

CARLTON COUNTY BOARD

County jail option hinges on school consolidation

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The Carlton county board will join a list of those waiting on decisions regarding consolidation between the Wrenshall and Carlton school districts.

The Carlton school board has been drafting a letter to the county regarding the possible sale of its high school property, which sits next to the county jail. The county board approached the district with the idea of using school property to build a new jail. It told the district earlier this year that it wanted an answer about the availability of the school land by next week.

That won't happen. The school district remains in consolidation limbo with Wrenshall and it could remain so for at least nine months. In a letter being drafted to the county for school board approval Monday night, chairwoman LaRae Lehto wrote that while the district remained willing to sell the property, she couldn't see a deal sealed until the results of an expected referendum in August regarding building costs for improvements in school buildings in a consolidated district.

But district residents and administration may have a pretty good idea in February of where things are headed. Both school districts are going over the contents of a survey

Board to set budget, tax levy

The Carlton County Board of Commissioners will vote on the 2019 property tax levy (payable in 2020) along with the 2020 budget at its 4 p.m. Dec. 23 meeting. The Truth-in-Taxation public hearing was held Dec. 3. The meeting will also include hearings on the proposed ordinance to raise the age to purchase tobacco at 4:30 p.m. and the bonding program for a new Barnum garage at 5 p.m.

expected to reach mailboxes in early January. Results of the survey, which will ask if residents if they want two-site consolidation and the costs associated with shoring up the schools at Wrenshall and South Terrace, should be a good predictor of how a referendum might go over.

If the survey results are unfavorable, Carlton would have to go to an undefined "Plan B." If voters have an appetite for consolidation and the plan for a high school and middle school in Wrenshall and an elementary in Carlton, the Carlton district could abandon the high school site and sell it to the county. But that too, would take time, as the construction and consolidation details would not allow students out of the high school building until at least the spring of 2021.

The county has its own "hoops to go through," before it can be sure about the prospects of a new jail, said commissioner Gary Peterson. The county board would like to follow in the footsteps of other counties

in the state that use a sales tax to help pay for new facilities. The legislature would need to approve use of the sales tax, Peterson said. There would also need to be a referendum to approve the tax, meaning the county could be on a similar timeline with the school district when it comes to ramping up toward a vote.

The two school districts are lobbying into the Minnesota Legislature term that begins in February to acquire nearly 50 percent in aid for the nearly \$40 million in estimated costs toward consolidation and school renovations.

Lehto said in her letter to the county that if the districts get good news from the legislature by May, it would be another step toward formal sale discussion. "At that point, we would be able to develop more specific potential timelines for the school construction projects," Lehto wrote in a draft of the letter to the county discussed at Thursday's Committee of the Whole meeting. It could include a tentative date for vacating

the high school property, she wrote. Any final negotiations would have to take place after a potential August referendum.

If the consolidation falls through, as it has in past efforts, Lehto said it wouldn't necessarily mean the district would keep its high school in the current location. The aging property has not been part of long-range planning discussions among board members, who have realized that without consolidation, a Plan B needs to be implemented. "While other scenarios may also involve the eventual closure of the [high school], we are not yet committed to any plan and therefore we cannot commit at this time to an absolute intent to sell the property to you," Lehto wrote in the draft.

The county isn't the only body waiting on how consolidation talks will affect the future.

Students are also in limbo as discussion on further Carlton-Wrenshall cooperative activities have apparently stalled. After successful forays into cooperative agreements for cross country and football, there had been talk of combining for track this spring. That idea is on hold.

"Carlton is not interested in pulling any more activities together until there is word that there is going to be consolidation," said Wrenshall superintendent

Kim Belcastro. At a meeting about a track pairing, Carlton officials indicated they couldn't commit to anything until the August referendum results.

For now, the only thing sure about the consolidation is that surveys will be out in a few weeks and results could be known by Feb. 10. "This should be able to give more direction on what the communities are willing to support financially and if there is support for consolidation," Belcastro said.

Other news from the Nov. 25 county meeting:

- The Carlton County board of commissioners approved a formal request of \$165,950 in disaster aid from the state for losses suffered in the Sept. 30 flood. Preliminary estimates are that 75 percent of the loss will be covered by disaster assistance. New electronic filing, enabling a GPS lock-in on damage sites, smoothed the information processing, county officials said. Five townships in the county were affected by swollen rivers and creeks.

- Northland Construction was the successful bidder for a bridge construction project on County State Aid Highway 1 just north of the intersection with CSAH 61 in Esko. The bid of \$1,095,028.48 was 4.44 percent more than the engineer's estimate.

- Carlton County and

the city of Moose Lake have come to an agreement for prosecutorial services beginning Jan. 1. The county attorney's office expects a yearly revenue stream of \$16,000, based on expected cases it will handle.

- The last privately owned parcel on Kettle Lake in the Corona bog area southeast of Cromwell will be purchased by Pheasants Forever from the Mowers family and gifted to the DNR for inclusion in the Kettle Lake Wildlife Management Area.

- The board also approved the purchase of a one-acre site in Kalevala Township, known as the old site for the Mansikka School. The land will be added to the Firebird Wildlife Management Area. County board approval is needed when any land with wetlands for wildlife purposes is purchased.

- BKV gave its final report for the jail study. Sheriff Kelly Lake said it is not the approved final report, which will be released later. Use of treatment plans for both men and women, on- and off-site, are being discussed as a future approach. The staff of BKV said "We have seen the local county staff really dig into the issues and we commend them for helping make a plan to implement in the local justice area."

County reporter Dan Reed contributed to this story.

CLOQUET SCHOOL BOARD

Board nixes contract, says it's too costly

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Cloquet School Board members sent Superintendent Michael Cary back to the bargaining table with the top candidate for MARSS/student data information specialist at Monday's meeting.

Board member Nate Sandman — whose wife, Nicole, resigned from the Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System position to work as secretary to the principal at the high school — said he felt the insurance and salary arrangement was too generous, and expressed concern that the salary steps were on the high side.

The MARSS specialist works with student data and reports, including

October 1 enrollments, December 1 child counts, and average daily membership, all important reports that can directly impact funding for the school district.

Board member Duane Buytaert agreed, and both men expressed concern about setting a precedent with the contract that would create problems with other staff negotiations in the future.

"It seems like a first-year position shouldn't be given 25 days of vacation," Buytaert said. "I would like to start applying for jobs and in Year One I get 25 days of vacation."

Buytaert also expressed concern about the candidate getting approximately \$9,000 above and beyond the previous MARSS specialist salary because the



Members of the Cloquet High School Madrigals vocal group sang Christmas carols in at least three different languages for Cloquet School board members and district staff before Monday's board meeting. Pictured, from left, are Lily Goebel, Cassandra Neumann, Lydia Stone and Olivia Macaulay. Jana Peterson / Pine Knot News

district wouldn't be paying for her insurance. (Just over \$9,300 is the district's approximate share of a single person's insurance.)

"I don't think we've done that before, where we've offset someone not taking insurance by this much money," Buytaert said. "I think we probably have some staff currently working for the district who in lieu of insurance ... would

jump at \$9,000."

Cary said he'd negotiated a step lower after previous feedback from the board, but it wasn't enough to gain the board's approval.

Buytaert and Sandman voted "no" to the contract, while Board Chair Ted Lammi and board member Dave Battaglia voted "yes," meaning the vote did not pass. Board members Jim Crowley and Hawk Huard

were absent.

All the board members and Cary agreed that the person was an excellent candidate, but the board asked that Cary bring the contract more in line with other employee benefit packages. If the top candidate didn't want to negotiate further, Cary said he would begin talks with the next favorite candidate.

In other matters Monday:

- Superintendent Cary told the board that e-learning days will not be an option this year for snow days in the Cloquet School District, but staff and administration are working toward making e-learning days part of the plan for the 2020-21 school year. State law says the district must communicate e-learning days at the start of the school year, Cary explained.

- Board members voted to terminate the contract with Snowmen, Inc. because the contractor failed to plow at Churchill prior to school starting on Dec. 3, causing school to be canceled at the elementary for a second day while the rest of the district went back to school. The board awarded the contract to 3D Construction instead, which already has the contracts for the high school and middle school.

The Cloquet School Board won't meet a second time this month because of the holiday break. The board's next meeting is set for Jan. 13.

CARLTON/WRENSHALL SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION

Consolidation survey primer offered

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It's 20 minutes that could change the future of two school districts and the children they serve.

That's about how long residents, staff and parents in the Carlton and Wrenshall school districts should set aside to complete their copies of a community survey regarding consolidation talks and facility plans between the two districts. Copies of the survey were mailed to school district residents and any parents/guardians of students who open-enroll into either district. Staff received the survey electronically this week.

The seven-page document covers many things, starting with the "why" of the survey: which is basically because the two school boards want reliable community feedback "that reflects the will of the taxpayers" before proceeding (or not) with possible plans to consolidate. It also includes background, facility needs, costs, tax information and timing for a possible consolidation. And, of

course, there are numerous questions about the "how" of consolidation: close Carlton's secondary school? Reopen the swimming pool in Wrenshall?

Wrenshall resident Tony Sheda attended Monday's Wrenshall school board meeting with his own list of questions about the survey.

No. 1 on his list was why the survey talks about state aid for consolidation — which could reduce the cost to local taxpayers by as much as 46 percent — as if it were going to happen.

Sheda pointed out that getting \$20 million or more from the state "is a longshot" and asked the board why it doesn't give people the costs without state aid.

Board member Matt Laveau was frank.

"If the 46 percent is not a viable option, we're not doing it," he told Sheda.

"There's no way any of us will support it if we don't get the 46 percent," board member Janaki Fisher-Merritt added. "I wouldn't vote for it."

Sheda also asked why anyone other than taxpayers in the two

school districts is being asked to fill out the survey — i.e., parents of open-enrolled students and teachers who don't live there — since they won't be paying the increased taxes that would follow.

Board member Janaki Fisher-Merritt explained that the districts want to know if the plan has staff support and what size a consolidated district would be.

"Will we have 800 students K-12 or 1200 if all the Carlton students [that open-enroll elsewhere] come back?" Fisher-Merritt said. "And there might be some faculty that say 'This is not what I signed up for.'"

When it comes to answering the question of how much people are willing to pay in taxes, Fisher-Merritt said consulting firm School Perceptions has the ability to separate taxpayer responses from others.

"We want to know what will pass," he said. "If you won't support an increase, we want to know. If we'd done this a few years ago when the vote [failed] 75/25 percent, we wouldn't have put that out."

Each printed copy also

contains a unique survey access number that people can use if they would prefer to answer the questions online. People can also reach out to either district to request additional survey copies for other adult members of the household to fill out or additional online codes.

The survey results go directly to consulting firm School Perceptions and are anonymous. No one from either school will get to see the individual answers; rather, the consulting firm will organize and compile the results.

Laveau stressed that people should answer the surveys, whether they support consolidation or not.

"We'd much rather people fill the survey out than they don't," Laveau said, pointing out that the trend in surveys is to get under 20 percent returned, but Wrenshall usually sees 90 percent of voters at a school referendum vote. "If people don't support it and they fill out a survey, they might just save themselves a trip to the voting booth."

As of Monday, Wrenshall superintendent Kim Belcastro said

Wrenshall board elects leadership

In the annual organizational meeting for the Wrenshall school board held Monday, Michelle Blanchard was elected the new school board chairwoman, while Jack Eudy was elected vice chairman. Deb Washenesky is the new board clerk, and Janaki Fisher-Merritt the new board treasurer. The Pine Knot News is the Wrenshall school district's new official newspaper.

133 surveys had already been turned in, according to School Perceptions.

Surveys are supposed to be completed by Jan. 27. The two school boards will get the results on Feb. 10, and the results will be discussed publicly at a Feb. 11 joint board meeting at South Terrace Elementary School.

Have questions? Carlton school district residents can call 218-384-4225, ext. 114 and Wrenshall school district residents can call 218-384-4274, ext. 2001.

Fire district ...

Continued from Page 1

CAFD also provides ambulance service to a state-mandated area of more than 250 square miles in Carlton County and southern St. Louis County.

The first move in the reorganization of the district this year will be to hire a new firefighter/EMT (emergency medical technician) for each of the district's three shifts.

Secondly, rather than having all of its full-time staff operate out of Station 1 in Cloquet (the east side), the fire district will begin staffing Station 2 in Perch Lake (west side) with four people from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. each day.

The fire chief explained that call volumes in that area are highest during the daytime hours, plus at night most of the district's 34 paid-on-call (POC) staff are home from their full-time jobs and available to respond to calls, he said. And rather than moving four full-time staff members from Cloquet to Perch Lake every day, the plan is to move two people over plus schedule two POC staff.

"We're hoping to have two paramedics and two firefighter/EMTs there," the chief said, explaining that it should be easier to hire a firefighter/EMT because the educational requirements are less for the basic life support (180-hour course) than for a paramedic's advanced life support training (two-year degree).

Hiring is a big issue for the CAFD and fire departments across the country, Schroeder said in an interview last week.

He pointed out that some calls don't require paramedic level care which is part of the reason they're going to hire EMTs. The other reason is they've had firefighter/paramedic spots open for over a year with no applicants.

Fire district taxes go up 9.1 percent

Following a public hearing on Dec. 12, board members of the Cloquet Area Fire District adopted a 2020 budget of \$5,432,400.

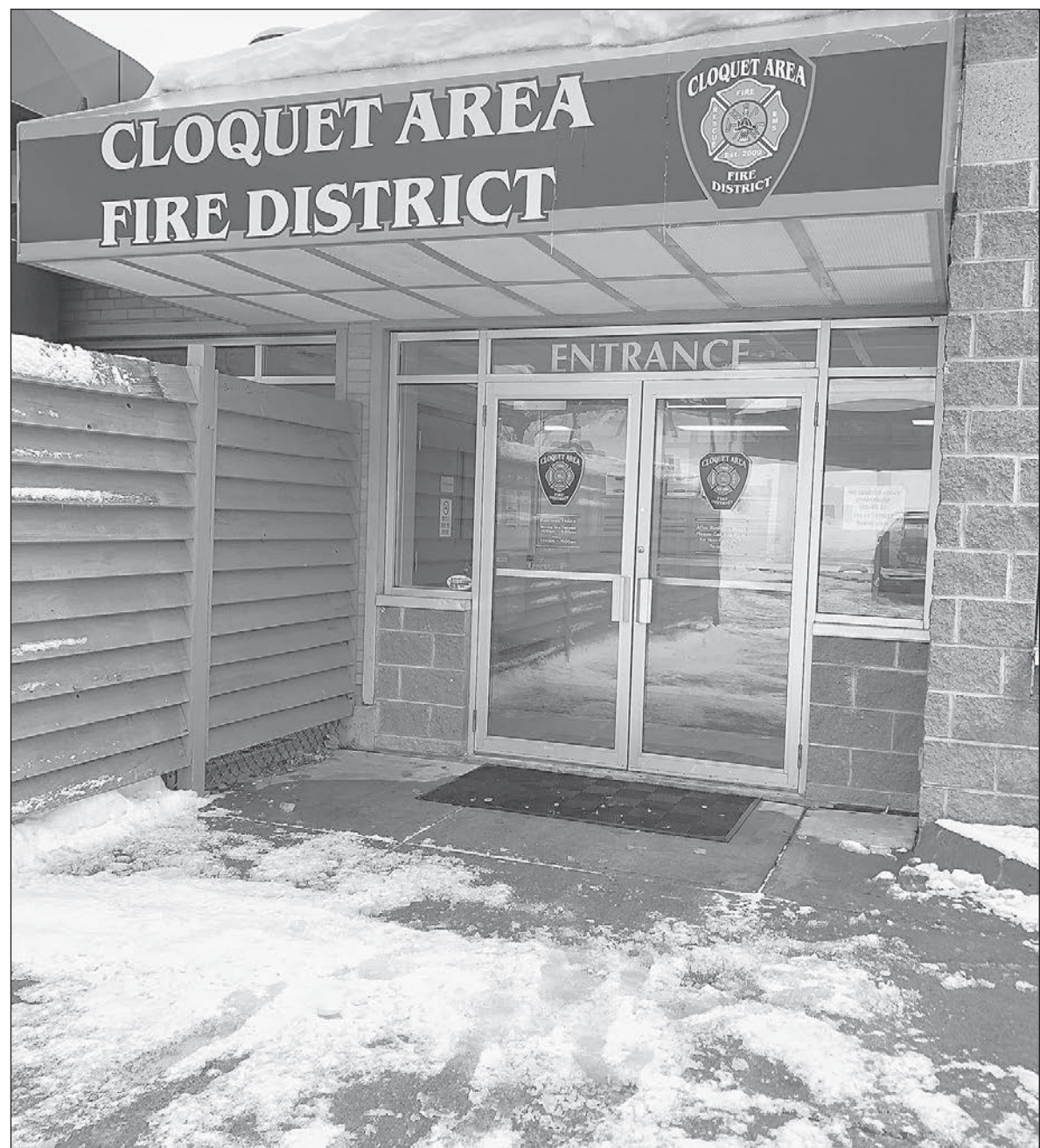
Some 55 percent of the fire district revenue is funded by local property taxes, which means the CAFD 2020 tax levy will be \$2,851,892, an increase of 9.1 percent from 2019. The other 45 percent is funding through user fees and other intergovernmental revenue. CAFD Chief Kevin Schroeder said the increase will fund the replacement of two ambulances for almost \$700,000 (due to age and maintenance issues), and to pay for staffing Station 2 in Perch Lake.

"It's an efficiency issue. An example is we're taking mental health transfers from Cloquet hospital to places like Fargo or I don't need to paramedic-level providers on that call," he said, pointing out that the district will save money and leave its most highly qualified staff in town for 911 calls that might require their skills.

Although a new building is not part of the plan for 2020, it's still on the table.

Schroeder said long-term goals still include combining Station 1 in Cloquet and Station 3 in Scanlon into one new facility that will better meet the space and training needs of the fire district, but that is further into the future, he said. Other plans including merging the Brevator and Perch Lake stations into one, and eventually creating a north station in East Brevator.

"We are just beginning the process of revisiting that whole project," he said, regarding previ-



There are many changes afoot for the Cloquet Area Fire District as its calls for service continue to rise. A new building is not in the plans for 2020 but it remains a longterm goal. The district map is shifting to improve staffing. *Jana Peterson / Pine Knot News*

ous plans to build a new \$10-\$12 million building. "With the change in delivery model and the addition of Brevator Township, we need to go back and find out 'does the plan we had still work for us?'"

He pointed to his office in what used to be the police department side of the public safety

building at 508 Cloquet Ave.

"Although we gained some office space, this does not solve our facility issues," he said.

He explained that the station was built for a time when the fire department was running four-person crews versus the eight- or nine-person crews of today. It is overcrowded and there

-is no room to expand because of the hill and homes behind it and Cloquet Avenue in front.

"We've been able to reduce redundancy in equipment, things we don't have to buy again, over the 10 years the district's been in existence, but we are just starting to reduce the inefficiency in facilities."

Wrenshall, Carlton home in on state aid

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Wrenshall and Carlton school district officials continue to prepare for a possible consolidation vote this year. Last Friday, the two superintendents and board members met with local legislators to kick off what is hoped to be a successful lobbying effort when the Minnesota Legislature opens Feb. 11.

That's the same day the districts will release the results of a survey put out last month to ask residents and parents of students about their support for a consolidated district and the costs associated with it to shore up district campuses.

Rep. Mike Sundin, DFL-Esko, and Sen. Jason Rarick, R-Brook Park, told the school representatives that they would only go

to bat for consolidation money only if they know the community supports the idea.

"The good news is that we will know what the community thinks through the survey," Superintendent Kim Belcastro said this week. She said she's heard good things from people since the survey went out and a good response is expected.

Representatives from Ehlers, a financial advisory group that has been hired to assist the districts in planning and managing the consolidation, were also at last week's meeting.

The districts are trying to leverage about 46 percent of its consolidation costs through a bill in the legislature that would allow what was designed as emergency funding for disaster to apply for consolidation as well. Fixes and

additions at the elementary school at South Terrace and the Wrenshall school are expected to run from \$32 million to \$40 million.

The options for district residents were spelled out in detail in the survey, including the possibility that state funding could be used to ease the tax burden.

The boards will review the results at regular meetings Feb. 10 and at a joint meeting Feb. 11. If residents back the two-site plan and estimated costs, the districts will seek the funding from the state.

Carlton Superintendent Gwen Carmen said the "aid is critical." The consolidation process would halt if state funding doesn't come.

It's all an intricate dance right now with many moving parts, but clarity should come soon, Belcastro said.

Sundin added another piece to the puzzle by

asking audience member Mark Thell, a county board member, if the consolidation timeline was feasible in Carlton County's plans to acquire Carlton High School for new facilities, including a jail. The county also has to go through the legislature to fund a new jail and the board announced this week that it projects breaking ground in 2022. That would squeeze into the consolidation plan, allowing the schools a year of construction to accommodate students at South Terrace and Wrenshall.

Sundin suggested that the school boards hire a lobbyist to present their plan to legislators in the upcoming session. The superintendents plans to visit St. Paul, and Ehlers will also represent the districts there. Rarick offered assistance in guiding members toward key committee

Carlton principal charged with DWI

The middle and high school principal for the Carlton school district was due in a county court this morning (Jan. 31) facing a driving while impaired charge after a traffic stop in December. Barry Wolff faces two DWI charges in Sherburne County after he was stopped by a deputy on Dec. 27. The arrest complaint says Wolff crossed the centerline and was making wide turns as he drove in Becker Township. He was booked into county jail that night and charged with a fourth-degree DWI, a misdemeanor.

Wolff has continued to work for the school district. Superintendent Gwen Carman said in a statement: "We are looking into the available information and determining whether, given the timing and location of the incident, it impacts his employment with the school district."

— Pine Knot News

chairs and members.

"Bonding is key," Sundin said. "This is going to be driven by the people. What do you want?"

The survey should answer the question. That's what Belcastro is hoping. She wants to be armed with

data to convince lawmakers to allow consolidation funding. "If we can be there with positive survey results, that will weigh heavily," she said.

The deadline to complete the survey was Monday.



Colleen Biskey plays a witch and Jill Hoffman is Snow White's mother in the current play within a play at County Seat Theater Company. *Contributed photo*

Strange 'Snow White' hits stage

Pine Knot News

The County Seat Theater Company's season opener is "Snow White & The Seven Dwarfs as Performed by Professor TJ Barker's Troupe of Theatricals."

Thw master of ceremonies, Professor TJ Barker, and his troupe of traveling theatricals have just arrived at the theater to begin a performance of their spectacular production of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" when they realize something is amiss. Not only has the orchestra not arrived, but also five of the hilarious O'Hanlon brothers have been stricken with food poisoning. Now only ... gasp ... two actors are left to play the dwarfs.

Can Professor Barker rally his troupe and prove that the show can go on?

Follow their madcap theatrical adventure as they take turns acting, puppeteering and becoming the orchestra while performing one of the most beloved fairy tales of all time.

Director Joel Soukkala said it's a story within a story, with a renaissance kind of flavor. He recommends audience members come early, explaining that the actors will be milling around the theater about 15 minutes prior to the start of the show.

"This one act play has so many wonderful elements," Soukkala said. The show features a local cast of 17 actors. "The lights, costumes and characters will keep you mesmerized through the entire story. The scenes move so fast you will probably want to see the show twice just to

see what you missed the first time."

The comedy with music by Ernie Nolan is perfect for families too, and the theater is offering a special rate of \$40 per family. Tickets can be reserved by calling the box office at 218-878-0071 or online at www.countyseattheater.com.

The County Seat Theater Company will present performances at the Encore Performing Arts Center in Cloquet Jan. 31- Feb. 2 and Feb. 6-9. Performances are at 7 p.m. except Sundays and the Saturday, Feb. 8 performances at 2 p.m.

The theater is located in the Encore Performing Arts Center, at 2035 Hwy 33 South (on Frontage Road) in Cloquet.

Raising digital kids is topic of coming film

Pine Knot News

Have you ever wondered how to manage all the technology your kids use? Have you wanted to know what experts recommend and what rules other families are implementing?

Area parents are invited to the Proctor High School auditorium Monday, Feb. 3 to watch "Screenagers," an award-winning film that probes into the vulnerable

corners of family life and depicts messy struggles over social media, video games and academics. The film offers solutions on how parents and others can help kids navigate the digital world. The screening is free and starts at 6 p.m. with doors open at 5:45 p.m.

A discussion with experts will follow the film. Find out more about the movie www.screenagersmovie.com.

We're open!

Come Check out Cloquet's newest affordable housing community. Now accepting applications for 2 and 3 bedroom units

Open House Schedule

Friday, February 7 - 4:00pm-6:00pm
Saturday, February 8 - 10:00am-12:00pm

Drop in for a tour and enter into a drawing just for coming. Apply today with \$35 application fee per adult enter into a bigger drawing.

No cash, check or money order only
Please RSVP to 651-290-6228

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If you have any questions and to RSVP contact
Carlton Lofts at
651-290-6228 or
Carlton.lofts@commonbond.org





Still dancing
their time away
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Consolidation survey: A resounding 'yes'

Process continues
for Carlton, Wrenshall

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Sue Peterson had some choice words about the survey results released this week regarding how residents feel about the possible consolidation of the Carlton and Wrenshall school districts. "Atypical."

"Shocking."
"Surprising."

Peterson works for School Perceptions, the company hired by the school districts to guide the survey. The school boards wanted a clear idea of where residents stood on consolidation and the costs to accomplish it. They want it. And they seem willing to pay for it as well.

An overwhelming number of people who responded to

the survey in January support a consolidated district. Across the board, in age categories and among those who have children in the district and those who don't, 80 percent of respondents want consolidation.

The results were released Tuesday night at a special meeting of the school boards with Peterson from School Perceptions, a company that has performed more than 10,000 surveys for schools

looking to gauge community support for school improvements.

More than 33 percent of the surveys came back — 1,121 — a number that Peterson called "beyond impressive." More than 50 percent of respondents support the costs associated with consolidating, about \$38 million to shore up the South Terrace school in Carlton to create a K-5 school and making room in Wrenshall for middle and high

school classes, including new gyms and an auditorium.

The taste for those costs comes with a caveat — funding from the state. School officials will now head down to the legislative session to lobby for about 40 percent of those costs coming through state bonding. If the bonding doesn't come, both districts have said there will be no consolidation.

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150 YEARS AGO, A CROSSROADS IN HISTORY



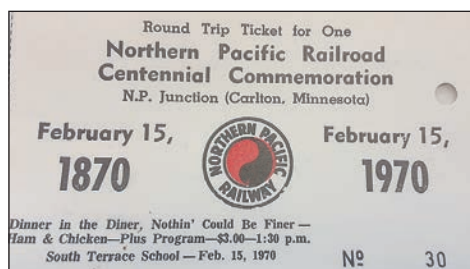
Men from the Northern Pacific Railroad and dignitaries from the region around Duluth joined in a groundbreaking ceremony Feb. 15, 1870, where the NP rail would link with the Lake Superior & Mississippi Railroad at a spot that is about a mile west of Carlton. The rail started here became the third transcontinental rail line in the U.S.

Northern Pacific started in county

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It was supposed to be an "impromptu" act, a quiet ceremony more for employees than the general public. There was likely good reason to keep things on the down-low. While the Northern Pacific Railroad had been buoyed the month before by a cash infusion from Jay Cooke, it really was nowhere near ready to begin the Herculean task of laying a rail line from Lake Superior to the Pacific Ocean.

But word got out. People traveled by rail from Duluth and Superior on the new Lake Superior & Mississippi Rail-



A ticket to a dinner in Carlton in 1970 celebrating 100 years since the famous groundbreaking.

road line that had been cut through the dalles of the St. Louis River. They came from the west and other points in horse-

drawn wagons. Despite the cold and snow, it was estimated that 200 people ended up gathering at a spot just a mile west of today's Carlton for the official Northern Pacific groundbreaking. It was 150 years ago — Feb. 15, 1870.

Officials used a shovel and pick-ax to fill a wheelbarrow full of soil. It was all ceremonial. No real work on the line would begin until well into the summer. Logistics got in the way of a planned first phase of the route to the Red River and Dakota Territory. Surveys of land had to be made.

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Eva Flovick, left, has been battling kidney failure the past year with the help of her mother, Katie Johnson. Contributed photo

Teen pushes on through kidney crisis

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A year ago, they thought the swelling in her face and ankles was caused by allergies. But the allergy shots didn't help. When her face was so swollen she couldn't open her eyes, the emergency room doctor told her to get a second opinion.

It was following that referral — to an allergy specialist — that 15-year-old Eva Flovick and her family found out she had severe kidney disease.

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Nordic skiers break through to state

Read about the historic team on Page 12. See a page honoring the team on Page 24.

Survey ...

Continued from Page 1

It means the next answer in the consolidation puzzle would come by the end of session in May. School Perceptions says the results shown in the survey indicate a high likelihood that a referendum in August would pass.

"This is extremely supportive data," Peterson said. "You've got some time to dig into it although

it's pretty clear."

It means Carlton Superintendent Gwen Carman and Wrenshall Superintendent Kim Belcastro will have some ammunition when lobbying in St. Paul for bonding money. When those two met with Sen. Jason Rarick and Rep. Mike Sundin last month, they were told that the lawmakers would need a strong sense of what taxpayers wanted in order to move a bill through.

"This is an overwhelming re-

sponse," Belcastro said Tuesday.

The survey results are "clear and consistent," Carman said.

The boards are expected to act on the results at regular meetings next week, when a new resolution will be presented to each body acknowledging support to move forward on a consolidation and levy vote in August contingent on bonding from St. Paul.

"We're hearing that we need to move on, do it and get it over with," said Wrenshall board

member Janaki Fisher-Merritt.

He said he had feared the survey could muddy the waters, showing only a slight preference for consolidation. But the numbers for consolidation are clear, he said, as is the appetite for raising taxes to do it.

"This is so helpful," he said.

"We have no interest in a referendum that won't pass."

"We still have to come together," Belcastro said, referring to board members being all in

for the next steps in the process.

"Tuesday, we'll know."

The Wrenshall board meets at 6 p.m. Monday. Carlton meets at 7 p.m. Tuesday.

Peterson said the boards are key in educating the public leading up to the election, even with the strong support shown in the survey.

"There's a likelihood of success," she said. "Educate the community. This data correlates with what you'd see in an election."

Eva ...

Continued from Page 1

Things moved quickly, and not in a good direction. By December, only nine months later, Eva's illness had progressed to stage 5: kidney failure.

On Monday the Cloquet High School freshman had both kidneys removed at the University of Minnesota Masonic Children's Hospital in Minneapolis.

Her mother, Katie Johnson, said Eva was feeling better Tuesday after the four-hour surgery the day before. They don't know how long Eva will be in the hospital, hopefully just a week or so, or how often she will have to return for dialysis.

But her mom is hoping Eva won't be without a kidney for long.

On Tuesday, Johnson was having a biopsy done on her own kidney, one of the final steps to getting approval as a donor.

"If there's nothing wrong, then I can be her donor," Johnson said in an interview Sunday, before the family traveled to prepare for Eva's surgery. "I've been doing a lot of testing the last two months. Hopefully we will know next week."

Mom is hoping that she can be the answer to getting her teenager back to good health, and able to enjoy going to concerts — she adores Taylor Swift — and movies, painting, "anything arts and crafts" and just hanging out with friends and family.

And school. Eva tried to start high school like any other freshman, but found she couldn't finish the first quarter. She finished as a homebound student.

"She's been a 4.0 student all year," Johnson said. "The teachers and the school have been wonderful. The high school has been very supportive. Eva probably would have been a lot more stressed about school if it wasn't for how good they are."

Flovick said she wanted to acknowledge the two nurses at the high school and all her teachers with "a special thank you" to her homebound teacher Lance Horvat.

She also thanked friends, family and community members for their love and



SAT, FEB 22 AT 2:00 PM - 6:00 PM

IT'S ALL ABOUT EVA! A benefit for Eva Flovick

Want to help?

Family Tradition and Eva Flovick's aunts and uncles are spearheading a fundraiser for Eva 2-6 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 22 on the main floor of The Jack, 1016 Cloquet Ave. They will be serving their signature coney and chicken salad along with chips and cookies. They ask for a \$10 donation for adults or \$5 for kids under 12. There will also be a silent auction and raffle as well as a bake sale. To donate an item or certificate for the auction, contact Melissa Johnson at melissarae48@yahoo.com. There's also a GoFundMe page. Search for "It's all about Eva" at www.gofundme.com to donate.

support.

Diagnosis

Eva Flovick was diagnosed with two kidney disorders in March 2019: nephrotic syndrome — a kidney disorder that causes the body to pass too much protein — and focal segmental glomerulosclerosis, a disease in which scar tissue forms on the parts of the kidneys that filter waste from the blood. FSGS can cause nephrotic syndrome, and some of the symptoms include swelling in legs, ankles and around the eyes, weight gain from extra fluid, foamy urine and high fat levels in the blood.

"Instead of the body releasing your urine, when the kidneys aren't doing their job, the fluid stays in your body," Johnson said. "It's not filtering out what it doesn't need. For Eva, it showed in her ankles, face, legs and stomach. She

would be out of breath a lot because of the disease and the fluid in her body; sometimes we would bring her in and she would have fluid in her lungs."

At the worst, Eva was retaining so much fluid that she weighed in more than 150 pounds — now she is down to 119, thanks to dialysis.

But dialysis isn't easy either. The process of filtering waste and extra chemicals and fluid from one's blood can take hours. Since December, it has meant going to Minneapolis for treatment three days a week, four hours each time, Johnson said. Eva can't get dialysis in Cloquet or Duluth because she is so young.

"They're great," Johnson said of the children's hospital. "She loves it there."

Even if the kidney transplant goes through, her mom said doctors will

have to watch closely in case the scarring of the kidneys comes back. It can be controlled with medicine for some people. She's hoping her daughter will do better with the medicines if doctors catch it sooner. She will also have to take antirejection drugs, even though she and her mother share the same blood type.

Strong support

Her mom said the support following Eva's diagnosis has been amazing.

"Family, friends, community ... people have really been there for her, even some that don't even know her," Johnson said, choking up with emotion for the first time in the interview. "My family has been great. Her friends have been good to her. My friends, everyone's been so great."

Eva's three uncles and four aunts — Katie's siblings Randy, John, Jill,

Kevin and their spouses — have been a huge help. And there's Grandma Margie Johnson, who hosted Eva and her brothers every summer when the family was living in North Carolina for a few years.

John and Sara Johnson have owned the popular Family Tradition restaurant in Cloquet for close to 30 years. Randy and Katie work there, and Eva also works there when she can.

"It really is a family tradition for us," Katie said.

Although they have insurance, the out-of-pocket costs and deductibles add up quickly. To help Katie Johnson cover some of those expenses, her family and friends are organizing a fundraiser and Family Tradition meal at The Jack in downtown Cloquet 2-6 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 22.

People are invited to eat, donate auction items, buy auction or bake sale items, and simply come together in support of Flovick and her family (which also includes her big brothers, Hayden, a junior at CHS, and Cole, age 26).

There's also a GoFundMe page. Search for "It's all about Eva" at www.gofundme.com to donate.

"This will also help her family continue to be able

to be by her side, as they are unable to work while she is receiving medical attention," her aunt Melissa wrote on the page.

Uncle Randy said the community has been great.

"That's one of the nice things about living in a small town," he said, expressing relief Tuesday that the surgery had gone well, and hope that his sister can be a donor.

"Her tests today are the last step," he said.

It's not the first time the Johnson family has been touched by tough times. When Randy was in sixth grade, their dad, a teacher, was paralyzed in a Jeep accident.

"We're pretty good at rallying around," Randy said. They've certainly been there for Eva, who's also been amazing, her mom said, through all the pain and long trips to the Twin Cities area since she was diagnosed, and especially since her kidneys started failing in December.

"For the most part, she doesn't complain, she just deals with it," Johnson said. "You know the days she's not feeling good, she's more quiet. But for the most part, she tries to smile and doesn't want anyone to worry about her."

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CARLTON/WRENSHALL SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION

Boards agree on consolidation plan, sort of

Mike Creger and Jana Peterson
news@pineknotnews.com

Mixed messages

Hagenah said he remains convinced that a one-site option is the way to go and is “not in favor” of what is in the current plan. He then said, “I will go along with the board. I will do whatever it takes to move it forward,” but voted “no” on the resolution.

Lehto said the “two-site plan is not my favorite” but that she does “support the process.”

“I prefer one site at South Terrace,” Karp said, but admitted that the “community has spoken” on the survey with support of two sites. She said she will “move forward.”

The Wrenshall school board wanted the full support of the Carlton school board this week when it comes to the next steps of the school district consolidation process. But some Carlton school board members are still lukewarm about the two-site plan. And that’s despite an overwhelming majority of constituents indicating via a recent survey that they want the districts to consolidate with two school locations, and that they are willing to pay for it.

On Monday, the Wrenshall board approved a resolution that the districts would move forward and lobby the state legislature for aid to help fund facility improvements at South Terrace in Carlton and the school in Wrenshall. A successful effort in St. Paul could lead to state funding that would pay 40 percent of the estimated \$38 million in school improvements. The resolution also called for the planning for the two-site transition leading up to and coming after a potential levy vote in August.

But the Wrenshall board vote came with one condition: that Carlton board members and the superintendent show unanimous support for the two-site consolidation and steps toward it at their meeting on Tuesday.

Wrenshall board member Janaki Fisher-Merritt expressed relief that such a large majority of the survey respondents supported the consolidation plan.

“I think we heard a pretty clear signal on the survey,” he said, stressing how important it is that everybody is on board, for the survey results to lead to positive election results. “You can’t have people going off in different directions, so I think it’s important that all Carlton board members and the superintendent support this and say that they support it.”

That didn’t happen. Carlton voted 5-1 in favor of the resolu-

tion, with superintendent Gwen Carman also voicing her support; but discussion revealed that three board members are actually not in support of the plans. LaRae Lehto, Sue Karp and Tim Hagenah all said they still prefer a one-site consolidation, despite negotiating with Wrenshall and agreeing to the two-site option presented in the survey.

Across the districts and throughout various voting blocs, there was about 80 percent approval of consolidation and its associated costs.

Hagenah said he read through some of the more than 600 comments left by survey respondents and has concerns similar to some of the comments raised. He said he remains convinced that a one-site option is the way to go and is “not in favor” of what is in the current plan. He then said, “I will go along with the board. I will do whatever it takes to move it forward,” but voted “no” on the resolution.

A review of the comments gathered from the surveys shows that a majority of them simply reiterate support for consolidation and the plan offered. Comments favoring the one-site option comprise less than half of the comments from online surveys, which made up about half of the survey responses.

Lehto said the “two-site plan is not my favorite” but that she does “support the process.”

Karp said she is convinced that the comments show there is more “diversity” among district residents when it comes to site

options, despite more than half of them supporting the two-site plan.

“I prefer one site at South Terrace,” Karp said, but admitted that the “community has spoken” on the survey with support of two sites. She said she will “move forward.”

Wrenshall board members were expected to meet at 6:30 a.m. today (Friday) about perhaps rewording their resolution that asked for full support from Carlton. “Consolidation is a very hard thing for some, which is unfortunate,” said Wrenshall superintendent Kim Belcastro after the Carlton meeting, which she attended along with a few other Wrenshall supporters. “The Wrenshall board wants to make sure that there is full support to be able to secure the state funding and to successfully pass a referendum in both communities.”

Sue Peterson from School Perceptions, the company that administered the survey, said last week when the results were announced that school board members needed to speak with one voice, especially since the survey showed overwhelming community support for the current plan and its costs.

Carlton board member Jen Chmielewski asked if there was any intent by fellow board members to lobby residents against the two-site plan. Hagenah said there wasn’t.

On Friday, Wrenshall board members were also expected to discuss spending \$24,000, split

between the districts, to pay for a lobbyist to promote bonding at the legislature, after voting against it Monday. Carlton board members said the cost was prohibitive but likely worth it to leverage the possible 40 percent in state bonding.

Belcastro told the Carlton board members that she has been told that getting the bonding might not be as much of a “heavy lift” as first thought, since there are a limited number of education bills running through the current session. The thought is that lawmakers on the education committees will be able to sift through the consolidation needs without a preponderance of other issues.

Local representatives Rep. Mike Sundin and Sen. Jason Rarick introduced bills this week in their respective bodies calling for the consolidation bonding.

Deficit budgets

The Carlton school board on Tuesday also approved an amended budget that is \$414,000 in the red. It means the district will have to dip into reserves to cover the budget. Carman said it will leave \$600,000 to \$750,000 in reserves after ending the last budget cycle with more than \$1 million. Chipping away at the reserve is “not a good thing,” Carman said, “but there is money.” She said the issue wasn’t state funding based on declining enrollment, as the number of students in the district has leveled off. A summary of the amended budget showed red

numbers for the general budget (\$223,55), transportation budget (\$159,012) and community budget (\$56,335.) There were other negative numbers but about \$200,000 in staff cuts help stave some of the budget bleeding, Carman said.

In Wrenshall Monday, board members approved the district’s 2019-20 revised budget with a deficit of \$184,339. As adopted, the budget includes one fewer day per week for the Wrens Club coordinator and aid, and no Wrens Club after June 30. That could change, as the school district intends to survey parents on not offering the program over the summer, as there will be ongoing construction/renovation projects in the building so the program could move to a local church if there’s enough interest.

Construction bonds

Wrenshall school board members got good news from the company handling the upcoming sale of its facilities maintenance bonds, expected to happen in mid-March. Proceeds from the bond sales will fund air quality and fire suppression improvements at Wrenshall school over the next two summers.

Ehlers senior municipal advisor Jodie Zesbaugh said with the much lower interest rates they’re seeing, the district will likely bond for less, just under \$9 million (versus the \$9.3 million max) and the property tax impact on residents should also be less than anticipated after the first year.

While initial calculations predicted the owners of a \$150,000 home would pay about \$139 in property taxes for the district, she expects that number to go down by \$30 to \$35 a year “assuming we get that nice low interest rate on March 16,” she added.

Because the work is being done over two years, Zesbaugh also said the district will likely earn a little more interest on the bonds over that time to help offset costs.

Protection offered for protectors

Jana Peterson
news@pineknotnews.com

Shield 616 and the Cloquet Eagles Club worked together to make Cloquet’s newest school resource officer (SRO), and the children he is there to protect, a little bit safer.

On Wednesday, Feb. 12, SRO Larry Sherk was presented with gear from Shield 616, a nonprofit organization that raises money to provide law enforcement officers with better protection.

The nonprofit group was started after founder Jake Skifstad, a former Colorado police officer and SWAT team member, responded to a shooting at a church that killed two and injured three more. He realized

later that his police-issued vest would not have saved him if the suspect had shot him because the “soft vests” typically worn by patrol officers will stop handgun rounds, but not rifle bullets.

Since 2015, Skifstad and Shield 616 have partnered with local organizations to help purchase better equipment for officers. Debbie Skifstad, Jake’s mother, spoke on behalf of Shield 616 at the ceremony.

Sherk was the latest recipient of an armor vest that is impenetrable by rifle fire, a helmet designed specifically for law enforcement to protect the wearer from bullets and other impacts to the skull, and other safety gear. The gift brings the total number of

Shield 616 vests to three for the CPD.

Interim police chief Derek Randall said he looks at the officers he works with and sees people passionate about their jobs, but he also worries because he sees the news every day about officers across the country who are hurt or killed in the line of duty.

“This gear is huge for us, we can’t thank you enough,” Randall said.

The Eagles raised money for the donation by holding a 5k race in Carlton to benefit law enforcement. It’s not the first time the fraternal organization has donated toward protective gear through Shield 616.

“For what you guys do for us, this is a drop in the bucket,” said Eagles chap-

lain Jim Zeal.

Police commander Adam Reed thanked both Shield 616 and the Eagles Club for the donation during the meeting Wednesday at the VFW, noting that Sherk works in the schools five days a week during the school year.

“Unfortunately, schools have been a target,” Reed said. “So your donation adds a layer of protection for our schools and community.”

Randall pointed out that Sherk is also a member of the local emergency response team, so the protective wear will serve in those situations as well.

Sherk, who started his job as SRO this school year, said the protective wear gives him another tool to



Debbie Skifstad of Shield 616 presents Cloquet police officer Larry Sherk with gear including an armor vest and helmet to help protect him from rifle bullets. Sherk is both a school resource officer in Cloquet and part of the local emergency response team. *Jana Peterson / Pine Knot News*

do the job the best he can, and one he hopes he never needs.

He said working with the students at the high

school and across the district has been a great experience, and the school year is flying by.

CARLTON/WRENSHALL SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION

Boards fine-tune school site plans

Mike Creger
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A joint committee made up of school board members from Carlton and Wrenshall districts is chipping away at site plans for a consolidated district. The boards have to submit a plan to the Minnesota Department of Education next week on what it will be asking voters for in a planned referendum in August. But that hinges on the current state legislature passing a measure in its bonding bill allocating money to schools seeking consolidation — and the legislature needs to finish its work by May 18.

The joint facilities commission decided late last month to follow most of the changes allowing for

an influx of students at South Terrace in Carlton for an elementary school and in Wrenshall for a middle and high school.

Notable revisions were nixing a sports complex of football, baseball and softball fields at South Terrace in favor of just a new football field and track at the high school in Wrenshall. The move shaved \$1 million off the total cost of adding gyms, classrooms and other spaces at the two sites.

A survey over the winter showed that residents had an appetite for a project of around \$39 million. The committee's reworked site plans come in at \$37.9 million. It also changed the building of new auditorium in favor of converting the Wrenshall

gym into performance space.

The commission also suggested adding a question on the referendum about refurbishing the pool in Wrenshall, something the survey showed most residents didn't have a taste for. Committee members said voters could always say no to the separate item, but felt swimming was an important skill to teach students and the pool could serve the community as well.

The Carlton board met last week and some members balked at the direction of the committee. They asked members to meet again knowing some Carlton board members weren't happy with losing varsity sports fields at South Terrace and asking about a pool the survey already provided

an answer on.

The committee met again Wednesday to reiterate its points.

The survey of residents showed a referendum tolerance at about \$38.4 million and the committee agreed that it met the goal of coming in under that number. The current site plan increases spending at South Terrace, from \$9.9 million to \$10.5 million. On Wednesday, the committee said it will work to provide details on how improvements will be made to the green space around the elementary to serve physical education needs as well as community space.

The plans in Wrenshall were trimmed from \$38.4 million to \$37.9 million. Planners had thought the current main gym

there would need to be converted into classroom space. When it was discovered the extra classroom space wasn't needed, the committee moved to convert the gym to an auditorium.

The school boards will meet next week to vote on the plan they will send to the state.

Candidate search

The Carlton board has already submitted a job description and is seeking candidates for its interim superintendent opening after Superintendent Gwen Carman announced last month that she was leaving for a job in southeastern Minnesota. The board will try to conduct interviews and come to a decision on a hire by the end of the month.



Dr. Melissa Robey reads "Germes Are Not for Sharing" as part of the Cloquet library's "Story Train" that features members of the community reading books in videos posted online. Screenshots courtesy Cloquet library

STORY TRAIN
CHUGS ALONG

Cloquet librarian Keiko Satomi said she was reading about the food train at B&B Market in Cloquet, along with stories about community members reading to kids online, when it occurred to her: Why not do a "Story Train by community helpers" online during the stay-at-home order? Satomi sent out a batch of emails and people obliged: already she has stories read by a doctor, a teacher, a farmer and a firefighter with more to come. The videos are posted on the library's new YouTube channel, along with other posts by librarian Justin Dinger with author talks and outdoor events. Satomi is also doing a storytime at 10:15 a.m. every Tuesday on Facebook Live and those are also posted to the YouTube channel. To find them, just search for Cloquet Public Library and subscribe or go to www.cloquetlibrary.org and find the story train link there. The city is also posting the stories to the CAT-7 cable access channel.

— Jana Peterson / Pine Knot News



ECFE and TOTS teacher Amber Grussendorf reads "Just for You" to a virtual audience in one of the Cloquet Public Library "Story Train" videos.

CARLTON COUNTY

County board member
will run to keep seat

Dan Reed
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Two-term Carlton County board commissioner Gary Peterson announced this week that he will seek re-election this fall. He made the announcement at the board's committee of the whole meeting on Monday. Filing opens on May 19 with the Carlton County Auditor. Peterson is the commissioner for District 5, which includes Moose Lake, Kettle River, Cromwell and Wright.

Peterson admitted it is a hard time to campaign for political office. Parades, festivals, prominent holidays, and door-to-door talks with the public are almost impossible with social distancing. That will not change for at least a few months and will perhaps continue after the November election.

The meeting this week took place online and by telephone. Acting auditor/treasurer Kathy Korteum said property tax collections are down 5 percent with two weeks left until the May 15 deadline.

"As far as the half-percent sales tax collections for transportation projects, over the years we have averaged around \$1.8 million in revenues," she said. "Averaging that over 12 months, March income was \$15,000 down and April was \$13,000 down. If those figures continue to hold we will be good during our current budget year."

No information has come from the Minnesota Legislature regarding a request for Carlton County to levy half-percent sales tax for the construction of

a new jail. If permission is granted by the legislature, the local voters of Carlton County will vote whether to levy the half-percent sales tax or put the building project funding as a property tax levy.

The bonding bill is expected to be completed before the session is required to end on May 18.

Carlton County coordinator Dennis Genereau said Itasca County received a 22-month extension for construction of a new jail because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic response. Carlton County could be available for an extension as well, he said.

A quote for a COVID-19 flyer to be sent to all Carlton County households was received from Community Printing of Cloquet. The board asked Genereau to check all the other local print shops for quotes before the May 12 board meeting when a decision is made on a printer.

Courthouse update

Minnesota Supreme Court Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea issued another order last week that extends the limited physical access to courthouses until May 18 in order to reduce and slow the spread of COVID-19. Remote, or virtual, technology may be used to conduct hearings in pending cases when possible.

The order also suspends all jury trials, authorizing them to begin June 1.

The order continues the previous authorization for the use of remote technology, when possible, to conduct district court hearings in any pending cases, except those required to be in the courtroom.

CAPTURING A 'SUPER' MOON



The May 7 full moon was the final supermoon of 2020. Cloquet photographer and retired doctor Dana Malkovich shared this photo he took of a 98.5 percent full moon at 5:14 a.m. May 6, looking east as it ascended above the trees lining the St. Louis River in Jay Cooke State Park.

“Supermoon” is not a scientific word, Malkovich said. “It is an astrological term applying to the full moon when it nears its perigee, the point when the moon is closest to earth in its elliptical orbit. At that point the moon looks slightly larger, maybe 15 percent, than what we typically see.”

He said he used a prolonged exposure of 25 seconds to create the photograph about a half-hour before sunrise that day. “The prolonged exposure creates a dreamy quality by smoothing the surface

of the river while retaining the sense of languorous movement seen in the current’s swirls and eddies,” Malkovich wrote. “The rocks projecting above the surface of this part of the river seem to be out of place in this scene, and contribute to the sense of otherworldliness.”

“Because of an optical illusion, the moon appears larger when it is near the horizon than when overhead. In addition, light traveling from the moon when it is near the horizon travels through a thicker layer of atmosphere, scattering the cold colors, blue, green and purple, and leaving the warmer red, yellow and orange frequencies. That’s why the moon looks orange. This contrasts nicely with the predominant blue color, considered complementary to orange, seen predominantly at this time of the morning. The prolonged exposure also accentuates the reflection of the moon in the water, seen here as a long path that leads you into the picture.”

CARLTON/WRENSHALL SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION

Consolidation plan headed to state

Mike Creger
news@PineKnotNews.com

The school boards from Carlton and Wrenshall earlier this week approved in separate online meetings a consolidation plan to be sent to the Minnesota Department of Education. It’s a formal step in a process with many parts as the districts edge closer to pairing up and forming an elementary school in Carlton and a middle and high school in Wrenshall.

The plan sent to the state describes how a combined district would spend \$39.7 million to shore up the schools and grounds in each city to accommodate the influx of students in a consolidation.

The plan was sent to meet a deadline from the state in order to hold an August referendum on bonding for the construction. In a survey sent to residents in each district over the winter, respondents indicated a project under \$40 million would likely pass in a vote. But that confidence requires a measure passed in the current state legislature securing money for school consolidations, covering up to 40 percent of the total

cost. The district awaits the fate of that measure within the overall bonding bill as the legislative session, riddled by delays due to the pandemic, comes to a close by law at midnight Sunday.

Should the measure pass, the districts would go ahead with a referendum. Bonding for the improvements would mean an increase in taxes for residents. On a home valued at \$200,000, the annual cost for 20 years would be \$278 a year, or \$23 a month.

A committee made up of members of both school boards came up with the plan submitted this week.

There were a few hiccups on the Carlton side when it came to passing the bill by the full boards. Sam Ojibway and Tim Hagenah are both members of the committee that came up with the final plan. They said they felt the move toward a varsity football field and track next to the high school in Wrenshall went against past discussions about a full athletic complex including baseball and softball fields at South Terrace in Carlton. But the price tag was deemed too high for a full complex in Carlton. With only a track

and a turf football field, the committee decided to put them next to the future high school in Wrenshall. Hagenah agreed with the notion at the time. Ojibway was absent from the meeting when the field positioning was discussed.

Both voted “no” on the plan sent to the state this week, making the final vote 4-2. Both said promises were made to have an athletic facility in Carlton. Others have said there were discussions about how the school grounds would be laid out but nothing set in stone.

Carlton members who voted for the plan said they respected the committee process and the experts working with the districts on the consolidation, echoing comments made at the Wrenshall meeting an hour earlier on Monday, where that board passed the plan unanimously.

Wrenshall Board member Janaki Fisher-Merritt said he was surprised with the committee results that also put a pool question on the proposed August ballot. But he said the boards and the public need to “trust the process” of committee work that digs into details of complicated issues.

The first question on the Au-

gust ballot would ask for support of issuing bonds for \$37,950,000 to improve and add spaces at South Terrace and at the Wrenshall school. That includes new gyms at both schools and more classroom space. At the proposed high school in Wrenshall, the current varsity gym would be converted into an auditorium and the bus garage expanded to hold a larger fleet.

The renovation of the pool at Wrenshall, now in disuse, would be a second question on the ballot, asking for \$1.7 million for a refurbished pool that would serve students and the community. Passing that question would mean a raise in annual taxes of about \$10 dollars.

Carlton board member Ann Gustafson, also a member of the committee that put the submitted plan together, said bickering over what is placed where loses sight of the purpose of the consolidation. She said in 10 years no one will care — if the boards today make good decisions based on a “whole district and what’s best for students.”

KNOT NOTES

COVID cases still rising locally

As the number of tests given increases across the state, so do the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19.

The Minnesota Department of Health reported 65 positive cases in Carlton County as of Wednesday, May 13, an increase of four from a week ago.

Of those 65 cases, at least 36 are from the Moose Lake prison, an increase of one confirmed case since last week.

Testing at the local Department of Corrections facilities is up, with 111 inmates tested in Moose Lake. Of those 36 were confirmed positive, 73 confirmed negative. Another 31 are presumed positive. Forty-three no longer require isolation. There were two tests still pending results.

At Willow River, 144 inmates had been tested as of Wednesday, May 13, with 66 confirmed positive, 25 confirmed negative and seven presumed positive. There were 53 tests still pending results. Confirmed cases in Willow River jumped by 19 from last week.

Employees who have tested positive for COVID-19 jumped from 33 to 35 in Moose Lake and remained at four in Willow River.

Statewide, Minnesota reports a total of 12,917 confirmed (tested) cases of COVID-19, out of 122,035 tests given. A total of 638 people have died in the state. No deaths from COVID-19 in Carlton County have been reported by the MDH.

Filing period opens for offices

The filing period opens Tuesday, May 19 for three Cloquet city council positions: Ward 4, Ward 5 and At-Large. Because Cloquet City Hall is currently closed to the public, affidavits of candidacy will be accepted by appointment and curbside, Monday through Friday between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. Make an appointment by either calling 218-655-1501 or emailing kstarnold@cloquetmn.gov or tpeterson@cloquetmn.gov. The filing period ends at 5 p.m. June 2.

The filing period for county and state offices also runs May 19-June 2.

Three county commissioner spots are up for election in November for Districts 1, 3 and 5. Call the Carlton County Auditor’s Office. Candidates may file in person or by mail, as long as the filing is received during the filing period.