



# STEELE COUNTY

# Times

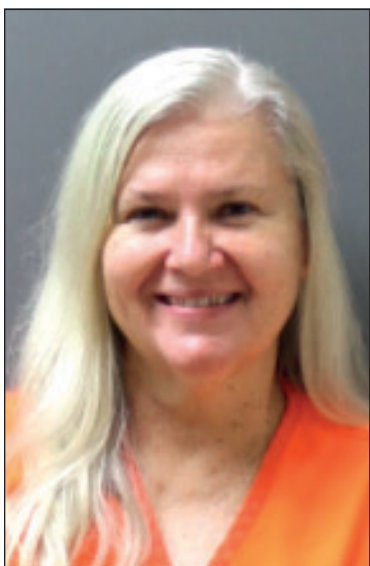
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WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2020  
Blooming Prairie, Minnesota

## SNAKING INTO NEW BUSINESS

STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

An 8-foot Boa constrictor wraps itself around Barry Benjamin of Owatonna just after it finished eating a 5-pound rabbit at Benjamin's new pet store last Wednesday morning. Benjamin, who has been breeding animals since he 5 years old, recently opened Happy Tails Pet Store in the Medford Outlet Center. See page B1 for a story on Benjamin's new venture.

## RIESS PLEADS GUILTY



Lois Riess

### Judge hands down life without parole

BY RICK BUSSLER  
PUBLISHER

In an extraordinary court hearing that took place in the auditorium of a high school, accused killer Lois Riess admitted her guilt Aug. 11, bringing an end to the nearly 2½ year saga that began outside of Blooming Prairie.

Riess appeared in person with an orange jump suit and handcuffed in the front for the hearing at Kasson-Mantorville High School, a move that came about because of Dodge County's small courtroom and concerns over COVID-19.

SEE RIESS PLEADS, A4

"What I did was an unpardonable crime. Solitude is forever. I feel I deserve this. I will have no reprieve."

**Lois Riess**  
Convicted Murderer



STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

With her head buried in her lap, Lois Riess leaves in a sheriff's transport vehicle Aug. 11 from Kasson-Mantorville High School where she pleaded guilty to killing her husband, David, in March 2018 outside of Blooming Prairie. The sheriff's office transported her to the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Shakopee where she will spend the rest of her life. The judge ordered her to life in prison without the chance of parole.

## Uniqueness in a COVID election County's primary turnout at 13%



STAFF PHOTO BY RICK BUSSLER

With protective masks in place, Alexis Weinzetl, left, and Sue Rypka go over voter records at the Clinton Falls precinct on Primary Election Day Aug. 11. Like all precincts, Clinton Falls installed Plexiglass for when voters came in to sign in. Clinton Falls also added an extra twist of hanging a clear plastic shower curtain for extra protection. Voter turnout around the county was 13.47% for the primary.

BY RICK BUSSLER  
PUBLISHER

It certainly will go down as one for the history books.

Election judges navigated through their first ever COVID-19 primary election on Aug. 11. With face mask in place, Sue Rypka monitored the polling activities at Clinton Falls. And she came up with a rather unique way to keep herself and voters safe while coming out to the polls.

Rypka purchased an inexpensive clear plastic shower curtain to provide protection between the judges and voters. In addition to the curtain, the precinct also had a smaller clear Plexiglass where voters signed in.

"People were laughing at me," Rypka related about her shower curtain invention. "It wasn't a real big investment—\$1 a piece," she said, noting she actually got the idea from watching TV.

But when it comes to safety during a pandemic, it's no laughing matter. "I'm glad we got the equipment to help protect us from the public," said Rypka.

SEE UNIQUENESS IN A COVID, A8

## Fair Fest shrinks down, scales back to drive-in event

BY RICK BUSSLER  
PUBLISHER

More than a few times last week Steele County Fair manager Scott Kozelka muttered under his breath that putting on a fair is easier than dealing with a condensed event to satisfy people wanting to get their fix of fair food.

After announcing plans a few weeks ago to host a Fair Fest with 20 food vendors and placing them strategically around the fairgrounds to satisfy social distancing requirements due to COVID-19, fair officials ran into a major snag

SEE FAIR FEST, A5

## Corky's Classic strikes out against COVID

BY RICK BUSSLER  
PUBLISHER

The early bird is usually known to get the worm. But in the case of Corky's Early Bird Softball Classic, well, they're out of luck this year.

Last week organizers of the popular national



SEE CORKY'S CLASSIC, A5

\$1.00 | Volume 129, No. 4



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### AREA DEATHS

Gordon Sommer, 85, Owatonna

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