject to open facilities, player numbers and social distancing.”

“Our River Valley League teams plan to play

their remaining schedule when given the OK to play,” Schmidt said. “They are not required to make up cancelled games, unless they wish to. Play as many as teams can handle with no minimum game requirement for our state tournament.

“A July 1 deadline to play is required for our MSMABA (Minnesota Senior Men’s Amateur Baseball Association) State Tourney to happen. Seeding will be done by last year’s team’s records of the teams participating.

“When that Phase 3 bell will ring (June 15, June 20, June 30) is unknown and will determine much.”

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Reducing sunfish limits is a good idea

By PAT BECK
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As far as I can remember, I’ve fished eight of the 190 lakes proposed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources for sunfish limit reduction.

Two of the lakes, we fished most often.

My family and I vacationed a week at a cabin on a resort at Elephant Lake in St. Louis County near Orr for three years in the early 2000s followed by about a half dozen years at a private cabin at nearby Blackduck Lake.

At Elephant, we caught a good number of sunfish, but most were small at 7 inches or less long. So we moved over to Blackduck and found the mother lode of big sunfish and crappies. The big fish continued to bite for years, although the numbers did slow down a bit, but then picked back up again in the last couple of years.

I’ve fished Tetonka Lake in Waterville with friends from shore in the shallow lagoons for a number of years in the spring. We used to catch big sunnies and crappies, but the last couple of years haven’t only caught a few small ones.

I’ve also fished Prior Lake, mostly ice fishing a number of years, and caught some nice sunnies in the 7-inch range.

Last year, while my family and I stayed at a cabin on Shields Lake in Shieldsville, near Faribault, we also fished a morning a couple of miles north at Mazaska Lake hoping for the big crappies. We didn’t catch any big ones and only a few small ones, plus a northern.

In the mid-1980s to mid-’90s,



Pat's Pitches

Pat Beck



St. Peter Herald Sports Editor Pat Beck shows about an 8-inch sunfish he caught last May at Shields Lake. The lake has a good population of sunfish and crappies, but the bigger ones like this are sometimes hard to find. (Pat Beck/St. Peter Herald)

when I used to live in the Twin Cities in Circle Pines, we fished nearby Centerville Lake a number of times and never caught very many fish, only some small sunnies and crappies.

Also up north, we stayed at a cabin on Clear Lake in Aitkin for two years and also only caught small sunfish. As the name says the lake is clear, which makes it difficult to catch bigger fish, so we ended up finding big sunfish in nearby Ripple Lake.

We also briefly fished off the dock one year at Bear Head Lake in that state park near Ely where I also only remember catching a few small sunfish.

All of these lakes, plus many more, would benefit in having the sunfish limits reduced. The only one where we experienced catching big sunfish was Blackduck, which still is pretty good.

With a limit of 20 sunfish, it wouldn’t hurt to cut it in half at Blackduck, Elephant and Clear, which the DNR is proposing. Anglers don’t need to keep 20 sunfish. A few fish are enough for a meal for one person. We don’t have to have a freezer full of fish.

Tetonka, Prior Lake, Mazaska, Centerville and Bearhead are proposed to be reduced to a limit of five sunfish. That would be OK, too, where the numbers and size of sunfish tend to be less in those lakes.

Sunfishing has provided more

than 50 years of enjoyment for me since I was 3 years old. They usually are willing to bite on a worm or a waxworm or just a jig or a variety of other artificial lures. And they’re one of the hardest fighting fish for their size.

Even though the limits may be reduced on some lakes, people can still catch and release as many as they wish. And by releasing the fish they could eventually grow bigger and provide better fishing and maybe bigger sunfish for future generations.

Catch and release has worked well with bass and muskies in which anglers release almost all of those species, and that has kept the size up.

For more information about sunfish and a video, go to: dnr.state.mn.us/fish/sunfish. Let the DNR know what you think about the proposed by responding to the online survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DDZVWFZ>



Coach Ron Guappone leads St. Peter VFW in infield practice Monday at Vets 2 field, while Zach Hermanson catches the balls returned.



Bennett Olson of St. Peter VFW practices in the batting cage at Veterans Field. (Photos by Pat Beck/St. Peter Herald)

SAINTS

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It’s not just the VFW age group. St. Peter also has two 11-year-old teams, one 12-year-old team, one 14AAA team and one 14A-15A team. Normally there are about six more teams, but the youngest groups of 8-, 9- and 10-year-olds cancelled their season.

However, Kent Bass offered to work on baseball skills with 10-year-olds, which is awesome, Moelter said.

The VFW team is practicing three times a week on a variety of days.

Practicing, which usually is difficult to schedule during the busy part of the season with so many games, gives players a better chance to develop their skills through drills such as fielding, bunt defense and hitting.

“Mostly this year is going to be working on skills,” Guappone said. “We get to work on a lot of the little things that we don’t get to work on in a typical season because we’ll have more time. They know the basics, but they all know they’ve got a lot more to learn. They listen, and they take what we teach them.”

Winning and losing are not important with no real games being played.

Although scrimmages have not been lined up yet, Guap-



Jorgen Jeramiason and the rest of the St. Peter VFW team warm up by playing catch in the first practice Monday at Veterans Field.

pone said he is open to play any teams in the area in the same age group including Mankato, Le Sueur-Henderson and Jordan.

Baseball teams are supposed to follow some safety guidelines, including social distancing of 6 feet apart and limits on sharing baseballs which are

sanitized throughout the practice.

“The most important thing we’re stressing is wash your hands and don’t come around if you think you’re sick,” Guappone said.

If they do scrimmages, they will umpire the games themselves. Coaches will stand be-

tween the pitcher and second base and call balls and strikes and the bases.

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David Winnett picks up a grounder at first base.



Shea Hildebrandt soft tosses a tennis ball to Jake Moelter in St. Peter VFW baseball hitting practice.

Gustie baseball field renovation to be completed this summer

By CJ SIEWERT
Gustavus Sports
Information Director

SAINT PETER – The Gustavus baseball field renovation project will be completed in the coming months as construction of Phase Two begins this summer. Highlights of the second phase include a 350-seat covered grandstand, two enclosed press boxes, patio-style viewing areas, state-of-the-art sound system, and improved live broadcast elements. The \$2 million project, which began in 2017, is entirely donor funded.

“This project is an exciting piece to a larger fundraising campaign,” said Athletics Director Tom Brown. “We are grateful for all the donors who support our vision to provide Gusties with one of the best facilities in Division III.”

Phase One of the renovation project was completed in the fall of 2017, which included artificial turf on the entire playing surface, new fencing to enclose the field, a 36-foot-wide scoreboard, and landscaping to improve spectator areas.

“What we’ve said all along is that to build the best Division III baseball program in



Conceptual drawing of the baseball grandstand.

the country we need to attract the best student-athletes,” said Head Coach Brad Baker. “With the completion of this project we will have one of the best ballparks in small college baseball. I’m really thankful for the donors who have supported our vision for the young men that choose Gustavus.”

The project will be completed prior to students returning to campus this fall.

Gustie Baseball Field renovation facts:

Surface: SPINTURF Ultrablade DFE 42 on entire field (including home plate and pitcher’s mound)

Multi-use surface: soccer practice, club sports, and intramurals use it as well

Open to community: field is

available to rent for local baseball organizations

Dimensions: 315’ – left foul pole, 365’ – left-center, 390’ – center, 365’ – right-center, 320’ – right foul pole

Elevated spectator areas directly behind home plate and down the right field line

350-seat covered grandstand

200 square-foot press box at top of grandstand, 70 square-foot auxiliary press box in third base dugout

• The baseball field has been in its current location since 2007 after construction of the football field replaced the former location of Myrum Baseball Field. Games were played on natural grass and dirt through the 2017 season.



Four Gustavus student-athletes received All-American (from left) – Steven Orzolek (So., Darwin), Taylor Rooney (Jr., Andover), Birgen Nelson (Fy., Edina), and Tierney Winter (Sr., Waterville).

Four Gusties earn All-America honors

NEW ORLEANS – The USTFCCCA announced its All-America awards for the 2020 indoor season on Tuesday and four Gustavus student-athletes received the honor – Steven Orzolek (So., Darwin), Taylor Rooney (Jr., Andover), Birgen Nelson (Fy., Edina), and Tierney Winter (Sr., Waterville). With the cancellation of the NCAA Championships, the criteria for the award was changed with all selected participants for the NCAA Indoor Championships receiving All-America honors.

Orzolek earns the honor in the shot put after taking second at the MIAC Championships with a toss of 16.31 meters. The sophomore’s throw was the 20th best throw in the nation and he was just one of 28 athletes to break the 16-meter mark this season, which he did twice.

Rooney gains All-America honors in the 60-meter hurdles for the third straight year. The junior held the fastest 60m hurdle time in the nation this year with a school record mark of 8.00 seconds, although he ranks second nation-

ally, as an athlete ran a 7.40 in the 55m hurdles which converts to 7.97 in the 60. Rooney brought in three MIAC Athlete of the Week awards this season to go along with two National Athlete of the Week honors.

Nelson kicked off her first season in Black and Gold with All-America honors in the 60-meter hurdles. The first-year ran the eighth fastest time in the NCAA this year with an 8.81 at the MIAC Championships to take second in the event. Nelson broke the school record in her first meet of the season at the St. Olaf quad, before breaking her own record four more times and setting the new bar at 8.81

Following All-America honors during the 2019 cross country season, Winter earns her first All-America award on the track in 2020 in the mile. The senior set a new school record at the Mark Schuck Open on Feb. 1 with a time of 5:03.48 before taking first place in the MIAC Championships with a time of 5:00.83 for the 16th fastest time in Division III.

GOLF

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Then he decided to make an Olson guitar bunker on the sixth fairway last September. The sand trap is bigger than the green and provides a unique showpiece for the course.

The street signs, posted on a tree, are chock-full of Beatles references, including Abbey Road, Strawberry Fields and Penny Lane. McKush’s plan is to build a log cabin clubhouse at the course, like at a course his family bought in 1979 called Lone Pine.

“It had a log cabin, so I’m kind of reliving my childhood,” McKush said. “We ended up selling that to Mystic Lake in 2002, and then I was director of golf at the Meadows at Mystic Lake and built that golf course. Then I retired at 47 in 2013, and I got bored in 2018 and bought this place.”

The log cabin has been put on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but McKush said construction could start next year.

“Then we’re going to continue with doing things like an Abby Road entrance,” McKush said.

Other, more technical, course upgrades to come include ponding projects on holes No. 2 and No. 8 to alleviate some of the drainage problems in low areas, plus the construction of cart paths all around the course, so when it rains, golfers can stay on the paths and not beat up the turf.

While the hole names are Beatles-related, some have double meanings. The first hole, for instance, is named in honor of longtime member John Segna, who had a heart attack there a couple years ago.

“Just by chance a helicopter was coming from Waseca and they ended up picking him up,” McKush said



The sixth fairway at Montgomery National Golf Club features a guitar fairway bunker. (Aerial photo courtesy of TwinCitiesGolf.com)

of the incident. “There were paramedics on the course, and everybody ran for his safety. When I said I’d like to call (the first hole) ‘The Day in the Life,’ Jon, who survived, said he would rather call it ‘A Little Help From My Friends.’”

He held a contest for naming the holes, and he gave prizes to the contestants who offered names he used. The Beatles wrote about 1,000 songs as a group from 1964 to 1970, and after they split up, they continued as solo artists or in new groups, so there is probably content to work off.

The 18th hole is named “The End,” hole No. 9 is “Number 9,” hole No. 15 is “Strawberry Fields,” where McKush is growing strawberries on the righthand side, and hole No. 5 is “Yellow Submarine.”

“We considered putting (the yellow submarine) there, but I’m scared that kids will hit balls off of it and it will crumble,” McKush said. So it’s displayed in the front of the pro shop, next to the parking lot, instead.

Thanks to the commitment to theme, it’s not only golfers are in-



At the entrance to Montgomery National Golf Club are sign posts showing distance to Beatles’ destinations. Owner Greg McKush holds a yellow submarine guitar. (Pat Beck/St. Peter Herald)

terested in the course. Recently, McKush had a wedding party of big Beatles fans come out and take photos. He also hosted a Beatle-loving couple’s 30th anniversary.

“I get a lot of new people and a lot of repeat customers, because they get to see this golf course,” McKush said. “And if the Beatles brought them here, it’s awesome.”



A 17-foot tall guitar graces Montgomery National Golf Club. Owner Greg McKush holds a yellow submarine guitar. (Pat Beck/St. Peter Herald)

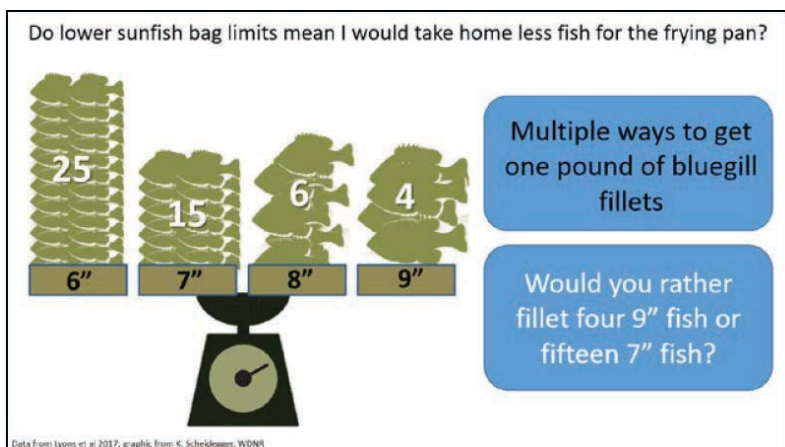
SUNFISH

From Page 1B

“And once those big male bluegills are removed, now there is no reason for smaller male bluegills to grow up. They had to grow up before to compete for those spots. Now that everybody is small, it’s a free for all. There is no reason to put any energy into growth and to get big, if you can be a 5-inch bluegill and still get those prime spawning areas and still fertilize eggs. There’s no reason to grow bigger than 5 inches, and they’re not going to do it.”

“We need those big male bluegills to force those small bluegills to grow, to put their energy into body growth rather than reproduction.”

In northern Minnesota, Eder said it takes 10 years to grow a trophy bluegill of 9-plus inches. “In the Waterville area we can do it in a couple of years quicker. But we’re still talking 7 or 8 years. Even on our really fast growing lakes, it takes



4 to 5 years to grow a keeper bluegill of 7 inches or so.

“Walleyes, on the other hand, if you’re looking for a 14-inch walleye, it’s twice as fast. They’re replaced faster and they grow faster. It’s a totally different fish than bluegills that take a long time to grow and are pretty hard to replace.”

Eder said a 9 or 10 inch bluegill is equivalent to a 28-30 inch trophy walleye, and most of those bluegills are coming home while the big walleyes often are

released.

Through emails, phone calls and catching surveys, Eder said anglers are not happy about the decline in the size of the bluegills that they’re catching.

“They still catch plenty, but they know that it’s not the good old days anymore,” Eder said. “Average size and maximum size that some of the fish that they’re seeing has declined in some cases quite a bit. And there is something with our standard DNR lake surveys that says numbers

are steady even increasing in places, but the number of big fish, 8-9 inches plus, have decreased quite a bit. Fishing pressure is a big reason.”

The prevalent use of electronic fish finders and other technological advancements combined with rapid social media communication have made it easier to find fish.

The first phase is reduced bag limits which have shown to be pretty successful in some of the lakes in northern Minnesota and in Wisconsin in increasing the average size of fish, Eder said. In lakes that were reduced to a limit of 10, the sunfish maintained their size, and in those that were reduced to a limit of five, size increased.

If you reduce the bag limit, then folks can’t take as many as those big fish, Eder said.

“We’re 20 fish daily bag limit, and we’re talking about knocking that down to 10 or five,” Eder said. “That’s a big cut. But it really is important to leave those big male bluegills. This is the time of year when folks can go out and fill a bucket

with them. That’s the kind of attitude that we’re hoping to change.”

For more information about sunfish, a list of the proposed lakes and a video, go to: dnr.state.mn.us/fish/sunfish. Let the DNR know what you think about the proposed by responding to the online survey at www.surveymonkey.com/r/DDZVWFZ.

For those who don’t want to go online, you can call or email any DNR area office.

“It’s really important that we get input from the anglers, resort owners and campground owners, bait shop owners,” Eder said. “We need to hear from everybody. That acceptance and compliance with regulations is key to success. If we ran a five limit bluegill regulation into a lake and nobody wants it, they’re probably not going to comply with it.”

He continued, “The goal is to get 200 to 250 lakes in the first phase and then to proposing more lakes in the second phase next summer or the summer after. It would be good to have them spread out instead of clustered around Brainerd or Grand Rapids or Fergus Falls.”



Five-year-olds Payton and Ashlyn Widmer catch a pair of sunnies on West Jefferson on this steamy Sunday afternoon in the Le Sueur County Sheriff and Mounted Posse Virtual Kids Fishing Contest.



Hunter Cram, 2, catches a sunfish at German Lake.



Kenzie Link, 4, hooks a bluegill Saturday on East Jefferson.



Three-year-old Paisley Cooley caught a nice sunfish Saturday at Lake Jefferson.

Kids catch all kinds of fish in online contest

By PAT BECK
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Little ones caught all sorts of big ones Saturday and Sunday in the 20th annual Take a Kid Fishing event organized by the The Le Sueur County Sheriff's Office and the Mounted Posse.

In this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the event was held virtually. Ages 2 to 14 participated in the contest which started midnight June 6 and ended at 11:30 p.m. June 7.

Sixty people posted a picture of their child and their "catch of the day" on the Le Sueur County Sheriff's Office Facebook event page. Each participant was put into a drawing for a chance to win a cooler full of fishing gear including a rod, reel, tackle and a Minnesota Vikings football.

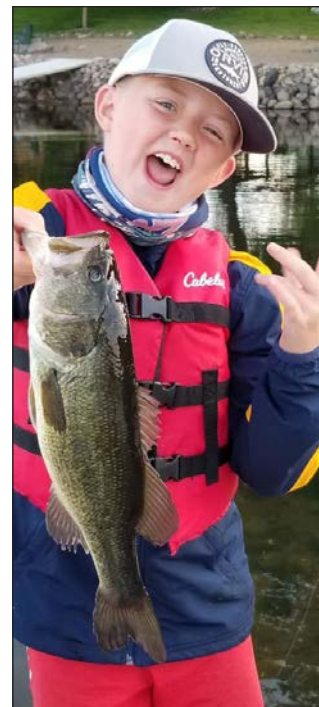
"The normal contest usually attracts 60 to 70 kids, so we had a pretty positive showing,"

Le Sueur County Deputy Sheriff Nick Greenig said. "The Vikings normally fish with the kids but couldn't this year because of the pandemic." The three raffle winners are: Isabella Schultz, Kyler Link and Maverick Michels.

The entries included eight different species of fish caught on 15 different lakes. The catches included 29 sunfish, 14 large mouth bass, five northerns, four crappies, two walleyes, one perch and one white bass.

The most fish (20) came from the East-West-Middle Jefferson chain of lakes. Next most frequent fish were 13 caught at German Lake. Lake Washington had four fish caught, Tetonka had three, Emily, Lake Sakatah and Sabre two each, Madison, Gorman, Volney and Lexington one each.

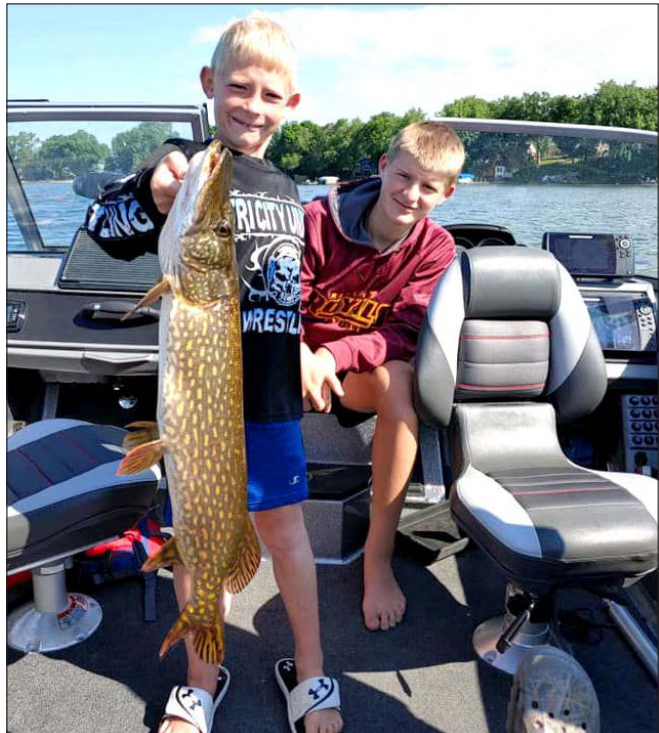
Plans for next year have not been finalized, but Greenig said, "We're hoping to go back to normal and take kids out in boats."



Sam Lagerson, 10, caught a largemouth bass Saturday on Lake Washington.



Benson Janovsky, 8, caught a walleye on Saturday on Lake Tetonka.



Bryce Sycks, 7, caught a big northern on Saturday on Big Jeff.



The catch of the day for Jordie Seely, 2.5, is a crappie Saturday on West Jefferson.



Melanie Von Bank, 7, caught a northern Saturday on Big Jeff.

Without stimulus, Le Sueur Community Center will need to close for rest of year

By CARSON HUGHES
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Le Sueur residents may have to kiss their 2020 plans of swimming, skating and working out at the Community Center goodbye.

On May 25, the Le Sueur City Council voted to close the Community Center for the rest of the year. The decision came after the Personnel and Budget Committee reviewed seven different plans for the center and found that opening it would not be possible without a deficit of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The Le Sueur Community Center is in a dire financial position. Having been closed since March 16, the facility has gone two and a half months without revenue. As of May 1, the Community Center had \$477,500 remaining out of the \$503,000 allocated to the facility in the 2020 budget, but those funds are likely to evaporate quickly with no income source.

To have the center open and fully operational, it would cost more than \$117,000 a month and opening up just the fitness center, while keeping the pool and ice rink closed, would still cost \$95,000 a month. The cheapest option available to the city would be to keep it closed, which would cost \$72,000 a month.

Following that cheapest option is a necessity for the city of Le Sueur. The budget for the Community Center is required to be balanced and if operational expenses are over budget, the expense would need to be subsidized through the city's general fund. The city estimated that if the center opened up just the fitness center, while following CDC guidelines, the center would run a deficit of \$262,000. The scenario left the council with only one choice: to close the Com-



The Le Sueur Community Center will be closed for the rest of the year if no stimulus funds are available to the facility. The city council made the decision after finding that they could not open the Community Center without a significant budget deficit. (Carson Hughes/Le Sueur County News)

munity Center through the rest of the year.

"It's something we don't want to do, but our hands are tied," said City Administrator Jasper Kruggel. "We can't open the facility. We have no revenue generation right now."

Stimulus needed

But Kruggel described these projections as "a worst case scenario." The city has directed the closure of the center under the assumption that the facility will not receive any stimulus from the state of Minnesota or the federal government through bills like the CARES Act.

Kruggel said that the city is still holding out hope that the Community Center could benefit from a potential stimulus disbursement from the Minnesota Legislature's June special legislative session. If the Community Center were to receive stimulus dollars, Kruggel said that the

city would reassess opening the facility.

"If we do receive outside funding, we'll be back at the drawing board and doing another analysis on how we can open things up and the different things we're going to have to do to ensure the safety of our patrons," said Kruggel.

The city will also be working with major users of the Community Center — the Le Sueur-Henderson School District and the Bulldogs Hockey Association — with the goal of opening the ice arena if finances allow.

To determine how the Community Center would operate while closed, the City Council looked at seven different scenarios. Of those scenarios, only two were expected to leave the Community Center budget with a surplus.

In Scenario 4, all part-time staff at the center would remain furloughed and the three full-time staff would have their hours cut to one-third of their normal

hours. Under this plan, the Community Center would have nearly \$2,000 left over at the end of the year. In Scenario 6, all staff would be furloughed on July 1, leaving the Community Center with \$17,000 in its budget.

However, the city described these scenarios as infeasible. While the Community Center would be closed, there is still essential work that would need to be done including general maintenance, the building of a new gym wall and the implementation of new software.

"Staff is still working on the Community Center," said Councilor John Favolise. "They're still doing things. When it's finally open, we should be in a really good position. We'll have new software all being put together far more efficiently, more comprehensively than anything we've ever had and staff is working on that. There's the new wall area upstairs in the fitness gym with cubbies in it that's being built. There's freshening up and everything else, plus they have to make sure that they are meeting their own [reopening] plan before they can open."

Looking ahead

Instead of these plans, the Personnel and Budget Committee recommended that the City Council approve Scenario 7. This plan would furlough all employees except for the manager, who would work 16 hours a week. The Community Center would be left with a deficit of \$443 at the end of the year, but the city hoped that efficiencies would allow the Community Center to break even.

Kruggel explained that the committee favored Scenario 7 because preparing a budget for 2021 was a major priority for the Community Center. The budgeting process has been complicated by CO-

VID-19, which has left the city uncertain about how many people will use the Community Center once it opens up again. Since the manager is the staff member most familiar with the budgeting process, Kruggel advocated for giving that person more hours.

Six of the seven members of the council supported Scenario 7, but Councilor Marvin Sullivan voted no on the measure, favoring Scenario 4. Sullivan believed that 4 was preferable because it would allow the Community Center to be staffed throughout the week and it would ensure that all full-time employees could continue working throughout the year.

"The big downfall I see with scenario 7 is our Community Center does not operate without all those staff," said Sullivan. "I understand that we're not operating for the rest of the year under any of these scenarios, but come Jan. 1 next year, if that's the plan we're going to open back up, we've essentially taken this job away from those other two parties and they haven't been hands on with anything involved in the Community Center, so there's going to be a period of time where it's new to them again."

The councilors that did vote in favor of Scenario 7 did so with reluctance, expressing their hope that the Community Center would be allowed to open this year with outside funding.

"If any of our assumptions change, particularly stimulus funding for the hardships caused by COVID-19 pandemic, this would give staff an opportunity to do the actions they need to do based on what we have in front of us to work with," said Mayor Gregory Hagg. "This is something that could be changing daily, weekly — we don't know. It's just like every day with this COVID-19, it seems like something is changing on it."