

## Ely Echo Editorial

### Blueberry decision seemed rushed

A decision by the Ely Chamber of Commerce board of directors to cancel this year's Blueberry/Art Festival seemed rushed and could have been delayed.

The announcement came over 100 days from the July 24 start of the three day event, Ely's largest tourist attraction each year. Thousands of people flood the community and businesses cite that weekend as being the one that pays the bills and helps keep them afloat through the rough winters we have here.

The coronavirus pandemic has had a worldwide impact, no doubt, and has been devastating in Ely economically but not medically. Through a stroke of luck, social distancing or the grace of God, our hospital has not been overrun or our clinic taxed to provide services.

So far the opposite has been the case. The clinic had to send word out this week that they are open for business. Our hospital has also been hurt by a drop in patients utilizing services including physical therapy, cardiac rehab and infusions and chemotherapy.

This is the result of a one-size fits all solution to a problem. None of us knows what the future holds but we do know that as of today, the state of Minnesota has largely avoided a predicted coronavirus surge.

There have been a total of 87 deaths in the

state through Wednesday. Of those just 22 were not in nursing home or assisted living settings. It's clear the state as a whole has not been affected to the degree predicted by our governor.

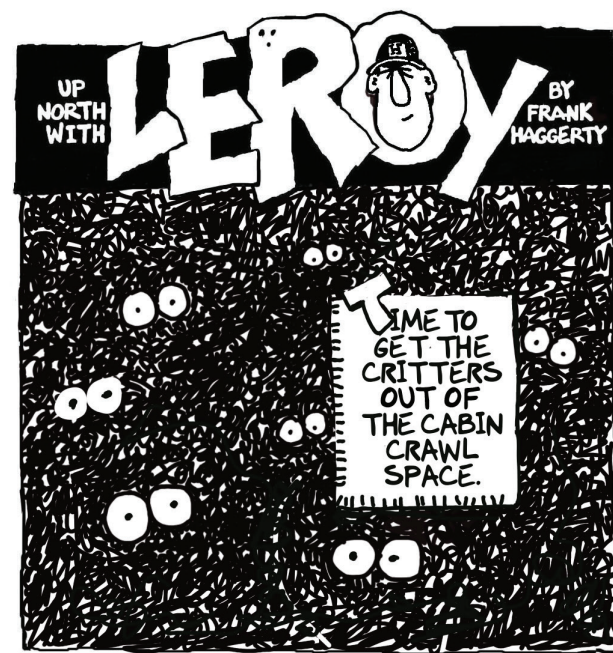
With that in mind, a decision to cancel at this point is premature and should be revisited and reversed. Planning can continue and there can even be notice provided to vendors that there is a possibility of a postponement or cancellation of the event.

Ely businesses, many of which are only open for the summer months, are already suffering under the closures ordered by Gov. Walz. Some may not reopen. Knowing that they won't have their biggest weekend of the year is hardly an incentive to roll out the welcome mat.

Our fragile tourism economy cannot afford the loss of the Blueberry/Art Festival. Even with the financial assistance being offered by the federal and state government, there is no way to plug that hole.

We don't believe this is an either or scenario where lockdown is the only answer to maintaining public health.

Take some more time, take emotion out of the equation and give our businesses, their employees and our community as a whole a fighting chance.



## Letters

...please contact our agency if we can assist your businesses or community

To the Editor:

In very short order, our region entered the uncharted territory of a global pandemic. The world's fight against the coronavirus has directly affected every region of our nation, including northeastern Minnesota. Our businesses, schools, communities, people of every age, health care systems and governments have been impacted and will likely continue to be impacted over the weeks and months ahead.

Some businesses continue to operate and provide essential services, while some have temporarily closed to help stop the spread. Some people are teleworking, while some continue to report to the frontlines. Students and teachers have embarked on a new mission of distance learning. Each of us has adjusted to major changes in our personal and professional daily lives.

I am so impressed by the stories I hear of how the region's businesses and communities are responding. They are remaining calm, professional and focused on adjusting to an unprecedented time in our region, our state and our nation. Our agency's support to the region's communities, businesses and workforce may grow and evolve in the

weeks and months ahead. I am completely confident that we are up for the challenge.

Please contact our agency if we can assist your business or community through our grant or loan programs, or if you need help connecting with other state and federal resources. We are here and want to help your business or community as it perseveres through COVID-19.

• Business Loans and Assistance: Email Scott Sundvall [scott.sundvall@state.mn.us](mailto:scott.sundvall@state.mn.us).

• Development & Commercial Infrastructure, Commercial Redevelopment: Email Chris Ismil [chris.ismil@state.mn.us](mailto:chris.ismil@state.mn.us).

• Building and Commercial Sites: Email Janelle Greschner [janelle.greschner@state.mn.us](mailto:janelle.greschner@state.mn.us).

• Broadband: Email Whitney Ridlon [whitney.ridlon@state.mn.us](mailto:whitney.ridlon@state.mn.us).

• Residential Redevelopment, Culture & Tourism, Workforce Development: Email Danae Beaudette [danae.beaudette@state.mn.us](mailto:danae.beaudette@state.mn.us).

I wish you all the very best and thank you for the role you play in our region's economic and social landscape.

Mark Phillips, Commissioner, Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation

...I have doubts about their ability to finance reconstruction and maintenance of the building

To the Editor

The owners of the Community Center are seeking an extension of nine years to bring their plan to fruition. I recommend that the City Council not grant the extension. I have doubts about their ability to finance reconstruction and maintenance of the building.

More importantly, I think the historic repurposing of building by the community can better serve Ely.

The K America Foundation is a tax-exempt organization that does not and will not ever pay property taxes to Ely.

The Community Center is an extraordinary valuable building in an excellent location. If properly repurposed, it could continue its role as an icon to our community. Moreover, it can significantly add to Ely's tax base on a sustainable basis, perhaps for forty years or more. The additional tax revenue would enable the City Council to lower Ely resident taxes

and/or permit the Council to create or improve amenities for Ely citizens.

It is estimated that if the building were repurposed for apartments or condominiums and retain the full range of historical Art Deco artifacts, it might cost about four million dollars. Couple this amount with the value of existing building and land, the total value is likely to make an attractive project worthy of private financing and, at a time when interest rates are historically low.

The Twin Cities has developers who have restored old structures to meet modern day uses. They could provide a turn-key repurposing construction of the Community Center.

Alternatively, the Ely area has talented people and institutions with the expertise to design, build, market and finance the revival of the Community Center.

Gerry Snyder  
Ely

... deadlier economic nosedive we have begun, we must end the lockdowns

Editor:

Where we are on Easter Sunday 2020. In order to look ahead we must first see where we are and how we got there. We are in a perfect storm within a vicious circle.

Apparently, COVID-19 originated in China. Like all totalitarian and communist governments, the Chinese leadership's primary concern is with protecting itself; thus, that government's actions gave the virus a head start in spreading across the globe.

People in our government made a series of mistakes, including inadequate preparation, quarantining kids first rather than higher-risk groups, quarantining "non-essential workers," and going even further into debt with what can only be a first stimulus of \$2 trillion.

The federal government

encouraged social distancing and state governors ordered lockdowns in order to stop the spread of the virus. Those efforts were futile if, as reported, a very high percentage of asymptomatic people had already transmitted the virus before we knew it was here; we couldn't "outrun" this as a federal official said on Feb. 27; and if the virus was continuing to spread faster than we could track it.

The amount of "bad math" people were relying on to make decisions is shocking. Models were bad; there was no baseline to start with for tracking the spread; and many people who had not died from the virus were listed as such, including many who may have died because their lungs were damaged by ventilators or from other underlying causes.

It looks like many deaths could have been prevented by preparation, moving to quarantine and provide treatment for higher-risk groups first, and reining in public fear.

The media continues the practice of creating sensational headlines and reporting as fast as possible. This is as much our fault as theirs, because we have developed the short attention spans and addictions to getting everything we want right now which have led to those practices. For various reasons, the media fully supported the effort to stop the spread of the virus. As a result, they panicked the herd.

Everything we did to stop the spread was a threat to the economy, where the financial threat is not as important as the "people threat." We have already

passed the point where the coming Greater Depression, as it's being described, will cause far more suffering and deaths than COVID-19 ever could have, even if every American had become infected and the virus had a much higher mortality rate.

The storm is quieting. But we are still caught in a vicious circle we cannot get out of unless we risk the appearance of doing something which may not help to stop the spread. Everyone believes the one thing we must do is to stop the spread of the virus. But to get out of the much deadlier economic nosedive we have begun, we must end the lockdowns now. We cannot wait, because the longer we wait the harder it becomes to pull out of the nosedive.

Terry A. Larson  
Alexandria, MN

## Lake County: Federal officials OK Boundary Waters reappraisal

by Teri Cadeau  
Duluth News Tribune

The new appraisal of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) is set to begin this fall.

Representatives from Lake, St. Louis and Cook Counties held a conference call with Stephen Censky, deputy secretary of the Department of Agriculture; Vicki Christiansen, chief of the U.S. Forest Service; and U.S. Rep. Pete Stabauer, R-Hermantown, to discuss the new appraisal.

The meeting on Monday, April 6 was originally intended to be in-person, but plans changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lake County administrator Matt Huddleston said he felt the call went well.

"Everyone on the call did

well on their parts and tried to communicate our biggest issues with the highest and best use. The last survey was very rigid and limited, but I hope they're going to be more creative and innovative with this process," he said.

Currently, the U.S. Forest Service appraises the BWCAW every 10 years and issues Lake, Cook and St. Louis counties payments-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILT) at three-quarters of 1% of the value of the land annually. The 2018 appraisal was rejected by Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue in late December after the three counties issued complaints. The 2018 appraisal valued an acre of BWCAW land at roughly \$500. This would have reduced PILT payments drastically in each county.

Lake County Board chair Rich Sve and member Rick Goutermont participated in the call with Huddleston and said they were encouraged by the responses from the officials.

"I was very impressed by the response we got. There was no stalling or saying, 'We'll check into it,'" Goutermont said. "It was, 'We hear you and we're going to move forward.'"

Federal officials asked the county to forward all the information presented during the hour-long call to their offices to help as they prepare the request for proposal for the new appraisal.

Sve said he felt the officials understood the impact the prior appraisal made.

"They said we'd have an opportunity to present to

the appraisers prior to the process, and that showed me they were serious," Sve said. "They were generous with their time, and I appreciated that we were able to get as high up the ladder as we could for this conversation."

The Lake County Board also discussed more work that could be done to help them get their points across. Board member Rick Hogenon asked if Geographic Information Systems (GIS) could be used to create a mock-up of what the Boundary Waters area would look like today if developments were continued when the Thye-Blatnik Act was created in the 1960s. Other board members agreed it was worth looking into.



## From the miscellaneous drawer

by Anne Swenson

No doubt it is important to stay in touch with family and friends. I prefer email for this, since I am not a Facebook fan or member. It seems to allow more personal info than I care to share.

Subscribers also contact me through email and it's good to hear from folks who have become friends over the past 40 years or so. And it's good to know of Betty M. and others like her who are preparing for another tourist season, whatever it is.

I'm not in the office as much as I used to be, so any and all contacts are welcomed.

Staying sequestered in London, my niece and her husband greet me through Skype. The last two attempts

though, have been spotty and often what is said disappears, even without the visual sight.

We all have so many projects which could be accomplished, but the motivation to do so may be lacking as my friend Linda noted.

I hope you are shopping locally to support the few businesses that are open, especially the grocery stores. Restaurants need our support as well and take-out food is a great choice to continuously choosing frozen food.

Truly, I love Ely and its people - even its quirks and quarrels. For the most part I can recall past connections which were less confrontational and more friendly.

We evolve, we learn, we re-ex-

amine our beliefs and make changes. That is as it should be.

Take care and stay safe, and keep your mind open to embrace change.

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In the Ely Echo for April 21, 1980, 40 years ago, the headlines were:

• Jackpine Bob accuses Dems and GOP major candidates are afraid to debate;

• School Board protests aid cut-backs

• Young military policewoman Debbie Skogen likes past, looks toward future;

• Reserve unit for Ely considered;

• USFS moves permit station.

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